THE MUSEUMIFICATION OF PRISONS IN TEHRAN AND SULAYMANIYAH: POWER, COLLECTIVE MEMORY AND HEGEMONY

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO
THE GRADUATE SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES
OF
MIDDLE EAST TECHNICAL UNIVERSITY

BY

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IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR
THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF SCIENCE
IN
THE DEPARTMENT OF MIDDLE EAST STUDIES

SEPTEMBER 2019

I hereby declare that all information in this document has been obtained and presented in accordance with academic rules and ethical conduct. I also declare that, as required by these rules and conduct, I have fully cited and referenced all material and results that are not original to this work.

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ABSTRACT

THE MUSEUMIFICATION OF PRISONS IN TEHRAN AND SULAYMANIYAH: POWER, COLLECTIVE MEMORY AND HEGEMONY

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September 2019, 290 pages

The purpose of this work is to analyze and compare from the lenses of power two former detention centers which have been turned into museums: Amna Suraka in Sulaymaniyah (Northern Iraq) and Ebrat in Tehran (Iran). These are memory sites condemning the former abuses of previous regimes' police and intelligence apparatuses. The thesis looks at the rhetorical discourse they exhibit and combines it with distinct theories from the the social sciences – namely power relations, symbolic power, hegemony and populism- to better understand how they perceive their own national identities and pasts. To achieve this, the analysis focuses on the relationships these sites maintain with history, memory and space; and by taking into consideration specific details and over-arching traits. The resulting conclusion posits that even though these sites differ notably in terms of museographical presentation, style and content, they both share a similar fascistic investment in memory in how they attempt to fabricate a wider and permanent history. They can be observed as the result of hegemonic projects obeying to the logics of populism in regards to how they utilize trauma; and that they can be observed as nodal points in a wider urban-memorial network constructing the identity of their respective nations.
Keywords: Iran, Iraqi Kurdistan, collective memory, hegemony, museums

ÖZ

TAHRAN VE SÜLEYMANİYE'DE BULUNAN HAPİSHANELERİN MÜZELEŞTİRİLMESİ: GÜÇ, KOLEKTİF BELLEK VE HEGEMONYA

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Bu çalışmanın amacı, müzeye dönüştürülmüş olan iki eski gözaltı/sorgu merkezini güç bağlamında analiz etmek ve karşılaştırmaktır; Süleymaniye'de (Küzey Irak) bulunan Amna Suraka ve Tehran'da (İran) bulunan Ebrat. Bu alanlar, önceki rejimlerin polis ve istihbarat birimlerinin suiistimalleri ve tacizlerinin kınandığı bellek mekânlarına dönüştürülmüştür. Tez, milli kimliğinin birer timsali olarak davranan bu mekânları daha iyi anlamak amacıyla, bu müzeleri ve sergilenen teorik söylemi, sosyal bilimlerin ilgili teorileri ile bir araya getirmektedir. Böylelikle, bu alanların tarih, bellek ve mekân ile kurmuş olduğu ilişkilere odaklanılmıştır. Bunu yaparken, hem öznel detaylar hem de kapsayıcı özellikler göz önünde bulundurulmuş. Varılan sonuç ile müze-grafik temsil, biçim ve içerik açısından bu iki alan oldukça farklılık gösterse de, ikisi de, nasıl daha geniş ve kalıcı bir tarihin icat edilerek bellek üzerine yapılmış benzer faşizan yatırımların paylaşıldığı önerilmektedir. Buna bağlı olarak, bu iki müzenin, popülizmin travmadan istifade etmeyi şart koşan mantığına itaat edilerek geliştirilmiş hegemonyacı projelerin sonuçları olarak ve milletlerin kimliklerinin inşa edildiği daha geniş bir kentsel-bellek ağının düğüm noktaları olarak gözlemlenebileceğini savunuyorum.
Anahtar Kelimeler: Iran, Irak Kürt Bölgesi, kollektif bellek, hegemonya, müzeler

To the stones of Ankara

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The author wishes to express his deepest gratitude to his supervisors Dr. Derya Göçer and Dr. Esin Kömez for their patience, academic wisdom, encouragement and instrinsic abilities to redirect and contain the research and its writing during its developing stages.

The author would also like to thank several professors in METU the courses of which have, directly or indirectly, influenced the eventual blossoming of this particular text: namely, Dr. Işık Kuşçu, Dr. Meliha Altunışık and Dr. İhsan Dağı. The comments and indications of Dr. Şerif Onur Bahçecik are also gratefully acknowledged.

Additonally, the author wishes to give special thanks to all the people who were of substantial help during the conducting of the fieldwork: particularly Ipek for her hospitality, readiness, conversation and priceless linguistic support in Iran; and Paula, for her conceptual guidance and valuable discussions in Iraqi Kurdistan.

The author would also like to thank his parents for their continued encouragement during the thesis writing process.

Last but not least, the author wishes many special thanks to his colleague Elif Kaymaz for her infinite support and tolerance during the writing process of the thesis, her continued logistic support and for her seminal guidance on the specific subjects of space and urbanism.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

If one is to visit the town of Khiam in southern Lebanon, he or she will most likely come across a specific complex of ruins which stands out strikingly: those of a former detention and interrogation centre managed by the South Lebanon Army (supposedly in complicity with the Israeli state) between 1985 and 2000, and which was infamous for its human rights violations, including systematic torture. The site was eventually 'liberated' and refashioned by Hizbullah into an exhibition space memorializing and denouncing the atrocities conducted during its despised fifteen years of operation. The jail-turned-museum's existence, however, would prove to be short-lived, as it was bombarded and destroyed in the midst of the 2006 war with Israel (Gendzier 2007, 89). In the long-standing cycle of violence endured by the country, and among a society which has become used to living with rubble in their immediate surroundings, as if naturally embedded in their daily lives, the Khiam story strikes a particular note: if, as claimed by several of the town's citizens (Porter 2017), the Israeli air force did knowingly and willingly target this specific space (a fact which, again, is disputed), it would demonstrate an awareness –and fear, even- of what we will now call the –'symbolic power' of the memorial museum. As it has been argued by many a scholar, there is no such thing as a single collective memory, but rather many different articulations of it depending on myriad factors; memories which are usually overlapping or can even be in contradiction and dispute with each other. The memorial narrative offered by the Khiam museum, thus, would have been literally 'razed to the ground' by the outsider army in a 'silencing' effort. But what is the actual use of obliterating an exhibition space if the local people already carry its contents' information, emotions, significance and ideas in their hearts and minds?

Wouldn't it actually heighten their preconceived impressions and hatred towards the occupying enemy?

This brings us to the following alternative scenario: perhaps the Israeli air force did not specifically intend to destroy this particular space, and thus its obliteration was merely accidental. However, the people's automatic indictment and accusations do show their recognition of the memorial value of a place like the Khiam detention centre museum, and how it tied to and represented what anthropology scholar Lara Deeb, studying that particular site, referred to as their 'just-lived past' (Deeb 2008). This is particularly compelling taking into account the idea that Lebanon is notorious for having a painfully confused "just-lived past'. A simplified explanation of such reality would address the complex social and sectarian nature of the country, but also to the fact that the post-war governments from the early 90s on focused exclusively on its material rebuilding, rather than conciliating and internalizing what the war really 'was'. That task would actually prove quite impossible, given the demographic fragility and the undisputable complexity of the long-winded conflict.

In his seminal work on the history and historiography of Lebanon, Kamal Salibi demonstrated that one of the main inherent obstacles facing this very problematic 'nation-state' is the fact that there was never a coalescence into a single national narrative which would explain the meaning, logic and nature of a state called "Lebanon". The country, Salibi argued, would always be prone to internal conflict, civil war and disintegration as long as these disputes, claims and counterclaims over history (and its consequent lack of a common vision of the past) endured, since there would continually be a (sometimes dormant) tug-of-war between different perceptions of its essential identity as well as the role it should presently play in the region (Salibi 1988, 216). Considering the last thirty years of Lebanese political and social history, it is safe to say his thesis has been mostly proven right, despite actual warfare never having crystallized. But this goes beyond Lebanon: such a reading can be extrapolated to any other 'new' nation-states (weak or otherwise), of which the Middle East certainly suffers no shortage of. Can we consider museums as

‘harmonizing efforts’ in historically confused or polarized societies? And if so, who are the conductors of such harmony, who are the manufacturers of popular history?

Yet a more revealing lesson can be learnt from Khiam. Under the auspices of Hizbullah, who conducted the museumification, the memorializing aim wasn’t as scattered, as unattainable nor as cryptic, since it focused mostly on one single particular aspect of the ‘just-lived past’: the Israeli occupation, frowned upon by virtually every citizen of the country, regardless of his or her religious or social background. In an ocean of raging ‘histories’, this was one of the realities that could not be contested: it was a trauma permeating the vast majority of the population. Hence Hizbullah was able to produce spaces such as Khiam as well as its companion museum, Mleeta, “the tourist landmark of the resistance”. This second site is in many ways the other side of the coin: it commemorates the heroic defence against the occupation -an occupation that resulted in atrocious activities such as those of Khiam. By connecting people’s consciences and understandings of the past through memorializing and by presenting in a space claimed realities (and not just any space, but the space where ‘it all took place’), the Hizbullah-orchestrated museumifications are, to put it simply, a fledging of a certain type of *power*. Not ‘power’ understood in its conventional coercive unitary meaning, but rather as a soft, benign, non-localizable impetus one of the aims of which, rather than repressing, might be the construction of a (by default artificial) common and hegemonic understanding among the society.

The Lebanese example is not trivial, as it sets the tone of the discussion to follow, in which I delve into prison museums. These are memory sites which may be considered to be the ultimate ‘museified’ trauma space, and thus they are a fruitful area in which to study the mechanisms of power and collective memory. By claiming that prison museums are not so much reflections and articulations of ‘factual realities’, but rather spaces in which discourse exists –a discourse not always complete, straightforward or perceived, yet still unavoidably trying to make sense of the convoluted past– in connection with the curators’ exhibitionary interests, this

thesis attempts to highlight not so much mechanisms through which the general public remembers, but rather to investigate *how* and *why* such museums stand as intrinsic dots in the fabric of power,. They will be taken as descriptive enclaves of a past which likely serve broader purposes in their 'rewritings' of history. Quickly dismissing such sites by claiming they are merely propagandistic would be an equivocal over-simplification which totally misses the point of their emergence, as the 'power' beneath them cannot be summarily explained and brushed aside as simple ideology without a certain degree of theorization and observation. Such an immediate quasi-explanation would also dangerously disregard the mechanisms and relationships existing between the state and civil society.

1.1. Structure and methodology of the thesis

The subject of memory sites (and, to a reduced extent, prison museums) has been analyzed widely via examples from 'the Western world', sometimes through the lens of 'dark tourism'. While it is an appealing perspective, I will nevertheless not be adopting since I believe it is not so applicable to both our cases as well as the Middle East in general. Instead I will focus on interpretations dealing with power and knowledge, a trend which became somewhat popular among scholars in the Europe and the US during the 90s, but which hasn't been copiously imported into the Middle East. In this process, I will be adding additional theoretical parameters which I regard as complimentary or necessary to further comprehend the described phenomena - namely reflections deducted from the studies of collective memory, historiography, hegemony, symbolic power and populism.

The question which most occupies us is, in broad strokes: how do power and collective memory intersect in the physical exhibited formulations and narratives found in these prison museums? As it will be obvious from the disparity of conceptual sources, it is not my intention to espouse a particular theory and 'prove' it, but rather, to reunite relevant perspectives on the issue which will be useful for a

better joint understanding of our cases. To which degree can we observe them as sites of power, and what do they tell us about the country's perception of itself? In order to provide an answer, the characteristics of such exhibition spaces will be dully analyzed and compared. Hopefully the present work will offer valuable contribution to historical, political and social studies of the two countries as well as to the more general literature on power, memory and museums.

Armed with such an elastic conceptual framework, in its essence the thesis revolves around the comparison between two prison museums presently open: Ebrat in Tehran (Iran) and Amna Suraka in Sulaymaniyah (Iraqi Kurdistan). Unlike the aforementioned example of Khiam, these can be currently visited. They both existed as 'detention centres' managed by long-gone and presently despised regimes; they share similar periods of operation; and they were both infamous for the coercion and torture of scores of political prisoners and civilians. The gist of the thesis revolves around fieldwork conducted in these sites: I visited Ebrat on two occasions (2016 and 2019) and Amna Suraka once (2019). I generated information based on their content, including the physical disposition of the exhibits and the rhetorical discourse found therein. In the analysis of each of their dimensions, and in order to provide a graphical complement to them, I will sometimes showcase photographs I took during my visits.

The primary aim of this text is to lay out the bases from which to examine these sites and then to test if such insights can be applied, as well as to observe and rationalize the similarities and divergences between the two cases. Therefore, in each of the sections I will be focusing on a determined conceptual or theoretical current and then borrowing examples from the memory sites to illustrate it. Before starting with this endeavour, I will provide a summarized description of the memory sites at hand, highlighting the main historical events they tell of (their years of active operation as prisons), as well as describing the historical context of their museumification.

The first chapter deals with power and museums, and is preoccupied mostly on a broad description of how we will understand "power" in relation to our memory sites. The second chapter brings the discussion to the realm of historiography in order to better comprehend the types of histories spawned in these museums. The third chapter introduces the possibility of espousing these prison museums with political hegemony, and investigates the fabrication of truths from that perspective. The fourth chapter delves into collective memory studies with the objective of locating what sort of 'memory' can be extracted from the sites. The fifth chapter looks at our cases as physical spaces in the urban milieu. Finally, the sixth chapter argues for the possibility of understanding these sites as rhetorical nodal points in a wider populist discourse. Even if each section contains its own logic, due to the interconnectedness of their topics and concepts, there is a clear discursive continuity between them: they should be regarded as cumulative steps towards a concluding whole which will result in a cohesive and over-arching appraisal of these and hopefully other memory sites.

The reason for concentrating on these specific prison museums in Iran and Kurdistan can be summarized as follows: this thesis posits that the relationship between museified 'collective memory' and the 'peoples' of those countries can help us further understand the very complex dynamics existing between memory and present ("the now" and "the past") as well as between state and civil society - dynamics which have not yet been explored sufficiently or at all from the lenses of museums. Moreover, both Iran and Kurdistan, due to their cultural and historical specifics, are unarguably striking cases where memorial discourse has been relatively recently pursued and established. Although prison museums do not abound in the Middle East region, I find it necessary to acknowledge the most significant which I will not be addressing: the Museum of Underground Prisoners in Jerusalem, Ulucanlar Prison in Ankara and Qasr in Tehran. I opted not to include them in this analysis due to obvious space limitations, but also because they differ notably from Ebrat and Amna Suraka. Among other reasons, they either operated in different moments in history or were open as prisons for way longer periods of time, and they were more formal prisons instead of detention/interrogation/torture centres. Hopefully, they will be

addressed in a longer version of this paper, as it would be thrilling to see if the conclusions obtained here could also be applied to them.

1.2. Literature review

The following pages will offer thorough description of the articles and books that inform the conceptual bases and historical accounts from which I will be conducting my case studies. As mentioned, the thesis lies in a theoretical multi-disciplinary intersection bringing together voices and analyses from different areas. I've divided the review into three main parts: the heftier of the two comprises works from the social sciences, notably political science, sociology and philosophy, which deal with the general issues of power, knowledge, museums and historiography. The second part is constituted by studies on collective memory and how it is related to physical sites of remembering and commemoration. The final chunk of the literature deals with the political, historical and social background behind both the prisons and their museifications, and thus draws heavily from historians of Iraq and Iran. The logic here is that in order to properly know how to apply our general theoretical approach to the cases, a relatively comprehensive understanding of the region and its characteristics is also necessary. All through the thesis, I will be actively using some of these sources and perhaps introducing new ones.

1.2.1. Power and museums

In order to successfully investigate the mechanisms of power in the field of museums, a meticulous reading of Foucault is required. Out of the multiplicity of articles of his which I have found substantially helpful for the thesis, in their majority extracted from his later era, most deal with issues of governmentality (1991, 1997) epistemes (1991), power relations (2000, 2003a, 2003b) knowledge (1977, 2000, 2013, 2003a),

pastoral power (2003a, 2003b), discourse (1984, 2002) power and truth (1980, 1997, 2000), society (2000), space (1998, 2000) and the technologies of the self (1997). I chose to go straight to the sources and thus the overwhelming majority of quotes found herein are extracted from seminal articles and lectures found in compilations edited by renowned scholars such as Rabinow, Faubion, Gordon, Shapiro, etc. The objective here is to locate and utilize the main Foucauldian frameworks and concepts that might be useful for the observation of prison museums. Other works of Foucault, such as *Discipline and Punish* (1995), due to its obvious connection to our topic and its relevant observations on the emergence of disciplinary power, or *The Order of Things* (2002), have also been considered. The logic behind the concepts used by Foucault when discussing power, history or knowledge, not always crystal clear, has been widely debated in the academic field (i.e. Castel 1994; Patton 1998; Hoffman 2014).

Connecting Foucault with the realm of museums there exist a fairly fecund school of academicians who have researched exhibition spaces from the lens of power and knowledge. Even though none of it is specific to prisons nor to the Middle East, their analyses can be successfully extrapolated. A seminal study of these characteristics is Tony Bennett's piece "The Exhibitonary Complex" (1988b), the ideas of which he would develop in further works (1988a, 1995, 1999, 2004) , where he discusses the emergence of the modern museum paying close attention to its intrinsic linkage to the nation state and argues it can be contemplated from the prism of power relations. This trend seems to have somewhat blossomed in the 90s (notably with Hooper-Greenhill 1992; Sherman and Rogoff 1994; Duncan 1995; Luke 2002), the same way scholars coming from the architecture field also started applying Foucauldian concepts to space (the best example of which is Hirst 2005). It seems to me such approaches are undoubtedly useful but some seem too preoccupied with the debatable concept of "ideology" (Azoulay 1994; Coffee 2006), which has drawn criticism from non-adherents claiming the overemphasis on power relations is either theoretically flawed, limited or just plain wrong (Witcomb 2003; Cuno 2011). Other authors haven't fully focused on Foucault in their analyses of museums but implicitly

or explicitly draw from his approaches, or have at the very least discussed power and ideology (Kirby 1988; Macdonald and Silverstone 1990; Roberts 1997; Appadurai and Breckenridge 1999; Henning 2006; Message 2006; Barrett 2012; Blankenberg and Dexter Lord 2015), as well as the engagement between society and museums (Sandell 2002; Thomas 2016).

To espouse this power-based overview to our particular cases, we must also take into consideration significant works on the institution known as 'the history museum'. These include orthodox looks into their history (Alexander 1996), specific case studies found in scholarly compilations (Lumley 1988; Boswell and Evans 1999; Messias Carbonell 2004; Ostow 2008), as well as analyses of particular types of museum such as the 'historical house' or the thematic historical museum (Urry 2002; Risnicoff de Gorgas 2004). As expected, the vast majority of these studies deal with museums in Europe and the US, and there doesn't seem to be an overarching study of such spaces in the middle east, excluding the odd example (Azoulay 1994).

Regarding historiography itself, one of the main concepts I utilize in the thesis is that of 'the battle over history', which is directly lifted from Kemal Salibi's classic *A House of Many Mansions* (1988). His study deals solely with Lebanon's seeming inability to come to terms with its own past and secure a healthy society and political scene, but it can be translated to other countries in the region quite comfortably. Salibi's idea is closely related, I believe, to other studies dealing with the emergence/fabrication of identities, traditions and nations (Gellner 1983; Anderson 1991; Hobsbawm 1992, 1999; Hewison 1999) which implicitly enter an interesting dialogue with Foucault's discussion on power/knowledge which is useful for our purposes.

Also significant is literature on historical revisionism. Considering that the prison museums under the scope here present historical narratives that constitute a break or updating of previous 'versions' of reality. Michel Rolph Trouillot's *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (1995) is handy to understand the link

between historiography and power, as are several other studies dealing with revisionism, often focusing on specific cases (Haynes 2007; Kopecek 2008; Hughes-Warrington 2013). Studies on transitology (state transitions from one type of regime to another, generally towards democracy) coming from the political sciences have also proven to be useful in the theoretical intersection that occupies us (primarily Rustow 1970) as they help us understand the 'revision' in history inherent in substantial political alterations.

Needless to say, Foucault does not monopolize power as a theoretical framework Even though it would appear as if the majority of museum historians concerned with this topic tend to mostly depart from Foucault when focusing on their analyses of power in the exhibition space, with the occasional nod to Habermas' discussion on the public space (for example Barrett 2012, Message and Witcomb 2015), there's barely any mention of Pierre Bourdieu (excepting his studies on museum visitors, which are of no relevance for this thesis). I believe many of the concepts Bourdieu raises in *Language and Symbolic Power* (1991), such as symbolic capital, description/ prescription, habitus and legitimate language (also found in other of his works, i.e. 1984; 2005), are of the uttermost importance to locate the deeper nuances of non-coercive modalities of power and can be fully applied to history, memory and cultural institutions. When extrapolated to our focus on prison museums, they prove fruitful and even essential. Another scholar strangely ignored by museum scholars is Claude Lefort, whose writings on non-coercive power and democratically faulty states (1986a, 1986b) are perfectly complementary to the Foucauldian analysis, adding a new layer of understanding.

Similarly, no analysis of this type would be complete without a generous research on Gramsci (2007), many concepts of whom are still relevant and surprisingly useful for this type of power analysis of the prison museum. Bennett (1988) is one of the few museum scholars to acknowledge the Marxist thinker in his discussion even though does not commit to a fully fledged exploration of his themes. In particular, Gramsci's reflections on civil society and the war of position therein, the concept of "common sense" among the population, and of course that of hegemony and consensus,

provide a good compliment to any analysis devoted to museums and power. Even though no proper study of museums from a gramscian perspective has been conducted, there's a vast resource of commentaries to be inspired from: relatively brief primers on his main ideas (Simon 1982; Hoffman 1984) to heftier studies (Bucki-Glucksmann 1980; Femia 1981; Thomas 2009), and of course volumes specifically dealing with hegemony and power (Fontana 1993, Haugaard and Lentner 2006; Howson and Smith 2008) and even space (Ekers 2013). From Gramsci we land on another theoretical key behind our better understanding of the thesis' case studies, since it is articulated in prison museums: the relationship between hegemony and populist rhetoric, a bridge I've located in the shape of Laclau and Mouffe's *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* (2001) as well as Laclau's *On Populist Reason* (2005).

Despite not being main concepts in our analysis, there are two areas the thesis slightly borrows from. Firstly there is modernity, which has enjoyed a fair share of debate in the social sciences (Giddens 1991; Latour 1993, Jameson 2002). A better understanding of what it amounts to paves the way to a richer reading of the modern museum. Lastly there is the somewhat maligned notion of ideology, which I mostly discard in my analysis but commentary on which (Abercrombie, Hill and Turner 1984; Finich 1996; Freeden 1996; Therborn 1999) can also be of substantial assistance. For a more local approach, some volumes discussing ideology and authoritarianism in the Middle East (Karam 2004; Jebnoun, Kia and Kirk 2014) might help us connect theory with our particular region.

1.2.2. Collective memory, memory sites and prisons

For the purposes of the thesis, special attention needs to be paid to the subject of collective memory, and how it links to both power and museums. No investigation of this ilk can proceed without first looking into Maurice Halbwachs' classic work *On Collective Memory* (1992), where the Durkheimian scholar posits the existence of multiple such memories. Jeffrey K. Olick's several recent works on historic memory

reach a similar thesis and expand on it, notably in *The Politics of Regret* (2007), which is perhaps too focused on the German case yet spawns suggestive findings. His compilations of articles on collective memory (Olick 2003, 2011) are a rich well of case studies. There's been several scholarly compilations of articles (Hodgkin and Radstone 2003; Moore and Whelan 2007; Bell 2010; Sebald and Wagle 2015) and academic books (Tumblety 2013; Barash 2016) on the relationship between history and collective memory, both dealing with general conceptualization as well as with specific cases. Since this thesis delves directly into trauma, insights about the role it plays in collective memory processes should also be considered (Douglass and Vogler 2003; Parr 2008; Alexander 2012). Even though a comprehensive history of collective memory in the Middle East as well as in the countries that occupy us is yet to be made, some work has been made on Lebanon (Gendzier 2007; Deeb 2008; Haugbolle 2010; Larkin 2012) and Iraqi Kurdistan (Ihsan 2016).

To better understand the significance and potential for power plays in 'memory sites' and historical museums, there is one seminal work that cannot be ignored: Pierre Nora's seminal article "Between Memory and History" (1989), in which the French historian discusses the discursive and manufactured nature of memorial sites, which he dubs "lieux de la mémorie" . There are several volumes that include scholarly discussion on the subject and consequent case studies (Crane 2000; Ernst 2000; Forty and Küchler 1999; Nelson and Olin 2003; Walkowitz and Knauer 2004; Dickinson, Blair and Ott 2010) as well as wider overviews on the general characteristics and functions of the memorial space (Stevens and Franck 2016). In this regard, Baudrillard's discussion on the value posited on historical objects and places (2002) is also of interest.

A work which proves quite definitive in the are of trauma site museification is Silke Arnold De-Simine's *Mediating memory in the museum: trauma, empathy, nostalgia* (2013), which presents a fecund discussion on appearance and functioning of historical exhibitions and memory sites, including prison museums and which deals with key concepts such as 'post-memory', 'prosthetic memory' or Rothberg's (2009)

‘multidirectional memory’, which are essential for the understanding of prison museums. Other studies of trauma museums and exhibitions dealing with violence and war have followed suit (Muchitsch 2013; Sodaro 2018); particularly enlightening are, of course, those works dealing specifically with the museification of prisons (Welch 2015; Burge 2017). The relationship between memory and the physical space (beyond museums), which should also be taken into consideration in the thesis, has also been contemplated and discussed in several scholarly volumes (Bastéa 2004; Crinson 2005; Treib 2009; Olsen and Pétrursdóttir 2014).

Even though this work doesn’t for the most part adhere to perspectives of ‘dark tourism’ (Lennon and Foley 2000), as it is not generally concerned with the physiological curiosity of visitors nor the economic/touristic angle behind museificiations, some relevant observations can be extracted from it, and particularly from books such as the compilation *Death Tourism: Disaster Sites as Recreational Landscape* (Sion 2014) and its spiritual prequels and sequels coming from both the social sciences as well as the tourism area (White and Frew 2013; Stone 2018; Korstanje and George 2018).

Prior to delving into the historical background of the cases, I believe it is fair to include a brief overview on prison literature: general accounts dealing with the functioning of penitentiary institutions. The logic here is that obtaining a grasp of what goes on in prisons will help us better understand how it might be museified. Thorough volumes on the emergence and characteristics of institutions of confinement over the decades (Finzsch and Jütte 1996; Garland 2002; Jewkes and Johnston 2006; Wener 2012), the relationship between power and space in jails (Simon, Temple and Tobe 2013) and the situation in the Middle East (Khalili and Schwedler 2010).

1.2.3. Historical background of Iraq and Iran

Finally, we require a review on the literature on the history of these two countries. This is crucial to gain a proper historical understanding of the prisons at hand. Of course the scope of the thesis is too limited to include a full-fledged assortment of all that has been written on the particular periods of the late 70s in Iran and late 80s in Iraq; but in order to fully appreciate the presentation and discourse of the museums in all their nuances, we need to have a good understanding of the historic/political nature of the times they were operating as institutions of confinement -as well as the changes that brought about their transformation into museums.

In regards to Iran, I deem it essential to consider the works of Ervand Abrahamian, starting with his general works dealing with the last hundred years of the country (1982, 2008). His studies on historical revisionism and the surrounding the Islamic Republic (1993) also prove also very valuable; and, since our subject is prisons, his meticulous investigation on several generations of imprisonment, punishment and public recantations in Iran is equally enlightening (1999). The museified versions of both Ebrat and Qasr memorialize the decade of the 70s, when they operated under the direction of the SAVAK; it is thus but natural to look into the later reign of Mohammed Reza Pahlavi, and the issues that brought about its downfall, as it has been analyzed in several books from diverse perspectives (Kapuściński 2006; Afkhami 2009; Milani 2011, Cooper 2016). In order to further understand the social and cultural upheaval which the revolution represented, Roy Mottahedeh's monumental *The Mantle of the Prophet* (1985) offers a deep and compelling intellectual history of the decades leading up to the regime change. Similarly, no study of memorialization in post-revolutionary Iran would be complete without a proper understanding of the revolution itself. Some works offer illuminating perspectives taken from theories of revolutions and social mobilizations (Parsa 1989; Keddie 2003; Kurtzmann 2004), others offer more testimonial accounts (Naraghi 1994), while further analyses observe the revolution and the subsequent Islamic Republic from a political, cultural and religious angle (Hiro 1985; Bakhash 1985; Lafraie 2009; Moazami 2013).

As with the complexities of Iran, understanding the relationship between Baghdad and Erbil in Iraq over the decades (and specifically the late 80s) as well as the internal politics of the Kurdistan region, is no easy feat. General historical accounts (Tripp 2000; Farouk-Sluglett and Sluglett 2001) provide a solid starting point; similarly, Kanan Makiya's famous *Republic of Fear: The Politics of Modern Iraq* (1989) provides rich insight into the dynamics of Saddam's Ba'athist regime in the 80s which paved the way to the Anfal campaigns. The massacres, including critical points which are of our interest such as the cities of Sulaymaniyah and Halabja, are a central topic in Makiya's *Cruelty and Silence* (1993), as well as in many other substantial researches on the genocide (Gunter 1992; Black 1993; Kelly 2008; Hardi 2011). There are also compelling accounts on the early 90s upheavals in the Kurdish region which led to the expulsion of Ba'athist forces and the establishment of an autonomous government and therefore opened the doors to proper memorialization (Laizer 1996; Voller 2014). Lastly, with the aims of tracing a somewhat comprehensive portrait of the political and social characteristics of the Kurdish government in the last three decades, as well as the discourses surrounding its identities, we can borrow from a relatively rich quarry of literature (Gunter 1999; Stansfield 2003; Yildiz 2004; Aziz 2011).

1.3. Definition of 'prison museum' as related to the aims of the thesis

Before proceeding with the main analysis, a brief description of the concept of "prison museum" is required. I understand these exhibition spaces as the intersection between history museums and memory sites, and therefore the thesis will be mostly observing them as these two typologies of spaces, which we might also summarize as "memory museums", "a specific kind of museum dedicated to a historical event commemorating mass suffering of some kind" (Williams 2007, 8). Museum scholar Silke Arnold-de Simine expands on this definition by discussing the intrinsic links between both types of sites:

> Memorials are usually seen as sacred places for reverent commemoration, their commemorative functions and associated ceremonies evoking burial sites. As such, they are supposed to honour the dead and establish a community united in mourning and in the resolve to prevent the cause for such grief and suffering in the future. In contrast, museums are educational institutions tasked with critical interpretation and historical contextualization. Increasingly, the distinction between the two types of institutions is becoming more and more blurred: new museums commemorating violent histories often double as memorials and quite a few memorials feature information centres (Arnold-de Simine 2013, 75)

My first claim here is that these exhibition spaces go beyond the events commemorated within and are in fact locations where a much broader activity of macro-historicizing ("making sense of the past") and formation of identity takes place, processes closely related to the emergence and resilience of current regimes. My second claim, a consequence of the first, is that as opposed to what is posited by some studies overtly preoccupied with the logics of tourism and capitalism, reconciliation and regret, or ideology and propaganda, we should observe them as sites within the public sphere that connect state and civil society. As a result, they exist as remarkable physical incarnations of these processes. The power relations unravelling here are not exclusively top-down, but due to the (memorially speaking) aggressive nature of the regimes and their monopoly over the urban space, there is an implicit drive to 'fix' memory, which I will attempt to prove by looking at some theoretical accounts not typical of the literature – namely Bourdieu's symbolic power, Gramsci's hegemony and Laclau's populism.

The ultimate aim is to arrive at a theoretical intersection in which the production of truths and knowledge regarding history; the emergence of 'memories'; its acceptance by society in a specific regime of truth; and the utilization of infamous physical spaces to channel or communicate it logically connect –not a perfect, regular, seamless connection, but a working connection nonetheless. The point is to understand in a larger theoretical manner, if we were to examine the power relations (and their offspring 'knowledge') prevailing in societies, why –if not how- these prison museums are precisely the way they are: why in Iran and Kurdistan museums

like Ebrat and Amna Suraka make sense in the evolution and morphing of that particular civil society and its reigning epistemes.

1.4. Power/knowledge versus conciliation and dark tourism

During most of the thesis, and especially in its first chapters, we will be analyzing the sites by leaning on Foucault's lessons on power/knowledge. Needless to say, this perspective is not blindly embraced by everyone who researches museums. Prior to setting out on this path, then, we shall summarily look at its main detractors.

Art historian James Cuno, a self-proclaimed "modern and liberal", flat-out rejects these trends (particularly Tony Bennett's and Carol Duncan's sceptical outlook) by claiming they "deny individual agency" to the visitor. He also asserts that museums contribute "to the vitality of the public sphere and the strengthening of civil society by encouraging the "public use of one's reason" (Cuno 2011, 54). Even though Cuno's fiery reading of those authors appears to be somewhat broad, and he perhaps simplifies their core arguments in a radical and very non-nuanced manner, he is fundamentally right in his affront against the overrating of curatorial/statal power – and in the coming pages I'll go to great lengths to highlight why we should not be blinded by or restricted to such an analysis, and instead always keep in mind the role of the visitor. However, it will become clear that such inclusive rationale is typical of a Western mindset, and it may dangerously fall into the traps of essentialism. Curator and academician Andrea Witcomb is another critic of post-Foucaldian readings (specifically Bennett's), arguing that they are somewhat limited:

> The first of these limitations is that museum visitors can only be understood as citizens. The museum space is seen as oriented exclusively towards the construction of a national community. The relationship can only be a political one. There is no recognition of the way in which museums can relate to a variety of communities, understood not in terms of opposition but in terms of cross-cultural forms of communication. The second limitation is that the social function of museums can only be considered in terms of governmentality to the exclusion of other relations such as popular culture, consumerism and the pursuit of pleasure.

> […] Third, Bennett limits his interpretation of the sphere of governmentality to culture. This not only has the effect of reducing all cultural practices to an effect of government; it also prevents a recognition of non-cultural contexts for museum as governmental practices. (Witcomb 2003, 17)

This passage warrants commentary. In the following chapters I will consistently argue that observing museums as mere sites of ideological display would be a wrong approach, and that power relations go beyond the governmental sphere (i.e. the production of truths can be handled by other agents, institutional or not). Museums are not just complicit enforcers of whatever the government dictates; we should not look "*through* the mechanisms that are produced when particular forms of knowledge and expertise are translated into practical, technical and institutionalized forms to decipher the modes of power that lie behind them", but rather "look at how particular forms of power are constituted *there*, within those mechanisms, rather than outside or behind them." (Bennett 2004, 5). In other words, I will not be attempting to construct grandiose claims on the general behaviour of these regimes; instead, I will focus exclusively on the museums themselves to see what glimpses they may offer of the rationale which allowed their existence.

I believe Witcomb's critique is, perhaps because of its focus on European and American examples (in which both museums and democracy have undergone remarkably different and possibly longer periods of morphing and settling), too lenient and idealistic, particularly in her call to cross-cultural integration. I believe the institution of the museum in the Middle East, considering the lack of representative freedoms (the region is, so to speak, in a different 'memorial stage'), is not at this point prepared nor intended to embrace alternative readings. In the words of an actual curator, it is not prepared "to willingly acknowledge the legitimacy of multiple interpretations" (Roberts 1997, 129). The regimes are too young, too paranoid and too concerned with their standing and continuity, and therefore not yet ripe for such openings. Despite being far from totalitarian, as there is always an open window for dissent, inclusiveness cannot yet translate into the realm of official museumifications.

Similarly to Witcomb, memory historian Jeffrey K. Olick mentions how "a politics of regret can be founded on an ethic of responsibility rather than an ethic of conviction – not retribution for retribution's sake, but that important combination of knowledge and acknowledgement that lays the foundation for reconciliation not between victim and perpetrator but among their children" (Olick 2007, 151). Again, as I will prove in the chapters that follow, it would be hard to argue for any presence of "regret" or "reconciliation" in these museums. If there is any, it certainly is one-sided and pales before the much more established mechanisms of vindication and resentment, as we will discuss in the last chapter: the "desired response" to these memorial museums is not so much "a commitment to a shared system of ethical values promoting pluralism and tolerance" (Arnold-de Simine 2013, 120). Not only did I not observe a patent reconciliatory stance displayed in these sites; I also do not think it is easy to claim that a given museum space actively and undoubtedly awakens such-and-such feelings on the visitor. A much wider substantial research based on surveys would be required for that. That would amount for a radically different epistemological approach: as aforementioned, here we will be strictly looking at the content displayed in the museums.

I will also discard Witcomb's point about the pursuit of pleasure since we are dealing with trauma sites. While similar interpretations might be valid when dealing with Western models of 'thanatourism'/'dark tourism' (which may stir an interest on the macabre or adrenalin in the visitors), I highly doubt one could make a case for the museums we are dealing with here being in any way the result of a will to economically or touristically reinvigorate areas. Philosopher Adrian Parr suggests that "memorial culture has come to the fore at a time when memory is increasingly being situated in connection to guilt by the market and culture" and that "it is not so much that the logic of postmodernism fosters amnesia as Jameson was to posit; rather it doesn't allow us to forget because there is money to be made off of the labour of memory" (Parr 2006, 176). I will claim that these cases (and not all cases in Middle Eastern settings, since a proper analysis would be required to arrive at such

conclusions) do not apply to such capitalist logics -even though we should accept the fact that the drive of museumification behind them may been directly or indirectly impacted by the rise of such sites in the Western sphere. Moreover, since as mentioned before the gist of the thesis looks at the discourse presented in the exhibits and not the person's reaction to it, I will not delve into the psyche of the visitor (i.e. curiosity, shock, morbidity) unless strictly necessary. I believe that line of research belongs to a completely different set of literature I am not prepared to engage with.

This thesis, therefore, is essentially focused on the description and analysis of the portrayal and re-interpreting of history and memory in these two museums. It thus shares a similar approach to Robin Ostow's *(Re)Visualizing National History* (2008), which deals extensively with European cases. Its theoretical framework is somewhat in line with Dickinson, Blair and Ott's compilation *Places of Public Memory* (2010), which is overtly (and, I believe, rightly) preoccupied with the role of rhetoric in such spaces; as well as with Sherman and Rogoff's influential collection of case studies *Museum Culture. Histories, discourses, spectacles* (1994), which breaks down museums "as the intricate amalgam of historical structures and narrative, practices and strategies of display, and the concerns and imperatives of various governing ideologies". It asks "how museums accord objects particular significances" and examines "the politics of museum exhibitions and display strategies" (Sherman and Rogoff 1994, ix).

However, it should be noted that as opposed to some of the contributions in that book, the aim of this paper is perhaps not so much to "unmask" the structures by which the relations between "objects, bodies of knowledge and processes of ideological persuasion are enacted" (Sherman and Rogoff 1994, x), as in the cases that occupy us there is not much material to "unmask" from an ideological standpoint; at the very most, its subtleties and nuances. As mentioned above, I refuse to observe museums as strictly places of state ideology, which would be a dangerously shallow perspective. Furthermore, each musefied articulation is specific to its place, culture and time, and thus not suitable for general theorizing. I much prefer to concentrate on

the particular cases and their relation to their own particular history: all through the thesis I will attempt to provide the most historically and culturally appropriate/accurate reading. In other words, I'm less concerned with ideology than with the actual stories these places tell, and how they relate to the people. If, as sociologist and museum researcher Timothy W. Luke asserts, museums "should be read as ontologues, whose passages and presentations reveal an important dimension of international relations that few other indicators provide" (Luke 2002, 80), then taking a closer look at what their exhibits are should prove a fruitful enterprise: not only to understand how these nations internally see themselves, but also how they rationalize, through memories and emotions, their place in the world.

1.5. General Information on the Memory Sites

1.5.1. The Amna Suraka Museum

The current Amna Suraka Museum ("Red Security", referring to the former colour of its external walls) is a complex of buildings established in Sulaymaniyah by the Ba'athist regime in 1979. It is located in the very central Shorish neighbourhood, nect to the Azadi Park. It was managed by the *al-Amn al-ʻAmm* (Department of General Security) until 1991. It housed six structures, including offices, several interrogation rooms, two torture chambers, solitary confinement cells and general cells. It was used jointly by the *mûkhâbarât* (Intelligence Service), the *ʻamn* (Secret Security) and the *estikhbârât* (Military Intelligence).

During the 80s, in Sulaymaniyah and elsewhere in Iraqi Kurdistan (as well as in Shiite-heavy areas), the Ba'athist regime engaged in a "sophisticated bureaucratic control of social, cultural, political, and economic life of the entire population" (Moradi 2016). The complex currently known as Amna Suraka was part of a wider network of surveillance and repression conducted by the Northern Bureau of the Baghdad government all across the Kurdish region, which included a series of small

stone ‘forts’ scattered all around the countryside, urban jails and army camps (turned concentration camps) such as Topzawa, Dibs or Nuqra Salman.

Continuous (and sometimes highly arbitrary) arrests were conducted throughout the decade. The detainees were brought to such sites and would often face mental torture, beatings, abuse, rape, starvation and murder (Laizer 1996, 11; McDowall 1996, 359-360). Civilians could be randomly seized by the police at any moment and brought to the Red Security building (Laizer 1996, 185). Among other punishments, the guards forced “the detained person to sit on an empty Pepsi/wine/whisky/arak bottle [anal penetration]”, and there was “public rape of men and women inside the prisons, hanging by wrists, flogging the soles of feet with lengths of electric cable, and interrogation at night as a way of preventing the detainee from sleeping” (Moradi 2016).

The overall situation in Kurdistan worsened in 1985 with the abduction of around 500 children in a substantial intelligence operation designed to counter the *peshmerga* (the guerrilla forces waging war against the Baghdad regime); many of their corpses were returned a couple years later - some had “had their eyes gouged out, or bore other marks of torture” (McDowall 1996, 352).
Things would quickly escalate in 1987 with the appointment of Saddam Husayn’s cousin Ali Hassan al-Majid (notoriously nicknamed ‘Chemical Ali’) as head of the Northern Bureau. Contiguous in time, a series of claims quickly spread among the Ba’athist elite in Baghdad: the idea that, at this late stage of the Iran/Iraq war, the Kurdish *peshmerga* were actively collaborating with Tehran, opening the door for the Iranian Revolutionary Guards to infiltrate the country, and thus shamelessly sabotaging the Iraqi military effort. Consequentially, the Kurds began to “be portrayed as traitors to the state, not merely opponents of Saddam Husayn” (McDowall 1996, 353). Their activities were described to Ba’ath officials and police/military personnel as “a danger for national survival” (Rohde 2010, 39). Al-Majid referred to the Kurdish region in these terms:

> I will prohibit large areas; I will prohibit any presence in them. […] No human beings except on the main roads. For five years I won't allow any human existence there. I don't want their agriculture. I don't want tomatoes; I don't want okra and cucumbers. If we don't act in this way the saboteurs' activities will never end, not for a million years. (Laizer 1996: 34)

Other quotes attributed to Al-Majid point to the endless hatred of his way of thinking: "I will kill them all with chemical weapons! Who is going to say anything? The international community? Fuck them!" (Hardi 2011, 106). And so the regime began to "extirpate Kurdish village society" (McDowall 1996, 354), and "crack down Kurdish 'treachery' once and for all" (Voller 2014, 59) through "extremely brutal counterinsurgency operations" (Rohde 2010, 38). Eight distinct campaigns of systematic genocide with the codename 'Anfal' ensued. They consisted in the heavy gassing with mustard and nerve gasses of hundreds of villages, which were later bombed and razed to the ground. Survivors were sometimes shot on the spot (without distinction between *peshmerga* and villager) or otherwise seized, incarcerated in the aforementioned prisons and camps, tortured and frequently "driven to undisclosed locations and executed". Sometimes prisoners would perish under fatal beatings in jail and their corpses were "left to rot for days where they died before being thrown into pits". Others, especially children, would die in jail due to malnutrition and dysentery (McDowall 1996, 356-360). Though not strictly part of the Anfal campaigns, the most notorious massacre taking place during that time was that of Halabja on the 16th March of 1988. It caused the instant deaths of 3200-5000 civilians (Rohde 2010, 36).

The Anfal was, in some ways, the "logical if brutal conclusion of the policies pursued b the regime towards the Kurds" (Tripp 2002, 245). Estimates of the total number of dead vary from 50.000 (Humans Right Watch, given in Bengio 2005, 175), 100.000 (Aziz 2011, 79; Lawrence 2008, 40; Hardi 2011, 107) and maybe even up to 200.000 (Stansfield and Resool 2007, 120; Bengio 2010, 61; Voller 2014, 60). It is estimated that around 1.5 million people were forcefully resettled to other parts of Iraq in a violent process of imposed "Arabization" (McDowall 1996, 360), and 80%

of the existing villages in the Kurdish region (approximately 4,000) were totally obliterated (Rohde 2010, 37; McDowall 1996, 360). In 1988 the Baghdad government released scores of Kurdish prisoners, who were then "forcibly relocated to housing complexes in the main highways and were left to fend for themselves without any means of support" (Hardi 2011, 107).

In February of 1991, with Operation Desert Storm underway, George H. Bush encouraged the Shiite and Kurdish people to revolt against the Baghdad regime. The popular upheaval was so extensive, however, that Washington soon opted not to support it, fearing severe regional destabilization (Gailbraith 2005, 268). In March of that year, "military bases, security and Ba'th party headquarters in the Kurdish towns and cities were attacked and overthrown by the Kurdish masses with the support of the *peshmerga*" (Aziz 2011, 82). Most of the camps, forts and jails were seized by the revolting populace: Ba'ath officials were either murdered or incarcerated in their own prisons (Lazier 1996, 10). It was by all accounts a strikingly bloody uprising. In his book about the Anfal and its aftermath, Kanan Makiya reproduces a shocking letter worth quoting at length, written by an eyewitness in Sulaymaniyah. It chillingly depicts the horrific takeover of the Red Security building which occupies us:

> On the morning of March 8, the people started coming out on the streets and attacking the police centers, the intelligence services, and the *mukhabarat* [party security]. They got hold of weapons. There were no more than two hundred *peshmerga* fighters in the whole of Sulaimaniyya and the rest were people from all walks of life. It was, I tell you, a genuine popular revolution! […] The real battle was waged around the well-fortified Central Security Headquarters Building in Sulaimaniyya, which held out for forty-eight hours. All the senior officials had fled into this building. Finally their impregnable fortress fell and the masses swarmed in, destroying and killing everything that stood in their way. I saw torture chambers and instruments like you wouldn't believe. Seven hundred security and party men died here and we had to walk on top of their corpses. Those who had survived the fighting were tried and executed on the spot by the people using iron saws and knives even as they screamed and sobbed (Makiya 1993, 89)

Following the American refusal to support the uprising, Sulaymaniyah was recaptured by the Ba'athist forces. However, the international pressure arising from

the mass exodus of hundreds of thousands of terrified Kurdish civilians, nearly two million, fleeing to the Turkish and Iranian borders gave way to the establishment of a no-fly zone, a “safe haven” in the Kurdish region which eventually bestowed on the Kurdish leadership a significant degree of governmental autonomy (Tripp 2002, 257-258).

The Amna Suraka building was left untouched for more than a decade, and in 2003 Hero Ibrahim Ahmed, the wife of Jalal Talabani (leader of the PUK party, whose stronghold is Sulaymaniyah), jump-started a process of museumification which led into the exhibit presently found in the main prison building. The first incarnation of the museum was opened on July of that year (Ridolfo 2003), following the American occupation of Iraq. According to a plaque in the museum, some of its sections -those dealing with the Anfal campaigns and the 1991 exodus- were added in 2014. They were paid for and overseen by the Financial Bureau of the PUK (which “assumed the majority of the costs”) and the governmental Ministry of Martyrs and Anfal Victims (Sulaymaniyah branch). It should be noted, thus, that the museum is not so much the offspring of the central Kurdish government in Erbil, but rather of the party who has for decades enjoyed the most widespread popular support in the Sulaymaniyah region.

1.5.2. The Ebrat Museum

The building currently housing the Ebrat Museum is, according to some accounts, one of the oldest prisons built in Iran. It is situated in downtown Tehran, next to the Shahr Park, the Sardar-e Bagh-e Melli, the former central post office and the presently named Imam Khomeini square. The site may have been already utilized as a jail in late Qajar times, yet it was particularly reinvigorated during the time of Reza Pahlavi Shah, when it became known as the “Tehran Central Jail”. The current structure, which consists of one building with a circular internal courtyard, was erected in the 30s by German architects and engineers According to a plaque in the

museum, the construction began in 1934 and ended in 1939, time during which it was known as the "transitory prison of *Shâhrbâni*", and during the 40s it operated as a women's prison (Sadr 2006)

In the early 70s the building passed onto the hands of the newly formed Anti-Sabotage Joint Committee (*Komiteh Moshtarak*), an organ established in 1972 and formed by the military intelligence, the gendarmerie, the urban police and the SAVAK (the secret police and domestic security agency) with the objective of countering terrorism and suppressing other significant anti-regime activities. They revamped the place as their main centre of operations, detention and interrogation in Tehran. It would almost instantly become an infamous site.

During most of the decade the main bulk of detainees and executions belonged to those guerrillas most actively waging war against the Shah, such as the Marxist Fedayeen and the Islamic-Marxist Mojahedin (Abrahamian 1999, 102). Although by no means as strongly persecuted, religious figures (known in prison slang as "mazhabi") eventually did also start falling under the scrutiny of the police (Abrahamian 1999, 112). The prison "soon attained a macabre reputation as initial interrogations were invariably carried out there". The term *Komiteh* "became synonymous with prison brutality" (Abrahamian 1999, 104-105). The recollections of the mullah Ali Hashemi, the subject of Roy Mottahedeh's monumental *The Mantle of the Prophet*, illustrate its notoriousness as early as 1972, when the "enhanced" interrogation/torture techniques were still in an early phase. After being arrested by secret police officials (for having written an article on Che Guevara and Islam),

> Ali was led out of the villa to a jeep and sat between two men in the back seat for three-hour drive to Tehran. When he caught sight of the huge flight of imposing stairs that stood in front of the post office Reza Shah had built in downtown Tehran, Ali knew what prison he was going to. A block beyond the post office was the "Committee" prison, run by a joint committee of the police and the SAVAK. […] Sometimes at night Ali's real dreams would end with the sounds of screams coming

> from someplace in the center of the prison, sounds that seemed to well up from some deep metallic pit. Ali had heard that the SAVAK tortured people in the Committee prison, and he had also heard that they sometimes played tapes of screams to break the will of the prisoners. Ali couldn't tell if the screams were real or taped, feigned or genuine; he only knew that when he heard the screams he would pull up his legs until his knees were under his chin, wrap his arms tightly around his shins, and watch the small opening of his cell to the corridor, a square patch of darkness slightly less intense than that in the rest of the cell. (Mottahedeh 1985, 258-261)

After hours or days of incarceration in the *Komiteh* jail, detainees who were deemed potentially dangerous were usually transferred to more formal long-term prisons in the Tehran area, notably Qasr (the oldest political prison in the city, established in the 20s), Qezel Hesar, Gohar Dasht and Evin (opened in 1972). The latter would eventually become (both during late Pahlavi era as well as all through the post-revolutionary epoch) the quintessential and most controversial political prison.

Iranian historian Ervand Abrahamian argues that it wasn't until the aftermath of 1953 that torture was regularly introduced in modern Iran, as it had been mostly absent during the reign of Reza Shah. To prove this, he provides several testimonials of arrestees who never faced any physical abuse are given (Abrahamian 1999, 88). However, in the 50s, "the secret police—first the Second Bureau and then the newly created SAVAK—selectively used torture on Tudeh [communist] activists suspected of withholding information on safe houses, arms caches, printing presses, and contacts in the armed forces". After its initial entry into the methodology of the authorities, torture slowly became distressingly systematic. It became more and more 'creative' and intensive in the early to mid 70s under the tutelage of the SAVAK, whose personnel was trained by American and Israeli operatives. The interrogators at the *Komiteh* jail conducted several types of tortures that had been "scientifically" selected to prevent early or unwanted deaths.

They included "the traditional bastinado", which "was excruciatingly painful", especially "when the victim was tied to a metal bed and lashed with a thick knotted electrical cable known as the *kable*" (an agony heightened by forcing victims to "walk around the cell between the rounds of lashings"); "sleep deprivation; extensive

solitary confinement; glaring searchlights; standing in one place for hours on end; nail extractions; snakes (favored for use with women); electrical shocks with cattle prods, often into the rectum; cigarette burns; sitting on hot grills; acid dripped into nostrils; near drownings; mock executions; and an electric chair with a large metal mask to muffle screams while amplifying them for the victim", dubbed the "Apollo". Prisoners were also "humiliated by being raped, urinated on, and forced to stand naked". The stories were so horrific that some hyperbolic claims quickly spread among the society: prisoners "being thrown to bears, starved to death, and having their limbs amputated" and of clerics being forced "to sit naked before strip-teasing prostitutes" (Abrahamian 1999, 106). Around 1976-77, and due to rising international pressure (including that of US presidential candidate Jimmy Carter) and constant scrutiny by human rights organization, the Shah was forced to tone down the levels of torture in the prisons, a process that was nicknamed by inmates as *jimmykrasi* (Abrahamian 1999, 119). According to Abrahamian, a total of 368 members of guerrillas were killed between 1971 and 1977; out of those, 45 perished under torture (Abrahamian 1999, 103).

During the course of the 1979 events, the jail was overtaken by revolutionaries on February 11th, with several of its agents being detained, blindfolded, later put on trial and executed. During that process, a few interviews with interrogators admitting to their activities were conducted and recorded. Many of the official regime vehicles were seized by the masses, as depicted in a series of photographs displayed at the current museum.

The jail continued to be used by the authorities of the Islamic Republic as an "illegal detention centre" in which interrogations and torture resumed. It was renamed Prison no. 3000, but received the more popular nickname *Komiteh-e Towhidi* or Towhid Prison (a Quranic term expressing the doctrine of the Oneness of God). It is estimated that it continued to be operational until its permanent closure in 2000 in the midst of the (generally perceived as) progressive Khatami era (HRW 2004, 40; Abrahamian 1999, 135; Amini 2009).

The prison underwent a process of museumification and opened its doors to visitors under the name Ebrat -a Persian term meaning "example" [to follow]- in the early 2000s. Even though some media outlets mention January 8th 2003 being the opening date, two different plaques in the museum state its opening was in 2000, 2001 and 2004.

According to information provided at the site, the museumification project was the "idea" of Ali Younesi, who at the time was the head of the Ministry of Intelligence (*Vezarat-e Ettela'at Jomhuri-ye Eslami-ye Iran*) during the presidency of Mohammad Khatami (he served during its latter stage, from 2000 to 2005). The fact that the Ministry of Intelligence is the offspring of the SAVAMA, which in turn replaced the SAVAK in the early years of the Islamic Republic, is worth noting; moreover, in 1983 Younesi served as chief court justice within the armed forces judiciary and was responsible for the death sentences of several Fedayeen and Tudeh partisans (Moshdeghi 2012). Although this information would appear as anecdotic, I believe it speaks volumes to one of my arguments in this thesis; the sometimes surprising and cyclical relationship between coercive and non-coercive power.

Even though it was an initiative of Younesi, the works of museumification and preservation were carried out by ICHTO (Iran Cultural Heritage, Handcraft and Tourism Organization), an institution directly administered and funded by the Iranian regime. According to the mission statement written by the director of Ebrat, Qasem Hasanpoor, the museum is intended to go well beyond a tourist site or memory site and should be considered as a didactical space: it "adheres to its purposes so as to create the advancement and education of youth in all manner of good literature, arts, and history that may conduce to the education of people throughout the world. In brief: Ebrat Museum is interested to create knowledge, to open the minds of people to the political knowledge, and to enable new generations to take best advantage of their educational opportunities." Besides presenting the exhibition space, the museum foundation also has departments specializing in Research Affairs, Translation, Publications and Oral History.

The displays of the museum focus entirely on the late Pahlavi era, with no mention whatsoever of its activities in the 80s and 90s.

1.6. Power and museums: a brief theoretical introduction

Analyzing these prison museums from the prism of 'power' may prove rewarding in the quest to understand what type of spaces they end up becoming. Needless to say, in the discussion which follows, 'power' is never taken as an absolute, the same way the content, morphology and/or discourse of a museum is never fully unitary, clear-cut nor strictly monolithic, as it is a product of a collaboration of different types. Yet tendencies, narratives and currents emanating from both state and civil society might very well play a decisive influence in their development and final presentation. Similarly, 'power' as we choose to channel it in this endeavour is by no means a coercive, despotic and violent articulation, but rather a much more diffuse and contextual power, which as will be argued below exists to a certain extent in these prison museums. It contrasts shockingly with its conventional repressive counterpart, which is more attuned to regular prisons. In order to gauge more properly this shift from one type of power to another in the same space, and before delving into the memory sites at hand, we must first look at several key concepts from political theory, sociology and philosophy which will pave the way for a solid conceptual framework.

1.6.1. The appearance of non-coercive power

To start things off, I deem it fair to delve into the subject matter by looking at Foucault. Not the Foucault of *Discipline and Punish*; the thematic closeness might be luring yet somewhat equivocal, as the goal here is not to tackle the inception and workings of the prison - yet of course much can be learnt from his conceptualization

of the discipline exercised over the bodies of men in those spaces. Instead we will be mostly focusing of Foucault's lucid observations on power relations. Even though he never wrote a proper monolithic volume on the subject, and would sometimes highlight its difficulty and underdeveloped nature (Foucault 2000, 284; 1980, 115), surely a substantial and sharp understanding of power is sprinkled throughout his many works. Certainly Foucault does not specifically address museums in his writings, but considering his fascination with disciplinary practices, systems of knowledge (epistemes) and typologies of power, I find it quite logical to think about such spaces from this vantage point. Considering the specificity of my object of study (prison museums) I will undertake my own particular reading of his work, though of course it will be supported with the commentaries of other scholars which have similarly appropriated Foucault to conduct their interpretation of museums.

Foucault made it very clear that he was not speaking of power as a "system of domination that controls everything and leaves no room for freedom" (Foucault 1997, 293). Let us first take into consideration the following paragraph, which in some regards constitutes the backbone of his general argument, derived from his long-time 'suspicion' of the notion of repression (Foucault 2003b, 17).

> The notion of repression is quite inadequate for capturing what is precisely the productive aspect of power. In defining the aspects of power as repression, one adopts a purely juridical conception of such power, one identifies power with a law that says no –power is taken, above all, as carrying the force of prohibition. Now, I believe that is a wholly negative, narrow, skeletal conception of power, one that has been curiously widespread. If power were never anything but repressive, if it never did anything but to say no, do you think one would be brought to obey it? What makes power hold good, what makes it accepted, is simply the fact that it doesn't only weigh on us as a force that says no; it also traverses and produces things, it induces pleasure, forms of knowledge, produces discourse. (Foucault 1980, 119)

If we were to summarize and inevitably somewhat simplify this line of thought, we would come up with the following dyad[1]:

NEGATIVE POWER	POSITIVE POWER

"juridical"	"technical"
Coercion; army, police, prisons	Discourse; education, media, museums

Moreover, when talking about 'power', Foucault is not imagining authoritative sources functioning in a top-down direction, but rather addressing the ability people have to act on things or other people.

> Power must be analysed as something which circulates […], it is never localised here or there, never in anybody's hands, never appropriated as a commodity or piece of wealth. Power is employed and exercised through a net-like organisation. And not only do individuals circulate between its threads; they are always in the position of simultaneously undergoing and exercising its power. They are not only its inert or consenting target; they are always also the elements of its articulation. In other words, individuals are the vehicles of power, nor its points of application. (Foucault 1980, 98)

In his own works Foucault looked at determined 'practices' in specific 'spaces' whose relations with power had at that point not been sufficiently explored. He argued that "penal institutions [among other types] have no doubt a limited significance if one is only looking for their economic significance. On the other hand, they are undoubtedly essential to the general functioning of the wheels of power" (Foucault 1980, 116). The mechanisms taking place in a hospital or a school wouldn't generally be thought of as 'power-based', but they abide to and follow a framework of disciplinary practices which are deemed to be 'right', practices rooted in a certain knowledge, in which power plays a substantial role even if perhaps not so patently. The establishment of 'systems of knowledge' in the period he analyzed (17th-18th centuries mostly) allowed for states to legitimately act on a basis deemed to be 'scientific' and therefore non-debatable. In the past, power struck brutally but succinctly, specifically and episodically, and the general mass of the population was often undisturbed by its exercise.

But then a political reconfiguration of the relationship between the governor and the governed took place: a new "economy" of power employing "much more efficient" and "much less wasteful" techniques than previously (Foucault 1980, 119). The

gradual penetration of the state (and its power) into segments of a society up to then untouched by it produced a subject (i.e. a civilian) which had his or her whole life affected -regardless of his or her potential unawareness- by the spread of such power.

In other words, the age of laws, prohibitions and punishments as the sole source of power came to an end: the king's head was cut (Foucault 1980, 221), and a more scattered and undetectable morphology of power began its creeping consolidation[2]. It began to make sense to observe the social life of an individual in regards to how much it may be touched by the machinations of non-oppressive and non-unitary power relations (i.e. not violent and not emanating from a single governmental agency). All individuals are to some extent engaged in or affected by this non-coercive power, some sort of homogenizing force which at the very least attempts to elicit a widespread common way of thinking – and it is "not only the power of the state, but the power that is exercised throughout the social body, through extremely difficult channels, forms, and institutions" (Foucault 2000, 283). Of course the most obvious institutional examples of this are the schools and the media, but it is also only natural to include museums, which are to a certain degree connected to the first two, in the sense that they might share disciplinary techniques and aims, as well as being spaces of narrative, indoctrination and communication.

1.6.2. Governmentality, culture and museums

Tony Bennett, perhaps the most renowned interpreter of Foucault in the sphere of museums, supports the idea that certain cultural forms were in their origins "technologically adapted in order to be rendered governmentally useful" (Bennett 1999, 390). He also speaks of the appearance of a "broader conception of the governmentalization of social relations – that is, the management of populations by means of specific knowledges, programmes and technologies – which, according to Foucault, most clearly distinguishes modern forms of social regulation from their

predecessors" (Bennett 1999, 382). A more detailed account of this 'shift' in the economy of power is as follows:

> If culture is the servant of power within absolutist regimes, the power it serves is – if not a singular one – certainly a power which augments its own effects in being represented as singular just as it is a power whose interest in the generality of the population is limited to the need to impress it to obedience. In the early nineteenth century, by contrast, we see the sphere of culture being, quite literally, refashioned – retooled for a new task – as it comes to be inscribed within governmental strategies which aim less at exacting popular obedience to a sovereign authority than at producing in a population a capacity for new forms of thought, feeling and behaviour." (Bennett 1999: 387)

Indeed we must proceed cautiously; a basic misconception would be claiming that crystal-clear discourses or ideologies flood these prison museums in a conscious attempt at brainwashing and stirring 'obedience' among the public. That they present a narrative is a truism; but narratives are hardly basic. Firstly, we must accept they are public places in which rhetoric is enforced, but not rhetoric in the sense of attempting to convince or sway, as noted by memory site scholars Dickinson, Blair and Ott in their reflections on museums and rhetoric:

> Once conceived as a rather narrow standard of assessment in oratory (Did a speaker achieve his/her ends?), rhetoric has broadened its sense from effect to "consequence" (effects that exceed or run counter to goals), and more recently to "effectivity" (understood as social value or utility, as modes of re-use or circulation (Dickinson, Blair and Ott 2010, 5)

Secondly, no matter how respectable or legitimate museums might be perceived -and some studies point out that they *are* regarded as legitimate (see Cuno 2004, 18; Thelen and Rosenzweig 1998, 105)[3]- they are still only one fragment of a person's understanding of his/her surrounding reality (next to other sources of information such as the family, school, the media, etc.). Bennett warns that "the main burden of Foucault's critique […] is that western political thought, up to and including Marxist theories of the state, has proved incapable or recognizing the capillary network of power relations associated with the development of modern forms of government

because it still envisages power, on the model of its monarchical form, as emanating from a single source" (Bennett 1999, 383). These prison museums are not the state's essence translated into a cultural physical discourse, even if they appear to offer consensual and straightforward narratives – they are the results of an interplay of power relations.

The bottom line here is that even if these memory sites may be seen as stalwarts of a precise and determined reading of "what happened", they are not the products of a single mindset or agent, for they are a collaborative process in which the state concedes grants or sponsorship; curators engage in a process of design; visitors bring with themselves previous understandings, knowledge and expectations of what is being portrayed; etc. A memorial dialogue ensues at the site. And yet despite this flexibility, it is unquestionable that there exist production and spreading of *a* (fixed) knowledge in the museum; it is a result of power. Since, if "power is exercised only over free subjects, and only insofar as they are 'free'", and consequently, "there is not a face-to-face confrontation of power and freedom as mutually exclusive facts (freedom disappearing everywhere power is exercised) but a much more complicated interplay" (Foucault 2003a, 139), institutions forcing ideologies upon individuals would hardly classify as sites were power is enforced – those would be sites of submission and violence, of the type of coercion that "bends, breaks, destroys, closes off all possibilities" (Foucault 2003a, 137). On the contrary, the art of governing people "is not a way to force people to do what the governor wants; it is always a versatile equilibrium, with complementarity and conflicts between techniques which assure coercion and processes through which the self is constructed or modified by himself" (Foucault 1993, 203).

The latter processes, these "techniques" or "technologies" of the self, exist insofar as "discipline requires that people interiorize social norms and become self-policing. This leads to an emphasis on interiority and the psyche and makes for a self-regarding subject, to whom the objective world matters only in relation to the feeling

it provokes" (Henning 2006, 112). According to Foucault, the collision between the technologies of domination and those of the self, which "permit individuals to effect by their own means a certain number of operations in their own bodies and souls, thought, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform themselves" (Foucault 1997, 225), forms the bases of what he calls governmentality. There is a tension between how the individual exercises his or her behaviour or freedom of belief and the outside threats of coercion. "Disciplinary societies operate though technologies that survey, classify and control time, space and people"; "as the individuals are surveyed, classified and exposed to this system, they become their own 'self-regulators', modifying their behaviour in accordance with the demands of social norms", so that "the ongoing process of normalization becomes self-perpetuating" (Barrett 2012, 103). In conclusion, the equilibrium between the inside and the outside is a power relation:

> Power relations are mobile, they can be modified, they are not fixed once and for all. […] It should also be noted that power relations are possible only insofar as the subjects are free. If one of them were completely at the other's disposal and became his thing, an object on which he could wreak boundless and limitless violence, there wouldn't be any relations of power. […] In power relations there is necessarily the possibility of resistance because if there were no possibility of resistance (of violent resistance, flight, deception, strategies capable of reversing the situation), there would be no power relations at all. (Foucault 1997, 292)

Visitors coming to these museums are free; by passing through the doors they do not submit to a total restructuring of their minds, for they are also subjected to other power relations informing their personal existence and thought that might come from institutions as diverse as the family, the workplace or religious figures. They also know how to self-regulate when experiencing personal disagreements with what is displayed. The articulated discourse in the museum rarely permeates the subject in its entirety, for it is a malleable relationship. As Bennett points out, "power is never exercised without encountering sources of opposition to which it is obliged to make concessions so that what is consented to is always power that has been modified in the course of its exercise" (Bennett 1999: 384). Somewhat similarly, in Foucault's terms, the exercise of power

> operates in the field of possibilities in which the behaviour of active subjects is able to inscribe itself. It is a set of actions on possible actions; it incites, it induces, it seduces, it makes easier or more difficult; it releases and contrives, makes more probable or less; in the extreme, it constrains or forbids absolutely, but it is always a way of action upon one or more acting subjects by virtue of their acting or being capable of action. A set of actions upon other actions (Foucault 2003a, 138)[4]

States do not invent power; they might extrapolate it to their institutions and reorganize it with more overtly political purposes, but the tension has always been there. Furthermore, not all disciplinary sites are clear or obvious enactments of power. The academic program present in schools, for instance, might be directly or indirectly dictated by the state, but the school is not a state institution in the same vein as the army or the police. And the same can be said of museums, which may be commissioned by the state or monitored by it, but whose creation depends on other actors such as municipalities (which might or might not be linked directly to the state apparatus), private investors or outside experts/intellectuals which contribute to the forming and display of information; they all converge tainted by pre-existing power relations. The prison museums that we are dealing with here are the result of governmental initiatives and funding, but that doesn't make them strictly physical incarnations of what the state stands for.

Moreover, as Foucault claims, there is no clear and absolute dichotomy and separation between 'negative' and 'positive' power, as they may inform each other outside the realms of the state, in what we can generally call the 'society'[5], a non-specific area in which different kinds of power relations and systems of knowledge exist. That is to say, it may be argued that it is only in highly totalitarian systems where the states' ideological dictum is essentially enforced with violence on a society which has been summarily and vehemently (and of course impossibly) incorporated into the state identity as if it was a homogeneous item, almost as if stopping history (Lefort 1986b, 276). In hybrid or relatively democratic systems (those which occupy us), the existing power relations can contribute to and/or

detriment the aims of the state. The problem resides, as noted by Bennett, to which extent it is fair or possible to (attempt to) study how much of the dominant "ideology" has in fact penetrated the subject: "It remains the case that the field of culture is thought of as structured by the descending flows of hegemonic ideologies, transmitted from the centres of bourgeois cultural power, as they reach into and reorganize the everyday culture of the subordinate classes. As a consequence, analysis is then often concerned to ascertain how far and how deeply such ideologies have reached into the lives of the subordinate classes or, per contra, to determine the extent to which their downward transmission has been successfully resisted" (Bennett 1999, 384). But wouldn't it be quite equivocal to observe the situation as it were a pure dichotomy? For the division between society and state is rarely so simple and straightforward.

Bennett, interestingly for our topic, does trace a striking parallel between prisons (institutions of confinement, or the 'carceral archipelago') and museums (institutions of spectacle, or the 'exhibitonary complex'), both of which were actually developed in their modern-day modalities around the same time, the late 18th and early 19th centuries. He considers prisons and museums to be the "Janus face of power" (Bennett 1988, 99).

> The institutions comprising 'the exhibitionary complex' [as opposed to prisions] were involved in the transfer of objects and bodies from the enclosed and private domains in which they had previously been displayed (but to a restricted public) into progressively more open and public arenas where, through the representation to which they were subjected, they formed vehicles for inscribing and broadcasting the messages of power (but of a different type) throughout society. Two different sets of institutions and their accompanying knowledge/power relations, then, whose histories, in these respects, run in opposing directions. Yet they are also parallel histories (Bennett 1988, 74)

He proceeds to argue that museums ultimately responded to the need not so much of disciplining bodies, but of "winning hearts and minds"; they were a set of "cultural technologies concerned to organize a voluntarily self-regulating citizenry", which "sought to allow the people, and en masse rather than individually, to know rather to

be known, to become the subjects rather than the objects of knowledge" (Bennett 1988, 76), including also the regulation of the lower or working classes (Bennett 1988, 84). Whereas the prison 'orders' the individuals in an enclosed space, the museum has its doors open; there is a relative reversal of the idea of the panopticon paradigm, in the sense that in the museums, not only can everybody be seen, but everybody can see (Bennett 1988, 78). This is particularly significant in the prison museum, since the inside of its walls was, during its times as a jail, kept from the general public.

Another major museum historian, Eilean Hooper-Greenhill, also looking from a Foucauldian prism, reached similar conclusions, speaking of how "the 'museum' became part of the network of constant and multiple relations between population, territory, and wealth" (Hooper-Greenhill 1992, 190). Timothy W. Luke, a third ardent power-relations interpreter of museums I will be borrowing from, talks of such exhibition spaces as "rhetorical relays, conceptual capacitors, and ideological integrers for the virtual circuits of command/control/communication and intelligence that develop stable social interactions sustainably and successfully" (Luke 2002, 228). Hence they not only are essential in the structures of power, but may perhaps even be more effective than domination or repression:

> Their often sophisticated narrative indirection orders social and personal behaviour from below by steering inclinations tacitly or implicitly through amusing diversion, making this sort of knowing often far more powerful than direct legislation by sovereign agencies attempting to impose order from above through coercive acts. Many social institutions are involved in activating and closing these educational processes, and it is quite apparent that all cultural institutions, like art, science and history museums, are important centres of such power-expressing and knowledge-articulating activity (Luke 2002, 222)

Regardless of whether we consider museumification as disciplinary, as a practice or technique, it is true it is based on putting things (information, facts, objects) in a certain order, filling a physical space so as to satisfy certain functions – an informational-educational display of content. Though non-state specific, there is a

certain codification of what the “museum” is, based on its emergence and development in the West, a codification that was later imported to other parts of the world (i.e. how a ‘natural history’ museum should be; what are the basics of an ‘art museum’, and so on). In this regard, the ‘museum’ can be observed under the lens of the new ‘techniques’ nascent in said time period.

CHAPTER 2

POWER AND HISTORY

Thus far it has become evident that we can naturally include museums in the Foulcadian investigation of knowledge and power[6]. The following chapters will turn to our cases and attempt to analyze them from different angles directly or indirectly related to power. This section looks at how 'history' and 'nation' are conceived in the exhibits. Since, as mentioned in the introduction, these spaces synthesize memory and history, it is expected they carry substantial historiographical weight.

2.1. A break with the past: the emergence of a people

One of the functions of the exhibition space as it coalesced into a concept two centuries ago was to provide the citizenry with sanctioned patterns of thinking and self-perceiving. As it coincided with the emergence of modern states, there was an organic interaction between both processes:

> A new technology of the exercise of power also emerged which was probably even more important that the constitutional reforms and new forms of government established at the end of the eighteenth century. […] I would say instead that what I find most striking about these new technologies of power is their concrete and precise characters, their grasp of a multiple and differentiated reality. […] It becomes a matter of obtaining productive service from individuals in their concrete lives. And in consequence, a real and effective "incorporation" of power was necessary, in the sense that power had to be able to gain access to the bodies of individuals, to their acts, attitudes, and the modes of everyday behaviour. (Foucault 1980, 124)

This is directly related to the 18th/19th century trends of the 'nation' emerging as the foremost innovation in the writing of a 'history' of the peoples, which had mostly to that point been concerned with the history of monarchs and dynasties:

> At this time, the nation is by no means something that is defined by its territorial unity, a definite political morphology, or its systematic subordination to some imperium. The nation has no frontiers, no definite system of power, and no State. The nation circulates behind frontiers and institutions. The nation, or rather "nations", or in other words the collections, societies, groupings of individuals who share a status, mores, customs and a certain particular law – in the sense of regulatory statuses rather than Statist laws. History will be about this, about these elements. And it is those elements that will begin to speak: it is the nation that begins to speak. (Foucault 2003b, 134)

With the advent of the nation-state, the preoccupations of power coming from governments became more conscious of its place in time and space, its unitary standing in a sea of other nations, and its past and present - in other terms, of its character and legacy. Therefore agents became increasingly absorbed in asserting and creating a streamlined version of 'history' the subjects could be identified and pervaded with. And this history was about the nation – more so the people than their rulers. Additionally, it highlighted the break with the past brought about by the dawn of democracy, the republic, etc. These trends are certainly old: but a residual tendency to "build the nation" is still very much palpable in memory sites located in the region that occupies us. In the following passage, Hooper-Greenhill is discussing late 18th century France, but it is remarkably eerie how much of it applies to modern-day Middle East, particularly the cases of Iran and Iraqi Kurdistan, and to Ebrat and Amna Suraka more specifically:

> The ‘museum’ as a disciplinary apparatus articulated a new ensemble of oppositions within a new regime of truth. The oppositions included private/public, closed/open, tyranny/liberty, superstition/knowledge, inherited wealth/courage. The museum was a crucial instrument that enabled the construction of a new set of values that at once discredited the ancient regime and celebrated the Republic. The collections, the confiscations from the tyrants and the trophies of war, accumulated together within one space, previously the property of the king and now available to all, materially demonstrated the historic shift of power. (Hooper-Greenhill 1992, 190)

Denouncing the previous regime by displaying its misguided excesses became part of the discursive ‘formation’ of the nation understood in its contemporary terms. We can observe these tendencies in our Kurdish case: in the external courtyard of Amna Suraka, several of the Ba’athist government’s weaponry (see Fig. 1 and 2), including tanks and artillery weapons, are exhibited. An information panel describes them as having been stationed in this site as well as partaken in the destruction and genocide of the Anfal campaigns. Displaying them serves as both ‘proof’ of the massacres as well as prized ‘bounty’ signalling the acquisition of sovereignty and the end to that regime’s reign of terror. There’s also an exhibit of smaller weapons used by the Ba’athist forces, with a note that reads “we neither manufactured these weapons, nor feel proud exhibiting them. In fact, those who threatened our existence used them”. The bellicose possessions of the tyrannical regime are presented as signifying a dark past which has been overcome. Similarly, atop the Gara Mountain in the Duhok region, one can visit the ruins of a building which used to be a small summer palace briefly frequented by Saddam Husayn. Although the site was semi-destroyed in 1994, the remaining rubble has not been removed: it sits undeterred as if signalling the ‘historic shift of power’.

Figures 1 and 2 Ba'athist tanks and artillery on display outside Amna Suraka

This process of exhibiting/criticizing confiscations of the previous regime(s) in order to showcase their wrongdoings is also widespread in Iranian museography. The clearest example is the former American Embassy, now an exhibition space named "Museum of Anti-Arrogance", in which scores of American equipments, from tape recorders to typing machines, are solemnly displayed as "spying devices". Again, the narrative is that the "people" revolted against that type of surveillance and now the crimes of the foreigners are in full display. There's also an undercurrent of condemnation in the preserving of the many Pahlavi palaces, including the impressive Golestan in Tehran, which are open for visiting. For the foreign visitor, they might appear as bizarre buildings representing, through their peculiar ornaments, a past era; but in the eyes of the regime (and supposedly of the vast majority of the civil society) they exemplify the type of disconnection towards the populace the Shah was accused of, as well as the unnecessary and vile excesses committed by the monarchs – their delusional grandeur.

Figure 3 Room in Ebrat displaying the lavish lifestyle of Mohammed Reza Shah

The Ebrat prison museum also engages in these dynamics. In my first visit there was a room, apparently removed over time, which directly fulfilled this function: it displayed, through photographs and items, the rotten essence of "Pahlavi Iran" (see Fig. 3) – and what those subjects interned in the jail were fighting against. The idea is to give a glimpse, particularly to the younger generations, of what the monarch stood for, and how it was opposed to the interests of the "people". As of now, vehicles utilized by senior officials of the Anti-Sabotage Joint Committee are parked in the outside corridors of the prison. The most noticeable and prized among them is the Cadillac limousine employed by General Hossein Fardoust, who was SAVAK deputy head for ten years. In later chapters we will analyze how this exhibition of "spoils" plays into the construction of a fixed type of memory.

These displays describe to the 'peoples', implicitly or explicitly, what they are *not*. Because it is not only a matter of controlling the populace through scientific or administrative technical developments (as asserted by Foucault, areas such as hygiene, fertility or demographics), but also establishing a comprehensive identity for its citizens, a sense of belonging to their territory and land: the concept of nationality. As neatly summarized by another scholar following Hooper-Greenhill's thread,

> The new public function of the museum was to educate the public *en masse*, producing "civilized" citizens for the republic. A new relationship was also forged between the state and the public museum. Behind the scenes in the museum, a "knowledgeable subject", know as a curator, produced knowledge for consumption by the public in the public spaces of the museum. […] Liberating collections from the monarch, rendering them "accessible to all" and thereby "public", meant that the "public museum" was invented. (Barrett 2012: 101)

But, why was the museum 'public' in its immediate inception, why did it become a responsibility of the state?

> While new public museums may have appeared to offer the potential to open up a properly discursive 'public' sphere for the debate of social and political issues, they tended in fact to be quickly appropriated by the newly disseminated forms of state power that Bennett, following Foucault, describes as being organized around a logic of governmentality. This appropriation of 'the public' via their institutions was not simply connected to the state's desire to infiltrate the life of its citizens. It also emerged as a result of the pressure exerted by the social reformers for the state to host and help the lower classes. (Message 2006, 93)

The intricacies and rising structures of the modern nation-state were thus endowed with the mission of spreading the knowledge; to play the role of the indoctrinator. Therefore the museum obtained an official, "institutional nature" which encourages the "construction of narratives that inhibit random access in favour or orderly, informative meaning-formation" (Crane 2000, 4). Luke also raises an interesting point about the fact that even though museums address the collective public, they also aim at the visitor perceiving the history within not only as part of a "nation", but also as his or her own story – they individualize.

> Museums script their ongoing shows of force in projects that fashion fresh patterns of subjectivity in which individuals and collectivities can affirm themselves as individual or collective subjects with particular identities and peculiar values. Knowledge and power compound each other's effects at these cultural sites by granting access to the sights of knowing recognition as well as giving out the cites of powerful guidance through museum amusements (Luke 2002, 222)

Needless to say, no museum is fully exempt of attempts to portray how the 'people' and the 'subjects' are, whether they are exhibition spaces showcasing the 'archaeology' of past civilizations or the contribution to the fine arts of local citizens, but it is particularly blatant, obviously, in memorial sites such as Amna Suraka and Ebrat, in which the lived-through trauma enhances what is being illustrated. As we will see, these prison museums portray what individuals went through, and in the process, construct the ideal of an individual in the contemporary reality.

2.2. Prison museums as 'ontologues' of a national history

> We may want to assume for purposes of description that the life history of an individual starts with birth. But when does the life of a collectivity start? At what point do we set the beginning of the past to be retrieved? How do we decide – and how does the collectivity decide – which events to include and which to exclude? (Trouillot 1995, 16)

These questions by noted anthropologist and Haitian scholar Michel-Rolph Trouillot summarize the gist of the complex endeavour facing memorial museums. Similarly to museums and modern nation states, historiography consolidated in 19th century; and debates around *what* can be historically told and *how* it can be told promptly followed suit. Since, in fact, 'history' is (or potentially can) be regarded as both an ontological and epistemological concept:

> Human beings participate in history both as actors and as narrators. The inherent ambivalence of the word "history" in many modern languages, including English, suggests this dual participation. In vernacular use, history means both the facts of the matter and a narrative of those facts, both "what happened" and "that which is said to have happened". The first meaning places the emphasis on the sociohistorical process, the second on our knowledge of that process or on a story about that process. […] The

> vernacular use of the word history thus offers us a semantic ambiguity: an irreducible distinction and yet an equally irreducible overlap between what happened and that which is said to have happened. Yet it also suggests the importance of context: the overlap and the distance between the two sides of historicity may not be susceptible to a general formula. The ways in which what happened and that which is said to have happened are and are not the same may itself be historical. (Trouillot 1995, 3-4)

This overlap is generally of interest among constructivist historians, which contend that "the historical narrative bypasses the issue of truth by virtue of its form. Narratives are necessarily emplotted in a way that life is not. Thus they necessarily distort life whether or not the evidence upon which they are based could be proved correct. Within that viewpoint, history becomes one among many types of narratives with no particular distinction except for its pretense of truth" (Trouillot 1995, 6). Needless to say, our prison museums are prime examples of 'emplotting': due to their condition as permanent exhibition spaces, by default they are required to 'package' history. As we will see in the pages to follow, by doing they explicate not only the events specific to their site, and in fact provide a wider interpretation of the historical context.

In a particularly inspired reflection, Foucault said that "we must not imagine that the world turns toward us a legible face which we would only have to decipher; the world is not the accomplice of our knowledge; there is no prediscursive providence which disposes the world in our favour. We must conceive discourse as a violence we do to things" (Foucault 1984, 125). And of course, putting things in order as well as linguistically and conceptually interpreting them -that is, partaking in the exercise of writing history- is by default a retrospective (and indeed violent) affair – and it is also an effort in "connecting" events. Media archaeologist Wolfgang Ernst talks of how "the category of the universal interrelation of things (*nexus rerum universalis*), borrowed from Enlightment thinking, became temporalized in nineteenth-century museology; the effect of historical progress in fact was an effect of such museal staging and framing" (Ernst 2000, 20) The contemporary acknowledgment of history as a somewhat regular (or regularizable) series of connected events was thus to some

extent an organic product of museum practices – processes which still continue to this very day.

If history is a flow, perhaps a shallow description but surely no proper analysis can be made in the immediate aftermath of any given event. As classical positivist approaches would have it, "the professionalization of [the discipline of history] is partly premised on that distinction: the more distant the sociohistorical process is from knowledge, the easier the claim to a "scientific" professionalism" (Trouillot 1995, 5). "Perspective" is a requirement; and once time has passed, history is revisited in accordance to presently prevailing frames of thought or epistemes. Thus, the 'writing' (or 'rewriting') of history may sometimes fall trap to the fallacy of determinism. If a monarch or tyrant was toppled, it must've been because of the perseverance, historical rightfulness and mobilizing genius of his topplers (as if "it could not have been any other way") – despite the fact that such events are unpredictable and highly uncontrolled phenomena. The same problematic can be applied to collective memory, and surely to these memorial museums, which "resocialize people to accept artful displays of material objects as authoritative and legitimate means to understand the world." (Luke 2002, 122)

Needless to say, one can have a field day when bringing this sort of scepticism to the Middle East, an area which for the most parts suffers from a chronic inability to truly come to terms with the relative artificiality of its "nation states", as is clearly the case with Iraq. The role played by governmental apparatuses in the shaping of cultural frames may not be absolute, but it certainly exists, and it has had its own policies, techniques and effects. As Bennett remarks,

> Take the manifold political issues associated with the relations between nation, culture and identity. It is clear that this nexus of relations has been shaped into being by the activities of modern governments concerned to endow their citizens with specific sets of nationalized traits and attributes. It is also equally clear that, whatever their present configuration, there can be no reorganization of the relations between nation, culture

> and identity without intruding policy – and so a shift in culture's governmental deployment- into that trinity. (Bennett 1999, 390)

Museums are essentially modern institutions insofar as they can be tools for the spreading of "nationalizing" or homogenizing currents. In the wiser words of Gellner, in "standardised, homogeneous, centrally sustained high cultures, pervading entire populations *and not just* elite minorities, a situation arises in which well-defined educationally sanctioned and unified cultures constitute very nearly the only kind of unit with which men willingly and often ardently identify" (Gellner 1983, 55). Emphasis is mine, intended to underscore it is not merely a top-down process, but rather a collaborative or at least consensual endeavour. Without the possibility to 'ardently identify', nationalist narratives will not be able to persevere (as we saw in the introduction with the case of Lebanon as seen through Salibi's eyes). Benedict Anderson studied how the observation of the past as linear and its utilization by the present is an inherently modern phenomenon which aims to "think the nation" (Anderson 1991, 22):

> Dying for one's country, which usually does not choose, assumes a moral grandeur which dying for the Labour Party, the American Medical Association, or perhaps even Amnesty International cannot rival, for these are all bodies one can join or leave at easy will. Dying for the revolution also draws its grandeur from the degree to which it is felt to be something fundamentally pure. (Anderson 1991, 143)

Nationalizing efforts to ensure the legitimacy of the modern states include the establishment of myths, the claim of territories, the clear demarcation of friends and foes, the morphology of foreign relations, the extolment of personal sacrifices, and even the invention of traditions -as Hobsbawm (1983) would have it. In some instances (most certainly in the Kurdish case), as Anthony Smith posited, "ethnic nationalism has become a 'surrogate' religion which aims to overcome the sense of futility engendered by the removal of any vision of an existence after death, by linking individuals to persisting communities whose generations form indissoluble links in a chain of memories and identities" (Smith 1986, 176).

Mahir A. Aziz, researching memorial/nationalizing currents in post-1991 Kurdistan, resorts to Smith's "ethno-symbolist school of thought" for his analysis, and comes up with three main characteristics of nationalism which apply to the Kurdish case: "(1) it stresses subjective memories, values, myths and sentiments; (2) it recognizes the impact that 'old' cultural identities and ethnic ties have on the growth of nations and national identities; and lastly, (3) it clarifies the importance of collective passions and deep-seated loyalties" (Aziz 2011, 43). In other words:

> Belief in a unitary ethnic nation among the Kurds has produced an intensely felt collective sense of 'oneness' and has served a variety of functions in modern Iraqi Kurdistan. The distinction between cultural or ethnic and civil nationalism is difficult to ascertain in the Kurdish case the boundary dividing them is unclear. Both types of nationalism look forward and backwards to seek to build a common destiny and obtain historical legitimacy. […] A unique sense of Kurdish national identity emerged when Kurdish society began to modernize. People came to define themselves in terms of ethnicity based on the myth of common ancestry. This meshed with civic identity and its acquisition of political rights. One can assume that ideas of civic nationalism spread along with the political transformation of the post-1990s. (Aziz 2011, 28-29)

In the Kurdish process nationalizing, elements of a shared culture were particularly highlighted (i.e. "laws, dress, music, food and folklore"), as "providers of common cultural bonds", "national symbols as markers of national solidarity" and "interactive aids through which people can and do participate and celebrate the nation and their linkages to it" - which, I believe, include museums as "means of new technological communications". All these "represent the group as a whole or in the abstract, thereby communicating 'groupness' itself" (Aziz 2011, 36-38).

Figures 4 and 5 Traditional house display at Amna Suraka

Later we will examine how trauma played a significant role in this process – for now, it will suffice to note how in Amna Suraka, a memory site condemning the excesses of the Ba'ath, there is a whole room devoted to the pre-Anfal regional lifestyle: a recreation of a traditional house, also exhibiting the classic Kurdish attire (see Figures 4 and 5). Suddenly, the prison museum turns into some sort of ethnographical exhibit, evoking a rather nostalgic look at the (blatantly idyllic) existence Kurds had before oppression fell upon them. It is, in some regards, the utopian representation of a people. This space is remarkable not for its randomness, but because of its attempt to construct a fixed 'national' reality which the tyrant attempted to crush. Surfing on the myth of the common ancestry and 'old' traditional identities, it can be considered an effort to reinforce Kurdish identity "by means of language, culture and education" (Bengio 2010, 67); or to "glorify history, endowing their nation with deep historical roots" -in the words of another scholar who

additionally analyzed Kurdish and Iraqi school textbooks, revealing the utter disparity of information and the "competing and contradictory visions of history held by Iraqi ethnonational groups" (Kirmanj 2014, 97).

As aforementioned, historians have always been to some extent troubled by epistemological problems when it comes to the study of the past; the question of "how can one write a history of the present, which necessitates a reading of history based on a question formulated today, that is not a projection of today's preoccupations onto the past?" (Castel 1994, 239). If this is a struggle for the professional historian -if academicians need to set on the task of acknowledging "both the distinction and the overlap between process and narrative" (Trouillot 1995, 23)- of course less scholarly cultural entities, such as state agents or museum curators, cannot escape from it –not to mention the average visitor to the exhibition. I think this is very telling in our cases, given that the establishment of 'official' histories came in the aftermath of tumultuous and/or violent periods: Hobsawm observes that "paradoxically, the past remains the most useful analytical tool for coping with constant change" (Hobsbawm 1972, 11). That is to say, in moments of substantial change (or ongoing change), contemplating the past as solid and lineal proves a helpful, even necessary, mechanism for making sense out of the confusion. This is the ultimate function of that ethnographical room in Amna Suraka, or of the exhibition of 'spoils' shown in the previous chapter. Especially in the cases of Iran and Kurdistan, I believe the past is used and reused by states, societies and communities to serve the particular interests which concern them in the present moment; and of course it is only natural for such nationalizing and/or discursive agendas to circulate in museums, which according to Luke, are sites functioning as 'ontologues', "telling us what reality really is", helping the people "forge reality" and organizing "the collective rites of this unstable reality's reception that will write authoritative accounts of the past, present, and future in their displays" (Luke 2002, 222)[7]. In the eloquent words of cultural historian Robert Hewison,

> The impulse to preserve the past is part of the impulse to preserve the self. Without knowing where we have been, it is difficult to know where we are going. The past is the foundation of individual and collective identity, objects from the past are the source of significance as cultural symbols. Continuity between past and present creates a sense of sequence out of aleatory chaos and, since chance is inevitable, a stable system of ordered meanings enables us to cope with both innovation and decay. The nostalgic impulse is an important agency in adjustment to crisis, it is a social emollient and reinforces national identity when confidence is weakened or threatened. The paradox, however, is that one of our defences against change is change itself: through the filter of nostalgia we change the past, and through the conservative impulse we seek to change the present. The question then is not whether or not we should preserve the past, but what kind of past we have chosen to preserve, and what that has done to our present. (Hewison 1999, 161)

Most studies concerned with these types of discursive transactions taking place in museum spaces (including the 'preservation' of the past and the tension/continuity it maintains with the present) investigate European or American settings, which evidently have a longer history of such practices. This analysis intends to translate these insights to the arena of the Middle East, but not without certain precaution. Since nationalizing politics of states can be observed in terms of modernity, it is remarkable how many of the countries in this region are not completely settled in their 'pasts' and thus continue to suffer from identity problems (the most poignant example being Lebanon as read by Salibi). But some of this Western literature can be extrapolated if applied with sensibility to the cultural specifics of the region. I would further argue that despise the mentioned nationalizing struggles, the nation as imagined in Amna Suraka and Ebrat is very much conclusive due to the emergence of clear-cut regimes. The following reflection by Trouillot, which summarizes part of our hypothesis so far, is applicable to most situations in which "history" and "memory" are created: "A flag, a memorial, a museum exhibit, or an anniversary can become the center of a living theater with historical pretensions and worldwide audiences", and therefore "the production of history for mass consumption in the form of commercial and political rituals" has become "increasingly manipulative in spite of the participation of professional historians as consultants to these various ventures" (Trouillot 1995, 137). This brings us to a second cautionary approach: as of now, no comprehensive analysis of the effects of museums in the people in Iran and Iraq exists in the literature, so it may be a fallacy to treat the discursive

morphology of the spaces and visitor expectations with Western standards. However, I would argue that dynamics resembling the history/memory site are patent in the region: particularly, the Shiite preservation and extolment of shrines, holy places and similar memorial enclaves (i.e. *shohada* graveyards, devoted to martyrs) is superficially not so dissimilar in its commemorative goals. Memorializing currents can also be culturally located in Kurdistan: we have for example the figure of Mustafa, one of the testimonies of Kanan Makiya's *Cruelty and Silence*, who strived to build a memorial monument for the dead in his village of Gultapa in the immediate aftermath of the Anfal (Makiya 1994, 148).

In fact Appadurai and Breckenridge, when studying the condition of museums in a non-Western locale such as India, raise concerns similar to those we encountered so far: how an "object's meanings have always reflected a negotiated settlement between long-standing cultural significations and more volatile group interests and objectives", there being dynamics which "range from the problems associated with ethnicity and social identity, nostalgia, and the search for 'museified' authenticity, to the tension between the interests states have in fixing local identities and the pressures localities exert in seeking to transform such identities" (Appadurai and Breckenridge 1999, 406). This is similar to Appardurai's prior suggestion "of a number or formal constraints that universally enforce that credibility and limit the character of historical debates: authority, continuity, depth, and interdependence" (referenced in Trouillot 1995, 8). Similarly, in her study of Israeli history museums, Ariella Azoulay adopts a Western approach on the manufactured character of exhibits, designed so as to push forward specific versions of history, as well as their pursuit of credibility:

> The dominant practice that characterizes the traditional museum is an act of petrification, taxidermy or freezing, whih makes possible preservation of the outward appearance of things as they appeared in the past, or at least the illusion of this appearance. The 'authentic' value is an outgrowth of this practice. In contrast, the main practice in the new museum, and later, more specifically, in the history museum, is that of transforming documents into objects of display, that is, transforming representations of various types into exhibits. This practice is distinguished from

> previous ones, since from now on exhibits could legitimately be fabricated […] One may see in the collection of "fabricated exhibits" merely a broadening of the bounds of possible museum objects. But such a conception disguises the ideological manipulations that become possible as a result of crossbreeding the practices of preservation and display (which includes the transformation of documents into exhibits). Thus the sphere of museum activity came to include the discourse and practice of preservation and to adapt their central values and terms: authenticity, uniqueness, rescue from oblivion, rarity, and so forth. The crossbreeding between these two practices and the blurring of the boundaries between them made possible the emergence in its present form of the ideological institution we know as the historical museum dedicated to preserving the past and its treasures of material culture. (Azoulay 1994, 92-93)

2.3. Historical authenticity in the prison museums

Appardurai's nuanced observation on 'credibility' and Azoulay's blatant accusations on the fabricated nature of the exhibit (which are perhaps exceedingly fiery - particularly in her resorting to ideology[8]), connect with our next point: the generation of authenticity. Trouillot, whose work partly revolves around the production of an official history and its relations with power, also raises concerns surrounding the notions of "authenticity" or "credibility". He suggests that these are actually the factors which

> set the historical narrative apart from fiction. This need is both contingent and necessary. It is contingent inasmuch as some narratives go back and forth over the line between fiction and history, while others occupy an undefined position that seems to deny the very existence of a line. It is necessary inasmuch as, at some point, historically specific groups of humans must decide if a particular narrative belongs to history or to fiction. (Trouillot 1995, 8)

The question remains as to how is authenticity created and preserved in these spaces, an issue to which we shall now turn. Trouillot's observation on how an important role is played by the present will be of help for starters:

The historicity of the human condition also requires that practices of power and domination be renewed. It is that renewal that should concern us most, even if in the name of our pasts. The so-called legacies of past horrors –slavery, colonialism or the Holocaust- are possible

> only because of that renewal. And that renewal occurs only in the present. Thus, even in relation to The Past our authenticity resides in the struggles of our present. Only in that present can we be true or false to the past we choose to acknowledge. (Trouillot 1995, 151)

While it is expected from the professional scholar to generate historical 'scientific' knowledge by employing reliable documents, the museum sets on the task of exhibiting the 'true' narrative by relying on veracious 'historical' sources and items; as observed, in neither of these processes is the producer fully dissociated from the present – and most certainly not in the latter case. It is in this process of construction where the adaptive elasticity of power sprouts: "In history, power begins at the source" (Trouillot 1995, 29). For it will be clearly noticeable, as the thesis progresses, that the 'history' showcased in these museums is much different than the historical account I presented in the introduction. There are several overlapping mechanisms taking place in these prison museums through which multifarious objects are utilized to construct a narrative, to 'trigger' memory and to endow authenticity to the discourse contained therein.

First, there is the display of torture devices. Ebrat excels in this compilation of fearsome instruments, which for the most part come accompanied with very detailed descriptions of how they were used. These include the whipping bed, the "hot" cage, the "hot" chair (the surfaces of both were heated up in order to burn the flesh of the subject), the courtyard pool (where waterboarding would take place), cables to exert electric shocks, needles, and the notorious Apollo (a contraption designed to dispatch electric charges, impart bastinado and isolate the subject's head through the use of a metal bell-like hood). In other informational panels there's also the description of secondary tortures such as the pulling of hairs, random beatings, the hanging of bodies upside down or in a crucified posture, the overcrowding of cells, the administration of wrong treatments at the prison's clinic intended to increase the pain while preventing death, and burning of skin via lit cigarettes. Many of these are staged utilizing wax figures (see Figure 6). Nowhere in the exhibition is there a disclaimer on whether these are the actual historical objects or recreated facsimiles, though the latter option seems more probable, given the fact that the prison continued its operations under the Islamic Republic. The validity of these instruments is

reinforced through the telling of historical testimonies, which we will analyze in the chapter on memory.

By comparison, the exhibition at Amna Suraka is more contained and seems to convey the idea that the Ba'athist intelligence preferred to keep things simpler, though equally bloody. Three distinct torture rooms are in display. The first was intended for 'psychological torture'. In it, inmates would be threatened and coerced, their cries often recorded and later played on repeat through the prison corridors to demoralize other prisoners. The second room was reserved for types of tortures revolving around electrical shock and bastinado; in the third, victims would be hung from the ceiling, beaten, electrocuted and burnt with heated irons. In the latter room the original tables and chairs used by interrogators, which were taken by two civilians when the prison fell, are on display. Besides these items, however, there is no actual device in sight, only two sets of plaster-like white figures representing two of the tortures: bastinado and hanging (see Figure 7). This highlights the foremost methodological difference of exhibition between the two sites (kitsch vs. symbolism), which we will address again later.

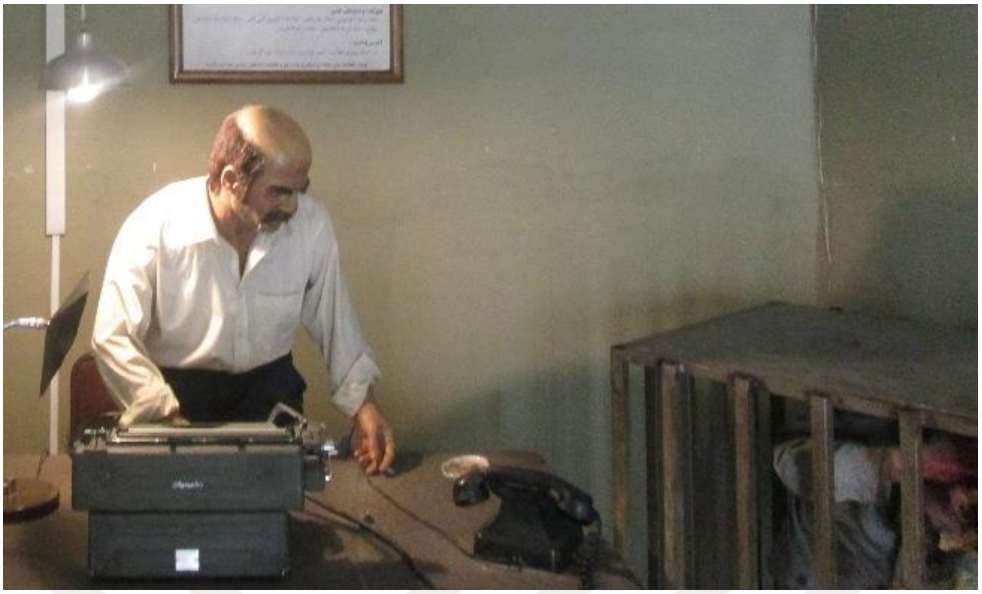


Figure 6 Wax figures of an interrogator torturing an inmate who has been locked in the "hot" cage

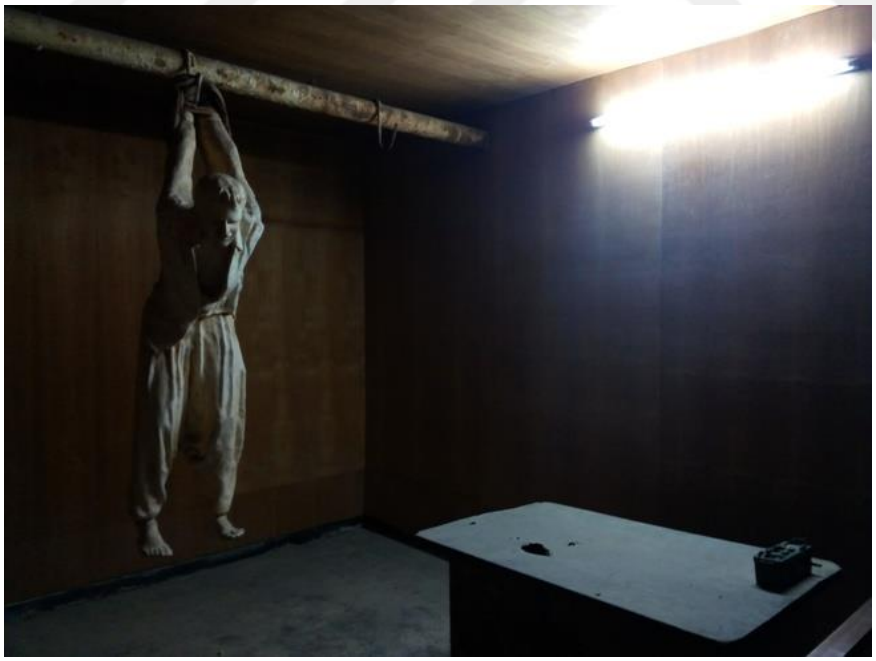
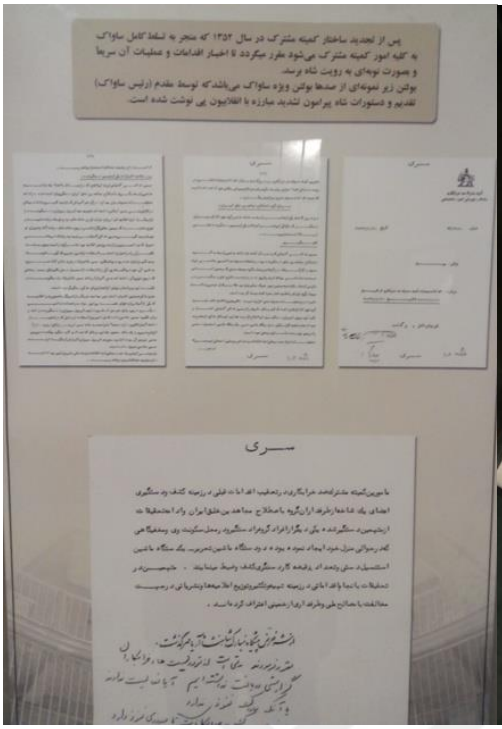


Figure 7 Torture room in Amna Suraka

Secondly, authenticity can be proven through the display of official documents, communiqués, letters and certificates. Interestingly, Amna Suraka does not exhibit much of this content, excepting a brief selection of papers detailing the Anfal campaigns. However, Ebrat is overtly captivated with this material. The main intention is to show that not only did those torture devices and violent interrogation behaviours exist, but that the top-tier SAVAK deputies were very much aware of such goings-on despite constantly denying it in public outlets. Documents are presented as the ultimate factual proof of both the fact that torture did take place as well as the Shah's knowledge of it. The sheer number of bearing the seal and signature of the monarch himself (which directly incriminates his person) is heftily pointed out in the exhibition space. Nevertheless, those are limited to trials, execution sentences, and counter-terrorism summaries, and do not include torture. An information panel informs of the fact that after 1973 a system of informational reports was established so that Mohammed Reza could be notified of all developments taking place in the prisons. These documents include reports written by the Anti-Sabotage Joint Committee explaining the logistics behind the suppression of several revolts; memos about operations; special bulletins prepared by Nasser Moghaddam (head of SAVAK in 1978) for the Shah's personal consumption; communiqués written by the Ministry of Defence also intended for the monarch; documents informing of several court appeals and pardon requests from prisoners sentenced to death (which were rejected by the Shah's office); and individual reports concerning the arrest of criminals and their transfers between prisons (see Figures 8 and 9).



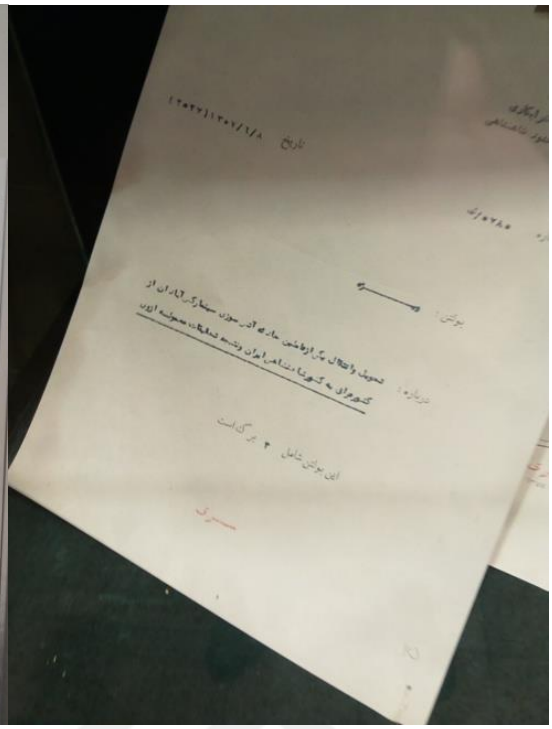


Figure 8 (left) Explanation, with documented examples, of reports directly sent to the Shah by the Anti-Sabotage Joint Committee.

Figure 9 (right) Arrest report of the person responsible for setting the Rex Cinema of Abadan on fire.

Finally, there are the photographs of those who were jailed within those walls. Both of these memory sites engage in an exhibiting technique I would call the “wall of heads”, which is the covering of whole corridors or rooms with pictures of people (see Figures 10 and 11). The rhetorical intention here is to both overwhelm the visitor with the sheer volume of victims as well as to (literally and metaphorically) present to him or her the undeniable “human face” of the atrocities. The difference between both museums lies in the fact that Amna Suraka more generally displays victims of the Anfal as well as those who fled from their homes after the failed uprising of 1991, while Ebrat showcases those who supposedly spent time in this specific jail, including their names. The Iranian prison also provides “spotlights” on

particular inmates: it exhibits their mugshots –the pictures taken during the time of their incarceration- alongside personal accounts, court sentences, death notes, etc. This convergence of facial semblances and written narrative works towards a denser construction of empathy. One room focuses entirely on those who perished under torture. Death report sheets written by SAVAK personnel are provided alongside descriptions and photos of the victims: both the aforementioned mugshots as well as pictures of their (often disfigured) corpses, a striking contrast. Esmail Akhbarian Azari, Amirmorad Nankadi and Kamran Sahihi (detained for arguing with university guards, attending religious sittings or being members of religious associations in early 1973), are among those exhibited.

Photography is then used in both museums, to further prove the existence and precarious tribulations of those who were jailed, interrogated and sometimes murdered by the regimes, even though Ebrat rhetorically commits to it more fully possibly to there being a higher availability of sources. For reasons which we will examine in the next segment of this chapter, the photography in Amna Suraka condemns the torment of the whole of the Anfal, utilizing the site of this determined prison as underpinning – as such, its picturing of victims is broader and non-site specific, relying on journalistic visuals rather than governmentally produced material. According to a commentator on this memory site, the exhibit “insists that there can be no future without photographic imagery to remember, preserve, write, and produce memory/history visually” (Moradi 2016)

Figures 10 and 11 Detention photos of those incarcerated, hanging on the corridors of Ebrat.

Even if there are other sources of historical validity which we will consider in further chapters: belongings of the prisoners and their written letters, as well as the actual physicality of the space. The selection thus far does already allow us, however, to point out the slight degrees of manipulation surrounding the selection of items and the narratives built around them. The fact that traumatic events happened in these prisons is not to be dismissed as fiction – yet at the same time, the interpretations of them are particular to their understandings, to the 'common sense' derived from them (a point further explored in the chapter on hegemony). At the very least, they are authentic in how they resonate in the general public. "It is not that some societies distinguish between fiction and history and others do not. Rather, the difference is in the range of narratives that specific collectivities must put to their own tests of historical credibility because of the stakes involved in these narratives" (Trouillot

1995, 14) The memorializing stakes involved in the violent past of these sites are not meek. Most importantly, authenticity is always created and observed from what I'd refer to as the experience-ful watchtower of the present. Trouillot resorts to comparative literature scholar Anthony Cascardi to comment on the issue:

> Cascardi suggests that "authenticity is not a type or degree of knowledge, but a relationship to what is known". To say that "what is known" must include the present will seem self-evident, but it may be less obvious that historical authenticity resides not in the fidelity to an alleged past but in a honesty vis-à-vis the present as it re-presents the past. […] Authenticity implies a relation with what is known that duplicates two sides of historicity: it engages us both as actors and narrators. Thus, authenticity cannot reside in attitudes toward a discrete past kept alive through narratives. Whether it invokes, claims or rejects The Past, authenticity obtains only in regard to current practices that engage us as witnesses, actors, and commentators – including practices of historical narration. (Trouillot 1995, 148-150)

Trouillot is also aware of the diversity of enclaves from which a regular citizen may obtain his dosage of historical information and sense-making. This is also why when examining these prison museums we need to keep in mind that they are not academic sites – they are public spaces catered to the general population, and their content might be modelled after civil society's accepted narratives (as will be examined in the following chapter).

2.4. From specific memory site to macro-history

To conclude our discussion on history and power, and after having acknowledged the authentication mechanisms acquired from objects, let us now concentrate on the 'amplified' portraits of history existing in these museums, which have been hinted at in the segments devoted to the ontology of the nation. For this, we will conduct a brief incursion into the realm of memory, which will be dully analyzed later on in the thesis.

If history is fabricated, then so can be memory. One of the foremost scholars in the field, Pierre Nora, famously considered the emergence of "sites of memory" (including museums and monuments) as a modern phenomenon. Historian Susan Crane summarizes Nora's argument, which contends that memory sites "have been created in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries because collective memory no longer functions in an organic or natural way. Sites of memory thus artificially organize the past, creating meanings that groups then assimilate in order to cope with modernity" (Crane 2000, 6). These prison museums might thus function as surrogates of memory, and help the visitors to 'complete' the blanks, confusions or chasms in their thinking of the past. And they achieve this task through the simplification of the complexities of history, and particularly, through manufacturing a 'narrative', which in Ernst's opinion, is basic for the transformation of 'things' into 'stories', which can then act as "memory triggers" (Ernst 2000, 25)

> The most effective medium for cutting down historical complexity, however, is narrative; only by means of such supplementation by a rival, textual medium (as part of the documentation area) is the proper museal exhibition free to concentrate on the presentation of material artefacts and their expressive value, creating the illusion for the visitor of entering a direct dialogue with the objects of the past – not hermeneutically controlled (as in historical narratives) but along the lines of the open logic of signifiers. Thus the archaeological and the historical dimensions of the museum are decoupled: since the effect of continuity, of coherence, in reading the past can be achieved only on a level beyond the concrete disconnectedness of discrete artefacts (whether textual documents or visual objects), it requires narrative to transform monumental objects into documentary information. (Ernst 2000: 33)

Pierre Bourdieu reaches a similar conclusion when discussing not so much history but 'ethnic' or 'regional' categories, which, "like categories of kinship, institute a reality by using the power of *revelation* and *construction* exercised by *objectification in discourse*" (Bourdieu 1993, 223). His analysis also underscores the gap between the more 'objective' "(ancestry, territory, language, religion, economic activity, etc.)" and more 'subjective' ways of understanding one's own position within the social world, "such as the feeling of belonging", the latter of which he refers to as representations (Bourdieu 1993, 226).

> The quest for the 'objective' criteria of 'regional' or 'ethnic' identity should not make one forget that, in social practice, these criteria (for example, language, dialect and accent) are the object of *mental representations*, that is, of acts of perception and appreciation, of cognition and recognition, in which agents invest their interest and their presuppositions, and of *objectified representations*, in things (emblems, flags, badges, etc.) or acts, self-interested strategies of symbolic manipulation which aim at determining the (mental) representation that other people may form of these properties and their bearers. […] What is at stake here is the power of imposing a vision of the social world through principles of di-vision which, when they are imposed on a whole group, establish meaning and a consensus about meaning, and in particular about the identity and unity of the group, which creates the reality of the unity and identity of the group. (Bourdieu 1993, 220-21)

So far we have examined the construction of 'identity' and 'groupness' in these sites, while 'consent' will be tackled on in the next chapters. At this point it will have become patently clear that if we are to investigate both "history" and "memory" in these prison museums, we need to take into consideration the processes through which historical narratives are created in the regional and national sphere –not as ideology, but as a result of an interplay between the agents of fabrication, the actors starring in those fabrications, and the subjects to whom it is addressed (Trouillot 1995, 93). Even though undertaking this monumental task is not the object of this text, it will suffice for us to be aware of it in the observation of these sites, the debate around which, as historical products, needs to take into "account both the context of its production and the context of its consumption" (Trouillot 1995, 146)[9]. These two contextual moments will be analyzed in the chapter on memory.

Let us now focus on the ultimate historical meaning 'established' around the history of these prisons, as it is illustrated at the site: how the museums construct a bigger past through seemingly detached objectivism. In Amna Suraka, there is a large room devoted strictly to the events of the Anfal and Halabja, despite the latter town already having its own memorial. The horrors lived within the walls of the prison are extrapolated and taken as but one example of the whole genocidal campaign of the late 80s – as if the core source of the construction of history lied prominently in trauma.

This, of course, is hardly random, and in fact could even be expected. Given that "every nation has to cope with the question of collective identity in the process of nation building" and "for the Kurds this task was especially challenging and agonizing" (Bengio 2014, 3), many scholars have pointed out to the seminal importance of the genocide for the fabrication of 'Kurdishness' and the "revival of Kurdish nationalism" (Hardi 2011, 119). Since, "with virtually no family or individual not affected by the actions of the Iraqi army in Kurdistan, a commonality of suffering acted to consolidate Kurdish identity in the face of overwhelming oppression"; in fewer words, it "fed the forces of reactive nationalism" (Stansfield and Resool 2007, 121-122). "Repression and conflict over the years did heighten Kurdish private and politicized ethnic identity" (Romano 2006, 204), with specifically the Halabja massacre being perhaps "the formative event for Kurdish nation building":

> Rather than break the back of the Kurds, as Saddam Husayn had hoped, these traumatic experiences only served to etch in their minds their separate national identity from the Arabs of Iraq, reinforcing their resolve to establish their own political entity. […] The Halabja affair was a formative event for the Kurds because it transformed the idea of a Kurdish nation from theory to practice. (Bengio 2010, 61-62)

The Anfal campaigns thus not only had "a profound demographic, economic and psychological impact on the Iraqi Kurds", but would also "further politicize Kurdishness and strengthen Kurdish national consciousness" (Aziz 2011, 79): it is an "ever-present legitimizing symbol for formulating demands for political independence" (Hardi 2011, 107). This perspective is openly and patently embodied in the governmentally sponsored interpretations of history, even appearing in the preamble of the Kurdish constitution, which reads "We, the people of Iraqi Kurdistan have been oppressed for decades by a dictatorial regime which monopolized all kinds of power. A regime that deprived us of freedom and all those natural rights God bestowed upon humans" (Moradi 2016).

> An unmistakable hallmark of nation identity pervades the draft constitutions: the collective memory of persecution perpetrated by the Iraqi state. As exemplified by

> various drafts and other official and nonofficial narratives of Kurdish society, national identity is conditioned by and expressed through a discourse of victimization and trauma. […] The suffering inflicted upon the Kurds, particularly in the 1980s, remains a cornerstone of national identity. Shafiq Qazzaz, the KRG minister of humanitarian assistance of cooperation, observed that 'the Kurds see their present identity mostly in terms of what has happened in the last two or three decades. They therefore see the Kurdish identity through persecution and suffering: Arabization, Halabja, and Anfal operations' (Feder 2014, 110)

Thus the Anfal, as a 'symbol' of nationhood, as the pillar of the Kurdish spirit, is naturally on display in this museum. A memory site of this type cannot only address the micro-history belonging to its space, but must also widen itself to embrace the 'bigger picture', as if the 'memory of the nation' outsourced to it the task of physically embody it through exhibits. It must partake in the "the construction of a unified narrative of suffering at the hands of successive Iraqi governments" (Stansfield and Resool 2007, 122).

It does so by presenting an awe-inspiring hall plastered with endless columns listing the names of all those who disappeared in the late 1980s, a tapestry of their pictures, detailed descriptions and maps of the operations conducted by the Ba'ath commanders with timelines and dates, estimates of the number of dead in each operation, objects of victims which were left behind and texts detailing the political and military perpetuators of the genocide (including specific army units). There is a corner devoted to the Nuqra Salman prison camp which summarizes the hardships prisoners had to endure: systematic torture, leaving the corpses of those who died under beatings to rot and then throwing them to wild dogs to be eaten, constant insulting by the prison guards, starvation, and unlawful theft of the prisoners' money and belongings. In this room, "the repetition of 'Anfal' has come to embody the preservation of remembering the Baʿthi order as well as the representation of [its] genocidal acts" (Moradi 2016).

Next to the Anfal hall there's another room whose content is even less related to the prison but which further contributes to the idea of Kurdish identity being born out of overwhelming oppression: it narrates the mass exodus which ensued in the wake of the popular uprising of March 1991, classified in the museum as "a turning point in

our nation's struggle for freedom". In a text which heavily insists on the notion of "history", the mass flight of civilians to the Turkish and Iranian borders is described as "the shout that awakened humanity from its deep sleep", in reference to the international human rights attention it ended up receiving. The hall is cluttered with photographs documenting the events (which are even emplaced on the ceiling) and it also features a small cinema room where a documentary on the exodus produced by the BBC is shown on repeat. The short corridor leading to the screen is decorated as if to emulate the type of makeshift tents under which many of those fleeing had to sleep in after being denied entry to Turkey – one of the rare occasions in which the museum resorts to a fabricated/thematized arrangement of the space.

At this point in the research, we can preliminarily yet soundly conclude that in what concerns the 'past', Amna Suraka does thus present an implicit but obvious narrative historical connectivity between the roots of the nation, the traditional "Kurdish lifestyle", the torture of the 80s, the Anfal/Halabja massacres and the 1991 humanitarian crisis, relying on victimology and concepts such as 'resistance' or 'freedom' (terms and ideas which will be dully addressed in the final chapter). Yet that is not all - as we will see in further chapters, the site also includes insights on the present and future of the nation.

Figures 12 and 13 Operation maps, lists and photographs of victims in the Anfal hall

Figures 14 and 15 Photographs hanging in the exodus hall, including those inside a recreated tent

More nuanced processes of macro-historicizing take place in Ebrat, which as a memory site does not attempt to carry the entire memorial weight of the whole Iranian revolutionary period, as opposed to the task assigned to Amna Suraka –which, it should be noted, also features a large film screening room surprisingly named after movie director Yilmaz Güney (of Turkish nationality, and half Kurdish half Zaza ethnic origins), bringing thus the memorial connectivity to the international level. Yet, despite apparently only scrutinizing the goings-on in that particular prison, Ebrat does contain a much wider and tailored historical account of surrounding events in which both the precursors and aftermath to the Revolution are addressed. Due to its more cryptic inclusion -as opposed to the Iraqi prison-, longer historical contextualisations will be required.

In his intriguing paper on the "use and abuse" of history, Abrahamian accentuated to which extent the newly established Islamic Republic of Iran re-examined and readapted several pre-revolutionary historical figures, events and concepts to represent and excessively magnify the role played by the religious establishment in their fight against first the Qajars and then the Pahlavi tyranny, transforming and/or exaggerating historical fact whenever it was deemed convenient. Such "rediscovered" history of Iran was thus spread through different channels, from the naming of public places, the issuing of stamps, TV programmes or school textbooks. People like Ayatollah Modarres, Kuchek Khan or Ayatollah Kashani (as well as related events) were then re-located in history, their value reinvigorated and amplified.

> The Islamic Republic has certainly not treated history as bunk. Indeed, it has gone to considerable trouble – with somewhat unconventional means – to obtain the "historical truth". […] Whereas Khomeini (at least, in his theological treatises) used holy texts to support the clergy's right to rule, the Islamic Republic claims the same right on the grounds that the clergy have valiantly saved the country from imperialism, feudalism and despotism. This is legitimacy based not so much on divine right as on the secular function of preserving national independence. (Abrahamian 1993, 91-92)

Comparing this approach (written in the early 90s) with the exhibitionary tendencies of this museum (established many years after) should prove quite interesting. Even

though perhaps not explicitly, in Ebrat we can observe a similar attempt to construct a “canonical” history of the post-Mossadegh era. During those times, several guerrilla organizations, illegal political parties and secret societies attempted to combat Mohammad Reza’s reign through diverse means, including scores of Marxist/Leftist/Communist groups (Keddie 2003, 168) - such as Peykar, Mojahedin, Tudeh or JAMA, a few of which had soft or marked Islamic leanings. Especially after the events of 1981 (including the Haft-e Tire bombing, orchestrated by a then fallen-out-of-grace Mojahedin), most of these have been crossed out or repudiated in the official national history, so it is not to be expected they should be showcased in the museum.

Initially surprising is, however, the omission of the Freedom Movement of Iran, which was founded in 1961 by the likes of Shariati, Taleghani and Mehdi Bazargan, who ended up becoming the head of the post-1979 interim government (Chehabi 1990, 253). The first two actively enjoy substantial degrees of recognition in national historiography and public memorializing, and were also incarcerated for long periods of time by the Shah. Despite having highlighted in the 70s moderate Islamic tendencies, anti-Pahlavi attitudes and calls for democracy, nowadays the party is perhaps too tainted by Mossadeghism and constitutionalism – Bazargan having been somewhat ‘rejected’ by history for having opposed pure political Islam. According to Freedom Movement historian H.E Chehabi, already in the early 80s the party faced boycott and taunts at the parliament, and Bazargan would eventually come to be regarded by the regime as merely a misguided but tolerated opposition leader which, despite having played a significant pre-1979 role and having enjoyed the support of relevant clerics as well as younger Islamist scholars, always remained an outsider. His association with Ayatollah Montazeri, who would be ostracized by Khomeini, did not help (Chehabi 1990, 294-299, 304-310).

Instead, of all possible anti-Pahlavi oppositional groups, Ebrat features a room entirely focused on the Islamic Nations Party, a short-lived revolutionary Islamic-

socialist guerrilla group active during the first half of the 60s which nowadays mostly amount to a footnote in the history of the period (it is not even mentioned major historical accounts of modern Iran such as Ansari 2003; Keddie 2003; Abrahamian 1982). The party was founded on four main principles -"Islamic belief, principality of the Quran, solidarity with Islamic nations and belief in revolution" (Vahabzadeh 2010, 9)- and had as objectives "the capture of political power, the creation of a communal economy and the establishment of a dictatorship based on a single party" (Bashiriyeh 2011, 14). It would go on to prepare bank robberies and kidnappings, plans which would be quickly uncovered by the SAVAK. This would culminate in a standoff with the police which would result in the arrest of 57 of its 140 members - who would receive harsh prison sentences (Vahabzadeh 2010, 10).

Figure 16 *Ettelaat*'s coverage of the crackdown on the Islamic Nations Party

Despite its existence appearing almost as anecdotic, tons of information is given in the exhibition, including a long description of its history; detailed profiles of some of its members (including religious student Mohammad Javad Kermani and bazaari Mohammad Bagher Sanoveri, whose accidental arrest led to the police's discovery of the organization); top secret SAVAK reports investigating their activities; *Ettelaat* newspaper clippings on the day of the arrest (the heading title: "The Dangerous Secrets of a Party Have Been Revealed") and on the eventual trial of its members (see Figure 16); and leaflets and manifestos highlighting their principal aims (eradicating the royal family and establishing an Islamic government). The exhibit seems to appropriate the political aspects of the party most close to the subsequent Islamic Republic without underscoring its more extreme positions ("dictatorship") or terrorist activities (including armed struggle and possible involvement in the assassination of prime minister Hassan Ali Mansur). It should also be noted that several of its members would end up in the Assembly of Experts, the Islamic Republican Party and, most significantly, the Revolutionary Guards (O'Hern 2012, 18). The party's activities belong to a pre-*Komiteh* prison period, though, which shows the museum's will to embrace prior events. That being the case, however, it strikes as rather incomprehensible why it would chose to focus on the Islamic Nations Party and not on other 50s/60s more renowned groups, particularly the *Fedaiyan-e Islam* (not to be confused with the 70s Fedayen). Its leader, Navvab Safavi, is memorialized in the urban sphere of Tehran, has been praised by the likes of Ali Khamenei (Hovsepian-Bearce 2015, 30) and is a textbook example of martyrdom (having been executed by the regime in 1956); and his group espoused anti-Westernism and fundamentalism (Bashriyeh 2011, 13), trends which would be of significant appeal to later revolutionaries. But perhaps the party's links with the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood (Enayat 1988, 93) or Safavi's tolerance for monarchy (Behdad 1997, 55) have tainted its validity.

In Ebrat there's also one room devoted solely to the 'Abudharr Group', an association of high school and university students active during the 60s/70s which constitutes another footnote in the bigger picture. They were named after Abu Dharr

al-Ghifari, “the most outspoken ‘anti-capitalist’ companion of the Prophet” (Enayat 1988, 16). This figure (who is particularly popular among Shiites for having opposed Muawiyah and having been a close friend of Imam Ali) had a penchant for fighting in favour of the oppressed, which gained him the recognition among some contemporary thinkers, including Shariati, as the first “Muslim socialist” (Javadzadeh 2011, 105). The group in question consisted mostly of “young religious laymen who had decided that the best way to fight the regime was through guerrilla activities” (Siavoshi 2017, 83). Among other actions, they torched a cinema in the city of Navahand and killed a policeman (Naficy 2012, 75). Some of them were then arrested and six executed. However, the museum display does not highlight their armed struggle and instead emphasizes they were incarcerated for ‘establishing Quran reading sessions’. Letters from prison, photographs and reports physically corroborate their sufferings under the Shah.

The two rooms mentioned so far are proof of the peculiar vision of the run-up to the revolution put forward by the museum: not exactly historically incorrect, but heavily edited and subjectively selected. However, the most significant “after-the-fact” historicizing is to be found in the “Well-Known Figures” Corridor. It is a collection of wax figures dramatically placed in solitary cells (see Figures 17 and 18). Even it is argued they were all inmates, this section is implicitly not so much about the prison but about a more general history of the precedents and aftermath of the revolution.

Figures 17 and 18 Wax figures of Hashemi Rafsanjani (left) and Ali Khamenei (right) in the solitary cells of the 'Well-Known Figures Corridor"

In a nutshell, this Corridor depicts the "reality" that the clergy were by all accounts the most important stalwarts against the Shah's oppression and the main receivers of his tortures and tyranny – despite the fact that actually the foremost foes of the monarch, and the most combated, were actually the leftist guerrillas. This is not to say the clergy was not persecuted, since to all accounts it was – it's more an issue of tone and emphasis. The figures reunited here constitute a gathering of heroes, some of them having been "martyred", the names of which also permeate official history books as well as the urban milieu of cities like Tehran. According to the presented story, these are the people who sustained the most torture for rising against the monarch. I will briefly describe each of them to better make my case. The descriptions are not those provided in the museum site, but my own summaries, even

though I have left in quotes some of the terms and phrases employed at the site. As of my most recent visit, the exhibited figures are as follows:

- Ayatollah Mahdi Shah Abadi: arrested for the first time in 1963 for supporting Khomeini after the latter's exile, arrested a few times by SAVAK in the 70s for supporting families of political prisoners and spreading Khomeinist propaganda. After the revolution, he partook in the Council of the Islamic Revolution and afterwards became a parliamentary member very active in his visits to the warfront; he was killed by Iraqi forces near Ahwaz in 1984.

- Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani: arrested by the SAVAK several times from 1963 to 1978, and altogether spent over four years imprisoned in several jails for supporting Khomeini, under whom he had studied theology in Qom, and for rallying against the Shah. He was a seminal member of the Council of the Islamic Revolution and performed several functions in the 80s, including being Speaker of Parliament, until being elected President of Iran in 1989, a post he maintained until 1997. From 2007 to 2011 he served as chairman of the Assembly of Experts. He died of a heart attack in 2017.

- Dr. Ayatollah Mohammad Mofatteh: professor of philosophy and theology at Tehran University, arrested by the SAVAK several times (starting from 1968) for supporting Khomeini, giving incendiary speeches in prayers, distributing political propaganda and conducting activities within the “"Combatant Clergy Association”. He was assassinated by the anti-clerical Islamist extremist ‘Forqan Group’ in 1979.

- Ayatollah Ata'ollah Ashrafi Esfahani: befriended Khomeini while studying at Qom, and in the late 70s headed the demonstrations against the Shah in the city of Kermanshah. He would later by appointed by Khomeini as the chief

mullah for Friday prayers in the city. He was assassinated by the "hypocrites" Mojahedin in 1982.

- Mohammad Kachui: arrested three times throughout the 70s for revolutionary activities. After the revolution he focused on capturing ex-torturers of the Pahlavi regime and eventually became warden of Evin Prison. He was assassinated in 1981 by the "hypocrites" Mojahedin.

- Sayyed Ali Hosseini Khamenei: was arrested seven times in the 60s and 70s for religio-political activities, including provoking the masses and spreading propaganda, and spent several months in prison, where he sustained "brutal and savage torture". Became a member of the Council of the Islamic Revolution in 1979 and held different governmental posts until being proclaimed the new Supreme Leader after Khomeini's death in 1989.

- Sayyed Abd Al-Karim Hashemi Nejad: arrested five times (starting from the protests of 1963 until the eve of the revolution) for spreading Khomeinist propaganda and enticing the masses. After 1979, he became the Islamic Republican Party secretary of the Mashad branch. He was assassinated in 1981 by the "hypocrites" Mojahedin.
- Sayyed Abdolhossein Dastgheib: arrested and exiled a few times after 1963 for conducting Khomeinist protests and spreading propaganda. Led the anti-Shah demonstrations in Shiraz in the late 70s and after the revolution was appointed as representative of the Supreme Leader in the region. He was assassinated in 1981 by the "hypocrites" Mojahedin.

- Ayatollah Sayyed Mahmoud Taleghani: arrested for the first time in 1953 for supporting Mossadeq. He would spend over ten years imprisoned, notably in Qasr, from 1963 to 1978, for political activities, including the founding alongside Mehdi Bazargan of the Freedom Movement of Iran. After the

revolutionary events he was appointed leader of the Friday Prayer in Tehran, headed the Council of the Islamic Revolution and was a member of the Assembly that penned the new constitution. He died under mysterious circumstances in 1979.

- Dr. Ali Shariati: university professor of political science and sociology, he was arrested several times after 1953 and imprisoned for 18 months in solitary confinement in 1975-76 for agitating the students against the regime through his revolutionary current of leftist Shi'ism and for his activities within the Freedom Movement of Iran. He was exiled to England, where he died under mysterious circumstances in 1977.

- Ayatollah Mohamad Ali Ghazi Tabatabaei: arrested three times for conducting anti-regime activities in Tabriz and spreading the message of Khomeini, under whom he had studied in Qom in the 50s. After the revolution he was appointed the Supreme Leader's representative in East Azerbaijan. He was assassinated in 1979 by the "hypocrites" Mojahedin.

- Mohammad Ali Rajai: arrested several times starting from 1963 for his activities as a member of the Freedom Movement of Iran, where he developed a relationship with Taleghani. He spent over four years incarcerated, time during which he sustained "horrendous torture continuously", before being released in the eve of the revolution. He served as Minister of Education, Prime Minister and eventually was chosen as President of the Republic in August 1981. Less than a month later he would be assassinated by the "hypocrites" Mojahedin.

- Hojattolislam Mohammad Javad Bahonar: after earning a PhD in theology in Tehran University, he was arrested three times from 1958 to 1978 for speeches against the Pahlavi regime at the religious institute Hosseiniyeh

Ershad, and for the spreading of Khomeinist propaganda. He became a member of the Council of the Islamic Revolution and would go on to hold the posts of Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance and Prime Minister before his assassination by the "hypocrites" Mojahedin in 1981.

- Seyyed Asadollah Lajevardi: he was arrested several times starting from 1964 for anti-regime terrorist activities. After the revolution he was appointed the chief prosecutor of Tehran and in 1981 he became the warden of Evin Prison. He was assassinated in 1998 by the "hypocrites" Mojahedin.

- Ayatollah Ali Qoddusi: after founding in 1964 the influential Haghani School in Qom, he was taken into custody several times for supporting Khomeini. He was appointed general attorney in the aftermath of the Revolution. He was assassinated in 1981 by the "hypocrites" Mojahedin.

- Ayatollah Seyyed Mohammad Beheshti: he was arrested several times in the 60s and 70s for anti-regime activities before joining Khomeini in his Najafi exile. After the revolution he became a member of the Council of the Islamic Revolution, participated in the penning of the new constitution and was later appointed head of the Supreme Judicial Court of Iran. He was assassinated in 1981 by the "hypocrites" Mojahedin.

- Khosrow Golsorkhi: revolutionary poet of Marxist tendencies, arrested in 1973 for allegedly plotting to kidnap the Shah, convicted of treason and publicly executed by shooting in 1974, after which he became a popular symbol of the resistance.

- Ayatollah Hussain Ghaffari: after having studied in Qom in the 50s, he was arrested several times after 1963 for the writing and spreading of anti-regime

articles and propaganda. He was finally jailed in 1974 and died under the tortures of the SAVAK.

- Muhammad Mehid Haj Ebrahim Araghi: arrested several times since the 50s for terrorist activities against the regime under the banner of the Fedaiyan-e Islam, including his imprisonment in 1965 for having partaken in the assassination of prime minister Ali Mansur. He was released in 1977 and after the revolution he would briefly manage Qasr prison until his assassination in 1979 by the Islamist extremist 'Forqan Group'.

- Ayatollah Mohammad Reza Mahdavi Kani: after having studied under Khomeini in Qom in the 50s, he started anti-Regime political activities in the aftermath of 1963, as a result of which he was jailed three times. After the revolution was appointed chief of the commission in charge of judging Pahlavi personnel and served as the head of several ministries. From 2011 until his death in 2014 he was the chairman of the Assembly of Experts.

- Safar-e Ghahremani "Safar Khan": he was first arrested in 1948 and spent 32 years imprisoned for leftist activities and membership of the Tudeh party. He was finally freed in 1978 and died of old age in 2002.

This selection of famous individuals is very telling of the type of history which is being manufactured in Ebrat. Firstly, since the vast majority of those exhibited were clerical figures, it would tacitly seem as if the backbone of both the 60s/70s anti-Shah activities as well as the revolution itself were mostly orchestrated by the religious establishment. As shown by the numbers of dead divided by political affiliation I provided in the introduction (Abrahamian 1999, 103), while it is true that some clerics stood against the Shah (some others did not), the perspective presented at the museum is a gross overstatement. Taking aside the main protagonists (i.e. Rafsanjani or Taleghani), several provincial ayatollahs whose actions would deserve

a footnote in any academic history of the events are showcased as having played a decisive role. The geographical diversity of those (from Tabriz to Mashad) also constructs the idea of Khomenist-tinted clerical resistance having spread everywhere, not just Tehran. Moreover, in the descriptive texts, the biographical background of those individuals who were not directly clerical figures features comments on their undeniable piety and their alleged links to religious leaders. This is the case with a couple of the 'leftist' representatives, including Shariati, whom the regime seems to acknowledge and respect due to his influence despite clear ideological disagreements; Golsorkhi, who is said to have praised the virtues of Imam Hossein in one of his last speeches in court; or with Kachui, who supposedly attended the lectures of Khamenei in the 60s.

The few leftists that are included are Golsorkhi, a truly popular figure who transcended his political allegiance; or 'repented' guerrilla fighters who collaborated with the regime after the revolution, such as Araghi, who nevertheless was a former member of the tolerable Islamist Fedayeen. Of the latter it is also said he was "betrayed" by the Tudeh party. The description of the only Tudeh party representative, Safar Khan, underscores his moral integrity: it is explained that unlike other party members, he refused to give in information and betray his cause in order to secure an earlier release – which is a peculiar compliment given that several senior Tudeh members would be forced to publicly destroy their reputations in the televised recantations of 80s (Abrahamian 1999, 220-227). Moreover, Safar Khan's description remarks on his distancing from the Tudeh after 1979. So his inclusion is not so anomalous: among those exhibited, he is the one who suffered the machinations of the Pahlavi regime the longest – and given his subsequent political passivity his example is admissible. The early links Kachui and Lajevardi maintained with the Mohajeddin and other guerrillas are not mentioned. The fact that both would go on to become prison wardens is worth mentioning. In particular Lajevardi's inclusion is very problematic considering that in the 80s he would become known as the "The Butcher of Evin" after having ordered the tortures and execution of

hundreds of people (Abrahamian 1999, 136) –none of which is, of course, described at the site.

At this point of the analysis we can certainly ratify Abrahmian's thesis on the abuse of history. But we can extract one further conclusion from the exhibited figures. It is noticeable how many of the religious personalities (more than half of them, in fact) displayed here met a tragic end in the aftermath of the revolution. The word utilized in the descriptions is of course "martyred". With the exception of Ghaffari, none of these individuals did actually die in the hands of the SAVAK or under the orders of the Shah, despite the fact that the main point of their inclusion is to denounce such entities. This can be explained in two ways. From a plain rhetorical perspective, the fact they sustained interrogation or torture *and then* were martyred while trying to construct the new Iran exemplifies their heroic nature, perseverance and piety in the fight against evils. This is very much in line with some interpretations of the martyrdom of Imam Hussain in Karbala, which highlight the political activism inherent in his righteous battle against Yazid -for example, Najafabadi's *The Eternal Martyr* (Roff 2015, 127).

It would argue, however, that the inclusion of these assassinated personalities is an attempt to infiltrate further denouncement against the main enemies of the current regime in its inception and afterwards –first and foremost the Mohajeddin (who are constantly referred by using the Quran-flavoured term "hypocrites"[10])- by recalling events such as the Haft-e Tir bombing of 1981. In the most nuanced of manners, the despicable nature of these foes is anachronistically introduced in the memory site. In other rooms of the museum, alongside the personal possessions of regular inmates who were interned in this prison during SAVAK times, there are also belongings to some of these personalities who were martyred afterwards. For example, the clothes and items of "respected" Ayatollah Doctor Mofatteh, who was killed in 1979 by the Forqan group, an Islamic extremist organization waging war against the clerical establishment, the liberals and the bazaaris (Cohen 2015, 51). Besides murdering

Mofatteh and others, they attempted to assassinate other prominent figures such as Khamenei or Rafsanjani. The museum, almost unnoticeably yet certainly not fortuitously, morphs into a site extolling the founding fathers of the current political reality besides condemning the subject at hand, the Pahlavis.

Even though a more extensive reading of these characters and the reasons for their inclusion could be extracted, this brief overview will have sufficed to illustrate how these personalities incarnate the essences of the current episteme. This includes the construction of a "legitimated" past - how history is rewritten to befit such an impression of what happened, how the history presented goes well beyond the events which took place in the site, and how seemingly disconnected events are brought together through the utilization of symbolic feelings and concepts ("martyrdom", the "hypocrisy" of adversaries, "torture"), a realization to which we shall turn in the last chapter.

CHAPTER 3

HEGEMONY AND PRISON MUSEUMS

Many of the issues raised so far point to the relative degree of historical editing, emphasizing and/or fabrication found in these exhibits. It is now time to understand these dynamics from the perspective of hegemony. First I will look at and then combine two theoretical concepts, symbolic power and therapeutic governance. This conceptual line will be then directly connected to the appraisal of the museums in terms of hegemony, which the second section of this chapter will delve into. Finally, through several examples, we will be able to connect these findings with the previous chapter and the idea of 'truth'.

3.1. Symbolic dominance, therapeutic governance and elite guidance

I believe Bourdieu's thorough analysis on symbolic power is not only very much in tune with the preceding discussion but also armours it with a deeper layer of understanding. Even if Bourdieu is (mostly) referring to 'language' in his analysis, he does acknowledge it transcending the sphere of linguistics (Bourdieu 1991, 73). Consider, for example, the following passage:

> To speak of *the* language, without further specification, as linguists do, is tacitly to accept the *official* definition of the *official* language of a political unit. This language is the one which, within the territorial limits of that unit, imposes itself on the whole population as the only legitimate language […] Produced by authors who have authority to write, fixed and codified by grammarians and teachers who are also charged with the task of inculcating its mastery, the language is a *code*. […] The official language is bound up with the state, both in its genesis and its social uses. It is in the process of state formation that the conditions are created for the constitution of a unified linguistic market, dominated by the official language. Obligatory on official occasions and in official places (schools, public administrations, political institutions,

> etc.), this state language becomes the theoretical norm against which all linguistic practices are objectively measured. Ignorance is no excuse; this linguistic law has its body of jurists –the grammarians- and its agents of regulation and imposition –the teachers- who are empowered *universally* to subject the linguistic performance of the speaking subjects to examination and to the legal sanction of academic qualification. […] Thus, only when the making of the 'nation', an entirely abstract group based on law, creates new usages and functions does it become indispensable to forge a standard language, impersonal and anonymous, like the official uses it has to serve, and by the same token to undertake the work of normalizing the products of the linguistic habitus (Bourdieu 1991, 45-47)

I believe the arguments drawn for the existence of an artificial 'official' language, spread in the dawn of the nation-state, can be extrapolated to other areas of power/knowledge and state regulation, namely memory and history. If we were to substitute 'language' in the preceding fragment with 'history' (and 'grammarians' for 'historians', etc.) we'd end up with a revealing and adequate reading of the formation of a common national history (it's not trivial that Bourdieu directly speaks of the "making of a nation" as an abstract group, which is evidently harmonious with our debate on history and power). Thus an 'official story' on which most of the general public can agree emerges. That doesn't imply its settlement was a controlled phenomenon nor that the state monopolized its creation -as it can drink from other sources, such as the civil society or religious institutions (Bourdieu 1991, 50). What is most significant is that this is the 'official story' most broadly accepted, and the version of events that is most likely to be observed and recognized in public spaces and by official institutions. The teaching and representation of this uniform reading of history in schools and museums, if not fully predisposing the young public to such an interpretation, at least informs and makes them conscious of what is seen as 'proper'. Bourdieu illustrates this by quoting Durkheimian sociologist Georges Davy: "In teaching the same clear fixed language to children who know it only very vaguely or who even speak various dialects, [the school teacher] is already inclining them quite naturally to see and feel things the same way; and he works to build the common consciousness of the nation" (Bourdieu 1991, 49). These processes are referred to as types of 'symbolic dominance':

> The effects of domination which accompany the unification of the market are always exerted through a whole set of specific institutions and mechanisms, of which the specifically linguistic policy of the state and even the overt interventions of pressure groups form only the most superficial aspect. […] All symbolic domination presupposes, on the part of those who submit to it, a form of complicity which is neither passive submission to external constraint nor a free adherence to values. The recognition of the legitimacy of the official language has nothing in common with an explicitly professed, deliberate and revocable belief, or with an intentional act of accepting a 'norm'. It is inscribed, in a practical state, in dispositions which are impalpably inculcated through a long and slow process of acquisition […] The distinctiveness of symbolic domination lies precisely in the fact that it assumes, of those who submit to it, an attitude which challenges the usual dichotomy of freedom and constraint. The 'choices' of the habitus are accomplished without consciousness or constraint, by virtue of the dispositions which, although they are unquestionably the product of social determinisms, are also constituted outside the spheres of consciousness and constraint. The propensity to reduce the search for causes to a search for responsibilities makes it impossible to see that intimidation, a symbolic violence which is not aware of what it is (to the extent that it implies no act of intimidation) can only be exerted on a person predisposed (in his habitus) to feel it, whereas others will ignore it. (Bourdieu 1991, 50-51)

From this it can be inferred that the machinations of such a power are of the uttermost subtlety in the sense that the subject is not ever aware of it even existing: unless faced with a severe and radical instance of coming to terms with an alternate reality (which is unlikely), history as it has come to be understood is taken for granted as if it were the natural order of things – "without consciousness or constraint". The subject's history has been determined. He has (mostly unconsciously) succumbed to habitus [11], which is not only the offspring of commonplace, archetypal types of indoctrination (i.e. primary school), but also stemming from "suggestions inscribed in the most apparently insignificant aspects of the things, situations and practices of everyday life" (Bourdieu 1991, 51). This breed of "invisible, silent violence" functions as follows: instead of "telling the child what he must do, tells him what he is, and thus leads him to become durably what he has to be, is the condition for the effectiveness of all kinds of symbolic power that will subsequently be able to operate on a habitus predisposed to respond to them" (Bourdieu 1991, 52). Needless to say, at this point we cannot merely observe historical discourse by a determined state or government as an 'ideology' the subjects rationally intake or reject, as it defies such categorization. We begin to

observe the tacit effects of hegemony, in which social groups either consent to accepting a certain reality, or naturalize it without questioning it.

To further illustrate how symbolic power might be exerted on the common citizen by governmental agents, I will now introduce a Foucauldian concept which contributes to these processes of invisible education: that of 'pastoral power'. This variety of power, he asserts, stems from and was multiplied outside the ecclesiastical institution as one amongst the several emerging techniques utilized by the state. It is "individualizing […], it is coextensive and continuous with life; it is linked with the production of truth – the truth of the individual himself" (Foucault 2003a, 132). The characteristics of such modality of power, as explained in the following fragment, are incorporated into the logics of government:

> It is a form of power whose ultimate aim is to assure individual salvation in the next world. It is a form of power that looks after not just the whole community but each individual in particular, during his entire life. Finally, this form of power cannot be exercised without knowing the inside of people's minds, without exploring their souls, without making them reveal their innermost secrets. It implies a knowledge of the conscience and an ability to direct it. (Foucault 2003a, 132)

It is a truism that such an absolute individualized control is a clear impossibility – similarly, it cannot be argued that museums are "pastoral" given that they cannot be purely individualizing – they can broadly "win hearts and minds", but not actually infiltrate each individual's "souls". I am not adopting the concept of pastorality *senso stricto*, but loosely linking it to how the state developed systems of further indoctrination and surveillance of individual subjects. These include the intent to offer (moral guidance that also gives the impression of being particular to each of the citizens: the discourse-maker making sure they are in peace with their 'history' and 'memory', by guaranteeing that the 'aleatory chaos' between past and present has been organically summarized and packaged. This positive power is not merely passive; it may even be perceived as siding with the people -the citizens being complicit rather than submitted to it.

Political philosopher Claude Lefort reaches a similar description of power, which he observes as a productive agent of representation and cohesion, a task it accomplishes through the triple gesture of 'shaping' (*mise en forme*), 'making sense' (*mise en sens*) and 'staging' (*mise en scène*), thus pushing forward an interaction with society that transcends surveillance and control and actually attempts to paint it (Lefort 1986b, 257). Power earns a "symbolic character", not reduced to the "function of an organ, an instrument, at the service of social forces which allegedly exist prior to it" (Lefort 1986a, 279). The 'triple' gesture he refers to is fully flexed, I believe, in these prison museums, culminating in the *mise-en-scène*, the physical embodiment of history/memory following the making-sense of events (what better canvas than an exhibition space?).

When exercising such programmes, power dabbles in its pseudo-pastoral potential: guidance of the society through a process that appears to have been birthed by the society itself. This is implicitly linked to Herbert Marcuse's comments on how consumerism fosters the spread of false needs to keep societies subservient; how there is an "effective suffocation of those needs which demand liberation" (Marcuse 1964, 9). Surely this perspective derives from the observation of industrial society, but it can be translated into the realms of memory: the fabrication of "necessary" memories and histories the political protagonists of which have essentially looked after the needs of the "people", and the purpose of which is to numb the subject's worries about the present. This is also why we can observe these museums as fulfilling a tranquilizing, therapeutic function, related with ever-growing policies concerned with the psychology of populations affected by intense processes of urbanization and the loss of individual identity – as if the individual's "sense of psychological well-being" became "an aspect of good governance" (Pupavac 2005: 162-167). The emergence of such memory sites can be somewhat perceived as an indoctrinarian form of "therapeutic governance focused on enchancing people's capacities, motivation and sense of well-being within their existing material circumstances" (Pupavac 2005, 173). This consists partly in fostering self-esteem among the common citizen and endowing him or her with "symbolic moral

recognition" (Pupavac 2005, 175) as forming part of a unavoidably vague but inquestiobaly firm stand against the evils of history – regardless of more disputable recent developments in their surroundings.

The signs of power enacted through the various mechanisms listed above proliferate in rituals, ceremonies, 'collective memory', and sure enough we can locate its imprints in the origin and continuity of museums, as Bennett reminds us:

> To identify with power, to see it as, if not directly theirs, then indirectly so, a force regulated and channelled by society's ruling groups but for the good of all: this was the rhetoric of power embodied in the exhibitionary complex – a power made manifest not in its ability to inflict pain but by its ability to organize and co-ordinate an order of things and to produce a place for the people in relation to that order. (Bennett 1988, 80)

The order of things, their arrangement and display "as to simulate the organization of the world", would prove to be a utopian project: the "dream that the rational ordering of things might mirror the real order of things was soon revealed to be just that" (Bennett 1988b, 83). But this has never stopped exhibition spaces to espouse a therapeutic mentality, nor have their effects ceased to be implicitly of a symbolic violence. The more extensive and particularized these techniques became -the more sites and occasions in which such symbolic therapy could be enforced- the more successful was 'power' not only in easing and accommodating the citizen's mind, but also in establishing a more thorough permeation of knowledge to the subject and about the subject. It is not only about the nation, but about the subject himself or herself, through individualizing, as mentioned before: "Museums provide us with objects that are being preserved, saved as memory triggers and archival resources, not only for entire cultures, but at the same time for each individual in that culture" (Crane 2000, 6)[12].

Sometimes this legitimate history, which as we saw is artificial, might be contested by other factors of "legitimate competence", such as the family, which is partly why

official channels (i.e. schools and museums – two institutions closely interrelated as they do compliment each other) must constantly engage in a "permanent effort of correction" (Bourdieu 1991, 60), in which the *recognition* of legitimate history is more uniform and widespread, perhaps, than its unequal *knowledge* (Bourdieu 1991, 62). In other words, a person's acceptance of a story is more probable than his or her dissection of the realities behind it. We can conclude the preceding discussion by looking at this further observation by Bourdieu:

> Symbolic productions therefore owe their most specific properties to the social conditions of their production and, more precisely, to the position of the producer in the field of production, which governs, through various forms of mediation, not only the expressive interest, and the form and the force of the censorship which is imposed on it, but also the competence which allows this interest to be satisfied within the limits of these constraints. […] It follows that a work is tied to a particular field no less by its form than by its content: to imagine what Heidegger would have said in another form, such as the form of philosophical discourse employed in Germany in 1890, or the form assumed nowadays by political science articles from Yale or Harvard, or any other form, is to imagine an *impossible* Heidegger. (Bourdieu 1991, 139)

Indeed, to imagine an Amna Suraka or an Ebrat as emerging in other periods, under a different regime, or responding to alternative epistemes blossoming in society, is to imagine impossible versions of them. The governmental/societal compound that enabled their establishment is unique to its place and time; and so is its particular representation of history and memory. And equally culturally and historically specific are the pastoral agents who incarnate the spirit of the times. In the case of Iraqi Kurdistan –as we will examine much more closely in the next section – we are confronted with a 'divided pastorality', so Amna Suraka is hardly vocal in this issue, but the same cannot be said of Ebrat.

In Iran, due to its particular theocratical system of government, we encounter the figure of the "Supreme Leader": he is the ultimate representative and guide of the Islamic Republic, the foremost jurisprudent and guardian of the word of God, and therefore the pastor who guides the Iranian crowds, whether it be times of scarcity or times of abundance. This person is Ali Khamenei, who was elected for this post by the Assembly of Experts in 1989 after the death of Khomeini. Over the years

Khamenei has battled with the stigma of not having actually been the most learned man in the time of his election, since he had not achieved the status of *marja-e taqlid*, "source of imitation", which is the highest level of Shiite clerical authority. For his election to be legal, the Constitution had to be amended. In the 90s several 'dissident' clerics voiced their discontent and questioned Khamenei's abilities: those include Grand Ayatollah Yasubedin Rastegar Juybari, who was arrested in 1996 and imprisoned in both Evin and Towhid (the former Ebrat) and then detained again in 2004 (ISCHRO 2006); and Grand *Marja* Hussein Al-Montazeri. The latter was being groomed to replace Khomeini but experienced a falling out with the ayatollah which resulted in his candidacy to Supreme Leader being dropped and his placement under house arrest in the 90s (Keddie 2003, 283). Many critical commentators also noted the 'outsider' nature of Khamenei, who had not been part of Khomeini's original inner circle well until the aftermath of the revolution, when he was brought in by Rafsanjani (see for example Sahimi 2016). Despite holding the same title as Khomeini, he is generally referred merely as *rahber* (leader), while the latter is known as "Imam".

Figure 19 (left) Postcard mugshots of inmate Khamenei sold at the gift shop
Figure 20 (right) Photograph of Khamenei standing behind Khomeini in 1963, which hangs in the "Khamenei Room" of the museum

Given such lack of religious authority and his difficult position under the inescapable shadow of Khomeini, the publicity machine around Khamenei chose to eulogize about how he had been a relentless political activist in the 60s and 70s, regardless of not having been in touch with the Imam. This is very much the discursive line adopted in Ebrat. Leveraging the fact that he was briefly interned in this very prison, a whole room is devoted to the extolment of his achievements: several photographs of a young Khamenei conducting prayers, participating in protests and demonstrations, as well as a couple in which he is spotted in the vicinity of Khomeini in 1963, are exhibited (see Figure 20). A couple of them are footnoted by Khamenei quotes, and others offer lyrical descriptions such as: "Mashad, following the example of other cities, was moving in a direction more than any word could have depicted as revolution". There's also a handwritten note from a SAVAK officer to his superior detailing one of the arrests of Khamenei, as well as an edgy letter written by the

rahber himself in 1967 to a prison warden accusing him of thinking he "owns" the prisoners, to which he "respectfully disagrees" - since "a prison guard should never treat the prisoners like that".

The centrepiece of the room is a lengthy biographical text explaining how Khamenei ended up being arrested by the SAVAK at least seven times. The first was in 1963, for the vague achievement of having played a "key role" in disclosing the "corrupt practices of the Pahvlavi's cruel regime"; then in 1964, for "opposing the American policy of the Pahlavi regime", an incarceration during which he experienced the "utmost tortures". After his release, he conducted several classes" in Tehran and Mashad (his home city) which were "welcomed with open arms" by the "sprightly and revolutionary young people". He was arrested again that same year and tortured some more, but he decided that "these tortures would not break him, so he carried on his struggle against the Shah's regime", which put him in jail for a fourth time in 1970. However, "fighting against injustice and tyranny until the annihilation of the Pahlavi regime" was his "ultimate goal". After having been detained again in 1971, he gave a series of lectures on *Najd al-Balaghah* ("the peak of eloquence") in Mashad, which "appeared so extraordinarily interesting" that they attracted "thousands of young and enthusiastic people". He was detained in 1974 and brought to the Komiteh prison, where he sustained tortures for eight months, an experience which he reflected on by saying: "Unless you are faced with such brutal and vicious circumstances, you will not have any true and deep understanding of those hardships and difficulties." After his release he continued his "revolutionary and intellectual activities" and was arrested for a seventh time in 1977 and exiled out of Mashad. Finally, after Khomeini's arrival, he was chosen as a member of the revolutionary council.

Besides the obvious use of hyperboles in the description (not to mention historical vagueness such as 'playing a key role'; or slight anachronisms like 'inspiring the revolutionary youth' of the mid-60s), it could be argued the aim here is to depict a clear and solid revolutionary background which cannot be criticized, as well as

portraying Khamenei as a 'survivor' of the SAVAK, notably raising his political and moral legitimacy. In fact the detention mugshot of his time in prison, presumably in the *Komiteh* jail, hangs in several spots of Ebrat, and can be purchased as a postcard in the museum's gift shop (see Figure 19). The revolutionary credentials of Khamenei -portrayed as the ultimate freedom fighter-, his painful sufferings under the Shah, as well as his quotations, which add to the paternalism of his position of a 'guide' for the 'people', are a prime example of symbolic power, which utilizes photography as the factual demonstration of his achievements as 'testimony' to his highly activist life. Perhaps his current political pronouncements or actions might be debated – but his impeccable résumé, and therefore his validity in spearheading the nation, cannot.

3.2. Prison museums as hegemonic enclaves

Most of the aspects discussed in the previous pages have been channelled through the lenses of Foucault and Bourdieu, yet I would find it academically dishonest not to give due credit to Gramsci, who in some ways did predate the concern with many of these issues. Not trivially have I used the term hegemonic on several occasions. To see how symbolic dominance and pastorality may arise, and to understand better the rhetoric mechanisms these sites sport, we will now look at hegemony through the explanations of its proponent and his commentators. To start with, let us consider the following reflections by veteran Gramscian scholar Benedetto Fontana:

> An educational relation is hegemonic, and is also political. […] The state as educator means that the state acts as the bearer of the cultural and socio-political values and ruling principles of the dominant groups. As such, force and violence (which are specific to 'dictatorship' and to political society) are minimized and delimited (though of course never eliminated), and, correspondingly, consent and persuasion (which are specific to hegemony and civil society) are generated by means of the proliferation and dissemination of moral/intellectual and cultural values and principles. These values may range from the religious and the secular, and the principles may be both ethical ("ideological") and "technical". […] As Gramsci notes, the educative and "formative" role of the state is that 'of creating new and higher types of civilization, of adapting the 'civilization' and morality of the broadest popular masses. […] The state as educator functions on two related levels. First, on the material level it makes possible economic/technological and scientific technical production by establishing stable and

> regular (more or less predicable) procedures and structures. […] And second, the stat presents itself as a cultural, and moral and intellectual *hegemon* –that is to say, it presents itself as exercising leadership in the ancient Greek sense of power based on a persuasive and rational discourse. It exercises power by presenting itself as "ethico-political", as the representative of universal moral values and as the carrier of rational and objective principles independent of narrow socioeconomic and sociocultural interests. (Fontana 2006, 34-35)

As we can observe, similarly to what we've discovered so far, the Gramscian theoretical line also distinguishes between 'coercion' and 'consent', and endows the state with some degree of guiding legitimacy. Of course, the methodology differs: Gramsci arrives to this conclusion from his distinction between civil society – "the sphere of class struggles and of popular-democratic struggles" (Simon 1982, 27) and "political society" –the state-; the first befitting hegemony/consent and the second engaged with action/violence. "Civil society is the terrain upon which social classes compete for social and political leadership and hegemony over other groups. Such hegemony is guaranteed, however, "in the last instance", by capture of "the legal monopoly of violence embodied in the institutions of political society" (Thomas 2009, 137).

> The methodological criterion on which our own study must be based is the following: that the supremacy of a social group manifests itself in two ways, as "domination" [*dominio*] and as "moral and intellectual leadership" [*direzione*]. A social group dominates antagonistic groups, which it tends to "liquidate", or to subjugate perhaps even by armed force; it leads kindred and allied groups. A social group can, and indeed must, already exercise "leadership" before winning governmental power (this indeed is one of the principal conditions for the winning of such power); it subsequently becomes dominant when it exercises power, but even if it holds it firmly in its grasp, it must continue to "lead" as well. (Gramsci 2003, 57)

In what strictly concerns hegemony[13], even though Gramsci sprung from Marxism in his analysis, it can be applied to leadership strategies by any of the social strata, since it is "*in nuce* a generic and formal theory of social power" (Thomas 2009, 160). In general, hegemony has to be understood as "the supremacy of one group or class over other classes or groups established by means other than reliance on violence" (Fontana 2006, 27), "a relation, not domination by means of force, but of consent by means of political and ideological leadership" – ultimately, as "the organization of

consent", and thus "it requires the unification of a variety of different social forces into a broad alliance expressing a national-popular collective will, such that each of these forces preserves its own autonomy" (Simon 1982, 22-25). In other words, hegemony "involves a leading social group securing the (active or passive) consent of the other social strata, rather than unilaterally imposing its decrees upon unwilling 'subjects'" (Thomas 2009, 161), and consequently, "hegemony emerges as a new 'consensual' political practice distinct from mere coercion (a dominant means of previous ruling classes) on this new terrain of civil society; but, like civil society, integrally linked to the state, hegemony's full meaning only becomes apparent when it is related to its dialectical distinction of coercion" (Thomas 2009, 144).

This doesn't strictly mean that the new hegemonic force needs to propose a discourse radically different from what came before, for its effort is that of co-opting as many groups as possible, including the 'old' elites, and therefore "the nature of ideological struggle is not to make a completely fresh start; rather, it is a process of transformation in which some of the elements are rearranged and combined in a different way with a new nucleus or central principle" (Simon 1982, 62). The idea here is that should there be a revolution, it is "both negation and fulfilment, both destruction and construction" (Simon 1982, 65). Furthermore, should there be an ideological system, it "cannot be produced ready-made; rather, it has to be put together and gradually built up in the course of political and economic struggles, and its character will depend on the relation of forces existing during the period when it is being constructed" (Simon 1982, 64).[14]

The hegemonic group has to ensure its continued dominance through a hegemonic apparatus, "a complex set of institutions, ideologies, practices and agents (including the 'intellectuals')", unification "by reference to the class that constitutes itself in and by the mediation of various sub-systems" (Buci-Glucksmann 1980, 63). Moreover, as a "wide-ranging series of articulated institutions (understood in the broadest sense) and practices –from newspapers to educational organisations to political parties- by means of which a class and its allies engage their opponents in a struggle for political

power", the apparatus as a concept "traverses the boundaries of the so-called public (pertaining to the state) and private (civil society), to include all initiatives by means of which a class concretises its hegemonic project in an integral sense" (Thomas 2009, 226). Most importantly, coercion and consent are not seen as mutually exclusive in the functioning of a state, but rather distinct forms of domination exercised over antagonizing and co-optable groups, respectively:

> The 'normal' exercise of hegemony on the now classical terrain of the parliamentary regime is characterised by a combination of force and consent, which counterbalance each other without force predominating excessively over consent; rather, it appears to be based on the consent of the majority, expressed by the so-called organs of public opinion (Gramsci 2003, 80)

This possibility of consent is understood here as active, not imposed but 'negotiated' "by unequal forces in a complex process through which the subordination and the resistance are created and recreated" (Simon 1982, 65). It is of course only available to those modern states which have reached some degree of democratic ripeness. Gramsci would eventually arrive at the concept of the integral state, "defined as 'dictatorship + hegemony' and as 'political society + civil society'"; thus "a socio-political order is therefore formed by the interpenetration of these two analytically separate, but intimately interwoven, spheres" (Fontana 2006, 33). Consequently, "the state, rather than imposing itself on society, emerges and gathers its cultural force from it. State power issues from civil society and, at the same time, civil society maintains its coherence and stability through the rational authority of the state" (Fontana 2006: 35). It follows that "state organizations, while juridically and analytically distinct from those of civil society, are nevertheless rooted and grounded within civil society, which provides the educational and cultural resources that determine the character of the same organizations" (Fontana 2006, 36). [15]

For our purposes, this 'interwoven' nature between 'the government' and 'the private' – "hegemony armoured by coercion" (Simon 1982, 28) – is not to be understated. While, as previously mentioned, Gramsci detects these "two major superstructural levels", "the one that can be called civil society, that is the ensemble

of organisms commonly called private, and that of 'political society' or 'the State'" (Gramsci 2003, 12), loosely the levels of hegemony and domination respectively, he also identifies 'intellectuals' as being the fabric that connects both spheres.[16] We will not argue here that museums or memorials are similar to intellectuals, or that they are plain 'institutional forms'. But, as public places of exhibition, gathering and instruction, they are enclaves where the realm of the state and the realm of civil society do, to some extent, come together, interact with, connect and inform each other; and also physical spaces that can play into the hands of the leanings of the hegemonic project.

Firstly, let us presuppose that the group currently enjoying state power did indeed emerge from the struggles of power relations in civil society, existing within them and eventually gaining the upper hand among the groups and forging hegemony prior to gaining pre-state power (Thomas 2009, 194) – since, groups are prone to failure in their altering of the "social and political logic of State apparatuses" if there is a "lack of a hegemonic project" (Laclau and Mouffe 2000, 73). The group might have imposed itself in a period of "organic crisis in which the historic bloc begins to disintegrate, creating the opportunity for a subordinate class to transcend its corporate limitations and build up a broad movement capable of challenging the existing order and achieving hegemony" (Simon 1982, 41). Later on, as the manufacturer –or at the very least enabler- of museum spaces, such hegemonic group brings into display in these sites the philosophy or demands of the foremost social group whilst co-opting other social groups, specially if (as in our cases) the seizing of state power was not achieved by means of a "passive revolution". That is, the "relatively far-reaching modifications" made "to a country's social and economic structure" were not "from above, through the agency of the state and without relying on the active participation of the people" (Simon 1982, 26). It is generally accepted that both the Iranian revolution and the Kurdish uprisings of 1991 were a joint effort by several strata uniting against the adversity of a common foe – the resulting governments knead on the shoulders of such hegemonic projects, despite notable chunks of such alliances eventually fading or being disrupted and terminated by the

new regimes. As we will see, the Kurdish case is more complicated due to the civil war of the 90s – but it can be argued that post-2003 Kurdistan has veered towards a more solid hegemony.

Since "the state apparatus plays an important role in concretising this unifying supplement to civil society's constitutive divided particularity" (Thomas 2009, 189), moreover, and given that these prison museums are not instruments of coercion, we can consider them spaces of hegemonic articulation: sites where the new hegemonic force's original establishment "by means of a transformation of popular consciousness, of people's ways of thinking and feeling, of their 'conceptions of the world', and their standards of moral conduct" (Simon 1982, 26) continues undeterred, sites where co-opting and consent are in fact automatically and unavoidably generated. The discourse presented in these sites regarding the history and significance of the place in relation to the general society is therefore not external to said society[17]. In our analysis, thus, we need to dissect such sites not as the mere products of the state or civil society, but as some result of the political logic of hegemonizing trends and interplays existing between them. It will have become clear by now that no state-civil society dyad can exist without there being some degree of a historical bloc or hegemonic formation, which permeates –also to some degree- multifarious institutions:

> Articulatory practices take place not only *within* given social and political spaces, but *between* them. The autonomy of the State as a whole – assuming for a moment that we can speak of it as a unity – depends on the construction of a political space which can only be the result of hegemonic articulations. (Laclau and Mouffe 2000, 140)

Hence, if civil society is the "sphere in which competition, conflict and factional strife occur", the "sphere where different systems of belief and of knowledge, different conceptions of the world, oppose each other and vie for the favour of the people", it is also where "consent is manufactured; consensus is mobilized; and popular support is attained" (Fontana 2006, 36). Moreover, "civil society is the locus wherein the state (and its various political organs and functions) generates support

and consent for itself. […] In this sense, the state and the political order in general are deemed legitimate (that is, consent is generated) to the extent that it is able to penetrate (and in turn, be penetrated by) the multifarious associations that together form civil society" (Fontana 2006, 37)[18]. Fontana follows this train of though to reflect on what are these 'organs':

> Gramsci looks at institutions such as schools, libraries, voluntary assosciations and various clubs, religious groups, universities and colleges, and other groups that pluralist theorists today would call interest or pressure groups. His analysis tends to be thoroughgoing and encompasses even the psycho-spatial and the urban-architectural structure of civil society, such as buildings, streets and boulevards, as well as their names. All these institutions, structures, and sociocultural practices are precisely what Gramsci means by the "powerful system of earthworks" that make up civil society: the "formidable complex of trenches and fortifications of the dominant class." These are the ideological and cultural, and thus hegemonic, apparatuses of civil society. At the same time they are economical and material." (Fontana 2006, 38)

At this point, I believe, it is quite inarguable that, if "the instruments of hegemonic persuasion cannot emerge or function without a material foundation, at once spatial, physical, technological, and economic" (Fontana 2006, 39), these prison museums are indeed a material, physical part of said 'powerful system of earthworks'. The history and memory their present is an unavoidable offspring of a complex, uncontrollable and deep negotiation process between the 'people' and the 'power'[19].

In Ebrat, similarly to how the role played by the clergy in their fight against oppression is substantially highlighted (as shown in the previous chapters), many of the displays insist on the idea that the Pahlavi monarchy's first and most substantial foe and victim was religion. This is a concept constructed by the post-revolutionary hegemonic elite in order to compulsorily dissociate itself from the Shah's programme and identity politics. It is also how it co-opts groups into the idea of their piety having been under attack, and attempts to hegemonically fabricate a regularized religious society which opposed the Pahlavis through several demands. There is no mention of pro-monarchy clerics at the site. And as we have observed, Islamic groups which have been deemed misguided are discarded and criticized, as if there

was only one possible righteous way of observing and dealing with society and religion.

The prison museum resorts to different strategies to achieve this impression. One of them is the showcase of books that were supposedly banned in the 70s, most of which deal with religion (see Figure 21): *Purities in Islam, The Jews from Islam's Point of View, Shiism in Ali's time and Shiism in Safavi time, Wind and Rain in the Quran* and *How to Know Islam* are among those exhibited. The inclusion of these books is designed to insist on (or fabricate) the memory that to be a target of the regime, a subject didn't need to be politically active: merely pious Muslims could also suffer the consequences of practicing their religion openly. According to a descriptive text in the museum, owning any of these books could be reason for arrest and punishment in the prisons. It is hard to ascertain the veracity of these claims – but as we discovered so far, the Pahlavi monarchy's main operations mostly dealt with Leftists.

Special attention is paid, of course, to Ruhollah Khomeini's *Islamic Government*. A copy of the book is exhibited (see Figure 22), as well as several of his multifarious printed statements and manifestos attacking the Shah (including his denouncing of the non-constitutionality of the Rastakhiz party). The possession of any book or leaflet of this ilk was indeed heavily prohibited. Also on display is a "stencil machine" (printing press) used by *Sayyid* (descendant of Mohammed and Ali) Hadi Khosrohashi to disseminate Khomeini's messages.

Figure 21 Religious books that could get a person arrested

Figure 22 Ayatollah Khomeini's "Islamic Government" with comments on its condition as a banned book

Moreover, to further emphasize the religiousness of the people being imprisoned, interrogated and tortured, the museum resorts to the display of personal objects, letters and documents highlighting their righteous personalities: the *jānamāz* (praying rug) of martyred inmate Kazem Zolanvar, on which he "prayed nights on end" (see Figure 23), his book of *Nahj al-Balagha* (collection of sermons attributed to Imam Ali) and his *tasbīḥ* (the string of beads used to keep track of prayers); pages from a poetry book on martyrdom which belonged to martyred inmate Morad Nankoli; a *tasbīḥ* which inmate Qasem Nazigi made with bread dough and string from his cell's blanket (see Figure; letters written by executed prisoners Morteza Samadi Labbaf and Mohammadli Movahedi sent to their families in which they ask for the forgiveness of God and extol the virtues of the Quran (the latter even asks them to do the fasting of Ramazan he was unable to comply with), among other items. Naturally,

many of those jailed in the prison were active Muslims – it is the memory site's insistence on their religion what reveals the hegemonic processes below: even in the worst circumstances, they never abandoned their beliefs.

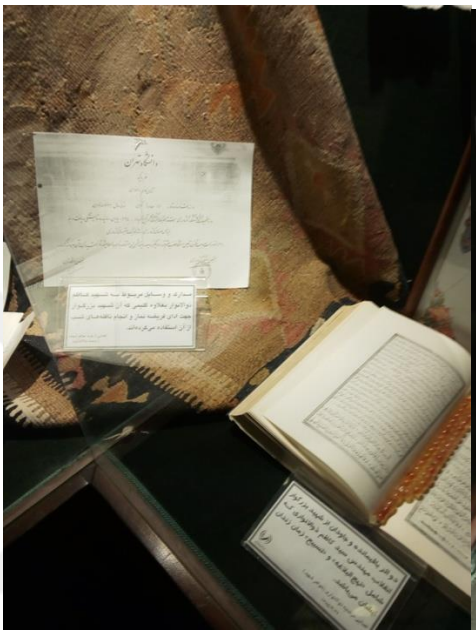


Figure 23 Personal effects of Kazem Zolanvar
Figure 24 Tasbih made of dough belonging to Qasem Nazigi

Due to the decades-old two-sided 'political split' present in Iraqi Kurdistan and the absence of a clear 'hegemon head', it may appear as more risky to speak of hegemonic memorializing in the region. For indeed the two major parties, the KDP and the PUK, did appear to be "at the throats of each other" for the better part of the last century (Anderson 2007, 148), a situation which culminated in the unfortunate civil war of the mid 90s. As Ofra Bengio was writing in 2004, "the Kurdish national movement has always suffered from a lack of cohesiveness; tribal and sectional interest at times overshadow national ones" (Bengio 2004, 175). Yet many scholars

have pointed out that after the ceasefire agreement of 1998 which cooled things off (Romano 2006, 210), and in the aftermath of the American invasion of 2003, the KDP and the PUK leaderships, "despite their ideological differences", have not only "shown considerable dynamism, commitment, and creativity in dealing with their adversaries" (Ahmed 2007, 183) but have also worked towards burying the hatchet once and for all.

> The attempts at compromise and reconciliation between the two leaders and their parties increased. […] In light of the uncertain future of Iraq and Kurdistan, and in view of the awareness of the weakness iunto which they had locked themselves and the Kurdish national movement by their own divisiveness, Talabani and Barzani increased their efforts toward a dialogue. The leadership of both parties may have also understood that there was no chance of either party overcoming the other, and that the continued strife and hostility, with no possibility of either side prevailing, would weaken the Kurdish national movement as a whole (Eppel 2010, 81-82)

In 2002, the "reunified parliament of the de facto Kurdish state met for the first time since 1994 and declared that Iraqi Kurdistan would be a federal state in a post-Saddam Hussein Iraq" (Gunter 2008, 15); in 2004, the Transitional Administrative Law, which recognized "Kurdistan" within Iraq, was signed (O'Leary and Salih 2005, 15); and in 2005, the KRG was officialized within the constitution of Iraq (Voller 2014, 99). Kurdish nationalism became "more consolidated than ever" (Aziz 2011, 6). According to Aziz, the double-headed hegemon's "Kurdification of Kurdish culture" has been immensely successful: in his survey of university students in 2007, he found out that they do not observe internal divisions: "young people identify stongly with their land, their people, their language and their heritage. They are Kurds, *Kurdistani*, or *Kurdistanyeti*, first and foremost" (Aziz 2011, 127, 154). These hegemonic operations served the two-fold objective of conciliating the two factions in the hopes for a more successful political future as well as obtaining the people's consent in recognizing and tolerating not only a double leadership but also its joint perception of Kurdish memory. Indeed sculptures of Mustafa Barzani abound more profusely in the north-west while the Sulaymaniyah region has its fair share of Jalal Talabani public portraits; but both parties could get behind the overarching power of trauma, which allows for the construction of a unified political space. This, of course,

does not imply the whole society agrees – as we will see with our discussion on the possibility of dissent, a few political entities in Kurdistan have refused to submit – but it is in memory sites like these in which the hegemonic project can be most noticed.

The appearance of the first incarnation of Amna Suraka in 2003 sits perfectly in the middle of this process of reconciliation. However, it should be noted the more macro-historical halls described in the previous chapter (Exodus and Anfal) were opened a decade later, when the hegemony was fully solidified. Since the mythification of the traditional past and the trauma of the genocide have already been analyzed, let us focus on a section of the prison museum which at first glance would strike as anomalous: a hall opened in 2018 explaining and exalting the patriotic struggle of the *peshmerga* against ISIS.

Linked to the Anfal era symbol of resistance, the figure of the Kurdish fighter is a hegemonic construct appealing to the regular civilian's love for his or her own country. Ofra Bengio has insisted on the noticeable memorial "glorification" of not so much the leaders, but of the 'people' and the *peshmerga* (Bengio 2005, 179; 2010, 66). Since Amna Suraka is "commonly known as a site of repression and liberation" (Moradi 2016), a section devoted to the united front of those combating oppression no matter the time, is but natural. The hall features an endless array of portraits of those who were martyred in battle, including coffins wrapped with Kurdish flags. It also makes explicit the contributions of the most important military commanders by honouring them. As could be expected, it also showcases belongings extracted from the battlefield such as clothes, water flasks, rosaries [*tespihs*], and bags. Unlike the main prison museum, here wax figures are introduced: female and male soldiers walking on rubble, wearing both traditional *peshmerga* robes as well as modern military attire (see Figure 25). Additionally, there are ripped ISIS flags and other spoils from the ground, and even a small memorial for Kurdish war journalists who perished in the conflict. This exhibit, I believe, is not only the ultimate example of the concept of "looking at the past from the present/future", but a hegemonic effort to

homogenize the local population. After the 90s internal conflict, which saw Kurdish militias facing each other, the rhetorical discourse present here assesses the fermented unity of all fighters and civilians against evil. Thus, it constructs both the 'nation' as well as its brave unity in times of trouble.

Figure 25 Wax figures of *peshmerga* fighters

3.3. The carving of truths

In this section I will further theorize the previous aspects in a way that fuses our chapters on history and museums with the recent explication of hegemony. Even though some museums might be conscious of their multicultural, all-inclusive role in the 21st century and implicitly or explicitly present content with diverse

understandings for the visitor to freely interpret, for him or her to draw her/his own conclusions, even actively encouraging discussion and alternative readings of what is shown, a large degree of museums do not feature such options, and present themselves as some sort of ultimate 'centres of truth' that reflect such 'philosophy' of their historical epoch. This is the hegemonic effect which I have tried to illustrate so far. Luke goes back to Weber's *Methodology of the Human Sciences* to comment on how the process of constructing truth is enacted.

> As Weber suggests, in any act of interpretation, the thematizing of an interpretive center for authoritative explanation [is always] a considerable project in itself. It must begin somewhere, somehow, at some time to construct a contingent and contestable particularization of reality. For various museum practices, whether thematizations of culture, history, nature or technology, this move represents selecting "a fine segment of the meaningless infinity of the world process" and then transforming it into "a segment on which human beings confer meanings and significance." (Luke 2002, 221)

One cannot argue against the existing manufacturing of reality ever present in museums, despite it not being an openly acknowledged dynamic. Hardly can a visitor read a disclaimer at their entrance asking him or her to be wary of the content showcased inside or encouraging debate and reflection. That the exhibit is "the truth" (or, at the very least, mostly truthful) is taken for granted – in the case of our prison museums, the truth showcased is not meant to trigger intellectual dissecting, but rather emphatic understandings. Carol Duncan, another enthusiast scholar of Foucauldian leanings, offers this reflection:

> We can also appreciate the ideological force of a cultural experience that claims for its truths the status of objective knowledge. To control a museum means precisely to control the representation of a community and its highest values and truths. It is also the power to define the relative standing of individuals within that community. Those who are best prepared to perform its ritual –those who are most able to respond to its various cues – are also those whose identities (social, sexual, racial, etc.) the museum ritual most fully confirms. (Duncan 1995, 8)

Following this interpretation, visitors who most fully abide or at least consent to what is being presented could be considered to be the ones most in-line with (or most

co-opted by) the ‘truths’ the discourse of the museum has established. But, of course, what are these ‘truths’? Is there a ‘truth’? It is in this regard that we go back to Foucault, who through Nietszche arrived at the conclusion that truths are fabricated (Foucault 2013, 206). And of course, they hover over power relations:

> The important thing here, I believe, is that truth isn’t outside power or lacking in power: contrary to a myth whose history and functions would repay further study, truth isn’t the reward of the free spirits, the child of protracted solitude, nor the privilege of those who have succeeded in liberating themselves. Truth is a thing of this world: it is produced only by virtue of multiple forms of constraint. And it induces regular effect of power. Each society has its own regime of truth, its “general politics” of truth – that is, the types of discourse it accepts and makes function as true; the mechanisms and instances that enable one to distinguish true and false statements; the means by which each is sanctioned; the techniques and procedures accorded value in the acquisition of truth; the status of those who are charged with saying what counts as true. (Foucault 1980, 131)

Again, this is not to be confused with the old coercive forms of power, in which the uttering or announcing of specific ideas might be met with prohibition, banning or punishment. Those mechanisms, typical of totalitarian societies -in which, as we mentioned before, ‘truth’ cannot be in any way contested, since power “seeks to make itself material in an organ which assumes itself to be the representative of a *unitary* people”, under the pretext of achieving which “the social division made visible by the logic of democracy is thereupon denied” and the state “raises itself to the sole possessor of the truth of the social order” (Laclau and Mouffe 2000, 187-88)- might still be enforced. But the spread of truth goes well beyond that, transcends politics, and penetrates into the realm of the personal, the realm of the customary (i.e. Bourdieu’s *habitus*), the realm of identity. In regimes of truth, what is right or wrong goes beyond what is legal or illegal, and succumbs into a grey area more akin to what is ‘proper’ and what is ‘improper’. In memory scholar Jeffrey K. Olick’s terms, it is a world of prescriptions and proscriptions (Olick 2007, 40).

> In a society such as ours –or in any society, come to that- multiple relations of power traverse, characterize and constitute the social body; they are indissociable from a discourse of truth, and they can neither be established nor function unless a true discourse is produced, accumulated, put into circulation, and set to work. Power cannot be exercised unless a certain economy of discourses of truth functions in, on the

> basis of, and thanks to, that power. […] Power constantly asks questions and questions us; it constantly investigates and records; it institutionalizes the search for the truth, professionalizes it, and rewards it. (Foucault 2003b, 24)

What can be derived from Foucault is that whatever 'truth' is presented in a museum, inevitably it has to have been a product of the interplay between the producer of knowledge and the subject the knowledge is addressed to (whose agency is at play, or what are its objectives, is irrelevant to understand of the essence of this idea)[20]:

> In societies like ours, the "political economy" of truth is characterized by five important traits. "Truth" is centred on the form of scientific discourse and the institutions that produce it; it is subject to constant economic and political incitement (the demand for truth, as much for economic production as for political power); it is the object, under diverse forms, of immense diffusion and consumption (circulating through apparatuses of education and information whose extent is relatively broad in the social body, notwithstanding certain strict limitations); it is produced and transmitted under the control, dominant if not exclusive, of a few great political and economic apparatuses (university, army, writing, media); finally, it is the issue of a whole political debate and social confrontation ("ideological" struggles) (Foucault 1980: 131)[21]

As Deleuze put it, "the idea of truth isn't something already out there we have to discover, but has to be created in every domain" (Deleuze 1995, 126). Moreover, in Gramscian terms, this fabrication most probably is in harmony with the foremost regime of truth, which finds its roots not (or at least, not only) in the state apparatus, but in civil society. Instead of "cultural frameworks" or "epistemes", Gramsci talks of superstructures, as described here by one of his scholars:

> The superstructures are the terrains on which, or the forms in which, members of a social group come to 'know' in a particular way the determining conditions of their lives within a particular historical situation. This is to say that they are necessary (or organic) rather than adventitious, to any social formation constituted by contradictions between classes; and that they have an extensive social efficacy, rather than being individually idiosyncratic, or dependent upon an individual knowing subject (or group conceived as subject) fallen into error. In a strict sense, for Gramsci, there is *no* knowledge outside the superstructures for the simple reason that such an outside does not exist: 'ideas do not fall from the sky', in Labriola's memorable phrase, but are historically produced as a social relation. Thus, when Gramsci says that a form of knowledge is superstructural (ideological), this should not be understood in a negative

> sense, as the absence of 'clear and distinct ideas'. Rather, it points to the political status of these forms, or the political overdetermination of knowledge itself, within a historicist perspective. (Thomas 2009, 101)

The superstructure, in its exhibitionary physicality, lays the bases of what a thing means, for example what a historical figure or historical event represents, and how is it tied to the rest of past things as well as present things: it embodies the "common sense" of the era.

> Every museum tries to present an artful display of artefacts and ideas to entertain and educate its visitors. At the same time, it also is a materialized ideological narrative, fabricating its own focalized normative code of practices and values out of peculiarly arranged displays with historical artefacts, corporate products, natural organisms, technological devices, or art works. While their public pose most frequently is one of cool detached objectivity, museums are unavoidably enterprises organized around engaged partisan principles. (Luke 2002, 228)

In societies where regimes of truth are more tightly constructed, successful in their spreading, interconnected by several channels (education, media, etc.), seen as 'natural' or 'logical' by the general populace, the truth presented in museums, the 'institutionalized truth' (one among other power-related truths), is more likely to strike a chord and consequently 'make sense' in the regular visitor's head – as opposed to challenging his or her preconceived notions.

> Meanings, then, circulate through many venues: schools, theatres, churches, sciences, technologies, and states all mediate the exchange of this discursive economy. Museums, however, provide a decisively important conjuncture for such discursive forces. They give us narrative glue to assemble totalizing oversight out of fragmentary facts. Museums are much more than entertaining destinations for family outings on weekend afternoons, but they also become so powerful because so many families visit them voluntarily and frequently. Thus, museum sites are key ontotopes, museum discourses generate many ontonyms, and museum curators act as powerful ontocrats. The political dynamics of their epistemic practices, then, are well worth studying in far more detail. (Luke 2002, 103)

Hooper-Greenhill offers a similar reflection on the fluidity of 'meanings' of objects in the museum, which can be extrapolated to the 'truths' of history and memory:

> An ‘effective’ history has shown us how the meanings that are construed from objects are many, variable and fragile. Meanings are not constant, and the construction of meaning can always be undertaken again, in new contexts and with new functions. The radical potential of museum lies in precisely this. New relationships can always be built, new meanings can always be discovered, new interpretations with new relevances can be found, new codes and new rules can be written.” (Hooper-Greenhill 1992, 215)

And she compliments this reflection with a quote of Foucault’s:

> The successes of history belong to those who are capable of seizing these rules, to replace those who had used them, to disguise themselves so as to pervert them, invert their meaning, and redirect them against those who had initially imposed them; controlling this complex mechanism, they will make it function so as to overcome the rulers through their own rules. (Foucault 1977, 151)

Luke offers a somewhat similar observation on the ‘radical’ potential of the museum, even though more sombre and critical.

> Museums will remain salients of cultural struggle, because a people’s visits to them, and the aesthetical/ethical/philosophical lessons that those individuals learn there, can transform their consciousness as well as alter their actions. Will is right: culture is an incubator of character, and museums are central nodes in the narrative networks that states and societies develop to cultivate national character. (Luke 2002, 230)

In this process of earning knowledge and finding truths, the role of the museums is not to be understated – yet they are forced to take on the impossible task of constructing a relatively seamless narrative of “what took place” (which is often contradictory, confusing and inscrutable) and by bestowing meaning into objects – processes we have observed in the preceding pages. Violent periods such as civil wars or revolutions, for example, generally delve into chaos to such a degree that the chronological enumeration of events or the arbitrary selecting of witnessing accounts is insufficient to concoct a proper complete picture. Editing and simplification are in the order of the day, for reasons completely unrelated to discourse or bias. Museums are thus exercises in homogenizing and narration of “the social world”:

> The political labour of representation gives the objectivity of public discourse an exemplary practice to a way of seeing it or of experiencing the social world that was previously relegated to the state of a practical disposition of a tacit and often confused experience (unease, rebelliousness, etc.). It thus enables agents to discover within themselves common properties that lie beyond the diversity of particular situations which isolate, divide and demobilize, and to construct their social identity on the basis of characteristics or experiences that seemed totally dissimilar so long as the principle of pertinence by virtue of which they could be constituted as indices of membership of the same class was lacking (Bourdieu 1991, 130)

This construction of truth or knowledge, however, enjoys an extra legitimizing factor in prison museums, as opposed to other types of regular exhibition spaces: the fact that 'it all happened here'. They enjoy the uttermost degree of potential authenticity in these terms:

> The meaning of history is also in its purpose. Empirical exactitude as defined and verified in specific context is necessary to historical production. But empirical exactitude alone is not enough. Historical representations – be they books, commercial exhibits or public commemorations – cannot be conceived only as vehicles for the transmission of knowledge. They must establish some relation to that knowledge. Further, not any relation will do. Authenticity is required, lest the representation becomes a fake, a morally repugnant spectacle. (Trouillot 1995, 149)

For no matter what type of information a visitor might bring into the museum, whether it be previous ideas borrowed from the media, literature, school or so on, being able to visit and breathe the physicality of the space gives the immediate impression of being closer to 'true history'. The arrangement and presentation of such space, then, will be analyzed in subsequent chapters as a substantial contribution to the formulation of truth.

For now, let us look at one important aspect of these prison museums: their walls. The commonly held notion of "if these walls could talk" applies here – as if they had been ultimate witnesses to the history therein. It is particularly interesting to observe a 'truth'-carving technique employed in Amna Suraka: some of the graffiti and messages on the walls are highlighted and transcribed. In prisons, it is not unusual for inmates to carve sentences or words (see Figure 26), and the museified version of the jail builds on that concept by underscoring some of the most significant. In this

process, some of the former prisoners are given a voice – while, by default, others are not deemed as relevant. Here are the quotes on walls that were exhibited in my visit:

> Omer Qaladzary (1/11/1989) I am still here, God is great, don't spill tears for my body stained with blood. I am martyred by the oppressor but thanks to God I am a Peshmerga.

> My name is Muhsin, jailed in one of the corners of this cell. I was detained at home, I was only 15 years old, they changed my name to 18 so to be executed. Then I said mother, father, I am about to be executed by Ba'athism. We will never meet again.

> Time of prayers, Morning/ 5:06 am, Noon / 11.33 am, Afternoon 2:35 pm, Sunset / 5:04 pm, Evening / 6:24 pm. I am here 18/3/1989, 16/11/1990, 30/12/1990. Barzan Mohammed Jamal

> Life is pain, and pain is the beginning of life

> DLSHAD, 13/12/1990

Figure 26 (left) Graffiti in Amna Suraka
Figure 27 (right) Graffiti in Ebrat

Apparently disparate and/or random, these carvings offer a specific portrayal of the mindsets of the prisoners, appealing to major 'truths', which could be summarized as follows: the righteousness of the *peshmerga*, the malign nature of the Ba'ath, the pride in being martyred for one's country and the importance of piousness in the face of evil and tyranny. As opposed to after-the-fact filmed testimonials –which we will address later- these are the unequivocal original voices of those interned, set on stone.

In Ebrat, there's also a couple of graffiti, even it would be fair to question their historical authenticity given that the site continued to function as a prison for a couple decades after 1979. Additionally, they appear too clean and convey a type of content which may seem too evident: unsurprisingly, they are of a distinctly religious character (see Figure 27).

> The mercy of God is for the fighters of his religion
>
> When you're hopeless and you've given up on everything, look where your hope is headed to and it's God

3.4. The battle over epistemes and the possibility of heresy

In order to conclude this chapter, I will attempt to finally connect the presence of memorial sites such as these prisons as a direct consequence of hegemony consolidating in society. All the previous descriptions of the 'political economy' of truth, the musings about its 'invention', the existence of a 'field of discursivity', 'super-structure' or 'episteme', are directly related, in my view, to Kamal Salibi's thesis, stated in the introduction, of history being a battleground. For inasmuch as truth is non-primal and essentially fabricated, 'incited' by politics, 'produced' by institutions, 'massively' consumed, 'under the control' of apparatuses, there's no doubt that it can be open-ended and subject to change – it can be contested. Thus, we can talk of a "battle 'for truth', or at least around truth". As we saw, truth is to be understood as "the ensemble of rules according to which the true and the false are separated and specific effects of power attached to the true". We also take for granted that "it's not a matter of a battle 'on behalf' of the truth but a battle about the status of truth and the economic and political role it plays" (Foucault 1980, 132). According to Bourdieu,

> [Political] action aims to produce and impose representations (mental, verbal, visual or theatrical) of the social world which may be capable of acting on this world by acting on agents' representation of it. Or, more precisely, it aims to make or unmake groups – and, by the same token, the collective actions they can undertake to transform the social world in accordance with their interests –by producing, reproducing or destroying the representations that make groups visible for themselves and for others. […] Political subversion presupposes cognitive subversion, a subversion of the vision of the world. (Bourdieu 1991, 127)

Over the last decades we've witnessed these type of breaks in the interpretation of history in the Middle East; moments when a new conception of memory and identity emerged and posed a challenge to the authorized and conventional version of events and threatened to 'transform' the vision of the social world. Case in point would be Israel in the 80s, when some sort of 'battle over history' emerged between revisionist academicians on one hand and the 'hegemonic' masses and political actors on the other. This is what Bourdieu calls a "double game", a

> symbolic struggle […] for the conservation or transformation of the divisions established between classes by the conservation or transformation of the systems of classification which are its incorporated form and of the institutions which contribute to perpetuating the current classification by legitimating it. […] What is at stake at this game is, on the one hand, the monopoly of the elaboration and diffusion of the legitimate principle of di-vision of the social world and, thereby, of the mobilization of groups, and, on the other hand, the monopoly of the use of objectified instruments of power (objectified political capital). It thus takes the form of a struggle over the specifically symbolic power of making people see and believe, of predicting and prescribing, of making known and recognized, which is at the same time a struggle for power over the 'public powers' (Bourdieu 1991, 181)

On the opposite spectrum, similar agents in other countries might refrain from attempting to sculpt a clear historical truth in official or memorial channels – Lebanon, for instance, is still devoid of a national history museum (at the time of this writing, it is being built).

Concerning Iran and Iraqi Kurdistan, as it will have become obvious, a sudden or progressive change in the regime of truth after political or military altercations endowed the regime with some sort of monopoly over the memorialization of past events – solidified in memorial sites and history museums. The hegemonic elite also gained the right to the principles of di-vision: of officially deciding which groups were which, and what they represented in the drama of the country. Of course, unconformity might gel through other channels (i.e. street protests), but it is not visible in the memorializing space; in this specific area, we can conclude that indeed

“the production of ideas about the social world is always subordinated to the logic of the conquest of power” (Bourdieu 1991, 181).

If in the early museums “the recent past was historicized as the newly emerging nation-states sought to preserve and immemorialize their own formation as part of that process of ‘nationing’ their populations that was essential for their further development” (Bennett 1988, 89), a similar assessment can be made of museums under the auspices of new regimes. The cases studied here are perhaps not as grandiose of those of ‘new nations’ (even though this could be applied to Kurdistan), but inasmuch as they represent nascent regime which represent a political and ideological suture with the past, they did need to consolidate their validity by constructing such (hi)stories. And what’s more, these regimes are the ‘political’ aftermath of contention, civil warlike struggle and revolution:

> Power is war, the continuation of war by other means. At this point, we can invert Clausewitz’s proposition and say that politics is the continuation of war by other means. Thus would imply three things. First, that power relations, as they function in a society like ours, are essentially anchored in a certain relationship of force that was established in and through war at a given historical moment that can be historically specified. And while it is true that political power puts an end to war and establishes or attempts to establish the reign of peace in civil society, it certainly does not do so in order to suspend the effects of power or to neutralize the disequilibrium revealed by the last battle of the war. According to this hypothesis, political power is perpetually to use a sort of silent war to reinscribe that relationship of force, and to reinscribe it in institutions, economic inequalities, language, and even the bodies of individuals. […] We are always writing the history of the same war, even when we are writing the history of peace and its institutions (Foucault 2003b, 16)[22]

For in our contemporary history, the “war for domination will be replaced by a struggle that is of a different substance: not an armed clash, but an effort, a rivalry, a striving toward the universality of the State”. It is a struggle that has to be regarded in “non-military”, “civilian” terms (Foucault 2003b, 225). If there is confrontation, it is not over other states, but rather, over the identity of the country and its society. And the subject’s perception of his or her reality and history, inasmuch as they live surrounded by power relations (and not, as we’ve learnt, by pure coercion, which erases the possibility of “thinking back”), can be guided, but never fully anticipated.

> The struggle in which knowledge of the social world is at stake would be pointless if each agent could find, within himself, the source of an infallible knowledge of the truth of his condition and his position in the social space, and it would be equally pointless if the same agents could not recognize themselves in different discourses and classifications (according to class, ethnicity, religion, sex, etc.), or in opposing evaluations of the products resulting from the same principles of classification. But the effects of this struggle would be totally unpredictable […] if the propensity to recognize oneself in the different discourses and classifications offered were equally probable among all agents, whatever their position in the social space. (Bourdieu 1991, 132)[23]

In Gramscian terms, given the existence of a hegemonic force in a determined time, it is but natural that civil society continues as "the sphere where the subordinate social groups may organise their opposition and construct an alternative hegemony – a counter-hegemony" (Simon 1982, 27). For, according to this conception, there must always exist some degree of pluralism in civil society for hegemony to operate: the Gramscian theory of hegemony "accepts social complexity as the very condition of a political struggle – through its threefold displacement of the Leninist theory of 'class alliances'- sets the basis for a democratic practice of politics, compatible with a plurality of historical subjects." (Laclau and Mouffe 2000, 71)[24]

We should be careful, however, not to overrate the probability or perseverance of alternative claims to memory and history. In order to discuss this notion, I will offer a passage by Olick:

> The contemporary public sphere is filled with groups competing over history and competing in terms of history. But that competition goes on and even increases as other historicities old and new proliferate side by side. […] We exist with, indeed move rather fluidly among, the multiple temporalities of face-to-face community, global village, archival history, national history (especially through the media) and various not necessarily coherently integrated identities (e.g. male, father, husband, American, sociologist, white) that take place in locations more widely dispersed than ever before. […]In this sense, the current proliferation of historical identitarianism, commodified nostalgia, museumification, record keeping, lieux de mémoire, separation, and regret are part of one process: not that they are the same things – indeed, each of these practices and institutional forms has its own logic, and there are often conflicts among them and with less past-oriented frameworks – but that their

> differences result from the same process of chronic differentiation. Though the use of the past is a hallmark of multiculturalism, multiculturalism also implies a diversity of chronic frames, some traditionally historical, some involving new temporalities, and some not historical at all. Of course, even the most pluralistic states in the most multicultural societies are concerned about their cohesion; they continue to offer unitary narratives to integrate the many alternatives available, and they worry about the authority they have ceded to the public sphere over such matters as history standards and public storytelling (Olick 2007, 191)

In my opinion, this perspective may be dangerously Eurocentric. While it is true that indeed non-official memories circulate among civil society (and their existence is actually what justifies the emergence of hegemonic forces), in Iran and Kurdistan, due to the nature and rise of their political regimes and the need to legitimize their validity, it is almost impossible to discern concessions to this multiplicity of views in institutional official channels such as museums. Multiculturalism is not supported nor clearly eroded – it simply is not so much featured. "Mnemonic resistance", a "common strategy in the past few decades, when increasing numbers of individuals and groups have challenged official versions of the past and demanded redress for perceived contemporary historical wrongs" (Olick 2007, 139), does obviously exist in some forms, but not so much in these enclaves devoted to memorializing. I am not arguing multiculturalism is totally absent from these countries' museography, for this would require much further analysis: to give but two examples, in Ankawa, the Christian neighbourhood of Erbil, there is an ethnographic exhibition space centred on the Assyrian people – even though it is very much politically neutral and ignores controversial moments of past violence; in the Holy Defense Museum in Tehran, a small section applauds the efforts of a few Armenians in the Iran/Iraq war – even though it emphasizes their Iranian nationalism. Of course multiculturalism may be slightly present in the public space, but these prison museums instead opt to concoct a neutral, undifferentiated 'people'. Meanwhile, I would argue that notably multicultural states such as Lebanon, due to the pre-eminence of issues and problems more pressing than the fabrication of memory, the governments do not seem to display heightened interest in such attempts at cohesion.

In a way, given the urban nature, location, budgetary scale, significance and all around magnitude of museumification and memorializing, it can be said that to some extent the 'professionals' in charge of such endeavours (unlike other forms of affordable commemoration, such as ceremonies or publishing of books) have to submit to the monopoly of the state and the municipality –the only sources of grants and permits regarding such projects – and thus, as Bourdieu would also note, the majority of the population is "dispossessed" of such curatorial possibilities, while museum agents act as gate keepers (Bourdieu 2017, 69). Trouillot reminds us that "the production of historical narrative involves the uneven contribution of competing groups and individuals who have unequal access to the means for such production" (Trouillot 1995, xix). Who else but the state enjoys the greater access? This issue is also addressed by Bourdieu:

> Because the products offered by the political field are instruments for perceiving and expressing the social world (or, if you like, principles of di-vision), the distribution of opinions in a given population depends on the state of the instruments of perception and expression available and on the access that different groups have to these instruments. This means that the political field in fact produces an effect of censorship by limiting the universe of political discourse, and thereby the universe of what is politically thinkable, to the finite space of discourse capable of being produced or reproduced within the limits of the political *problematic*, understood as a space of stances effectively adopted within the field – i.e. stances that are socio-logically possible given the laws that determine entry into the field. (Bourdieu 1991: 172)

The establishment, the form and the content of the museum, regardless of its ideological tone, will always be indirectly affected by the "constraints and limitations inherent in the functioning of the political field" (Bourdieu 1991, 173), that is, by the regimes – which also, in our cases, are long-standing, permanent and apparently not too open to major political change. Hence "the struggle for the monopoly of the development and circulation of the principles of di-vison of the social world is more and more strictly reserved for professionals and for the large units of production and circulation, thus excluding de *facto* the small independent producers." (Bourdieu 1991, 196) Anyone can publish a pamphlet; opening a museum is a whole different endeavour.

Whatever theoretical reading we adopt, it is clear that there can be struggles against these forms of "subjectivity and submission", against a type of "rationality" (Foucault 2003a, 201, 130)[25]. And this is why the society as a whole needs to be addressed in any discussion of this kind: it's not about the government doing a series of things, but about the citizens understanding and accepting the truth that is being given: the concept of consent. As Bourdieu reminds us, in a very Gramscian manner, the language of authority never governs "without the collaboration of those it governs, without the help of the social mechanisms capable of producing this complicity based on misrecognition, which is the basis of all authority" (Bourdieu 1991: 113). This, in turn, is also very much true of the collective memory that emerges in that society: "public memory speaks primarily about the structure of power in society because that power is always in question in a world of polarities and contradictions and because cultural understanding is always grounded in the material structure of society itself" (Bodnar 1994, 15).

The idea that "every power relationship implies, at least in potentia, a strategy of struggle" (Foucault 2003a, 142), that "there is no power without potential refusal or revolt" (Foucault 2003a, 201), may translate into the museum in the shape of believability: the visitor does have the option to reject some of the information being given – yet still, this does not alter the fact that it is the main information officially presented and made available to him[26]. In some instances, even "the historical narrative within which an actual event fits could precede that event itself, at least in theory, but perhaps also in practice" (Trouillot 1995, 26). That is to say, the 'academic' version of history might come after the 'popular' interpretation has already blossomed.

> Debates […] involve not only professional historians but ethnic and religious leaders, political appointees, journalists, and various associations within civil society as well as independent citizens, not all of whom are activists. This variety of narrators is one of many indications that theories of history have a rather limited view of the field of historical production. They grossly underestimate the size, the relevance, and the complexity of the overlapping sites where history is produced, notably outside of academia. […] Thus, the thematic awareness of history is not activated only by

> recognized academics. We are all amateur historians with various degrees of awareness about our production. We also learn history from similar amateurs. Universities and university presses are not the only loci of production of the historical narrative. […] Long before average citizens read the historians who set the standards of the day for colleagues and students, they access history through celebrations, site and museum visits, movies, national holidays, and primary school books. (Trouillot 1995: 19-20)

Before the scholars could get there, a somewhat basic and understandable (through probably not very coherent) reading of the events of 1988-90 in Kurdistan and 1978-79 in Iran had already settled in the psyches of those populations. From the point of view of the curator, it doesn't make sense to design an exhibit without having in mind what the visitors will be, and what qualms and expectations they are likely to have; this is related to the already discussed original function of history museums as being the purveyors of the 'real story' of the people they address:

> The relation between the exhibiting subject and the exhibited subject is crucial for understanding the narrative structure of the exhibition and the criteria that dictated the practices of preservation, classification, and display. But these two subjects do not alone shape the picture of the past and its display. The potential target audience of the representation of the past has an important role to play, for it is usually a construct – hidden or overt- of the exhibition narrative. When the exhibition takes place in a context or national or ethnic struggle, […] another subject is involved –the other who has been excluded from the arena of exhibition and whose status as either source or object of knowledge (or both) has been denied. (Azoulay 1994, 100)

These typologies of editing practices take place in all exhibitions and unless very pronounced, do not substantially affect the experience of the visitor – because, in order to capture the largest number of 'hearts and minds', the exhibitions need to be loose and general. A visitor might disagree or contest some of the notions or facts, but most probably not all of them; only if very insulted, confused or alienated may he or she have an actual visceral reaction. In most instances, visitors come 'prepared' and 'expecting' to find a regular and anticipated interpretation of their history, learnt through other channels.

> We go to museums to learn about ourselves, to witness what has been identified as significant art or history or science, and to come away with a stronger sense of ourselves as implicated in a vast web of tradition and knowledge. At the end of the twentieth century, the average museum-goer may well ask, "Who decided which objects I may view here? Who has established this master narrative of meaning with which I am being presented?" But I think it is far more likely that the individual museum-goer continues to go seeking to be impressed by the objects that s/he either expected to find, or is expecting to be initiated to. The sheer size, scale, or scope of the exhibits may sufficiently impress viewers as significant, and we need to consider what kind of memories inspire and form around these impressions. (Crane 2000, 12)

When a person visits a prison museum, he or she knows in broad terms what to expect, the type of exhibit that will be laid before him or her, with only a few variables existing (one being the intensity of the display). If a local visitor, she or he will come with an additional layer of understanding and will be able to recognize names or dates more efficiently. In other words, "individual memories and academic intentions interact in the production of personal expectations and collective representations, in an ongoing, reciprocal mediation. The viability of these collisions is constantly being tested in museum exhibits, and nowhere more productively than in what might be termed "pathetic" exhibitions, [those which] are deliberately attempting to reshape real or imagined museum orthodoxies" (Crane 2000, 7). An example of such a 'pathetic exhibition' was a proposed exhibit on the Enola Gay, the plane that bombed Hiroshima, at the Smithsonian in Washington (also referenced in Trouillot, 21; Dickinson, Blair and Ott 2010, 19), which Luke reflects on:

> Shrewd curatorial vision, when coupled with a well-scripted narrative in an elegantly crafted exhibit, can leverage entertaining force in ways that might rewrite civic lessons against the prevailing regime of rules. When individual viewers or exhibition audiences encounter such displays and discourses, real conflict over their civic identities may well unfold at the show site. (Luke 2002, 227)

This is an indicator of how museum hold some degree of 'power' on the public discourse and are, likewise, constrained and castrated by the power relations taking place in society. It can be said that while the original history museum as it appeared in Europe in the 19th century was overtly concerned with the telling of the 'national glories' of peoples and armies and now its message is portrayed as more factual and

detached, an exhibition space normally will not challenge the visitor's frame of thought very much or directly attack it, for it would not be popularly accepted[27]. Imagine, for instance, an exhibition devoted to the valuable historical contributions of the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company in Tehran, or a museum memorializing the Armenian communities of Diyarbakır. The current epistemes prevent such endeavours – addressing them would be heretical.

> Heretical subversion exploits the possibility of changing the social world by changing the representation of this world which contributes to its reality or, more precisely, by counterposing a *paradoxical pre-vision*, a utopia, a project or programme, to the ordinary vision which apprehends the social world as a natural world (Bourdieu 1991, 128)

Though "heretical subversion" might find its way in some channels, it is not allowed in institutions such as museums, because of the self-evident physical and economic requirements they present: it is unlike the spreading of pamphlets, the opening of websites or other similar 'street tactics'. Those in power are also those in control of what typology of "common sense" is spread in the visible channels of historicizing (schools, museums, even the media sometimes) and how it is used to undermine the 'other' ways of looking at the society. This is how Bourdieu rationalizes how curatorial agents may attempt to infiltrate truths through rhetoric:

> Dominant individuals strive to produce, through a purely reactionary discourse, a substitute for everything that is threatened by the very existence of heretical discourse. Finding nothing for which to reproach the social world as it stands, they endeavour to impose universally, through a discourse permeated by the simplicity and transparency of common sense, the feeling of obviousness and necessity which this world imposes of them; having an interest in leaving things as they are, they attempt to undermine politics in a depoliticized political discourse, produced through a process of neutralization or, even better, of negation, which seeks to restore the doxa to its original state of innocence. (Bourdieu 1991: 131)

To which he later adds:

> The most sophisticated symbolic strategies can never produce completely the conditions of their own success and would be doomed to failure if they could not count

> on the active complicity of a whole of individuals who defend orthodoxy and orchestrate –by amplifying it- the initial condemnation of reductive readings. (Bourdieu 1991, 153)

That is, symbolic strategies cannot succeed without the compliance or consent from a major part of the civil society. As Foucault says, "every strategy of confrontation dreams of becoming a relationship of power and every relationship of power tends, both through its intrinsic course of development and when frontally encountering resistances, to become a winning strategy" (Foucault 2003a, 143). It's not as if the museum effort is a gamble hoping to speak volumes to as many subjects as possible. Such an effort is sentient in that it knows (as we can deduct from the preceding passage) that at least a substantial group of individuals (the dominant hegemony and co-opted groups) are likely to get behind it. However, this is not always the case: the most telling example is the events of 2006 at Halabja. A mass of angry citizens, mostly younger individuals who did not recall or experience the massacre, stormed the memorial and burned it down, after which some were beaten and arrested by the authorities (Lawrence 2008, 274). The angry crowds maintained that "the leadership had exploited [the memorial] for their own political purposes, while neglecting the reconstruction of the town itself" (Bengio 2010, 63). In this case, it's not so much that parts of the society perceive the content or meaning or the memory site as inherently wrong; rather, they sensed how their present-day livelihoods were not given sufficient attention when compared to implicit hegemonic efforts in 'memorializing'.

Despite exceptions like these, we can assume that the producer is implicitly or explicitly aware of the target, especially in our prison museum cases, a relationship explored in the following fragment by Bourdieu which, despite referring mostly to works of art and philosophy, can be comfortably smuggled into our discussion:

> The production anticipates the interpretation, and, in the double-guessing game played by its interpreters, invites over-interpretation, while still reserving the right to repudiate this in the name of the essential inexhaustibility of the work, which may lead

> one to accept or, equally, to reject any interpretation, by virtue of the transcendent power of its creative force, which is also expressed as a power of criticism and self-criticism. […] Like a priest who, as Weber observes, has the means to make the lay person carry the responsibility for the failure of the cultural enterprise, the great priestly prophecy thus guarantees the complicity of interpreters who have no option but to pursue and recognize the necessity of the work, even through accidents, shifts and lapses, or find themselves cast out into the darkness of 'error' or, even better, 'errance'. (Bourdieu 155)[28]

For our purposes, these are interesting observations, which I would like to couple with the following commentary on Foucault:

> In the attempt to exercise their capacity for autonomous action, those subject to relations of domination will inevitably be led to oppose them. It is not a question of advocating such resistance, of praising autonomy or blaming domination as respective exemplars of a good and evil for all, but simply of understanding why such resistance does occur. To the extent that it occurs, such resistance follows from the nature of particular human beings. It is an effect on human freedom (Patton 1998, 73)

Former political prisons incarcerated those who chose not to submit to the previous established regime of truth (or even despite not partaking in this opposition, were targeted for sometimes largely arbitrary reasons); and now, museified, such incarcerations may be utilized as the cornerstone of a new regime of truth guiding subjects far from 'errance'. The accumulated resentment of those under the previous domination blossoms in the exhibit in a more pedagogical, yet still mostly discourse-based framework. There is an intriguing cyclical nature, or at least peculiar connectivity, in this particular museumification process. And, let us not forget, coercion and repression might still continue in these countries (and they certainly do) alongside other power relations: the two mechanisms/typologies of power, one disciplinary and the other regulatory, "do not exist at the same level. Which means of course that they are not mutually exclusive and can be articulated with each other" (Foucault 2003b, 250).

At this point it will have become clear that the more rooted and persuasive regimes of truth are, the less possibility there is for individuals challenging such regime to

appear and be successful in their endeavour; it will also be evident that the monopoly of truth goes well beyond categories such as state control, for 'truth' is also essentially a part of society, of power relations that exist outside the realm of the state (regardless of whether the latter opts to take advantage of them). In the battle over truth, "among the most effective and best concealed censorships are all those which consist in excluding certain agents from communication by excluding them from the groups which speak or the places which allow one to speak with authority" (Bourdieu 1991, 138), that is, excluding alternative stories to coexist in the museum space.

In conclusion, once the dominant force has seized political power, it needs to seek ways not only to consolidate its legitimacy, but to continue it and expand it, of transcending itself as more than a mere discursive fit for a specific time. This also allows us to comprehend these museums as sites in which indeed *a* truth is displayed, but it is not merely the truth of a programmatic ideology; rather, the reality is something way deeper than that – the common sense. For instance, a state with an established regime of truth might come into collision with a spreading and trending international discourse such as that of human rights, or a homebred political discourse coming from local communities. What might result from this conflation, the consequences it might entail for both the governing agents and the citizens, the possible re-codification of truth that might ensue, cannot be systematically analyzed as a whole, nor exactly predicted. What happens when a state criticizes a past regime's or a foreign government's mistreatment of prisoners despite it itself engaging on a similar actions? Objectively speaking, not to mention superficially, this government would be accused of hypocrisy, but it's not as simple as that: in these museums we have observed the resilience of established epistemes - equipped with their hegemonic armour, their found historical truths, their mechanisms of symbolic power, their pastoral leanings and the extent of their spread in society – which cannot, in the memorial space, be so much challenged[29].

CHAPTER 4

POWER AND MEMORY

It is now time to study these spaces strictly as memory sites. The conceptual baggage accumulated so far will be of great help to better comprehend the actual 'memorial' angle of the prison museums. Not surprisingly, the aforementioned fluidity and hegemonic tendencies inherent to the reading of history also permeate collective memory. I will begin and mostly refer to one of the earliest sociological studies on the subject, Maurice Halbwachs', which is still as valid as ever.

4.1. The unitary collective memory: a necessary fabrication

Halbwachs already pointed out to the absence of an actual homogeneous, solid and definitive 'memory' and the seminal role played by society in its construction: "it is in society that people normally acquire their memories. It is also in society that they recall, recognize and localize their memories." (Halbwachs 1992, 38)

> Most of the time, when I remember, it is others who spur me on; their memory comes to the aid of mine and mine relies on theirs. There is nothing mysterious about recall of memories in these cases at least. There is no point in seeking where they are preserved in my brain or in some nook of my mind to which I alone have access: for they are recalled to me externally, and the groups of which I am part at any time give me the means to reconstruct them, upon condition, to be sure, that I turn toward them and adopt, at least for the moment, their way of thinking […]. It is in this sense that there exists a collective memory and social frameworks for memory; it is to the degree that our individual thought places itself in these frameworks and participates in this memory that is capable of the act of recollection. (Halbwachs 1992, 38)

Following this train of thought, Halbwachs would contend that with the exception of the memories emanating from dreams, which are only based upon themselves (Halbwachs 1992, 42), the majority (if not everything) of what the individual person

recalls is in fact a social construct. That is to say, "collective frameworks of memory are not constructed after the fact by the combination of individual recollections" but rather they are "precisely the instruments used by the collective memory to reconstruct an image of the past which is in accord, in each epoch, with the predominant thoughts of the society" (Halbwachs 1992, 40).

> The individual calls recollections to mind by relying on the frameworks of social memory. In other words, the various groups that compose society are capable at every moment of reconstructing their past. But, as we have seen, they most frequently distort that past in the act of reconstructing it. There are surely many facts, and many details of certain facts, that the individual would forget if others did not keep their memory alive for him. But, on the other hand, society can live only if there is a sufficient unity of outlooks among the individuals and groups comprising it. […] Society, in each period, rearranges its recollections in such a way as to adjust them to the variable conditions of its equilibrium. […] When reflection begins to operate, when instead of letting the past recur, we construct it through an effort of reasoning, what happens is that we distort that past, because we wish to introduce greater coherence. (Halbwachs 1992, 182-183)

Thus, our imagination constantly remains "under the influence of our social milieu" or, in other words, the mind reconstructs memories "under the pressure of society", and it is spurred on by verbal conventions – acts of communication (Halbwachs 1992, 49-51). The ultimate aim of memorial exercise is to provide coherence and significance to our pasts. This is, to some extent, a peculiar phenomenon, as Halbwachs acknowledges when referring to nostalgia: "It is not strange then that society causes the mind to transfigure the past to the point of yearning for it?" (Halbwachs 1992, 51). Collective memory scholar Jeffrey K. Olick, commenting on Halbwachs' analysis, summarizes it as follows:

> Group memberships provide the materials for memory and prod the individual into recalling particular events and into forgetting others. Groups can even produce memories in individuals of event that they never experienced in any direct sense. Halbwachs therefore resists the more extreme internalist subjectivism of Bergson, as well as the commonsense view of remembering as a purely –perhaps even paradigmatically- individual affair. […] Halbwachs argues that memory is in no way a repository of all past experiences. Over time, memories become generalized "imagos", and such imagos require a social context for their preservation. Memories, in this sense, are as much the products of the symbols and narrative available publicly – and of the

> social means for storing and transmitting them – as they are the possessions of individuals. (Olick 2007, 19)

How this is relevant to our prison museums is not complicated to understand. When Halbwachs reflects on the fact that "society from time to time obligates people not just to reproduce in thought previous events of their lives, but also to touch them up, to shorten them, or to complete them so that, however convinced we are that our memories are exact, we give them a prestige that reality did not possess" (Halbwachs 1992, 51), it's indeed very tempting to recognize the shadows of our exhibition spaces in their ontological duty. Yet it is worth noting that here Halbwachs is referring to how one single individual achieves a recollection of his own lived past, not how the 'general' past is recalled in more abstract terms by 'the people' through institutions. In the words of Olick, Halbwachs is referring to a "collected memory", "the aggregated individual memories of members of a group" (Olick 2007, 23). It is reasonable to assume that proper collective memory, a reconstruction mechanism through societal or institutional "collective commemorative representations and mnemonic traces" (Olick 2007, 20), would be an even more evident fabrication, as it would be the result of a consensus – and thus, of a hegemonic operation of a certain type:

> What makes recent memories hang together is not that they are contiguous in time: it is rather that they are part of a totality of thoughts common to a group, the group of people with whom we have a relation at this moment, or with whom we have had a relation on the preceding day or days. To recall them it is hence sufficient that we place ourselves in the perspective of this group, that we adopt its interests and follow the slant of its reflections. Exactly the same process occurs when we attempt to localize older memories. We have to place them within a totality of memories common to other groups, groups that are narrower and more lasting, such as our family." (Halbwachs 1992, 52)

The echoes of the preceding discussion on hegemony reverberate through this passage. Society (or groups within it) is able to exert considerable influence on how a single person might regard his or her past. But this passage also unveils a very relevant reality: that individuals are essentially part of groups, and therefore, that "just as people are members of many different groups at the same time, the memory

of the same fact can be placed within many frameworks, which result from distinct collective memories" (Halbwachs 1992, 53). In a previous paper I wrote on the failures of reconciliation in Lebanese society, I argued that in cases in which institutional or official history or memory of events is not available or provided to citizens, they are most likely to turn to their families or other immediate groups to make sense of their past. This is precisely what Salibi argues when asserting that there are histories at war in Lebanon. We can rightly assume that no society can achieve a singular perception of what happened because, as mentioned, each individual belongs to and therefore is imbibed by his or her own groups. However, should a hegemonic force emerge in society, and should it 'conquer' the state and utilize its organs, through the already explained mechanisms of power, I think it is fair to also contend that its unified construct of the past can also gain the upper hand; and that such a 'national' memory might end up undermining the less institutionalized, more chaotic memories of apparently lesser groups such as the family unit.

Since we cannot remember everything that happened to us, and since we cannot really know the events that happened when we were not there, we have to unavoidably turn to what civil society, through different mechanisms and perhaps in its state form (i.e. schools), tells us in order to figure out or at least try to comprehend something as convoluted as the 'past'. Consider the following fragment:

> When Chateaubriand in a famous page tells how evenings were spent at the manor of Combourg, is this an account of an event that happened only once? Was he particularly impressed, on one evening more than any other, by the silent comings and goings of his father, by the appearance of the hall, and by the details that he throws into relief in his description? No: he undoubtedly assembled in one single scene recollections of many evenings that were engraved in his memory and in that of his family. What he portrays is the summation of an entire period – the idea of a type of life. […] What we find is a reconstructed picture. In order to see it come to life in its bygone reality, it is through reflection rather than from its suspension that the author chooses this particular physical trait or that particular custom. […] To be sure, this is a description created long afterward by a writer. The person who tells the story is obliged to translate his recollection so as to communicate them; what he writes may not correspond exactly to all he calls to mind. But the scene as it is represented

> nevertheless gives, in a summary of collective reflections and feelings, it still projects a singularly vivid image on the screen of an obscure and unclear past. (Halbwachs 1992, 60)

Collective memory, as history, does in fact need a narrative force. And more so than history, it needs to be imbued with some degree of sentiment and meaning. It needs to indicate or mean something – it has to be imbued with a significant, emotional connection with the present. If, as observed here in regards to Chateaubriand, not even a skilled and evocative writer directly recalling his past can one hundred percent emulate in his writings what really happened, then neither museums can attempt to achieve such an impossible feat. What they can do, however, as the writer does, is to contract and summarize 'what happened' and ornament it with feelings, reflections and meanings that are relevant to the 'people' from their particular hegemonic standpoint. Moreover, if we assume that a reigning narrative has emerged within civil society and has become the discursive fodder of the hegemonic force, it is only natural for it to strive to neutralize and co-opt as many of the mentioned 'collective' frameworks of memory as possible. Olick insists on the relevance of non-lived, non-aggregated personal memories in the construction of such collective frameworks:

> A great deal of work has argued that symbols and their systems of relations have a degree of autonomy from the subjective perceptions of individuals. Of course, the nature and degree of that autonomy vary greatly depending of the approach. Whether built on a Saussurean distinction between langue and parole, on Durkheiman notions of collective conscience, or hermeneutical approaches to the history of ideas, or on vernacular ideas about national character heritage, however, it is fairly common to assert that collectives have memories, just like they have identities, and that ideas, styles, genres, and discourses, among other things, are more than the aggregation of individual subjectivities. (Olick 2007, 28)[30]

So, it is fair to conclude that, as we observed with history, memory is also fabricated through the lenses of the present - and not by ideologues but by the epistemes most prevalent in civil society: "we accept remembering in the way society remembers" (Halbwachs 1992, 82)[31].

4.2. Borrowing meanings from religious memory

One of the most important frameworks highlighted by Halbwachs is that of religious memory[32]. Although his analysis is only concerned with Christianity, it can be extrapolated to our cases. Certainly in Iran and Kurdistan there is a reoccurrence of religious memory in the way members of the society make sense of their present and past. This is also why it is relatively convenient for the hegemonic force, in its pursuit of a common interpretation aligned to its interests, to somehow recall it. For religious memory may in fact be the most ancient – preceding national or familial memories – and, as opposed to other kinds of collective frameworks, "the memory of religious groups claims to be fixed once and for all" as "it either obliges others to adapt themselves to its dominant representations, or it systematically ignores them" (Halbwachs 1992, 92).

> The society wishes to adopt these larger and deeper beliefs without entirely rupturing the framework of notions in which it has matured up until this point. That is why at the same time that society projects into its past conceptions that were recently elaborated, it is also intent on incorporating into the new religion elements of old cults that are assimilable into a new framework. Society must persuade its members that they already carry these beliefs within themselves at least partially, or even that they will recover beliefs which had been rejected some time ago. But this is possible only if society does not confront all of the past, if it at least preserves the forms of the past. Even at the moment that it is evolving, society returns to its past. It enframes the new elements that it pushes to the forefront in a totality of remembrances, traditions, and familiar ideas" (Halbwachs 1992, 86)

Memorial ideas of martyrdom, tyranny, etc. are thus incorporated into the contemporary interpretation of the social world and the past (in the case of Iran I would even argue there is a strong "literary" memory -through the likes of Ferdowsi and Mevlana- that people can resort to in order to make sense of current struggles). In these cases, since entities or events in the contemporary world cannot interact with, modify or update the old tenets – as "religion aims at preserving unchanged thought the course of time the remembrance of an ancient period without any admixture of subsequent remembrances" and therefore dogmas as well as rituals "assume more

retrograde forms from century to century, so as to resist more effectively the influences emanating from the outside" (Halbwachs 1992, 93) – it is only but natural for them to be recoated under the guise of present realities [33].

While the memory rethorics Amna Suraka are of an ethno-national calibre, as pointed out in preceeding chapters, the discourse in Ebrat does implicitly recall some Islamic conventions. The museum cannot be overtly religious due to the fact that this would clash with the alleged 'scientificity' of the history portrayed, yet many instances of religious ideography can be located in several spots.

For example, a plaque describing a wall of victims and denouncing the injustices of the SAVAK bears the ominous heading "He is the Avenger". This is a reference to the Quranic concept of *al-Muntaqim*, sometimes described, by scholars like Henry Corbin, as referring to the hidden twelfth Imam (Mehrabani 2017, 77), and even attributed to (though not by the Prophet) as one of the many eminent names of Allah Himself[34]: "Allah has the power to doom the activities of disobedient people and extremists to failure, to make sinners fall from their position in society, and to punish those who stray from the right path" (Samat 2001, 300). References to punishment, retribution, the disapproval of wrongdoers and the removal of what is harmful can be found in several parts of the Quran, for instance in *al-Sajdah* 32:22: "we shall inflict retribution on the guilty" (also *al-Maidah* 5:95; *Ibrahim* 14:47; etc.). Thus, the fall of the SAVAK and the Shah is to some extent portrayed within the spiritual frameworks of Quranic logic.

As a further instance of confluence between historical event and religious memory, in the corridor displays of ex-prisoner photographs, those who were killed under torture (in religious-discursive parlance, "martyred") are underscored with a red tulip (see Figure 28), which is a symbol of martyrdom coming from Persian Sufi allegorical poetry and which was adopted by those protesting the dead during the times of the revolution (Ram 2002, 96). Its presence in the museum thus unites

general literary-religious memory with memory of the revolutionary events themselves.

Figure 28 Corridor photographs of interned prisoners; those martyred are identified with a red tulip

Similarly to familial memory, religious memory can also be fragmented, and diverse versions of it can come to the fore (Halbwachs 1992, 115): different types of groups can claim a better understanding of past events and teachings, which evolves into the emergence of not only sects but schools of thought and even micro-communities centred around specific priests or theologians. For example, in 1969 Ayatollah Najafabadi published his book *Shahid-e Javid* (*The Eternal Martyr*), which refashioned the figure of Imam Hussain and his martyrdom into that of a political activist. It both reutilized an old story to recontemplate the present as well as created

a schism between learned men, the most inflexible of which considered this reading of a sacred foundational event to be unacceptable. However, others were more welcoming of the idea (Mottahedeh 1985, 353). For indeed the religious establishment can "allow without apparent contradiction that new revelations occur", nevertheless it tries to "link these new data to the ancient data and to place them within the body of its doctrine, that is, of its tradition." Adopting this perspective, Halbwachs concludes that "although religious memory attempts to isolate itself from the temporal society, it obeys the same laws as every collective memory: it does not preserve the past but reconstructs it with the aid of the material traces, rites, texts, and traditions left behind by that past, and with the aid moreover of recent psychological and social data, that is to say, with the present." (Halbwachs 1992, 119)[35]

4.3. Memory sites: timings and usages

If remembering takes place, to a substantial degree, "in and through language, narrative, and dialogue" (Olick 2007, 29), obviously these prison museums aid and abet in this reconstruction of the person's memories from the vantage point of the present, whether they were experienced by him/herself or belong to a previous era. They are public spaces in which individual, society and individual converge in such a way that it may be difficult to dissociate: "There is no individual memory without social experience, nor is there any collective memory without individuals participating in communal life. Thinking about remembering this way demands that we overcome our inculcated tendency – as both social scientists and modern social actors – to see individual and society, in the words of Norbert Elias, as separate things, "like pots and pans"" (Olick 2007, 34). Furthermore, considering there are several frameworks of collective memory, and if a "recollection is the richer when it reappears at the junction of a greater number of these frameworks, which in effect intersect each other and overlap in part" (Halbwachs 1992, 173), it is logical to try to understand public memory sites as the 'safest' and 'richest' conflation of similar ways of thinking – those which are the most readily and hegemonically constructed

and accepted by the general society in their "present-day frameworks" (Halbwachs 1992, 188).

All of this brings us to the conclusion that as with history, collective memory is a construction. Susan Sontag, skeptical of Halbwachs, would even argue that "collective instruction" is a more adequate term to refer to collective memory (Sontag 2003, 76), since it may very well be a manufactured formulation disassociated from the actual recalled images of the individual and becomes instead the representation of dominant symbols and epistemes. Dickinson, Blair and Ott refer to the intrinsic and inescapable rhetorical nature of collective memory exercises to justify its unavoidable artificiality:

> To be sure, most of what passes for public memory bears at least some arguable resemblance to or some trace of a "real" past event. […] But we must acknowledge public memory to be "invented", not in the large sense of a fabrication, but in the more limited sense that public memories are constructed of rhetorical resources. To suggest otherwise is to deny both the material and symbolic dimensions of memory articulations, which underwrite their partiality. (Dickinson, Blair and Ott 2010, 13)

Pierre Nora, who devised the term *lieux de la mémoire*, in one of his most mystical passages, goes as far as to consider memory as a phenomenon of the now – a "bond tying us to the eternal present"- but also as a phenomenon of "emotion and magic", accommodating "only those facts that suit it", thriving on "vague, telescoping reminiscences, on hazy general impressions or specific symbolic details", and situating "remembrance in a sacred context" (Nora 1996, 3). If history, "according to Halbwachs, is 'dead memory', a way of preserving pasts to which we no longer have an "organic experiential relation", then "memory inevitably gives way to history as we lose touch with our pasts" (Olick 2007, 181). This approach, which is debatable, implies that collective memory is directly linked to the present, as opposed to history.

In fact Nora goes even farther and argues that actually the construction of memory and history, originally orchestrated by the nation-making processes (as observed in previous chapters), can no longer be counted among the possessions of the state: "the

nation as a foundation of identity has eroded as the state has ceded power to society" and therefore, in this particular process, the "nation-state as declining in salience, the last incarnation of the unification of memory and history, a form in which history could provide the social cohesion that memory no longer could" (Olick 2007, 182). I believe this is a somewhat misguided approach that first of all ignores the already discussed convergence between state and civil society in the production of hegemonic narratives as if they were two widely distinct areas; and secondly, even in the most progressive and diverse of countries, there will always exist an 'official' national historical narrative provided by the state institutions. As Olick notes:

> Nora is correct to describe the nation-state's loss of salience but is wrong to attribute it to a unilinear decline of memory in favour of history. It is not a shift from one to the other but is the proliferation of alternatives alongside the original that in fact diminished its dominance. The nation-state is not the last union of memory and history but it is the last that can claim to be the only such unity without being successfully challenged. The rise of alternate histories and alternate historicities, which do not require the disappearance of a national history per se, chips away at its dominance: The nation-state now has to compete with alternative claimants. (Olick 2007, 189)

In the previous chapter I looked at the possibility of 'alternative claimants' in our cases and tentatively asserted that due to the type of emergence, political culture and populist nature of Iran and Kurdistan, the role played by the hegemonic state force is not to be undermined in the construction of the historical/memorial narrative.

In any case, let us accept that indeed public memories are products of their own time. Most memory scholars seem to agree with this notion, as echoed here by Dickinson, Blair and Ott after their remarkably dense survey on the literature:

> Public memory may be taken to serve interests, needs, and desires of the present; to establish a seemingly unbreakable continuity with the past; to mark off the present as "a different world" from the past, and so forth. It does not do all of those things at the same time. But it does any of them only within the more-or-less-limited confines of a set of available resources for re-presentation and circulation within a specific cultural confluence. (Dickinson, Blair and Ott 2010, 13)

This observation is very similar to noted memory site researcher James Young's suggestion when speaking of memorials: "Where and by whom these memorials are constructed, these sites remember the past according to a variety of national myths, ideals and political needs" (Young 2016, 13). Historian David Lowenthal concurs with this general perspective: "The prime function of memory, then, is not to preserve the past but to adapt it as to enrich and manipulate the present", and consequently, "memories are not ready-made reflections of the past, but eclectic, selective reconstructions based on subsequent actions and perceptions and on ever-changing codes by which we delineate, symbolize and classify the world around us" (Lowenthal 1985, 210).

Olick adds a nuanced dimension to this idea, admitting that while indeed collective memory "should be seen as an active process of sense-making through time" (Olick 2007, 38), it is not fixed, but rather "a negotiation rather than constraint by, or contemporary strategic manipulation of, the past"; some degree of path-dependency exists in this process. Indeed, "the past makes the present", and the past can provide "a necessary point of reference for identity and action"; but by that same card, commemoration is always changing and morphing, "explainable in terms of its contemporary circumstances" (Olick 2007, 55).

> Circumstances shape commemorative choices and reactions to them […], however, those circumstances also include the ongoing discourse. It makes little sense to say that either political context or discursive history was decisive. Instead, it is the inextricable interplay of past and present, discursive history and contemporary context – accomplished through "genre memory" – that produces images of the past and reactions to those images (Olick 2007, 80)

Yet, as products of their own time, both the original prisons and their museumifications run the risk of losing their authenticity, validity or purpose – and instead of transforming its citizens, they may end up alienating them. This happens whenever a museum's raison d'être is outdated, probably due to a substantial shift in civil society that prompts the once-valid "signifiers" and their accompanying rhetoric to expire and become outdated. In this regard, sociologist James Loewen observes

that there are three key historical moments in a memory place: its manifest narrative (the events that took place), the story of its erection or preservation, and a "third age that comes into play whenever one visits a historic site – the visitor's own era" (Loewen 1999, 39). These three moments may not be in harmony, which might cause memory sites to fall into the pits of the obsolete.

It could be argued that the closure of an "illegal prison" such as Towhid (the name attributed to Ebrat in the 80s and 90s) in 2000 might befit the progressive agenda of the Khatami era, even though this could be subject to discussion. What is less debatable, however, is the fact that in 2000, after a decade of reformist programmes which might have been regarded by the more hardcore-conservative elements of both the state and the civil society as a gradual distancing from the "revolutionary" spirit of 1979, the hegemonic conservation of the spirit Islamic Republic needed to be reinforced and the relevance of its continuity reassessed. As the number of citizens who never experienced the 70s steadily increased, a reminder of the Shah's despotism in the shape of a museified space would prove useful, acquainting the younger generations with the terrible crimes committed by the monarchy, partly the reason why the revolution ensued – as well as with the religious leadership's dignified role in that struggle.

In regards to Amna Suraka, in the chapter on hegemony I argued that the museum opened in a transitory moment when the KDP and PUK leaderships were committing to a rapprochement. Not only that: the original opening of the site was in July of 2003, several months after the American invasion of Iraq, which amounted to a newly restored sense of hope among both the Kurdish government and the civil society. Similarly, in September of that very year the memorial at Halabja would be inaugurated with the presence of American authorities. The fall of Saddam and the end of sanctions signalled a new chapter in which proper national memorializing could get on its foot. Additionally, as in Ebrat, it was time to acquaint the children with the terrors that had plagued their parents.

4.4. The affective input of testimonies

After cautiously accepting the relationships these museums maintain with the present- "highly variable and dependent upon contexts, available rhetorical resources, representational choices, framings by various *techné*" (Dickinson, Blair and Ott 2010, 22), let us also assume that public memory is by default incomplete and gravitating around 'meanings' and sentiments, as opposed to history -which, it could be argued (not unproblematically), is "judged by its adherence to protocols of evidence", as opposed to memory, which is "assessed in terms of its effectivity" (Dickinson, Blair and Ott 2010, 9).

> Rather than representing a fully developed chronicle of the social group's past, public memory embraces events, people, objects, and places that it deems worthy of preservation, based on some kind of emotional attachment. […] The significance of affect to public memory is typically articulated in one of two ways: as a simple irreducible, and unexplored, assumption, or as the particularized ground for phenomenological explorations of trauma. (Dickinson, Blair and Ott 2010, 7)

And let's recall that we already concluded that there is no such thing as one definitive single collective memory which could possibly encompass all the 'people' such memory is related to (since there is an intersection of minor collective frameworks that prevent a thing like that). Therefore, let us assume that it is flexible.

> Because public memory is definitively partial, it is subject to challenge on the grounds of its nature as such. That is, public memories may be challenged by different versions of the past, by introduction of different information or valuations" (Dickinson, Blair and Ott 2010, 9)

How can we then understand and explain the apparent solidity and resilience of 'official' versions of a people's memory as portrayed in these prison museums? Aren't memories after all a fluctuating entity, can't they be subject to change within

the timelines of specific hegemonic formations or regimes? One explanation would be the fact that the more affective and meaningful specific memories are, the easier they are to simplify and conserve: in our cases, we are dealing with some degree of trauma narrative. No matter how much the social field may change, this trauma is not to be disputed, because it is armoured by such sentimental importance, by "facts" and by discourses (including the populist factor, which will be introduced in this paper later on). In other words, in the process of memory formation in determined epistemes, the perception of these events as trauma not only has been immanently established and has progressively crystallized; it has also been impregnated with affective narration.

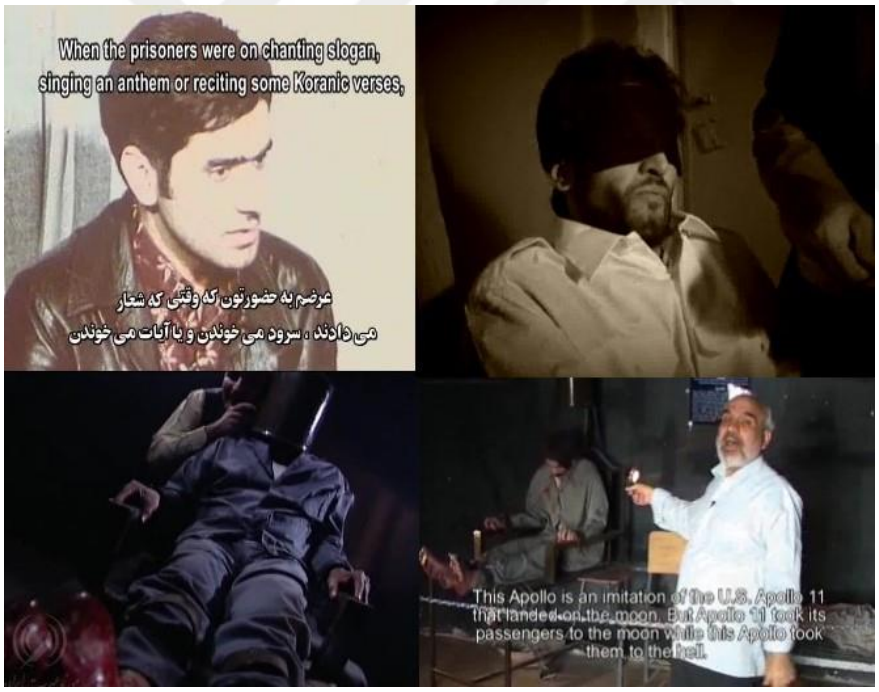


Figure 29 Stills from the films shown in Ebrat, including the confession of SAVAK interrogator Arash, the dramatic re-enactment of blindfolded torture, a witness describing the torture device "Apollo" and a filmed dramatization of the workings of such device.

The utilization of testimonies or oral history to illustrate events is a traditional way of rhetorically merging sentiment, narrative, discourse and traumatic memory in the exhibition space. Museum scholar Silke Arnold de-Simine recalls trauma historian Dominick LaCapra's concept of "secondary witnessing" to illustrate how a visitor who did *not* witness what happened acquires the impression that he/she did after having been imbued, through such mechanisms, with images and stories of those who did (Arnold de-Simine 2014, 42).

In Ebrat, several of the museum guides are actually victims who survived the torture conducted within those very walls, and offer excruciating depictions of the tribulations they endured decades ago to visitors. Some of the information panels offer testimonies of : one of the lengthiest is that of Ezzat Shahi, who published a very celebrated memoir of his times behind bars in the 70s. Moreover, in several of the rooms, as well as in the film screened in the entrance theatre, recorded snippets of first-hand accounts are shown to legitimize what is being physically shown: the witnesses confirm the interrogator's utilization of torture devices and complement it with horrifying anecdotes.

In said opening film, a fragment from the Shah's notorious October of 1976 interview with CBS' Mike Wallace (in which, after the latter accused him of being aware of the torture taking place in Iranian prisons, the monarch coolly replies "Physical? I don't believe") is screened, as well as film/audio recordings of Parviz Sabeti, former SAVAK deputy, in which he denies all claims of torture and states that their "general policy is to guide and forgive rather than to punish". This footage is interlaced with witnesses' painstaking depictions of the horrors that befell them and 1979 interviews with former SAVAK operatives such as "Kamali" or "Arash" in which they admit to their crimes (the latter of which even mentions that "when you work there you have no feelings at all"). Through this dialectical opposition, the Shah and the SAVAK deputies are inarguably unmasked as malign liars. The selection of witnesses, then, also naturally obeys the logics of a fabricated collective memory. The video testimonials are a "way of recording 'direct' encounters for

future generations", "necessary to show how individuals were affected by these atrocities, to let them speak for themselves and to foster affective and imaginative engagement in the viewers", thus becoming "secondary witnesses to the act of remembering and to a trauma text" (Arnold De-Simine 2013, 94, 104).

To get the point further across, the filmed depositions are blended with dramatized cinematic re-enactments of the described horrors: scenes with actors adopting the roles of torturer and tortured, filmed with crooked angles and fast editing. This bombastic convergence both provides credibility to the 'real' devices and visuals to the narrations while offering a experience which is both sensorial and shocking, aimed at awakening empathy in the visitor and further proving the case for the Shah's misdeeds, through processes of 'prosthetic memory' or 'post-memory', which will be analyzed in a further section of the thesis.

4.5. A fascistic investment of memory: silences and vilifications

A few pages back Olick's point on the possible fluidity of memory was addressed. As I will attempt to prove in this final section, however, the memory presented in these sites is far from flexible: it is fixed. First, however, I will further explain Olick's reasoning. He resorts to Bourdieu in order to note the fluctuant nature of memories, using the concept of "field" to explain the endless versions of the past that might circulate among people. "Field" amounts to a rather useful analytical tool which, when taken into consideration with the preceding discussion on hegemony, we can utilize to remark on the relational reality behind the act of remembering.

> There are thus many collective or social memories, partly because they are produced in different fields and partly because there are multiple contenders within particular fields. […] Though we may talk about official memory or vernacular memory, historical memory or literary memory, public memory and private memory, we need to keep in mind not only that these categories themselves – and the institutions to which they are associated – are ever shifting but also that the struggle over memory within them may in fact play a role in their configurations, both internal and external. A valid approach to social memory along these lines sensitizes us to the fact that different fields produce different kinds of pasts according to different rules, that remembering is a different

> activity in different fields, and that different kinds of remembering are involved in constituting and reconstituting the boundaries between fields. Moreover, different social fields, Bourdieu points out, have different implications for the *field of power* which, in his account, is a sort of metafield. On the one hand, this means that to speak about one kind of collective memory as especially powerful is to make no a priori claim about it being the real collective memory and others being either failed contenders or something else entirely. On the other hand, it also means that we can empirically determine which field is dominant at any particular moment, through keeping in mind that as the relational structure in terms of the field of power shifts, so too do the hierarchical relations among, and indeed the very boundaries of, the different fields. (Olick 2007, 92-94)

It is practically impossible to *really* be able to know what is the actual 'dominant' collective memory found in the societies of Iran and Kurdistan – an endeavour of these characteristics would at the very least require in-depth social fieldwork and massive amounts of surveying and interviewing. And because of conscious or unconscious fears among the people, maybe not even such a vast research would be able to procure realistic knowledge. Due to reasons already explained, however, we can observe these prison museums as sites where the hegemonic project displays a particular version of memory which it deems to be the most valid and far-reaching. Whether it is the most real, accurate and embraced "collective memory" among the citizens is something that cannot be proven here – we can, however, understand these memory sites' narratives as being the *perceived* (or, at the very least *desired*) widespread collective memory.

In this regard, the thorough post-Gramscian debate conducted by Laclau and Mouffe brings into the fold the very useful concept of "field of discursivity", which, according to their understanding, is an unavoidable, ever-present consequence of the 'openness' of the social reality. All articulatory practices taking place in museums or elsewhere are attempts to do an impossibility: to fix meaning, through 'nodal points', and secure is perseverance within the social:

> The impossibility of an ultimate fixity of meaning implies that there have to be partial fixations –otherwise, the very flow of differences would be impossible. Even in order to differ, to subvert meaning, there has to be a meaning. If the social does not manage

> to fix itself in the intelligible and instituted forms of a society, the social only exists, however, as an effort to construct an impossible object. Any discourse is constituted as an attempt to dominate the field of discursivity, to arrest the flow of differences, to construct a centre. We will call the privileged discursive points of this partial fixation, nodal points. […] *The practice of articulation, therefore, consists in the construction of nodal points which partially fix meaning; and the partial character of this fixation proceeds from the openness of the social, a result, in its turn, of the constant overflowing of every discourse by the infinitude of the field of discursivity*. (Laclau and Mouffe 2000, 112-113)

Thus, in the fluidity of the discursive field, "the practice of articulation, as fixation/dislocation of a system of differences, cannot consist of purely linguistic phenomena", and instead "must instead pierce the entire material density of the multifarious institutions, rituals and practices through which a discursive formation is structured" (Laclau and Mouffe 2000, 109).

Are these prison museums nodal points which strive to fix a meaning? Is, in fact, the circuit of museums in Iran or Kurdistan a series of connective nexuses working to weave a greater tapestry of "fixed" memory, as if it were an apparently centuries-old rug? I believe we can accentuate one further rhetorical aspect of these prison museums which both proves the previous point about the intent to offer *the* collective memory of the *people* and also explains its lack of fluctuation: the discourse presented in these museums reveals they engage in a 'fascistic' investment of memory. This term is introduced by philosopher Adrian Parr through her research on trauma via Deleuze and Guattari. Besides acknowledging, in a manner similar to my arguments so far, that "the present can never articulate the entirety of the past, nor the coincidence of the past and present within the present" and that the contemplation of the present is "a signifier for the signified contemplation of the past and future dimensions of the present" (Parr 2008, 24), she argues that it is actually

> possible to identify two very different investments this system of socialization takes in the context of memorial culture: one is schizoid (open), the other fascistic (paranoid). Briefly put, to speak of a schizoid investment of desire in the context of memorial culture is to extract the polyvocal movement of social energies and affects at play in the process of public remembrance. A schizoid investment of desire occurs when memorial culture registers the social force of collective trauma. […] A fascistic investment of memorial culture, on the other hand, is when the energies and affects the labor of memory produces are coded and given a fixed use. That is, as trauma registers

> throughout the social field it functions as a determinate entity. […] Succintly put, schizoid desiring-investments are revolutionary, open, polyvocal, liberating, and productive and can be characterized as zigzag or rhythm. Fascist, or paranoid investments of desire are organized a despotic signifier; they are univocal, expressive, and can be characterized by a line or form. (Parr 2008, 16-17, 30)

Following this analysis, it is explained that a schizoid investment provokes a "deterritorializing movement", while the fascistic investment "reterritorializes", as it looks "to the contents of the past in order to discover what the past means. In effect, as collective memory finds fascistic investment in modes of cultural production it mutates into a reterritorializing relation because culture attempts to resolve the contradiction between present and past realities by forming a fixed relation between these. What this means is that collective memory is used to reinforce the past as different to the present and in so doing past, present and future are codified according to their difference from one another (purely negative difference)" (Parr 2008, 182). In other words, there is a homogenization of the past, a desire to give it a concrete understanding and a sense of closure as well as stating it is *different* from the present.

Due to the already mentioned physical, fixed nature of these prison museums (as opposed to non-physical type of memories), and the fact that they are tasked with the necessity of offering a definitive, all-encompassing and self-fulfilling narrative, it is hard not to regard their investment as fascistic – they define a "finite regulating past" not devoid of morality (Parr 2008, 49). This does not mean that other similar sites cannot feature a 'polyvocal' or open-ended understanding of memory, or that "fixed" memory sites cannot mutate their exhibitions, since the "production of memory place is ongoing" and "their rhetorical invention is not limited to simply their initial construction" (Dickinson, Blair and Ott 2010, 31) – but they will do so in accordance to the main pre-chosen and embraced conception of the social world. Additionally, as physical spaces, they can be updated, but not as easily or readily as other sites or types of memorializing.

As aforementioned, Olick argued that the past/present negotiation in sense-making is ongoing (Olick 2007, 56); however, in the cases of Iran and Kurdistan, and in

particular regard to the crimes of previous regimes, this sense-making has indeed been frozen and set in stone; if anything, it is susceptible only to minimal alterations (as opposed to Olick's main object of study, post-war Germany, whose memorial discourse experienced many variations). This fixed narration has become normalized, and has not been yet substantially challenged, perhaps due to the relative novelty and/or stubbornness of the regimes, which have not yet evolved (and may not evolve) into properly embracing or 'polyvocal' societies – at least, as far as we could observe in these memory sites[36]. As I will argue in the final chapter of this thesis, trauma enormously contributes to this fixing of memory.

In these prison museums we can also contemplate how societies, through collective memory mechanisms and tensions between two directional alternatives – the influence of the past on the present and the influence of the present in the past - proscribe and prescribe how the citizens are to remember, as "political cultures operate as historical systems of meaning that is, as ordered but changing systems of claim-making – in which collective memory obliges the present (as prescription) and restricts it (as proscription) both mythically and rationally" (Olick 2007, 40, 53). One of the most important consequences of this process is the emergence of taboos, which are normally mythically operated. This is similar to Trouillot's analysis on "silences" emerging in history, as well as events being "forgotten"[37]. It is also linked to Nora's claim of the lack of organic qualities in artificial memory places. From this perspective, "memory is not only a precious good but has to be distinguished from 'inauthentic fakes': false, mistaken or implanted memories, prosthetic, second-hand, mediated or virtual memories, trivial or nostalgic memories, or simply memory scenarios whose veracity or relationship to the real is dubious" (Arnold-de Simine 2013, 14). The facts exhibited in these prison museums cannot be argued per se – if anything, the *way* they are presented, slightly modified and synthesized, and more importantly, the silences that are not addressed and the groups whose memories are dispossessed, is what might surround the museums with a certain layer of academic dubiousness.

> Taboos involve moral principles and definitional claims that are beyond debate, not because no alternatives exit but because these issues are not decided by rational argument. Taboos are usually obdurate: They may change gradually or may be transformed dramatically, but they make their claims as absolutes. One does debate with a taboo: one either obeys or transgresses its proscriptions. (Olick 2007, 41)

These memory sites are haunted by silences and taboos. It's not like the society is ignorant of such things – rather, in their condition of 'proscriptions' they cannot be showcased in the public sphere. Contiguous to this process and the fabrication of prosthetic memories, there is also some degree of "memory theft", "a more or less conscious appropriation of memories that can include deceiving oneself or others about their genuineness" (Arnold de-Simine and Radstone 2013, 24). The Islamic Republic of Iran has proven to be masterful in the manipulation of memory, particularly through the series of televised recantations extracted from a huge diversity of political prisoners who were forced to modify their own memories and therefore reinvent the collective memory of their groups, whether it be as members of the Tudeh or the Mojahedin, as investigated by Abrahamian (1999, 220-227).

The memory of the Iranian revolution as preserved in Ebrat seems to have forgotten the enormous contribution by several segments of the population to the mobilization, some of which were systematically persecuted in the aftermath of 1979, not to mention the main guerrillas waging war against the Shah which were the main victims of the SAVAK (Fedayin, Mojahedin etc). In other words, it is true that within the walls of the old Komiteh prison many mullahs and religious students were incarcerated, but their numbers paled in comparison with those of other groups.

In Amna Suraka, some of the most uneasy aspects of the Ba'athist reign are mostly ignored - namely the the Kurdish elites' sometime dealings with both Saddam and/or the Turkish state, not to mention internal tensions among the Kurds themselves, an issue addressed in the previous chapter. The most glaring omission, however, is that of the *jash* or "village guards", a mostly para-military militia formed by those Kurds who had been 'bought' or co-opted by the Baghdad regime. They collaborated with the Iraqi authrorities and partook in the genocide - many were attached to General

Security or other "emergency forces" engaged in intelligence and counter-insurgency operations in the towns (Aziz 2011, 196; McDowall 1996, 354). They numbered from 150.000 to 250.000, perhaps even more than that (Stansfield and Resool 2007, 119), and were rewarded by the Ba'ath government with "lucrative factory licenses, land grants or export/import privileges" (McDowall 1996, 356). The fact that a significant chunk of these *jash* were given amnesty by the Kurdish Front and turned against Saddam in the revolts of 1991 (Aziz 2011, 82), being "transformed from embarrassed collaborators with Baghdad into champions of the uprising" (McDowall 1996, 371), cannot by itself justify this absence, and in fact their dealings with the Ba'ath have probably not been forgotten (Makiya 1994, 145).

The village guards are very briefly and vaguely addressed in the museum description of the Anfal as "Kurdish mercenaries who acted as informers and helped the army". The utilization of the word 'mercenary' is somewhat misguided –and the magnitude of their participation not properly disclosed (a treatment perhaps similar to that given to multifarious Lebanese militias in the aftermath of the civil war there). Fazil Moradi, an anthropologist who has conducted research on the Anfal, claimed that Amna Suraka's choice to ignore the *jash* reality did to some extent betray the local memory: "both the KDP and the PUK have become a safe haven for Kurdish collaborators whose photographs are not on display and whose names are not inscribed on the entrance wall just like that of Saddam Hussein and his associates. In consequence, they are offered total impunity, which denies al-Anfal survivors persistent demand for legal justice" (Moradi 2016).

Moreover, despite claims of the conciliatory nature of such space, it is patently self-centred. There is no reference whatsoever to the plight of the southern Shiite population, who also suffered heftily during the Ba'athist reign (especially post-Iran war), not to mention other religious and ethnic minorities who over the last century have maintained a difficult (to say the least) relationship with the Kurdish hegemonic majority, from Assyrians to Yezidis (Lemarchand 2011, 3; Travis 2011, 123). It is in this sense that such spaces are 'fixed' and not 'polyvocal'. As noted by Arnold-de

Simine, some “traditional forms of public commemoration conveniently ignore any collective responsibility, while collective victimhood is framed in a narrative or heroic martyrdom, a form of suffering which can also be configured as an empowering nationalist discourse” (Arnold-de Simine 2013, 36). For sure in these museums there is a vast discarding of any accountability, which also translates in the preoccupation to unequivocally cast in stone the main culprits of all pain befallen on people: rancour and resentment determine the foes, as if they belonged to an entirely different society, heightened accusations that cannot be questioned.

In Ebrat, information pertaining to known interrogators, as well as upper echelon Anti-Sabotage Joint Committee operatives, is provided alongside photographs. This seems intended to ensure that their semblance and names live in infamy. A detailed diagram identifying every known perpetuator hangs in what used to be the warden’s main office (see Figure 30). In this table, the main persons in charge of the activities within the prisons (including former SAVAK deputy Parviz Sabeti, whose picture is also featured in the first room of the museum) are identified and photographed, and their hierarchy exposed. Moreover, to ‘fix’ the fact that Mohammed Reza was ultimately the person overseeing the whole operation, his picture crowns the chart. Next to the table hangs a peculiar sign. It is composed of three names and is supposed to represent the triangular concept which was the cornerstone of the Pahlavi regime: God-Shah-Hossein, three words which are presented as pseudo-symbiotic. The presence of this sign further incriminates the monarch in his usurping of religion, sacred values and religious figures to justify his tyrannical activities.

Figure 30 Organizational chart of Anti-Sabotage Joint Committee deputies and lower tier operatives, with Mohammed Reza Shah on top

Yet the incrimination goes beyond that. Besides the emplacements of a couple of pictures of the Shah visiting this specific prison (see Figure 31), in each of the rooms where torture is recreated there hang ‘official’ portraits of the monarch, the prince and the queen, as if observing and sanctioning the vile acts, often ornamented with Pahlavi era Iranian flags (see Figure 32). In all probability, this sheer quantity of ubiquitous royal portraits is an artificial overdose – a rhetorical exaggeration on behalf of the museum. But it serves a purpose: through their continued presence in the exhibition site, the spatial association between Shah and torturers is absolute.

The interrogators are routinely attacked all through the exhibition space. There’s a small exhibit of their passports and ID cards in which their responsibilities and posts are detailed; there’s also a text describing how Shapour Bakhtiar (the last prime

minister of Mohammed Reza) admitted to the fact that many of the SAVAK operatives had been trained by the CIA. The forging of a link between the Americans and the Pahlavi intelligence is also highlighted in the film screened at the entrance of the prison, in which the Mossad are also accused of having frequently collaborated with the Anti-Sabotage Joint Committee as well as trained its operatives.

The most notorious interrogators are provided with their own information panels, which specify their known facts and traits (see Figures 33 and 34): among them, Muhammad Ali Shabani "Doctor Hosseini", Fereydoun Tavangari "Arash", Naser Nasari "Rasovi" or "Dr. Manoochehri". These sheets firstly highlight, in a rather infantile manner, their most despicable personal characteristics: "drunk", "foul-mouthed", "mean", "vengeful", "womanizer", "womanizer (even by SAVAK standards)", "fetishist", "rapist", "looked like a gorilla", "narcissist", etc. They also list their preferred methods of operation and the tortures they had mastered, such as "Apollo", "electric cables", "hanging", "utilization of bottles", "peeing in mouths", "getting relatives to beat each other up" or "pushing needles under nails". A list of honours given by the Pahlavi state, including certificates and medals, is also provided, and finally their fates are explained –whether they fled the country or were caught and executed. In the latter case, it is noted in the panels that the information displayed comes from their own mouths, as they admitted to their crimes in trial. There are even summaries of a few of their written confessions hanging in the corridors.

Figure 31 (left) Wall photograph of one of Mohammed Reza's visits to the jail
Figure 32 Tortured prisoner being tortured on the 'hot chair' while overseen by the royal portraits

Figures 33 and 34 Information panels of interrogators "Arash"(left) and "Dr. Manoochehri"(right)

Some torturers are given extra attention: for example, in the room describing "Doctor Hosseini", to all accounts the most loathed torturer, it is explained, through newspaper clippings showing pictures of his corpse, how he tried to commit suicide due to shame and fear after his house was surrounded by revolutionaries, dying later from his own wounds. Of course many of these characters are given a physical embodiment in the museum as wax figures, which portray them as plain sadists – the incarnations of pure evil. Such emphasis is given to the identities of torturers that the museum falls prey to anachronism: there's a figure and an information sheet on the notorious "Doctor Ahmadi", known to have murdered some prisoners in the Reza Shah times, when such events were notably uncommon. Abrahamian describes him as "a self-taught pharmacist promoted through the ranks and given a crash course on nursing" (Abrahamian 1998, 44). After the flight of the monarch in the early 40s he would also flee the country, but would eventually be captured, tried and publicly executed for his abuses of power. The fact that this particular historical subject has nothing to do with SAVAK did not prevent his inclusion in this site.

Despite the immensity of the atrocities, Amna Suraka is not as heavy-handed in the accusations or vilifications – pictures of Saddam don't hang on every corner. This is probably related to the more recent nature of the events and its enormous scale, as well as the general population's comparably heightened awareness of the Ba'athist regime's legacy – in a way, there is no rhetorical need to build a negative image, as it already exists. However, the exhibition does make it very clear who are the culprits of the 80s terror, and the Ba'ath are diligently demonized – not unlike other memorial sites such as the Halabja graveyard, at the entrance of which hangs the following sign: "it is not allowed for Ba'aths to enter here" (McKiernan 2006, 351).

In the Anfal room, three major parties are enumerated as the enablers and producers of genocide: the Revolutionary Command Council, led by Saddam Hussein, who "supervised every operation"; the Socialist Ba'ath Arab party and its primary representatives; and the Committee of Northern Affairs (or Northern Bureau), which conducted the campaigns first-hand under the "undisputed authority" of Ali Hassan

al-Majid ("Chemical Ali"). Two other figures, Tahir Tawfil Al-Ani and Radhi Hassan Salman, are also pointed out as having played an important role as secretaries of the Bureau. There is also a long list in a smaller font enumerating all administrative and military branches that were under the command of al-Majid. Sometimes people's names are provided, including many generals in the army, top-tier personnel in the Ministries, the head of the directorate of Kurdistan and commanders in the Intelligence Offices. Each of the descriptions of the Anfal campaigns feature detailed lists of the army divisions, legions and battalions which took part in the atrocities. As for the interrogators, there is only one single profile – that of a certain "Hajjaj", who was provided with a red Volkswagen to more effectively leap from prison to prison and perform torture in "the cruellest of ways". It is written that he particularly enjoyed beating up prisoners when they had fallen asleep by telling them they shouldn't sleep when he was in the prison, and that he was known for his successes in "training wild dogs to eat human flesh".

In this section I've attempted to illustrate the fascistic investment shared by these prison museums: how through these omissions and detailed indictments a definitive version of memory is constructed, with all actors and events logically and historically connected and situated in the bigger picture. To ultimately make sense of these processes, one final element remains to be analyzed: the spatial nature of these memory sites, to which I shall now turn.

CHAPTER 5

POWER AND SPACE

> The bigger the material mass, the more easily it entraps us: mass graves and pyramids bring history closer while they make us feel small. A castle, a fort, a battlefield, a church, all these things bigger than we that we infuse with the reality of past lives, seem to speak of an immensity of which we know little except that we are part of it. Too solid to be unmarked, too conspicuous to be candid, they embody the ambiguities of history. They give us the power to touch it, but not that to hold it firmly in our hands – hence the mystery of their battered walls. (Trouillot 1995, 30)

This quote poetically describes the experience many of us are subjected to when confronting physical spaces that are deemed to be historically relevant. But what happens when these mysterious walls are museified and given an exhibitionary significance accompanied by an historical account and a memorial depth? How can their physical museumification unravel the ambiguities of the past, and what is the role that power and hegemony can play in such process?[38] Now that we've painted a detailed picture of the functionings of history and memory is the time to observe them as what they strictly are: physical spaces.

5.1. Prison museums as the physical embodiment of memory

From all the previous discussion we can come to the conclusion that spaces cannot be unaffected by the multiform tactics and flows of power. Memory sites are, in their essence, spaces where the Lefordian *mise-en-scène* is enacted - and not only that, they are also 'public', this notion understood as describing "a mode of action in the circumstances of collective contingency" (Dickinson, Blair and Ott 2010, 5). As a scholar points out: "museums, like hospitals, asylums, and prisons, involved spatial practices that were about educating the public, and about teaching preferred cultural practices and associated knowledge" (Barrett 2012, 59). If we go back to the state's

discovery of society two centuries ago, it should be noted that it was accompanied by its discovery of the urban space, which is naturally inhabited by such society. There emerged "problems in the links between the exercise of political power and the space of a territory, or the space of cities – links that were completely new" (Foucault 2000, 353). Wolfgang Ernst directly relates the appearance of museums to a much broader rearranging of the public space ignited by the states' concern for history.

> The historicist attitude at the end of the nineteenth century not only provided us with big architectural projects of places for the storage of history, storing and channelling valuable material and rubbish, but also provided us with grand theorems and thought systems. Memory was being located at the interface between cognitive metaphors and infrastructural agencies of object transmission: the museum, the cemetery, the warehouse (Ernst 2000, 25)

In previous eras the government was scarcely present in the streets (if anything, there was a "castle" or "palace" as the centre of authority), yet it began to penetrate the city in diverse ways, from the establishment of micro-centres of management and power; public facilities (related to areas as diverse as hygiene or transportation), private architecture (what could or could not be built, and where), centres of surveillance (police stations, prisons), arranging of leisure (public parks) and, of course, statements of identity and knowledge (monuments and museums). "The museum was not simply for the visual representation of images and paintings […]. Placing public space within a disciplinary model of space demonstrates how public space can function as a site of the surveillance of, and a stage for, public discourse", and thus "the public museum was also subject to interaction with new institutions that performed a disciplinary function for both the state and the public sphere" (Barrett 2012, 102). Museums are most certainly "statements" in the Foucauldian sense: they appear in

> 'surfaces of emergence', that is, particular institutional-organizational conditions of knowledge. Statements are not the products of human subjects in general: the statements which are part of definitely constructed subjects specific to the discursive formation, and qualified/constrained to speak in different ways. […] Enunciative modalities mean that only certain subjects are qualified and able to speak in particular

> ways; that certain statements cannot be made by everybody and anybody. […] So knowledges and the subjects who produce them are connected with particular institutional conditions and forms of power. (Hirst 2005, 157)

Hence some buildings, including the museum, can be regarded as statements, 'qualified' sites leveraged by one or several discursive epistemes at play in a particular place and time, by the "frameworks of thought of any given period, if we are to understand by that the historical outline of the speculative interests, beliefs, or broad theoretical opinions of the time" (Foucault 2002, 172). And they are 'public' given that the exhibitions are meant for the general population, "and it is therefore considered that the subject matter is of public importance" (Barrett 2012, 85). As such, "the public is articulated within and by the museum" (Barrett 2012, 58). The connection forged between state and society in the realms of the public space is explained by Olick via Habermas: "an important new space opened up between the authority of the state and the privacy of civil society – both of these themselves new forms – in which private individuals were able to debate the proper relations between the state and civil society […] Memory thus becomes a public affair; that is, we are able to conceptualize a collective memory –a public with a memory- only in the context of the interaction of multifarious interests and world views" (Olick 2007, 187). At last, memories that had been formerly constrained in the ephemeral oralness of social spheres (i.e. the family) or in the literature (to which a small segment of the population had access) started being governmentally sponsored and situated in the urban map.

Moreover, "structures therefore provide a means of knowledge through experience. The structure is an experience-effect. Churches with certain forms and features can produce effects of piety and the recognition of God […]. In this conception, there is not merely a subjective experience of space, but rather a set of effects which go beyond the building to the world and its Creator" (Hirst 2005, 165). What takes place in these prison museums is not only the reflective, rational ascertainment that the space was utilized for confinement or torture; it can have an effect that transcends a

logical reading and launches the visitor into the much more profound worlds of empathy, nationalism and so on, which are tightly tied to each person's everyday reality: "Our inner existence (mind) is incredibly entangled with the exterior world – in the things we make and in the phenomenological world in which we live" (Schwartzenberg 2009, 60). And consequently, in many ways, it is likely to exert some effect on the person's realization of his or her own destiny and expectations, since it may very well be "more of a construct in the mind than an actual object in the landscape" (*ibid*). I think the following reflections by Deleuze and Guattari speak to this idea:

> "A monument does not commemorate or celebrate something that happened but confides in the ear of the future the persistent sensations that embody the event: the constantly renewed suffering of men and women, their re-created protestations, their constantly resumed struggle. Will this all be in vain because suffering is eternal and revolutions do not survive their victory? But the success of a revolution resides only in itself, precisely in the vibrations, clinches, and openings it gave to men and women at the moment of its making and that composes in itself a monument that is always in the process of becoming, like those tumuli to which each new traveller adds a stone" (Deleuze and Guattari 1994, 177)

5.2. Spatial *techné*: prosthetic memories via objects, figures and cells

If the remembrance of past victories and dark periods is ongoing, the relationship between collective memory and space is quite deductible. As argued by Dickinson, Blair and Ott, "if symbolic/material supports are taken to be the essential material by which memory contents are articulated, surely the character of those media must have some strong impact on the substance of public memory" (Dickinson, Blair and Ott 2010, 20). In other words, memory might not be ontologically physical, but its recall and modelling is heavily influenced by things in the physical realm:

> "Place making, as a *techné* (or, more accurately, a coordination of various techné) of public memory, thus becomes vital to any understanding of the means by which that memory is formed and by which it may be embraced. Far from being overshadowed by contemporary media forms, one of the oldest of memory's *techné* seems still to exert a powerful hold. […] Because of their place-ness, memory places mobilize power not always available with other memory techné. That is so, first, because memory places are located. They have unique topographies (hills, trees, plains), geographies (cities,

> towns, capitals, countryside), and contextual structures (other buildings, sidewalks, variable light)" (Dickinson, Blair and Ott 2010, 25-29)

In the real world, we can speak of an "infrastructure of collective memory", this infrastructure being "all the different spaces, objects, 'texts' that make an engagement with the past possible" (Irwin-Zarecka 1994, 13). This is similar to Olick's comment on the fact that "there are mnemonic technologies other than the brain", such as various forms of recordings, documents, or photographs (Olick 2007, 29)[39]. Prison museums are hybrids sites that can fulfil diverse functions (affective, cognitive and expressive); and not unsurprisingly, they are in the front-line of such infrastructure of collective memory, as they feature a wide array of physical things – not only their locations per se, but 'original' artefacts, recorded discourses or accounts, official documents and recreated exhibits, which are diversely combined and interlinked.

These are places "in which inconspicuous, everyday objects" (i.e. the belongings of an ex-prisoner) may "become imbued with an aura and a new potency", answering to some sort of "fetishistic belief that an object has somehow soaked up the events in which it played a role and allows a spectator to feel that they are in the presence of the past" (Arnold-de Simine 2013, 84). One of the most famous genocide-related collections of 'objects left behind' is the shoes and suitcases of Holocaust victims in the Auschwitz-Birkenau camp. As we have observed in the preceding chapters, Ebrat also indulges in such assembling of items: besides the aforementioned religious-tinted personal effects, there are more mundane articles on display, often accompanied by brief descriptions, photographs and handwritten notes of the owner (see Figures 35 and 36). These are given an unexpected new value while serving to humanize the prisoners.

Excepting its hall on the *peshmerga* (which features some of the soldiers' items), Amna Suraka, however, does not partake in this typology of exhibit, leaving the victims of the prison mostly undifferentiated and anonymous: the ontological

difference between the two in this regard is that Ebrat attempts a more personalized exemplification of those who suffered in order to generate empathy.

Figure 35 and 36 Clothes and other personal items belonging to inmates Nematollah Izadi (left) and Ezzatollah Motahatri (right)

And next to 'commonplace' objects, there are those who are extraordinary, from military vehicles to torture instruments, which create a sense of the uncanny in the visitor. However, it is true that these memory sites do not actually rely on "collections" as most conventional museums do: since "the stories of persecution, migration and violence on which they concentrate are usually object-poor because the people, whose plight is exhibited, were dispossessed and the traces of their existence have been eradicated." For example, the absence of devices in Amna Suraka can probably be explained through this logic. "Therefore, these museums

produce highly visualized, multimedia-based narratives, that Hayden White described as 'historiophoty', that is, 'the representation of history and our thought about it in visual images and filmic discourse'." (Arnold-de Simine 2013, 10)

This amounts to (or has the potential to amount to) a sensorial and visceral visit that goes beyond Bennett's descriptions of classic museums: in a way these prison museums are experiential landscapes, "fluid rather than self-contained, physical and cognitive boundaries that position visitors in ways that shape their perceptions of memory sites. Museums, memorials and other material sites are spaces with imprecise beginnings and endings that are traversed, climbed, or otherwise consumed in a physical sense. They act "on the whole person, not just on the 'hearts and minds' of individuals". (Armada 2010, 218). This accumulation of different memory *techné* and the physicality of the traversed space, which amounts to an "experiential" type of museum (Landsberg 2004, 33), contributes to the average citizens' more vivid imagining of the past:

> Places also mobilize power because they are implacably material. They act directly on the body in ways that may reinforce or subvert their symbolic memory contents. Places of memory are composed of and/or contain objects, such as art installations, memorabilia, and historic artefacts. Their rhetoricity is not limited to the readable or visible; it engages the full sensorium. Such objects produce particular sensations through touch, sound, sight, smell, and taste. Memory places also prescribe particular paths of entry, traversal, and exit. Maps, arrows, walls, boundaries, openings, doors, modes of surveillance all encode power and possibility. The design and building of memorial places often function as "strategy" in Michel de Certeau's sense of that word. At the same time, the uses to which the visitors put memorial sites make, remake, and unmake the imposed structures of power. The important point is that, no matter how overtly a place may exert power through its incorporation, enablement, direction, and constraints on bodies, it has its own power dimension that becomes part of the experience. (Dickinson, Blair and Ott 2010: 29)

At this point in the analysis of the museums it will be clear that Ebrat is the more 'experiencial' of the two due to its penchant for figurativeness and cinematic recreation – however, both sites share the similar goal of utilizing the space to erect a memory. In his discussion on the concept *lieux de la mémoire*, Nora stressed that such sites are designed to supplant the disappearance of the traditional institutions

which used to maintain the remembrance of the past; "society thus commemorates and monumentalizes these traces as a means to perpetuate its lost tradition and maintain collective identities" (Carrier, quoted in Dickinson, Blair and Ott 2010, 11). It is as if society forgot its memories and those had to be clinically revived though monuments, which are "impoverished" versions of the real thing (Olick 2007, 182) – and thus there is an "increasing externalization and objectification of memory in "artificial" sites" (Olick 2007, 87).

Although I believe Nora's stance to be somewhat radical, given that as proven via Halbwachs memory does actually live on in different collectives – as one scholar pointed out, the fact that such memory sites exist "does not mean that more ephemeral and less easily documented means of remembering have been abandoned" (Savage 1994, 146) –, his claim that these types of places are artificially created to serve, upgrade or establish a mnemonic awareness in the populace is definitely right on track. Especially considering the fact that as years pass, the lived-trauma appears more remote to the general population: certainly a substantial chunk of the visitors may be old enough to remember the events being memorialized; however, the younger generations (to which these museums, as common school visits, are notably aimed at) will obtain these memories as completely unrelated to their own existence:

> Psychological traumas cannot be passed down through the generations like bad genes. In the first place, the fact that the memory of such personally traumatic experiences is externalized and objectified as narrative means it is no longer a purely individual psychological matter. And in the second place, discussing the ongoing nature of the trauma in terms of such transmitted personal narratives does not capture what we really mean – that is, an unassimilable breach in the collective narrative. […] It clearly makes both ethical and conceptual sense to speak of trauma as irreducible to individual and aggregated psychology. (Olick 2007, 32-33)

It is in this way also that the public memory of these prison museums is necessarily artificial and mediated. Alison Landsberg's concept of 'prosthetic memory' comes in very handy to define this peculiar relationship established between the subject and his/her people's past: these are memories which "are not natural, not the product of lived experience – or 'organic' in the hereditary nineteenth-century sense- but are

derived from an engagement with a mediated representation (seeing a film, visiting a museum, watching a television miniseries). […] The person does not simply apprehend a historical narrative but takes on a more personal, deeply felt memory of a past event through which she did not live. The resulting prosthetic memory has the ability to shape the person's subjectivity and politics" (Landsberg 2004, 20). As argued previously, since collective memory is not merely the aggregated memories of individuals in a group, the fabrication and acceptance of prosthetic memories through channels such as memory sites is a natural process which may very well be conducted through power relations:

> There are clearly demonstrable long-term structures to what societies remember or commemorate that are stubbornly impervious to the efforts of individuals to escape them. Power institutions value some histories more than others, provide narrative patterns and exemplars of how individuals and should remember and stimulate memory in ways and for reasons that have nothing to do with the individual or aggregate neurological records. Without such a collective perspective, we are both unable to provide good explanations of mythology, tradition, heritage and the like either as forms or in particular as well as risk reifying the individual. (Olick 2007, 29)

Spatial-based prosthetic memory (as opposed to books, speeches or feature films) can be achieved and imparted in the exhibition space through several means. But before looking at those, we should take a second to comment on how the public significance of museums has morphed over time. In the age of information, and its inevitable counterpart, globalization, the access to interpretations of reality has become easier; and thus the standing of the museum, with all its display mechanisms and modes of representation, is not as remarkable or definitive as it used to be. Perhaps in the 19th century museums as a form of culture were "instrumentalized" and "harnessed to governmental programmes aimed at the transformation of popular morals and manners" (Bennett 1999, 386), but nowadays they are hardly the only sites where that type of indoctrination may occur.

> In the practices of cultural consumption fostered by museums, every museum visitor reaffirms how well the mode of production operates in each act of his or her personal consumption. Such acts, however, do not happen randomly without any foresight or preparation. On the contrary, a great deal of instruction about what to consume, why to

> acquire it, and how it works in the larger scheme of things is directed at the self-managing individual through advertising, government information, and formal school instruction. The amusements given to many by museum institutions cannot be separated from this complex of guidance-giving practices. (Luke 2002, 227)

In order for museums to hold their ground and remain relevant in this 'complex of guidance-giving practices' which is the offspring of pastorality, one of the strategies they employ is offering a more interpretative experience, of "rewriting the fictions inherent in the collections."

> The transition towards interpretative media has also been spurred on by other modes of representation, especially television, which have, in effect, issue a challenge to museums' claims as proprietors of authenticity and immediacy. Museums may well hold 'the real thing', but one function of a relativist epistemology is that authenticity becomes a feature not only of the object itself, but of the subjects' experience of it. The question that a museum must address is whether an object is more 'real' for a visitor when it is displayed with taxonomically related artefacts in a showcase than when it is represented in the context of its production or use, as it maybe, for example, on television. (Macdonald and Silverstone 1990, 181)

To put it simply, from a visitors' perspective, though there will likely always be a romanticized appreciation of physically observing artefacts in an exhibition space (in particular if it is *the* place they originally belonged to), those can be more readily accessed and understood by other means.[40] In order to maintain their relevance, conventional museums seek alternative ways of appealing the public, whether through pragmatic mechanisms such as presenting a deeper, more quality interpretation (inevitably tainted by indoctrination), raising the interactive possibilities or offering a more "immersive" visit. Yet the more 'spectacular' and 'experiencial' they become - the more they depart from the typical historian's "fetishism of the facts, premised on an antiquated model of the natural sciences" (Trouillot 1995, 151)- the less serious they might be taken. In fact, much of the literature on museums is concerned with the pitfalls of the 'amusing' museum experience. Luke, for example, is hugely critical of history museums that fall into the trap of the "entertainmentality engine" or "regime of entertaining governmentality", since it runs the risk of potentially diffusing the memorial intent (Luke 2002, 57,

224). Furthermore, even the ‘amusing’ side of a museum, coupled with its consequential didactical nature, may also be one more layer of the power plays:

> The emergence of populations, which must be managed as data, markets, and tastes, redirects the practices of government toward the more astute administration of people and things. One of the most effective techniques for governing these populations today is entertainment; and, as I assert here, some of the most powerful public performances to interest and amuse people are museum exhibitions. To “amuse” people, one imparts some sense of “the Muses” to them, and museums can pull together publics and their knowledge of culture, history, nature, or technology in ways that artfully remediate the power of those governing the people and their things. (Luke 2002, 220)

In Ebrat, as explained before, filmed witnessing accounts combined with cinematic re-enactments help convey the sense of despair and dread that was lived within those walls. However, this is as far as the ‘experiencial’ infrastructure goes, and the site could be qualified as ‘contained’ when compared to another exhibit currently open in Tehran, the Holy Defense Museum (which features cold/hot ‘temperature’ rooms the purpose of which is to convey the plights of the soldiers during the Iraq war, who had to endure harsh climates; or a ‘bombardment simulator’ which emulates through sight, sounds and vibration an air attack of the Iraqi force on a village).

If anything, Ebrat utilizes the spatial possibilities of the site to visually brew prosthetic memories by resorting to a rather conventional exhibitionary recipe: the staging of scenes through wax figures and related objects. Instead of leaving such horrific acts to the visitor’s imagination, the museum revives those memories by recreating the bodies of both prisoners and interrogators. The latter are dressed in overtly 70s “European” attire, also known as the Western “Engineer” look (Mottahedeh 1988, 15). It is the appearance of the Pahlavi personnel according to post-70s epistemes (see Figure 37): jeans, belts, shirts and ties. They are often portrayed smoking cigarettes, adopting cocky postures and sadistically enjoying their job. On the other hand, inmates are given utterly despaired expressions; their faces bloody and anxious (see Figure 38).

It is the contrast between the two sides where a prosthetic memory attempts to blossom. However, it might end up feeling caricature-like and campy, becoming precisely what Luke warned about: some of the tortured figures are so outright macabre and gruesome that they would appear to be directly lifted from a tourist attraction such as the London Dungeon. Although their purpose is to more vividly illustrate the described sufferings, they may run the risks of entering the realm of the uncanny. The presence of other ornamental additions, such as 'bloody' footprints on the floor intended to guide the visitors, doesn't help. As opposed to the more spartan presentations of horrific memory sites elsewhere -such as Auschwitz, which is devoid of any wax re-enactments- Ebrat goes all-in and opts to not leave anything to the visitors' imagination. This is the closest this memorial site comes to obeying the logics of 'dark tourism' by playing on visitors' morbid sensibilities – yet, of course, with the explicit objective of denouncing the brutality of SAVAK operatives that ran the prison. It should be noted that this cannot be ascertained as an archetypal Iranian museographical tendency –nor as an offspring of often misconceived Shiite 'dramatism'- due to the fact that the exhibition in the former Qasr prison, also in Tehran, is very different, resorting much more to art and emptiness instead of figurative kitschiness.

Figure 37 (left) Wax figures of torturer whipping an inmate in Ebrat
Figure 38 (right) Wax figure of victim in 'crucified' hanging stance in Ebrat

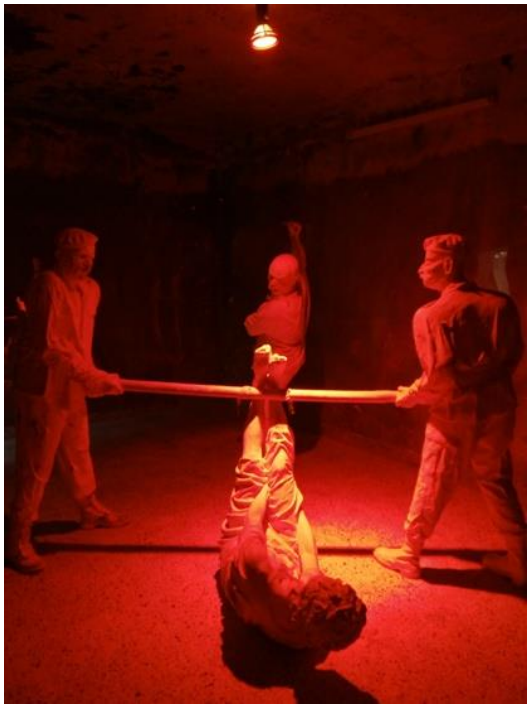


Figure 39 Figurative representation of bastinado torture in Amna Suraka

In fact, Qasr is more concordant with Amna Suraka. The Kurdish memory site adopts a clearly distinct approach, which is symbolic and sombre in nature. Here the re-stagings of torture are much fewer and they are illustrated through white plaster ghost-like figures, in some regards more anonymous and unsettling. The use of lightning adds to the theatrical effect. There still exists the tortured/tortured dyad, but it is patently more nuanced and ominous. With the major exception of one hellish depiction of bastinado (see Figure 39), instead of pursuing a circus-esque chamber of horrors the museum appears to be trusting of the visitors' perception: several informational panels summarize the types of torture and tribulations experienced by the prisoners, yet the cells they are describing are often vacuous. It is expected that just by traversing the space, the visitor will be able to conjure up the atrocities that went on.

Figure 40 (left) Solitary cell with toilet in Amna Suraka

Figure 41 (right) Figure emplaced in the women's general cell in Amna Suraka

Figure 42 General cell in Ebrat

Figure 43 General cell in Amna Suraka

I would differentiate this technique by referring to it as the ‘empty cell’ method, in which the physical remains converge with non-physical acquired knowledge (see Figure 40). In Ebrat there is hardly any cell devoid of figurative representations. General cells are often cluttered with figurative representations of prisoners (see Figure 42). In Amna Suraka, the void of the space (disrupted by, at most, a ghastly figure, a few scattered belongings or blankets) is intended to communicate oblivion and despair (see Figure 43) –almost as if visuals were not enough to narrate the extreme circumstances. The plaques around the rooms and corridors inform of the terrible conditions the inmates were subjected to: severe overcrowding of both general and solitary cells, lack of access to toilets, inability to sleep, systematic starvation, the forgery of inmates’ ages so that they could be legally executed, their continued incarceration despite having served their sentences, the utilization of toilets as cells, having to jump over blood stains on the floor tortured inmates had left behind, and so on. Some particular spaces are highlighted: an interrogation room referred to as “Sheraton”, which earned this nickname because the tortures therein would be only psychological and not physical; a general cell designed for women (see Figure 41), who would often give birth in the worst conditions and whose babies would be taken away by the guards so as to enact mental torture and force them into admitting crimes; or a corridor wall from which hangs a loose wire, identified as having been connected to a microphone emplaced inside the walls to spy on and monitor the prisoners’ conversations.

5.3. The permanency of the prison museum

The discrepancies in exhibitionary techniques explained in the previous pages show us how, when dealing with concepts as vast and interpretable as “history” or “memory”, there’s several physical ways to conduct editing (what things are shown or not shown), condensing (how are things summarized and synthesized) and formation of meaning at stage (what those things eventually come to signify): “The ‘fixing’ of memory in the museum constitutes an apparent permanence of the recollected, organized in static time and space. Memory of cultures, nature and

nations is set to trigger memory in and for multiple, diverse collectives. These memories then become components of identities –even for individuals who would in no other way feel connected with these objects" (Crane 2000, 3)[41].

We must now take into consideration the physical immanence and location of these prison museums. As aforementioned, Bennett is on point when stressing the fact that since their inception museums, as physical spaces in the urban sphere, provided a context for the permanent display of power/knowledge. Again, as with the shift from the "old" power's episodic quality in its displays of violence (the scaffold and public executions) to the permanent incarceration of criminals, when the institution of museums (as opposed, as well, to ephemeral expos) emerged it did so "in relation to a network of institutions which provided mechanisms for the permanent display of power. And for power which was not reduced to periodic effects but which, to the contrary, manifested itself precisely in continually displaying its ability to command, order and control objects and bodies, living or dead" (Bennett 1988, 79). As opposed to other more fleeting discursive formations, museums are passive yet permanent sites: they occupy a space in cities which can be visited during most days of the week.

This gains an extra relevance when taking into consideration specifically prison museums, which are re-instrumentalized spaces which are open to change: their carcass (the building itself) remains, but the content of the exhibitions might mutate over time, in accordance with the modification of cultural frames or policies. Furthermore, same as with many instances of prisons, museums "were also typically located at the centre of cities where they stood as embodiments of a power to 'show and tell' which, in being deployed in a newly constituted open and public space, sought rhetorically to incorporate the people within the processes of the state" (Bennett 1988, 99). In the cases that occupy us, this is very much true: these are prisons located at the very heart of the city, and as such the centrality of the present museums taps into the locals' previous remembrance of them as sites of coercion.

Bennett also talks of how the "ideological reach of exhibitions often extended significantly further as they established their influence over the popular entertainment zones", and how "through this network of relations that the official public culture of museums reached into the developing urban popular culture" (Bennett 1988, 96), which although not exactly applicable to contemporary settings, still raises a fundamental concept: that of the prison museum not being an isolated memory site. Earlier on I advanced the possibility of observing them as 'nodal points' in a bigger circuit of urban-collective remembrance located in their cities or countries.

Indeed they exist as one enclave among many in a power/knowledge-impregnated cultural network of museumification/commemoration which includes memorials, graveyards, names of public places such as squares or streets, other museums, parks, urban art and sculpturing, and so on. This constellation of physical 'memory triggers' -of memory sites forming the part of a whole- being nodal points is undeniable and should prove an interesting research: the discourses in Ebrat feed off the memorial public sphere of Tehran (including graveyards, squares, metro stations and sites such as the Holy Defense Museum or the former American Embassy); and so do those in Amna Suraka (from the Barzani Memorial Center to Halabja).

5.4. Readapting the space: between artificiality and 'true being'

By conflating said physical permanency with the previous analysis of the treatment of cells, I will now look at how these sites translate the architectural and infrastructural characteristics of a prison into a museum. Foucault seems a bit ambiguous when it comes to discussing architecture; in one conversation, he states that there's no such thing as functionally designed "spaces of liberation" or "spaces of oppression" per se, since liberty and oppression are 'practices' that directly depend on the management of those spaces, not the spaces themselves: "there may, in fact, always be a certain number of projects whose aim is to modify some

constraints, to loosen, or even to break them, but none of these projects can, simply by its nature, assure that people will have liberty automatically, that it will be established by the project itself" (Foucault 2000, 354)[42]. Hence, he distinguishes "between the actual physical spaces and the social practices of spaces, arguing that the practice of discourse is more important than the material existence of places where such discourse occurs. He asks: how does what is practiced in the building affect the design of the building?" (Barrett 2012, 104).

We can extrapolate this line of thought, which Foucault somewhat brings to the extreme by asserting that not even concentration camps are devoid of liberty, as well as his comments on how starting from the 17th century a "spatialization" of knowledge commenced (Foucault 2000, 362), to other examples: there's a succulent array of spaces which, due to their panoptic qualities, might have been used by the authorities as centres of surveillance or imprisonment, such as stadiums, schools or hospitals.

Likewise, the disposition of walls or rooms, and general architecture of some buildings have made them easily mutable into museums with diverse aims, including previously residential spaces such as private homes, as we can attest by observing the long tradition of 'historical houses'. Notwithstanding the obvious differences in regards to the construct of a 'historical prison', both these types of sites can be endowed with a high symbolic value[43].

Figures 44 and 45 External and internal prison corridors in Amna Suraka

The spaces in their physical qualities might be neutral; what 'practice' they are used for is a decision made by an external agent – which generally is the state, or some other agent within the state's framework of grants and permissions. This is especially true of museums, which by default do not necessarily require specifically designed buildings to exist –that is, as long as there is sufficient exhibition space, any place can potentially be a museum. Furthermore, what type of content is exhibited, what type of feelings are pursued in the museum (is it nostalgia, is it trauma, is it art, is it critique?), or whether there exists a thematic or historic correlation between the exhibiting space and the exhibited content, is similarly not set on stone. As mentioned in the preceding chapter, Amna Suraka opts to leave most of its cells empty, while Ebrat fills them with figures and paraphernalia; yet both similarly utilize the building's former corridors and staircases to usher the visitors through the exhibition space (see Figure 45). Due to typical oppressive nature of prison

architecture, the exhibition space is patently claustrophobic in some sections, which adds to the dread and condemnation of the past: structurally, the museums borrow the more suffocating aspects of the original prison, including its heavy doors and dimly lit corners. In Amna Suraka, even the original barbed wire preventing the escape of inmates has been recovered (see Figure 44).

As echoed in the previous comments on historical houses, these prison museums cannot function just by purely fabricated exhibits; they have to reek of some physical authenticity, and this is dependant on their presumably 'historical' architectural traits and objects found within. In *The System of Objects*, Baudrillard talks of the restoration of an old French farmhouse, and how its architect was concerned with the preservation and re-installation of "ancient" materials, which amounted to the house's "*true* being". "Rather as a church does not become a genuinely sacred place until a few bones or relics have been enshrined to it, so this architect cannot feel at home (in the strongest sense: he cannot thoroughly rid himself of that particular kind of anxiety) until he can sense the infinitesimal yet sublime presence within his brand-new walls of an old stone that bears witness to past generations" (Baudrillard 2002, 78). As with this anecdotal example, in these prison museums "the cunning of the cultural guilty conscience even leads to a curious paradox" (Baudrillard 2002, 78), that of the juxtaposition of 'authentic' objects or spaces with those reformed, reinstalled or directly invented, or other types of supporting materials that have no direct relationship with the space:

> The problem of all historical exhibitions is the pretension to re-presenting a past that is by definition absent, notwithstanding the authenticity of the original exhibits. Archaeological artefacts are subject to a semiosis that turns them into objects that are meant to be decipherable as historic documents. They are a database that has undergone a change of state when entering into the domain of the discipline. […] Complex historical configurations can hardly be constructed by museum display without the assistance of supplementary media in addition to the authentic object, such as video documentation and film. (Ernst 2000, 32)

The anachronistic and illogical nature of the display is accepted by the visitor as it answers to the unwritten rules of the exhibition space, but perhaps he or she might not realize to which extent it is a construct, a curatorial effort influenced by rhetorical discourse and power plays. As observed by Bennett, “both in the practices of museums and, as visitors, in our relationships to them the illusion that they deal in the ‘real stuff’ of history persists” (Bennett 1988b, 83).

Figure 46 Interior circular courtyard in Ebrat

In previous sections we have looked at how these sites utilize objects, photographs and documents to appear historically scientific and authentic; however, now we must also comment on the actual physicality of the spaces. As will have been clear by this

point, Ebrat is a highly staged memory site. This is quite probably due to the fact that it was used for many years after the fall of the Shah, and so bringing back the 'look' it must have had in the 70s required a higher investment in recreation: the rooms are cluttered with portraits of the monarch, old Iranian flags and period-appropriate furniture. However, as a consequence of this, the visitor may experience mixed feelings: the vast array of documentation and photography heightens the credibility of the discourse, but the artificiality of the wax figures and the fictitious physical environment might very well counter the claims of authenticity. The fact that the site appears to have been heavily restored adds to such an impression: some of its areas appear to be too clean and simulated, in particular the internal courtyard (see Figure 46), which does not transmit the filth of prisons – though perhaps this contrast adds to the rhetorical shock.

Amna Suraka is a whole different story, partly due to the fact that it is a structure existing in the open (whereas Ebrat is more nondescript: it is inserted between other buildings, and therefore cannot be easily identified from the streets). Regarding the actual prison building, the ontological effort revolves around the self-dissociation from artificiality. Excepting the scattered presence of a few figures, the rearranging of some of the areas (including the emplacement of tanks and artillery weapons outside) and techniques of preservation (the plastering of the walls with plastic to protect them from damage), there is essentially no recreation taking place: it would appear to have been 'found' as it is. As opposed to Ebrat, the site was not utilized after its liberation, and thus the buildings in the complex did not undergo any major process of readaptation or refurbishment prior to the museumification. As such, it is a much more downtrodden site which bears the painful traces of its past, and it could be perceived (though not literally) as being 'ruins'.

Given the violent takeover of the prison (which was described in the introduction), in their exterior walls the buildings of Amna Suraka are reminiscent of a chilling war zone, with parts of them having been obliterated and/or ridden with bullet holes (see

Figures 47 and 48), an appearance which is striking given they are surrounded by commonplace residential structures. Even though it doesn't feature the quantity of photographs and documents provided by Ebrat, it gains its authenticity through the physical power it inculcates on those 'traversing' it. According to Baudrillard's rural architect, Ebrat probably would be devoid of its 'true being' – while Amna Suraka's stones and walls would appear to be, by themselves, the more inspiring narrators of what happened.

Figures 47 and 48 Battered structures in Amna Suraka

5.5. From inert physical spaces to 'entitled' narrators of memory

At this point we must also bring to the fold the fact that museums are just not spaces, but spaces of communication. When taking into consideration how prison museums (or, for that matter, some types of historical houses, factory museums, further memory sites, etc.) are devoid of 'auratic' qualities and might even be perceived as better experiences the more 'authentic' they are (Urry 2002, 118), it seems to me the notorious McLuhan quote[44], "the medium is the message", has never been truer: by their pure physicality, they communicate regardless of what is in them, *in spite of* what is in them. There could be nothing inside and they would still be somewhat evocative – they would convey *something*. The fact that they have been readied to be 'visitable' is an additional grand communicative statement. How are things arranged, which areas are open or closed, which parts have been 'restored', how much of the architecture has been tinkered, add layers to this process of communication[45]. 'Information' is displayed in the exhibit, and then consumed by the visitor. At least in the case of the classic modalities of museum, lessons are presumably taught, a seemingly unilateral (but, as we have seen, very much two-sided) dialogue is established. Even if the 'museum' is devoid of any data or facts (i.e. signs or texts), it is still communicating by its capacity as a 'musefied' site.

A bombed building exists as a site of desolation; if musefied it earns a renewed value and a prestigious position in the networks of commemoration -or whichever the aims are. A private house may sit undeterred until it is claimed it possesses specific qualities (historical, architectural, etc.) and thus from then on the visiting subject is asked to observe it with different eyes. The walls of an operating prison might be a daily sight in a citizen's existence, and they can evoke all sorts of feelings, from detachment to fear. A closed or abandoned prison might very well incite memories or reflection. Even if not memorialized, these sites can be emotionally visceral. As observed by architect Juhani Pallasmaa, "in addition to being memory devices, landscapes and buildings are also amplifiers of emotions, they reinforce sensations of

belonging or alienation, invitation or rejection, tranquillity or despair […] Through their authority and aura, they evoke and strengthen our own emotions and project them back to us as if these feelings of ours had an external source. […] Architecture has to safeguard memories" (Pallasmaa 2009, 30-35).

A prison-turned-museum, however, 'officializes' and encourages these meditations, connected with such feelings of rancour or fear, and provides them with a 'visitable' infrastructure. Prior to its museumification, the prison was already part of the 'heritage' of the citizens, and to some extent it moulded their identities. I understand heritage here as follows:

> All landscapes qualify as somebody's heritage, even if the term 'heritage' is rarely allowed such liberal application. This is certainly not an argument for the preservation of all landscapes […] but it is an argument for some cognisance among landscape managers of how identities, many of which are historically rooted, are actually inscribed in landscapes, even in ones that seem very mundane. (O'Keefe 2007, 10).

Post-museumification, personal or collective processes of attachment or detachment cease to be passive. The prison now *has* a story to tell, and we are informed we should be interested in its apparent relevance. This relevance derives notably from the museum's entitlement as an authorized narrator. Part of the previous discussion was focused on the diverse possible truths existing about history -and the battle waged around them- as well as on the museum's role in such a contention. After having introduced the physical dimension, let us go back to Bourdieu to further dissect how these sites sitting in the thoroughfare may earn credibility and prestige as a centre for legitimate history.

The symbolic imposition of a narrative can only function if "there is a convergence of social conditions which are altogether distinct from the strictly linguistic logic of discourse", that is, when it's not only about the perceived validity, logic and acceptability of what is being said in itself, but about the 'symbolic capital'

accumulated by the agent uttering it – the popular recognition such an agent (Bourdieu 1991, 72). In other words, the history/memory presented in the museum will be respectfully regarded in hopefully high esteem if the institution itself is endowed with entitlement in such matters.

> The symbolic efficacy of religious language is threatened when the set of mechanisms capable of ensuring the reproduction of the relationship of recognition, which is the basis of its authority, ceases to function. This is also true of any relation of symbolic imposition, even on the one implied by the use of the legitimate language which, as such, involves the claim to be heard, believed and obeyed, and which can exercise its specific efficacy only as long as it can count on the effectiveness of all the mechanisms which secure the reproduction of the dominant language and the recognition of its legitimacy (Bourdieu 1991, 73)

In these prison museums, the framework of legitimacy lies on several factors, including but not limited to its sponsorship and inauguration by beloved or at least respected authorities (governmental or not), the non-verbal intrinsic power of real (or realistic) objects, the ’undeniable’ memories of witnesses (prisoners) in their role as victims, and so on. The first set is of substantial importance inasmuch as they are the pastoral agents of historicizing and memorializing: “the person who wishes to proceed felicitously with the christening of a ship or of a person must be entitled to do so, in the same way that, to be able to give an order, one must have a recognized authority over the recipient of that order” (Bourdieu 1991, 73). Here the utilization of the word ‘felicity’ refers to ‘the ability to find appropriate expression for one's thoughts’ (Oxford Dictionary). Is appropriate for a politician to inaugurate a museum, the same way it is appropriate for a museum to talk about one’s history. It is the somewhat unconscious realization of the fact that *of course*, former prison museums must be the best sites to learn about what happened to the country in years of tumult. The prison museum as both discourses and sites to visit are two directly dependent values.

> The logical exercise of separating the act of speech from its conditions of execution shows, through the absurdities that this abstraction engenders, that the performative utterance, as an act of institution, cannot socio-logically exist independently of the

> institution which gives it its raison d'être, and if it were to be produced in spite of everything, it would be socially deprived of sense. (Bourdieu 1991, 74)

Therefore, "the anticipated conditions of felicity help to determine the utterance by allowing it to be thought of and experienced as reasonable and realistic" (Bourdieu 1991, 75). The prison museum's claim to hold the truth in regards to memory, a claim which is "more or less recognized and therefore more or less sanctioned socially" (Bourdieu 1991, 75), derives not so much from the actual physiognomy of the truth presented, its exactitude or precision, but from its entitled position as a consented and revered orthodox educational centre. Of course, the goofier or kitschier the museum becomes, the less 'objective' it may be regarded. But by default it enjoys a respectability other sites of indoctrination or discourse may not receive, even if just for the mere fact that these memory sites are unique – they face no competition *and* are perceived as entitled truth centres. From all this it can be concluded that their power may very well lie on collective recognition rather than on 'ideological' efficacy.

Thus, according to Bourdieu (who is fond of employing economic and liturgical jargon), to properly comprehend the formation and reception of discourse in these museums we must take into account "the laws of price formation which characterize the market concerned or, in other words, the laws defining the social conditions of acceptability" (Bourdieu 1991, 76). These 'laws' motor types of "anticipated censorship, of a self-censorship which determines not only the manner of saying or the 'level' of the language, but also what it will be possible or not possible to say" (Bourdieu 1991, 77). And they are 'laws' abstractly brokered between the 'recognized' enacter of discourse and the civil society which recognizes in them symbolic capital – again, a process much more complex than pure ideology. In all the previous chapters I attempted to localize these laws through comparing the exhibits with a deep historical-cultural reading of the states and societies at hand. They may also be the reason why, as illustrated previously, these sites may run the risk of becoming outdated. A further Bourdieuan concept which is directly related to these issues is that of "delegated power":

> The stylistic features which characterize the language of priests, teachers and, more generally, all institutions, like routinization, stereotyping and neutralization, all stem from the position occupied in a competitive field by these persons entrusted with delegated authority. It is not enough to say […] that the use made of language in a determinate situation by a determinate speaker, with his style, rhetoric and socially marked identity, provides words with 'connotations' that are tied to a particular context, introducing into discourse that surplus of meaning which gives its 'illocutionary force'. In fact, the use of language, the manner as much as the substance of discourse, depends on the social position of the speaker, which governs the access he can have to the language of the institution, that is, to the official, orthodox and legitimate speech. (Bourdieu 1991, 109)

Thus, regardless of the content found in a memory site, it is endowed with a "guarantee of delegation", the entitlement of being the "voice" of the current national generation (or of previous ones). In fact, this is what makes the establishment of prison museums by these regimes quite interesting: "For ritual to function and operate it must first of all present itself and be perceived as legitimate, with stereotyped symbols serving precisely to show that the agent does not act in his own name and on his own authority, but in his capacity as a delegate" (Bourdieu 1991, 115). The museum is thought of as the delegate of the people, not as a separate discursive establishment concocted by those 'in power' – a populist mechanism, as we will see later.

The long and short of it is that discourses in these prison museums "respond to the demands of a certain market; they are *compromise formations* resulting from a transaction between the expressive interest (what is to be said) and the censorship inherent in the particular relations of production" (Bourdieu 1991, 78). Ever since their hatching and proliferation decades (centuries) ago, museums have entered into a tacit agreement with the general population, which bestows upon them the entitlement to (more or less) research and depict what is 'scientifically' true, as long as it does not deviate much from what is 'collectively recognized' to the point of being unrealistic – and as long as it mostly adheres to what is accepted history as presented through other similarly 'reliable' channels. Moreover, the memory

preserved in a museum *needs* to be 'general' because of the wide spectrum of heterogeneous audiences it caters to (it may be claimed there is only one type of ideal citizen, but of course that is a sociological impossibility); there is a "subordination of the form of discourse to the form of the social relationship", otherwise a "stylistic collision" would ensue (Bourdieu 1991, 81). Let's connect this with Foucault's preoccupations with consent in realizing how a person may perceive things to be "acceptable":

> The definition of acceptability is found not in the situation but in the relationship between a market and a habitus, which itself is the product of the whole history of its relations with markets. The habitus is, indeed, linked to the market no less through its conditions of acquisition than through its conditions of use. We have not learned to speak simply by hearing a kind of speech spoken but also by speaking, thus by offering a determinate form of speech on a determinate market. […] And we have learned the value that the products offered on this primary market, together with the authority which it provides, receive on other markets (like that of the school). The system of successive reinforcements or refutations has thus constituted in each one of us a certain sense of the social value […] of the relation between the different usages and the different markets, which organizes all subsequent perceptions of linguistic products, tending to endow it with considerable stability […]. This linguistic 'sense of place' governs the degree of constraint which a given field will bring to bear on the production of discourse, imposing silence or a hyper-controlled language on some people while allowing others the liberties of a language that is securely established. (Bourdieu 1991, 81)

From this it follows that these historical museums, where 'memory' is presented and preserved, may very well be ultimate beacons of the 'socially accepted' discourse, or at least what the agents of museumification consider it to be – the memory sites have a "sense of place" as institutions who know and cater to the anticipated "habituses" of the populace.

5. 6. Acts of authority espousing space with memory

Unveiling the entitled narrative psyche of these sites bring us to a more accurate discussion on their direct memorial weight. In general, memory sites are particularly thrilling and affective because some connections between the past and the present are

usually provided by the place – a truism which applies to our cases. In this regard, Dickinson, Blair and Ott offer the following sketch about the relationship between public memory and space:

place: space :: memory : time

> Space and place sometimes are used as approximately equivalent terms. However, they are used more often to emphasize a difference in how physical situatedness is experienced. In such usages, a *place* that is bordered, specified, and locatable by being named is seen as different from open, undifferentiated, undesignated *space*. Although this distinction or some variant of it is frequently drawn, many theorists are quick to point out that the relationship between space and place is not necessarily one of opposition. For one thing, place as a structured bordered or built locale depends in part for its character upon how it deploys space. […] The point, therefore, is not to set space and place off as contraries, but to claim for them a set of mutually constitutive relationships. […] Both place and memory, from this point of view, are always already rhetorical. They assume an identity precisely in being recognizable –as named, bordered, and invented in particular ways. They are rendered recognizable by symbolic, and often material, intervention. They become publicly legible *only* by means of such interventions. (Dickinson, Blair and Ott 2010, 24)

In other words, once the place has been designated in the indeterminate space as having a story to tell, it is granted the claim to a memory extracted from the indeterminate flow of time. Indeed, "place has survived as a recognized memory apparatus perhaps longer than any other", and particularly "museums, preservations sites, battlefields, memorials" (i.e. places where a memory has been bestowed, regardless of their physical qualities or displayed content) "enjoy significance seemingly unmatched by other material supports of public memory", or in other words, "places of memory are material locales, and that renders them as quite specific apparatuses of public memory" (Dickinson, Blair and Ott 2010, 24, 32). Architect Donlyn Lyndon reaches a similar conclusion when positing that a place is a "space that can be remembered". It is a space

> that we can imagine, hold in the mind, and consider. They are territories that can be lived in with special satisfaction because they resonant with associations that engage our interests. Places bring things to mind. […] The experience of place is infused with memory; echoes of previous visits, expectations, and recollections invoked by similar places, as well as images, and descriptions in advertisements and books, and on the internet. All of these have prepared us (or enticed us) to visit; all present themselves for comparison in our minds. The memories lodged in places range from incidents of

> personal biography to highly refined and extensively interpreted segments of cultural lore, vested in the forms and the elements of ornament with which the place is made. These traces of patterns, which are based in understandings shared by participants in a culture, are given specific interpretation in a particular place. The experience of place within architecture, landscape, and cities is in some sense made of memories. (Lyndon 2009, 63)

In a way, regardless of museumification or not, these prisons are places which remain in the citizens' minds precisely due to the emotional engagement they represent in the "bigger picture" of past trauma – here, the "wound is not inflicted on a body or psyche but on a society as a whole" (Arnold-de Simine 2013, 39). Most would agree in that an exhibition space condemning the violent repression of a regime, if placed in a non-descript building or, what's more, in a different country (as in the trend of 'holocaust museums'), would still be valid but would certainly be lacking the same degree of emotional oomph. Being the location where "it all took place", the 'site of memory' angle supplies an extra layer of validity and perceived trustworthiness "related to the centrality of the signifier constituted by the memory place is an expectation of and investment in 'authenticity'", which is basically a is a "rhetorical effect, an impression lodged with visitors by the rhetorical work the place does" (Dickinson, Blair and Ott 2010, 27). Going back to Bourdieu's reflections on the power of delegation, now we can better understand how the "institutionalization" process of validation works.

> The power of words resides in the fact that they are not pronounced on behalf of the person who is only the 'carrier' of these words: the authorized spokesperson is only able to use words to act on other agents and, through their action, on things themselves, because his speech concentrates within it the accumulated symbolic capital of the group which has delegated him and of which he is the *authorized representative*. […] Perhaps the most important thing to remember is that the success of these operations of social magic – comprised by *acts of authority*, or what amounts to the same thing, *authorized acts*- is dependent on the combination of a systematic set of interdependent conditions which constitute social rituals" (Bourdieu 1991, 111)

Even if the prison museumification is not carried out by government representatives, its conversion into an exhibition space requires the authorization of the municipal and/or state authorities. This is why physical memorial networks –again, regardless of the content- are always directly or indirectly mapped by the authorities, who hold

that type of decisive power –in fact a monopoly, given their concession of grants and the economic investment such sites require- over the urban space. It is also why their emergence in the urban space as ontologues, as narrators of stories, is not frequent phenomena, as noted by Dickinson, Blair and Ott:

> If utterances are rare, as Foucault suggests, memory places are exceedingly so. Authorization to designate places by partial tales told in architecture, sculpture, diorama, or multimedia presentation is limited, not only because of the symbolic significance of such designations, but also because of their expense. To strain a colloquialism, this kind of "talk" doesn't come cheap. Thus, the establishment of a memory place already marks it for exceptional cultural importance. One does not find major memorials in Washington, D.C., honouring *all* of the U.S. presidents, for example […] Because of their material form, modes of visibility, rarity, and seeming permanence, places of memory are positioned perpetually as *the* sites of civic importance and their subject matter as *the* stories of the society. The stories they tell are thus favored by being made, quite literally, to matter to the lives of the collective. They are intractably present. (Dickinson, Blair and Ott 2010, 28)

In the case of direct government-orchestrated museumifications, the 'act of authority' is even clearer. But let us consider the 'act of institution' – the act of "moving from the implicit to the explicit, from one's subjective impression to objective impression", a "form of officialization and legitimization" (Bourdieu 1991, 173) – in these shifts from abandoned or functioning prisons to memory sites. Here one of the most important acts of symbolic power is that of the "inauguration", a social rite of sorts. In the inauguration of the prison museum two processes take place: first, the 'authorized representative' bestows on the site its memorial and historical relevance in an official ceremony. Here, "the abundance of microphones, cameras, journalists and photographers, is, like the Homeric skeptron described by Beneviste, the visible manifestation of the hearing granted to the orator, of his credit, of the social importance of his acts and his words", with "photography –which, by recording, eternalizes- solemnizing the exemplary acts of the political ritual" (Bourdieu 1991, 193). The fact that the prison museum is a centre of information and commemoration located in an urban environment makes the event more significant, specially when dealing with populist delegates endowed with the abstract traits of "sincerity" or "charisma" - for it is a space given to "the people" to better serve their memorial needs. Here the politician's "personal capital of 'fame' and 'popularity' based on the

fact of being known and recognized in person, and also on the possession of a certain number of specific qualifications which are the condition of the acquisition and conservation of a 'good reputation', is often the product of the reconversion of the capital of fame accumulated in other domains" (Bourdieu 1999, 194). In other words:

> The *auctor*, by virtue of the fact that he states things with authority, that is, in front and in the name of everyone, publicly and officially, he saves them from their arbitrary nature, he sanctions them, sanctifies them, consecrates them, making them worthy of existing, in conformity with the nature of things, and thus 'natural'. (Bourdieu 1999, 222)

Amna Suraka was a project of Hero Ibrahim Ahmed, the spouse of late PUK head Jalal Talabani. She is a highly regarded woman: besides being the wife of the main political leader in the region, she sports relatively impeccable anti-Ba'athist credentials. Additionally, she was one of the first female parliamentary members after the opening of the Kurdish parliament in 1992, she worked with the Kurdish branch of the NGO Save the Children and she spearheaded the establishment of the female *peshmerga* branch of the PUK. Her direct involvement in the museumification bestows the site with a degree of untouchable 'officialness'. Moreover, the museum's main halls were the product of the PUK Financial Bureau, that is, of the political party that has been pastorally looking after the citizens of Sulaymaniyah for decades. Even though the association between site and party is not so obvious in the museum, a sceptical scholar analyzing the museum lamented the fact that the PUK and the Talabanis have in fact claimed the museum "as a political and personal property" while dismissing other non-official memory sites (Moradi 2016).

The Iranian case is even more remarkable. As we observed in previous chapters, Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei is heavily featured in the Ebrat exhibit, which to some extent 'constructs' his public persona. It is no surprise, then, that in an act that revealed the cyclical nature between the 'bearer of the skeptron' and the 'constructed memory' of the space, Khamenei officially visited Ebrat after its opening. The *rahber* walked through the corridors trying to see if he recalled the internal structure of the prison, commenting on the accuracy of the display, remarking some details

regarding one of the interrogators, and reminiscing about some of his miserable memories at the prison in a soft yet serious and slightly epic tone. The event was filmed and televised, and some of the footage is included in the movie screened at the entrance of the museum. Additionally, there are pictures of his visit to specific rooms hanging on their walls, with some of his wistful quotes: “The day I visited the prison I was lost in thoughts for several hours, saddened when thinking about the cruelties that the Pahlavis did to me and my friends.”

Khamenei is not the only validating entity. At the museum door there are photographs of clerics, literary figures and other famous personalities who visited the museum: among them, divisions of the army; the late Ayatollah Mahdavi Kani (former chairman of the Assembly of Experts); and poets such as the late Mohammed Reza Aghasi (who specialized in spiritual-religious poetry) or Sayyed Ali Musavi Garmaroodi, whose poems on the Revolution (heavily committed to Islamic ideology) are widely known (Talattof 2000, 112) and often read in schools. To further officialize the site, in 2013 stamps bearing the memory of the Ebrat museum were put into circulation.

Figure 49 Fragment of Ali Khamenei’s official televised visit to Ebrat

5.7. Prison museums as ‘signs’ in the urban milieu

Despite their importance, consecrating events are but fleeting acts of delegation, coming and going in the timeframe of a few hours. They are subordinated to the second and most relevant act of institution: from then on, that physical space is permanently endowed with an official commemorative power. An example of this is the immense plaque that sits in the entrance to Ebrat. It amounts to an apparent ‘seal of quality’ which ensures the visitor what he/she is about to see has been ratified and approved by those holding the position of pastoral guidance (Supreme Leader Khamenei, President Khatami and Minister of Intelligence Ali Younesi). At the time of museification, they enjoyed political and religious credentials (they are described as *Hojatoleslam*, “authorities/proofs on/of Islam”)[46]. And thus, what was posed in moments of sanctification continues to live on inside the walls of the museum.

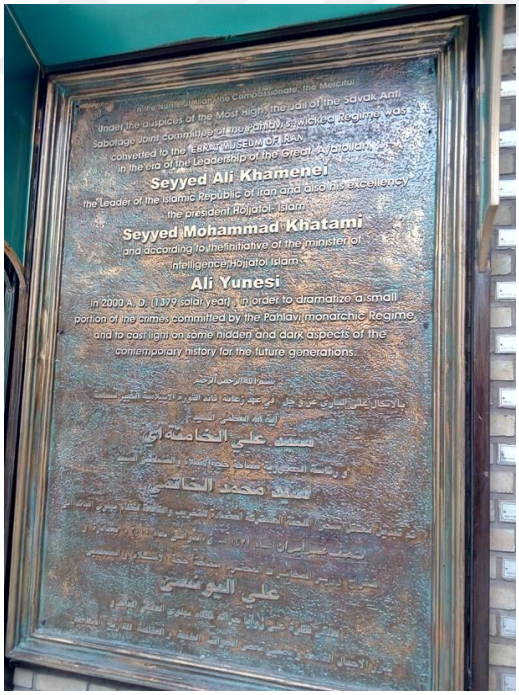


Figure 50 Plaque asserting the official/authorized nature of the Ebrat Museum

If we were referring to the buildings in personified terms, the process of investiture would "transform the representations others have of [it] and above all the behaviour they adopt towards [it]" and "it simultaneously transforms the representation that the invested person has of [itself], and the behaviour [it] feels obliged to adopt in order to conform to that representation." (Bourdieu 1991, 119) Indeed, from now on the building is forced to carry the memorial torch:

> The institution of an identity, which can be a title of nobility or a stigma, is the imposition of a name, i.e. of a social essence. To institute, to assign an essence, a competence, is to impose a right to be that is an obligation of being so (or to be so). It is to *signify* to someone what he is and how he should conduct himself as a consequence. (Bourdieu 1991, 120)

In this regard, sociologist John Urry raises an interesting idea when reflecting on the institutionalization of memorial sites:

> I have strongly argued for the significance of the gaze to tourist activities. […] But I have tried to establish that there has to be something distinctive to gaze upon […]. There has to be something extraordinary about the gaze. […] We do not literally 'see' things. Particularly as tourists we see objects which are constituted as signs. They stand for something else. When we gaze as tourists what we see are various signs or tourist clichés. Some such things function metaphorically. A pretty English village can be read as representing the continuities and traditions of England from the Middle Ages to the present day. By contrast the use of the term 'fun' in the advertising for a Club-Med holiday is a metaphor for sex. Other signs, such as lovers in Paris, function metonymically. Here what happens is the substitution of some feature or effect or cause of the phenomenon for the phenomenon itself. The ex-miner, now employed at the former coalmine to show tourists around, is a metonym for the structural change in the economy from one based on heavy industry to one based on services. The development of the industrial museum is an old mill is a metonymic sign of the development of a post-industrial society. (Urry 2002, 117)

It is fair to argue that the agents behind the museumification of a prison, that is, the people responsible of deeming it officially worthy of the "tourist gaze" (which, to better befit the discourse of this thesis, I would refer to as the "subject's gaze") are to some extent responding to perceived openings to or needs for social indoctrination. I

have refrained from emphasizing the touristic angle of these prison museums because all seems to indicate they do not obey to a mere capitalist logic. Yet they are technically 'touristic' in the sense that they are, after all, 'visitable' spaces.

> Memory places are destinations: they typically require visitors to travel to them. Thus is created a unique context for understanding the past, one that is rooted in touristic practices. The touristic contexts is rooted in a projected or desired departure from the ordinary, in a set of expectations that one will encounter rare or unique relics, learn about highly significant events or people, and/or be moved in particular ways by the experience of the place. […] The visit to a memory place is consummatory; it is the action invited by the "mere" existence of a memory place. […] The primary action the rhetoric of the memory place invites is the performance of travelling to and traversing it. That effort to participate in a memory place's rhetoric almost certainly predisposes its visitors to respond in certain ways, enthymematically prefiguring the rhetoric of the place –at the very least- as worthy of attention, investment, and effort. (Dickinson, Blair and Ott 2010, 26)

Continuing with Urry's analysis, these museums' revamping of such a space of coercion into a space of memory does tap into the construction of what he calls 'signs' (a term resembling Bourdieu's "signification" process mentioned a few lines above), which of course are artificially articulated. A political prison museum can metaphorically represent generations of justly or unjustly convicted people, there or in the whole world, as well as more broad statements on human rights; metonymically, it stands for the political change which has (fortunately, in the opinion of those agents) taken place in the country: a post-Pahlavi state, a post-Ba'athist reality. Urry talks of ex-miners guiding visitors through the industrial museum; in our cases, we find ex-convicts performing such a task in the prison museums. This concept of 'sign' is related to populism's 'signifier' I will introduce in the following chapter, as well as the idea of 'signifier' as adopted by Dickinson, Blair and Ott:

> In dealing with memory places, the signifier assumes a special importance. The signifier –the place- is in itself an object of attention and desire. It is an object of attention because of its status as a place, recognizable and set apart from undifferentiated space. But it is an object of *special* attention because of its self-nomination as a site of significant memory of and for a collective. This signifier commands attention, because it announces itself as a marker of collective identity. (Dickinson, Blair and Ott 2010, 25)

The sign is an essential aspect in the power relation dynamics rooted in the prison museum -regardless of their content, the mere fact that they are open visitable spaces automatically endows them with cultural or humanistic self-importance. Furthermore, Urry talks of how in some cases "the fame of the object becomes its meaning", and that there "is thus a ceremonial agenda, in which is established that we should see and sometimes even the order in which they should be seen" (Urry 2002, 118). For it is true these prison buildings are notably unremarkable. Dissociated from their 'history' and the representations that are brought about, they are just corridors and cells. A narration is imposed in the space, which directs the visitors through its memory.

In the case of most prison museums, what took place within their walls was also routine: it was the daily bread of the highly authoritarian systems of population surveillance and coercion. Yet, as Urry argues, in the last several decades there has been an increased interest by the general public in "representations of the 'ordinary'". In the prison museums that occupy us, however, the violence therein and its connection to the local populace, despite 'normal' in the workings of repressive apparatuses, is undoubtedly extra-ordinary and in-famous when considered in the light of 21st century democratic and human rights-based discourses. Urry recognizes a shift "from aura to nostalgia" (Urry 2002, 118); that is, the visitor does not attend these sites to be marvelled by the extravagant, curious and magnificent objects in display (i.e. in a grand masterworks art collection or a palace), but rather, to understand better the rote workings and mechanisms of an unremarkable location.

In our case, for we are dealing with trauma sites, I would propose the undertaken shift is from aura to resentful empathy: visitors do not come neither to be amazed at nor to revel and ponder about the old times, but rather to mourn, to detest, to condemn. This is the framework of signs and reactions which are offered to and expected of them. If the conventional museum ritual experience "is seen as transformative and confers or renews identity or purifies or restores order in the self

or to the world", museum visitors coming away "with a sense of enlightenment, or a feeling of having been spiritually nourished or restored" (Duncan 1995, 13), the prison museum experience is supposed to engage the visitors and confront them with the traumas of their own 'history'. Not only to shake them to their bones, to indeed *transform* them -but to also induce them in a particular denunciation of the past.

CHAPTER 6

POPULISM AND PRISON MUSEUMS

We have arrived at a point in which the careful observation of these memory sites from all its exhibitionary procedures and discursive angles (notably history, memory and space) can point us in the direction of one final finding. Much has been said of the 'symbolic' value of these museums, the 'fabricated' memories they concoct, the 'laws' they obey, the 'signs' they represent: this type of language and the continuous compilation of examples related to it, I believe, has driven the research into a definitive rhetorical logic: populism.

6.1. From 'meaningfulness' to the glue of populist reason

Let us briefly summarize. It will have now become clear that no matter what discourse is exhibited in the museum space, it is the not merely the offspring of the state's conception of truth, nor an external ideology designed to wow the masses, but rather a much more complex result of the interplay between society and the political agents, an interplay which is ongoing constantly to some extent or another. After having ascertained the existence of particular and fixed collective memories located in these prison museums, let us consider the following set of questions:

> Why is *this memory* so alluring as compared to another? *What affect* is being deployed that helps to secure adherence to this particular memory content and to the group that holds it to be important to its collective identity? […] What renders messages – memories or other kinds of contents- believable, persuasive, or even compelling to particular audiences at particular times in particular circumstances? […] How do memories stick? How do they come to matter?[…] What particular memories or castings of a particular memory must be forgotten to activate others? (Dickinson, Blair and Ott 2010: 14-19)

The authors of such relevant inquiries set on to provide answers departing from the conception that rhetoric is ever present in memorial activities – these sites are embedded with a "meaningful-ness" which "invites us to consider how discourses, events, objects, and practices inflect, deploy, and circulate affective investments" (Dickinson, Blair and Ott 2010, 3). They offer compelling explanations in order to better understand "how particular memories capture the imagination and produce attachment, and how memories achieve durability over time or compelling force in a particular context" (Dickinson, Blair and Ott 2010, 15). One interpretation focuses on "affective intensities, like pride, contempt, anxiety, anger, horror, shame, guilt, confidence, gratitude, or compassion (as well as other affective states)", which "contribute to the production and maintenance of affiliation in more or less direct ways, in various configurations, and with various investments" (Dickinson, Blair and Ott 2010, 15).

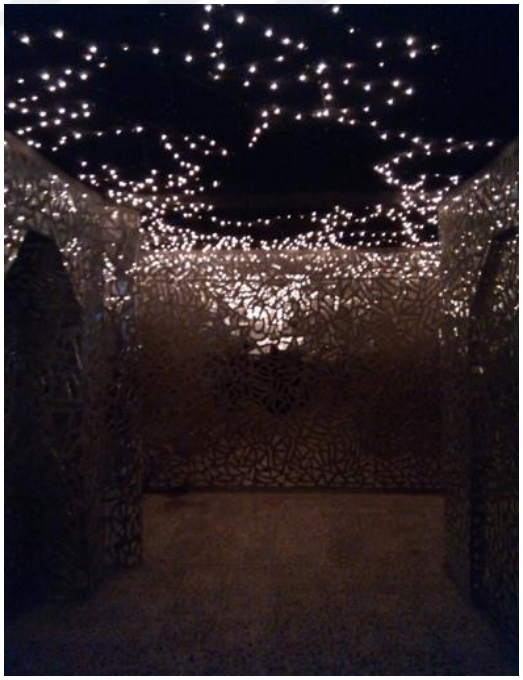


Figure 51 "Hall of Mirrors" in Amna Suraka

Figure 52 Painting by Ako Ghareb in Amna Suraka

Some of this meaningful affect can be aroused by artistic or pseudo-artistic installations and displays, which are charged with a heightened symbolism designed to convey a perhaps non-rational but highly effective sentiment to the visitor, to be ingested after or before he/she has acquired the 'documented' historical information: 'art' and the 'fact' compliment each other reciprocally. The clearest example of this in our cases is the "Hall of Mirrors" in Amna Suraka (see Figure 51), a corridor whose walls are ornamented with 182.000 broken pieces of glass (representing each of the lives lost during the Anfal) and whose ceiling features 5,000 tiny light bulbs (standing in for the villages which were razed to the ground). It is by far the most "memorial-like" space in the whole museum, raising a figurative spirit that strikingly contrasts with the oppression of the prison corridors. Nearby the Anfal room there's a painting by Ako Ghareb (a local artist who is also acknowledged as having

partaken in the design of the exhibits) which depicts, in a macabre and surrealist manner, the horrors of the genocide (see Figure 52).

Ebrat does not engage as much in these mechanisms – even though other similar spaces in Tehran, such as the Qasr prison museum or the American Embassy, are very heavy in artistic symbolism – not to mention the scores of public paintings in the streets. However, there is a small room, described as a "Memorial Booth", dedicated to the "martyrs who died under tortures or fights" during the times of the "damned Pahlavis" (see Figure 54). It is a simple and austere space where bloody handprints lie on the walls next to red tulips (as explained before, a symbol for martyrdom). In the entrance external corridor, there's also a striking exhibit of plaques bearing the names of those who were tortured (see Figure 53): the typology of display, evoking the endlessness of victims, is probably inspired by modern memorial techniques such as the Vietnam Memorial in Washington.

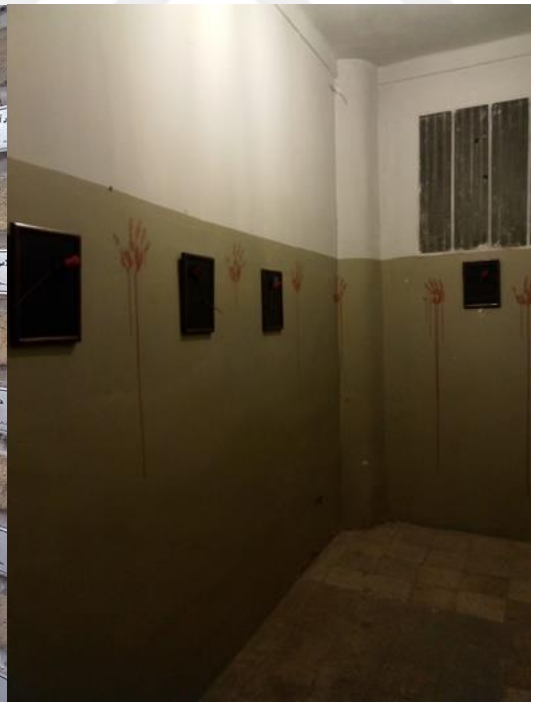


Figure 53 (left) Wall of names at the Ebrat entrance corridor

Figure 54 (right) "Memorial Booth" for martyrs in Ebrat

It is expected for artful displays such as those described to magnify the transcendence of the narrated events. However, regardless of whether they stand on artistic evocations or other rhetorical devices, there seems to be no doubt among scholars that memories are "meaningful stories" which help people "to define their identity, rather than as a collectively constructed and acquired knowledge about the past. It seems that audiences are able to relate to certain representations, re-creations, simulations and re-enactments of the past in a way which creates not only knowledge, but also a sense of belonging to a past" (Arnold-de Simine 2013, 27). Trauma as a social event can of course have the propensity to be remorphed into such affective intensities, particularly when the subject comes to terms with the reality that him/her (or his/her people) has been subjected to it. Trauma awakens a "sense of belonging or affiliation", which "is the condition of possibility for public memory" (Dickinson, Blair and Ott 2010, 17). Following Marianne Hirsch's concept of post-memory, through this process people "adopt the traumatic experiences – and thus also the memories – of others as experiences one might oneself have had, and of inscribing them into one's own life story" (Hirsch 2001, 10).

Moreover, in the 'making sense' of the past, people are inclined to submit to a "meaningful story that is satisfying and […] serviceable" to their present interests or worries (Arnold-de Simine 2013, 17). Other scholars have pointed out how in some cases "history of national memory is hard to separate from the history of patriotism" (Kammen 1991, 13) – which would introduce the existence of a nationalist affiliation in the affective process, of a will to perceive oneself as part of a country or a people. The feeling of self-identity, and its success and continuity, has also been given as reason for the effectiveness of meaningful memory: egyptologist and cultural memory scholar Jan Assman suggests that memory is comprised of a "body of reusable texts, images, and rituals specific to each society in each epoch, whose

cultivation serves to stabilize and convey that society's self-image" (Assman 1995, 132).

I will not disagree with these views here. However, not only should we effectively "interrogate the assumption that empathy allows people to form alliances across the divides of religion, 'race', ethnicity and nationality and critically question the premise that it elicits ethical behaviour, tolerance and deeper understanding of contemporary conflicts" (Arnold-de Simine, 46) – that is, not only should be sceptical of the general public's emphatic potential. I believe that these focuses on affection can be very much upgraded if we relate and attach them, especially those concerned with patriotism and self-identity, to the (also essentially rhetorical) logics of populism. Since we already looked at how hegemonic practices can potentially be funnelled or filtered in these memory sites, this appears as a reasonable step forward: investigating how populism can permeate these sites as a natural consequence of hegemonic processes, and whether empathy and hegemony can be dissociated. I think this approach is similar to what Olick mentioned in this fragment, in which both Bourdieu and populism are implicitly recalled:

> The sociological study of collective memory is thus not just a question of what determines collective memory, or even of what collective memory as an identifiable variable does – it does lots of things at once – but also of how it works within symbol systems as constituent of meaning and identity, through different ways at different times. (Olick 2007: 115)

Since from here on I will be referring to our cases as "populist", a description of the term is not only warranted but also extremely useful to better understand their nature. To analyze Olick's 'symbol systems', I will be parting from Laclau, whose breakdown of populism is technical and all-encompassing. This is no place to discuss whether the current Iranian and Kurdish regimes are purely 'populist', which would constitute an altogether different research, even though I will comment on this issue in the following pages[47]. Yet, I believe that regardless of the 'populist' degree they adhere to, these two regimes have been touched by it in different times of their

history, and the organs they produce alongside civil society are not exempt of exhibiting populist tendencies, as this analysis will strive to show. Laclau argues that theories which attempt to conceive "the will of the 'people' as something that was constituted *before* representation" (Laclau 2005, 163) are mistaken. That is to say, the populist discourse *creates* the people it is addressing. He instead posits that populism is actually inherent in most political acts, in particular if they are involved with the rhetorical manufacturing of the 'people':

> Not everything is society is political, because we have many sedimented social forms which have blurred the traces of their original political institution; but if heterogeneity is constitutive of the social bond, we are always going to have a political dimension by which society –and the 'people'- are constantly reinvented. […] Since the construction of the 'people' is the political act par excellence – as opposed to pure administration within a stable institutional framework – the *sine qua non* requirements of the political are the constitution of antagonistic frontiers within the social and the appeal to new subjects of social change – which involves, as we know, the production of empty signifiers in order to unify a multiplicity of heterogeneous demands in equivalential chains. But these are also the defining features of populism. There is no political intervention which is not populistic to some extent. (Laclau 2005, 154)

We must dissect the terminology used here as well as the rationality which brings about such conclusions. For Laclau, populist reason is a political logic in which a partiality within society identifies itself as a whole, and by doing so "assumes the role of an impossible universality" (Laclau 2005, 115) – it is a *plebs* claiming to be *populus* (Laclau 2005, 93). This partiality is not made up by clearly demarcated classes or groups but by a conglomeration of demands which may be shared by members of different strata in the classical sense (Laclau 2005, 74, 156). In other words, the unity of the group "is simply the result of an aggregation of social demands – which can, of course, be crystallized in sedimented social practices" (Laclau 2005, 224). Why?

> A first theoretical decision is to conceive of the 'people' as a *political* category, not as a *datum* of the social structure. This designates not a given group, but an act of institution that creates a new agency out of a plurality of heterogeneous elements. For this reason, I have insisted from the very beginning that my minimal unit of analysis

> would not be the *group*, as a referent, but the socio-political *demand*. (Laclau 2005: 224)

Populism is a political logic, "a way of constructing the political" (Laclau 2005, ix), a dimension of political culture (Laclau 2005, 14) which is "related to the institution of the social" (Laclau 2005, 117). Inasmuch as it does not come accompanied, by default, with set ideological contents or strategies, it is more of an *attitude*, and thus not comparable with, say, socialism or liberalism. The left, the right, anything in between: it can be employed and mastered by any political discourse. The question to be asked is "of what social reality or situation is [a determined] populism the *expression*?" (Laclau 2005, 17). At some point, the demand ceases being just a pure demand and becomes something else:

> A certain demand, which was perhaps at the beginning only one among many, acquires at some point an unexpected centrality, and becomes the name of something exceeding it, of something which it cannot control by itself but which, however, becomes a 'destiny' from which it cannot escape. When a democratic demand has gone through this process, it becomes a 'popular' one. But this is not achievable in terms of its own initial, material particularity. It has to become a nodal point of sublimination; it has to acquire a 'breast value'. It is only then that the 'name' becomes detached from the 'concept', the signifier from the signified. Without this detachment, there would be no populism. (Laclau 2005, 120)

By championing such popular demands in homogenizing equivalential chains, which eventually become unified into a system of signification (Laclau 2005: 74, 162, 225), the populist force attempts to move the antagonistic frontier (the internal barrier separating them from the non-hegemonic class) farther back (Laclau 2005: 78). One of the processes (if not the essential one) through which this is accomplished is through the production of 'empty signifiers', which eventually become floating (mobile) as such frontier moves back and forth –since the social world is naturally not a fixed field (Laclau 2005: 133). These signifiers are hollow concepts which embody everything and nothing at the same time – they may be the spiritual and abstract stand-ins for things that may not be possibly gauged through rationalizing. This is the extreme symbolical end of Urry's localization of metonymical "signs".

6.2. Prison museums: physical surrogates of empty signifiers

Using signifiers, a 'people' is fabricated. The embodiment of this 'people' and their spokes-entity is the populist force, the leader of which, as Laclau explains via Freud, is seen as both external as well as internal to the community. The 'leader' is to be "the object-choice of the members of the group, but he will also be part of the group, participating in the general process of mutual identification" (Laclau 2005, 63). Thus, using Freudian parlance, there is a narrow distance between the ego and the ego ideal (Laclau 2005, 161).

In the case of Kurdistan, the ethno-nationalist split hegemony spearheaded by Barzani and Talabani, whose facial semblances flood the streets, has often claimed to represent the totality of Kurdish people. In Iran, while it is true that Khomeini was "elevated into a demigod towering above the people", he was also portrayed as "embodying [the people's] historical roots, future destiny and revolutionary martyrs" (Abrahamian 1993, 38). The most righteous person, the figure the most fitting for governance, is also the one who understands people the best. Even though the superlative piety of Khamenei is by no means as exalted, the position of the supreme leader is by default always bridging these two points – the state and the civil society (as observed in the analysis of a room devoted to him in Ebrat).

In his discussion on whether 'Khomeinism' was more rooted on fundamentalism or populism, Abrahamian remarks on how the movement was "remarkably vague on specifics"; it had "vague aspirations and no precise programs"; the "rhetoric was more important than their programs and blueprints" (Abrahamian 1993, 31). This indeterminacy is a clear symptom of populism. When commenting about the populist rhetoric's general 'vagueness', Laclau brings up an interesting point, which is directly related to the emergence of such empty signifiers:

> Is it not the "vagueness" of populist discourses the consequence of social reality being, in some situations, vague and undetermined? And in that case, 'wouldn't populism be, rather than a clumsy political and ideological operation, a performative act endowed with a rationality of its own –that is to say, in some situations, vagueness is a precondition to constructing relevant political meanings? (Laclau 2005, 18)

Indeed, "vagueness and indeterminacy" may not be "shortcomings of a discourse about civil social reality, but [are], in some circumstances, inscribed in social reality as such" (Laclau 2005, 67). Civil society is by itself an unclear, blurry area, too complex perhaps to be endowed with its own tidy and ordered explanative processes. "History" and "memory" are similarly chaotic. Moreover, subjects may be likely to get behind vague and sometimes abstract terms as long as they submit to the opinion that such vagueness and abstractness display and reflect what they are and what they want. It is, of course, precisely a reflection. "The language of populist discourse – whether of Left or Right – is always going to be imprecise and fluctuating: not because of any cognitive failure, but because it tries to operate performatively within a social reality which is to a large extent heterogeneous and fluctuating" (Laclau 2005, 118). Indeed, the hegemonic-populist currents cannot by any means represent the whole of society (as discussed before, without antagonisms there cannot be civil society and therefore no hegemony), thus the empty signifiers it projects are "its own particularity embodying an unachievable fullness", an unachievable "totality or universality" (Laclau 2005, 70).

> We know that there is an insurmountable abyss between the particularity of groups integrating a community – often in conflict with one another – and the community as a whole, conceived as a universalistic totality. We also know that such abyss can only be hegemonically mediated, through a particularity which, at some point, assumes the representation of a totality which is incommensurable with it. But for this to be possible, the hegemonic force has to present its own particularity as the incarnation of an empty universality that transcend it. So it is not the case that there is a particularity which simply occupies an empty place, but a particularity which, because it has succeeded, through a hegemonic struggle, in becoming the empty signifier of the community, has a legitimate claim to occupy that place. (Laclau 2005, 170)

So, the particularity "assumes the representation of the totality that exceeds it", it engages in a determined rhetorical form of synecdoche -the part representing the

whole (Laclau 2005, 72). And here is where empty signifiers play a stellar role, as explained in the following fragment, worth quoting at length:

> The semantic role of these terms is not to express *any* positive content but, as we have seen, to function as the names of a fullness which is constitutively absent. It is because there is no human situation in which injustice of some kind or another does not exist that 'justice', as a term, makes sense. Since it names an undifferentiated fullness, it has no conceptual content whatsoever: it is not an *abstract* term but, in the strictest sense, *empty*. […] If I refer to a set of social grievances, to widespread injustice, and attribute its source to the 'oligarchy', for instance, I am performing two interlinked operations: on the one hand, I am constituting the 'people' by finding the common identity of a set of social claims in their opposition to the oligarchy; on the other, the enemy ceases to be purely circumstantial and acquires more global dimensions. This is why an equivalential chain *has* to be expressed through the cahtexis of a *singular* element: because we are dealing not with a conceptual operation of *finding* an abstract common feature underlying all social grievances, but with a performative operation constituting the chain as such. It is like the process of condensation in dreams: an image does not express its own particularity, but a plurality of quite dissimilar currents of unconscious thought which find their expression in a single image. (Laclau 2005, 99)

Even if most of the discussion has focused on the time when the 'populist' force emerges as a hegemonic project to battle state power and how the underdog gains its appeal (Laclau 2005: 123), these processes can continue indefinitely. The contending force attempts to both "break with the status quo, with the preceding institutional order" and to "constitute an order where there was anomie and dislocation" (Laclau 2005, 122). Two sides emerge: them and us. I think it is unarguable that such processes took place in Iran and Kurdistan in the immediate time prior to their government takeover and the establishment of new regimes (and even perhaps, long before those events).

In order to ensure its survival, the populist discourse needs to be resumed and reinforced, and so these concepts carried on encompassing a fictitious national whole even if they were devoid of actual ontological meaning or continuity -otherwise the hegemonic project, as previously shown, risks the possibility of disintegrating. And this is where the continuity of the empty signifiers is of essential value:

> No particular content has inscribed, in its ontic specificity, its actual meaning within a discursive formation – everything depends on the system of differential and equivalential articulations within which it is located. A signifier like 'workers', for instance, can, in certain discursive configurations, exhaust itself in a particularistic, sectional meaning; while in other discourses it can become the name par excellence of the 'people'. What has to be stressed is that this mobility also involves another possibility which is crucially important to an understanding of the way populist variations operate. We know that populism involves the division of the social scene into two camps. This division presupposes the presence of some privileged signifiers which condense in themselves the signification of a whole antagonistic camp (the 'regime', the 'oligarchy', the 'dominant groups', and so on, for the enemy; the 'people', the 'nation', the 'silent majority', and so on, for the oppressed underdog – these signifiers acquire this articulating role according, obviously, to a contextual history). In this process of condensation, however, we have to differentiate between two aspects: the *ontological* role of discursively constructing social division and the *ontic* content which, in certain circumstances, plays that role. The important point is that, at some stage, the ontic content can exhaust its ability to play the role, while the need for this nevertheless remains; and that – given the indeterminacy of the relation between ontic content and ontological function – this function can be performed by signifiers of an entirely opposite political sign. That is why, between left-wing and right-wing populism, there is a nebulous no-man's-land which can be crossed – and has been crossed – in many directions. (Laclau 2005, 87)

Indeed special attention should be paid here to populism's ontological effort: by discursively producing 'signifiers', it gives reality and relevance to things, events, processes and feelings that cannot actually be epistemologically determined as unities – through the operation of naming, it empties the significance (Laclau 2005, 104). It simplifies the field and makes it easier for the subject to adhere to such edited and constructed ideas: revolution, equality, democracy, and so on:

> Without empty terms such as 'justice', 'freedom' and so on being invested into the three demands, the latter would have remained closed in their particularism; but because the radical character of the investment, something of the emptiness of 'justice' and 'freedom' was transmitted to the demands, which thus became the *names* of a universality that transcended their actual particular contents. Particularism is not, however, eliminated: as in all hegemonic formations, popular identities are always the points of a tension/negotiation between universality and particularity (Laclau 2005, 96-97)

Moreover, inasmuch as signifiers become symbols of said "absent fullness of society", they also infiltrate the field of what is understood as history:

> Since society as fullness has no proper meaning beyond the ontic contents that embody it, those contents are, for the subjects attached to them, *all there is*. They are thus not an empirically achievable second best *vis-à-vis* an unattainable ultimate fullness for which we wait in vain. This, as we have seen, is the logic of hegemony. This moment of fusion between partial object and totality represent, at one point in time, the ultimate historical horizon, which cannot be split into its two dimensions, universal and particular. History cannot be conceived therefore as an infinite advance towards an ultimate aim. History is rather a discontinuous succession of hegemonic formations that cannot be ordered by a script transcending their contingent historicity. […] Political analyses which attempt to polarize politics in terms of the alternative between total revolution and gradualist reformism miss the point: what escapes them is the alternative logic of the *object petit a* – that is to say, the possibility that a partiality can become the name of an impossible totality (in other words, the logic of hegemony). (Laclau 2005, 227)

Why is all of this relevant to our purposes? First of all, populism is closely related to concepts touched upon so far. Laclau, for example, discusses the empty signifier nature of nationalism: "Whether nationalism, for instance, is going to become a central signifier in the constitution of popular identities depends on a contingent history impossible to determine through a priori means. […] It is not only that 'nationalism' can be substituted by other terms in its role as an empty signifier, but also that its own meaning will vary depending on the chain of equivalences associated with it." (Laclau 2005: 227) Most importantly, after having acknowledged the existing populist tendencies (at least in their inception) of the regimes at hand, conclusions can be reasonably reached.

Firstly, as sites exhibiting "memory" and "history" in a discursive fashion, aren't these prison museums actually particularities claiming to embody a universality? Don't they exhibit the story of such places as connected to the story of the whole 'people'? Undoubtedly such a compressing and identificatory process must exist in order for memorial sites to have any significance. This way, also, what is exhibited draws on from the populist discursive pool in search for signifiers. The "injustice" of previous regimes and the threat of its reoccurrence, which might be the root cause of very real personal trauma and negative feelings among people, may be constructed as a "historical" fact and reinforced in discursive operations as an empty signifier. Indeed, I am claiming that "trauma" can be used in such ways – which is not to say

that trauma is unreal or fabricated; rather, that a widespread, dislocated concept of "trauma" might be manipulated and packaged. As mentioned before, museum visitors are "transformed into 'secondary witnesses'. While first hand-witnesses are present, if not necessarily involved, in traumatic events, secondary witnesses are confronted with testimonies or representations of traumatic incidents" (Arnold-de Simine 2013, 17). This connects to the discussion in the previous chapters: memory and history need to be summarized and reinterpreted from the present: this is how they become vague and generalized. And this is how they might end up being soaked in populism.

In Iran, for example, concepts such as "revolution" or, more particularly, "the oppressed" (*mostazafin*), were empty signifiers surfing high on the wave of social mobilization and its aftermath. Abrahamian refers to the Khomeinist rhetoric as heavily relying on catchphrases, concepts and non-specific slogans, including calls for the reinstatement of "social justice", the erasure of "class differences", the will of "the masses", the evils of "imperialism", and so on (Abrahamian 1993, 31). In Kurdistan, by now it will have become very evident that concepts such as the 'resistance' against the oppressor and the 'trauma' they inflicted might as well be the essential *raison d'être* of such a museum.

Even though decades have passed and such discourse has been diluted, remnants of it still remain in sites such as museums, in which (as has been observed by looking as features such as the 'well-known figures corridor' or the video testimonials) the unquestionable reality of the 'people' having overcome tyranny and hypocrisy, as well as their holy martyrdoms in such endeavours, still lives on: in this sense, museums function as the associated surrogated physical representations/locales of these concepts – they embody the rhetorical notions which have circulated through society over and over, through different channels.

Secondly, as sites where the "official" discourse and the "people" meet, these prison museums are also to be regarded as spaces where the subject experiences something that is both internal and external to his surroundings (the 'museum' is part of his or her people, yet at the same time it is produced by forces which are not in his immediate surroundings). Thus, in these prison museums not only can we attest the complex state/society interactions which result in the fixing of a history, memory or knowledge, but also of a 'people'. The prison museums *are* the 'people': if "it is in contamination of the universality of the populus by the partiality of the plebs that the peculiarity of the 'people' as a historical actor lies" (Laclau 2005, 224), and if this construction is the basis of the populist nature, it is in these museums that we can regard how the hegemonic status quo, which was once the underdog, has (re)constructed the nation:

> There is nothing automatic about the emergence of a 'people'. On the contrary, it is the result of a complex construction process which can, among other possibilities, fail to achieve its aim. The reasons for this are clear: political identities are the result of this articulation (that is, tension) of the opposed logics of equivalence and difference, and the mere fact that the balance between these logics is broken by one of the two poles prevailing beyond a certain point over the other, is enough to cause the 'people' as a political actor to disintegrate. If institutional differentiation is too dominant, the equivalential homogogenization that popular identities require as the precondition of their construction becomes impossible. If social heterogeneity (which, as we have seen, is another form of differentiation) prevails, there is no possibility of establishing an equivalental chain in the first place. But it is also important to realize that total equivalence would also make the emergence of the 'people' as a collective actor impossible. An equivalence which was total would cease to be equivalence and collapse into mere identity: there would no longer be a chain but a homogeneous, undifferentiated mass. This is the only situation contemplated by early mass psychologists, to which they wrongly assimilated all forms of popular mobilization. (Laclau 2005: 200)

I believe most of the explanations and examples featured in the previous chapters – the making of a 'history', the display of 'truths', the emergence of a 'memory', etc– can be better understood and interpreted if we go beyond the Foucaldian lens and pay closer attention to post-Gramscian trends such as Laclau's. Looking at the logics of equivalence and difference inherent in all (pseudo)democratic civil societies provides us with a fruitful starting point from which to observe memorializing processes.

6.3. The past as foe and ally: the hegemonic utilization of trauma

It is fair to assume that the vast majority Iranian and Kurdish people will get to learn about physicality of the inside of a prison as observers of the past, not as inmates; prisons will be to them sites of remembering, empathy or morbid curiosity, not of internment and punishment. Perhaps these prisons were designed "to permit an internal, articulated and detailed control, […] an architecture that would operate to transform individuals" (Foucault 1995, 172), their actual interior existing only in the minds of those who suffered within their walls. It was never expected by the then-authorities that the common citizen would one day perhaps experience their intimacies; but now hundreds of thousands of people walk as visitors through the corridors of what used to be a "monotonous figure, at once material and symbolic, of the power to punish", in order to better understand the once "mysterious work of punishment" (Foucault 1995, 116).

Prisons have the "advantage of producing delinquency, an instrument of control and pressure on illegality, a substantial component in the exercise of power over bodies" (Foucault 1997, 36); whereas prison museums have the upper hand in the generating and provision of ways of thinking of and observing the past. Which makes them oddly interconnected: "for those who failed to adopt the tutelary relation to the self promoted by popular schooling or whose hearts and minds failed to be won in the new pedagogic relations between state and people symbolized by the open doors of the museum, the closed walls of the penitentiary threatened a sterner instruction in the lessons of power. Where instruction and rhetoric failed, punishment began" (Bennett 1988, 100). Although obviously this last passage deals with a century and a half ago, it is significant how much it resonates in the contemporary Middle East: for indeed, such prison museums have been established in non-fully democratic countries, in which the average visitor may still be subject to political persecution and the arbitrariness of surveillance and punishment. Those very clearly rejecting

these interpretations of history and memory (concocted by the state-civil society conundrum) may be subjected to 'sterner instructions in the lessons of power'.

This renders their qualities as spaces unique, for they are not conventional museums the architecture of which is designed to be an "organ of public instruction" (Bennett 1988, 81), responding to the principle of "show and tell" (Bennett 1988, 87). The sole fact that such spaces – prison museums - exist in our contemporary world -that they are created or at least allowed by the authorities- might be both observed positively, as a sign of general progress towards a better understanding of the past (or as an addition to other discourses such as that of human rights) or negatively as technique of power to both present itself as benevolent or generous and break with and distance itself from past through a specific or non-specific utilitarian sense – the fascistic road.

I will refrain from making such grandiose claims on the ultimate meaning of such sites, yet hopefully I will have offered resources and lines of thought that may contribute to our understanding of them. In a way, we can assume that it is likely for societies in which regimes of truth are widespread, solidified and consistent to breed museumifications of political prisons in which there is a "fixing" of memory, especially if the regime of truth in question has replaced a previous one to which it was enormously antagonistic, whether it be through progressive or radical processes, democratic or revolutionary.

But it's not only that: what is shown in the prison museums is both a justification for the current regime as well as a reminder for younger generations of why "history" floated in this particular direction –a reminder of "what happened" before, and why we arrived to this point today: "Museums deliberately forge memories in physical form to prevent the natural erosion of memory, both personal and collective: this is the task of preservation, of creating a new form for knowledge whose purely mental existence is well known to be ephemeral" (Crane 2000, 9). In their therapeutic task, they guide the new generations through the messy social world by erecting a history

from which hegemonically accepted memories can be extracted and portrayed through populist means. In the case of prison museums, these are not nostalgic efforts, they don't thrive on the sympathetic recall of visitors as in Urry's post-industrial museums. The same way they are anti-auratic, they are also anti-nostalgic. They are spaces of rage in which victimization and resentment plays a substantial role.

Olick mentions that "if genuine communities are communities of memory that constantly tell and retell their constitutive narratives […] there can be genuinely collective traumas insofar as historical events cannot easily be integrated into coherent and constructed narratives" (Olick 2007, 32). It seems obvious to me that in our cases, the "historical events" that constituted a trauma have been integrated – and have become an essential part – of the narrative of the nascent epistemes of these regimes. These memory sites are not only one remarkable example of this development – they might be the *most* remarkable.

Olick recalls how Walter Benjamin, "in the aftermath of the First World War, worried that the proliferation of memorial and commemorations provided a false consolation, ennobling the 'sacrifice' of dead soldiers in the service of ever new programs; real mourning, according to Benjamin, required keeping the wound open, not to motivate new struggles but to prevent the reality of the deaths from being swept into some future with which they had nothing to do" (Olick 2007, 146). Interestingly, in both the Iranian and Kurdish cases, old wounds are kept open indefinitely and the sacrifice of fallen soldiers –their martyrdom- is ennobled eternally. I believe these two processes justify (and most probably feed on) each other. Although the "revolution" cannot go on forever, there can be attempts, museified or otherwise, to keep the "revolutionary spirit" (in itself based on resentment) officially going forever, or at least to preserve it. Lowenthal posits that "memory transforms the experienced past into what we later think it should have been, eliminating undesired scenes and making favoured ones suitable" (Lowenthal 1985, 206), thus highlighting the role of 'forgetting' as a means to the establishment of place memory and identity among a peoples (the most glaring example, Olick

showed us, was post-war Germany). Here, the opposite process ensues: the *necessity to remember* is what makes the present circumstances suitable. Remembrance's diverse signifiers are utilized for the entitlement of the present governments, and trauma is one of the cornerstones of such intent. According to Olick, the apparition of trauma as a collective affair is directly linked to the rise of a linear historical consciousness among society:

> It seems plausible to make the case that historical consciousness preceded traumatic consciousness and that the linear, progressive temporality of history –and its individual corollary, biography- are part of the conditions that increase the likelihood of trauma and traumatic interpretations of suffering. […] This discussion of the rise of progressive temporality, which instructs individuals as well as collectivities how to understand their experience, is obviously one of the conditions for the experience of trauma because it is precisely this capacity that is disrupted by the kinds of experiences one has in industrial civilization. Here, then, is yet further support for the belief that trauma is a novel modern disease. (Olick 2007, 171)

Through *lieux de la mémorie* and other prosthetic memory-producing *techné*, trauma has ceased to be the matter of individual psychological intense experiences, and has become a useful identity symbol for the sustenance of collectivities (including 'peoples' or nations), members of which may have never come to experiencing anything remotely similar. Particularly when coupled with resentment, it produces several populist empty signifiers as well as their physical consequence - the type of prison museums we have observed here. Olick discusses the concept of *ressentiment* at length and comes up with observations very relevant to our purposes. By exploring the writings of Hanna Arendt, who argued that "pity, taken as the spring of virtue, has proved to possess a greater capacity for cruelty than cruelty itself" (Arendt 1991, 89), Olick reflects on how

> the politics of pity, the desire to ameliorate, to use suffering as an excuse to seize power, underlies the revolutionary impulse as well as underwrites its violent, principled extremism. […] From Nietzsche to Arendt, then, the central modern principle of legitimation – humanitarianism – seems ironically to be at the heart of our downfall; in the name of eliminating suffering and bettering ourselves, we have unleashed suffering on an unprecedented scale. (Olick 2007, 160)

For indeed, when the victimized hegemonic force, riding on resentment, becomes the establishment, some degree of irrationality (for trauma is, after all, intrinsically emotional) may also settle in. Olick also goes back to essayist and Holocaust survivor Jean Améry (1986):

> Améry argues that ressentiment "nails every one of us onto the cross of his ruined past. Absurdly, it demands that the irreversible be turned around, that the event be undone". As a result, for Améry, "resentment blocks the exit to the genuine human condition, the future". In this, then, Améry clearly agrees with Nietzche's diagnosis, the burden of the "it was". (Olick 2007, 164)

As long as the burden of the "it was" prevails, a true memorial reconciliation is unlikely, for this type of resentment cannot amount to "forward-looking humanitarianism" (Olick 2007, 64). In the examined societies, or at least in the most substantial interpretations of the lived past found in their memory fields, the "it was" and its fixture and continuity in the psyche of regimes and societies, is still too powerful an obstacle to be overcome.

Studies of totalitarian governments highlight how in such regimes the notion of social heterogeneity is rejected: "the notion of a variety of modes of life, behaviour, belief and opinion, in so far as thus notion radically contradicts the image of a society in harmony with itself" (Lefort 1986a, 285). This process of "uniformization", an integral part of their functioning, translates into the restless hunting down those outside or against the regimes of truth, which includes the creation of threats or 'enemies' outside or within the country (sometimes even imaginary or bloated). What is unknown or what is seemingly against the wishes of the state is considered 'parasitic'; it is rejected and coerced. But, in a way, the state requires the parasite to exist: it feeds on its ominous threat, which justifies governmental actions and discourses.

Even though the cases that occupy us cannot be qualified as totalitarian (mostly because of the existence of an actual civil society, some functioning degree of

democracy and a relatively successful and embraced populist leaning), they do exhibit slight inhibited totalitarian tendencies in this regard: this translates into the prison museum in their absolute demonization of the past regimes, which are the parasitic remnants of the former political enemy in the continuous 'silent' civil war - past regimes which also do share, essentially, similar or exact negative qualities with contemporary parasites or enemies (i.e. the Mojahedin in Iran or ISIS in Kurdistan). They do therefore utilize the past as both a matter of condemnation and as an element of support. As opposed to more conventional interpretations of trauma sites as sites for conciliation and the discourse of human rights, I would argue that these museums spring more out of resentment: their previously mentioned 'empathetic' qualities are tainted with venom. Wolfang Ernst provides a further reflection on the industrial museum which, again, can be somewhat extrapolated to our purposes:

> While many historical European industrial zones are currently being transformed to open-air museums of the industrial age, these same areas are suffering severely from another kin of very concrete heritage, the burden of waste disposal and soil contamination of the last two hundred years – a kind of memory difficult to cope with in aesthetic ways. Museums of industrial heritage in fact figure as a distraction of attention from the actual industrial legacy, the contaminated soil as a chemical store. (Ernst 2000, 28)

In a similar vein to Ernst's "distracting" industrial museums, these prisons now tell their visitors: "regardless of the current situation, it was always worse before." After mentioning Hayden White's controversial comments about how at some point that the historical narratives surrounding the Holocaust served to legitimate the policies of Israel, Trouillot reflects on whether the emergence and consolidation of specific histories may be intrinsically related to the need to establish moral authority (on behalf of the ruling regime). Trouillot dismisses this possibility by arguing that to contend that particular narrative legitimates particular policies is to refer implicitly to a "true" account of these policies through time, an account which itself can take the form of another narrative" (Trouillot 1995, 13).

However, it is very tempting to see the reflection (or the blatant presence) of such moral authority in the prison museums examined here which, as previously argued,

ignore both events of the past as well as similar events of the present in their insistence that they reside in the (ethical, even teleological) "right" side of history. The Shah's persecution of religiously-minded individuals, which is insisted on again and again in Ebrat, is seen as 'wrong': chasing individuals who are perceived as parasitic threats to the current regime's way of looking at the world or its internal security, however, is understandable and commendable, because those pursuing protest are also in the 'wrong'. Similarly, the oppression endured and epic resistance shown by the peoples of Iraqi Kurdistan is enough to counter or dismiss past or present wrongs conducted by their societies or political elites. The previous section, devoted to populism and its floating signifiers, I believe, makes the case for this interpretation.

Adrian Parr suggests that "how we remember also affirms how we live our lives today and tomorrow: defensively or joyfully" (Parr 2008, 1). In these museums, there is a defensive attitude which celebrates the end of particular eras: in this sense, they are both defensive and "joyful". Let us consider the following observation:

> Landscape is never neutral, which is not tantamount to claiming it is ideological […]. The connection between landscape and memory is implicitly ethical, in so far as it addresses the problem of what memory can do. More specifically though, there is the question of how landscape is not just scarred by an event, rather how it opens up to its own outside. In this way, landscape involves a becoming-other, an indeterminable experimentation with memory so that the designer doesn't use the land to interpret the past or turns it into a primary signifier of trauma. This constitutes what Deleuze and Guattari refer to as a legitimate conjunctive synthesis, one that is nomadic and polyvocal and is implicitly in opposition to the segregation fostered by its illegitimate counterpart. Instead, with a look toward the future, the designer exposes the implicated durations of the land, affirming and celebrating the movement of the past in the present. This is not the same as demanding we celebrate the holocaust – an abhorrent claim – but we do need to put the past to work so as to optimistically embrace the future, to celebrate life over and above death." (Parr 2008, 161)

I would claim these memory sites are to some extent "celebratory" and therefore utopian inasmuch in them lies a certain "impulse to imagine a better future" (Parr 2008, 187). After all, "the utopian potential of memory does not come from what memory guarantees; instead it surfaces in the demand memory makes on the future"

(Parr 2008, 48). Present, past and future, as we have seen in our analysis, are symbolically and historically interconnected in the main narratives being offered: as a commentator on Amna Suraka suggests, the site "writes/preserves/produces a selective memory that is less about the past than it is about the future" (Moravi 2016). Thus these museums are certainly "faced with a choice of whether or not traumatic memory compels us to act, meaning that we record this memory not to counter injustice but because we choose not to suffer in the face of it" (Parr 2008, 188).

But they do so by resorting to the pointing of fingers; to resentment and victimization. In them, we can find the condemnation of atrocities and the celebration of such an era being over, but, as explained, they record and condensate such events in a non-inclusive manner. They appear as hostile, not as conciliatory. In other words, a fascistic investment is taking place inasmuch as "the social field resists the endurance of traumatic memory, finding investment for this wound in an authoritarian image of the sublime or through repressive modes of remembrance" (Parr 2008, 187). They are "necessary sites of collective memory" (Moravi 2016) inasmuch as they are expected to carry the hegemonic torch of their generation, which by default is not elastic.

If we are to complement this with Benedict Anderson's (1991) thesis and argue that all communities are "imagined", then so is their truth, their particular history, their significance in world history, the meaning of their geographic enclaves, and their positions in the contemporary present; what they stand for, what they represent, their "memory". Yet all of these are not a product of a single group of people in a specific timeframe or place; they are the result of a convoluted and decades-long interplay between people of all types (from historians to politicians to sociologists to regular citizens) that might at some point have attained a relatively solid imaginary; if even the researcher might find it improbable to make sense of it, so is the common man.

It may be true that in the early museums, "the personal memories and desires of collectors and connoisseurs" were "bequeathed to visitors' memories, almost as if the

minds of these individuals were reinscribed in their museums and communicated to visitor audiences" (Crane 2000, 10). But the contemporary logics exhibitions are by no means as basic. It's not a simple transaction of knowledge going from point A to point B.

Considering they contribute to the general imaginary fabrication by their status as simplifiers (they make sense of the difficult reality by editing it and presenting it in a form that can be consumed through several techniques explained in the previous chapters) by utilization symbols and populist signifiers (incarnating widespread concepts like "freedom", "hope" or "social justice"), the workings at place are much deeper and convoluted. What's more, since they no longer stand as agents of one particular individual but rather a whole nation, they are part of a wider memorial network extolling the "righteousness" of the current regime and condemning the past and present "enemies": in Tehran, the musefied Qasr Prison, the former American Embassy, the Holy Defense Museum, the Peace Museum and museified houses of martyrs such as Ali Rajai share such tendencies (condemning, respectively, Reza Shah, western encroachment, the former Ba'athist regime in Iraq and terrorist organizations like the Mojahedin – they are all regarded as current or past parasitic elements); in Iraqi Kurdistan, the will of the oppressed peoples and the tyranny of Saddam's regime is denounced in sites as diverse as the Halabja Memorial or the Barzani Memorial Center and graveyard. Again, it is necessary to emphasize that these museums are not simply propagandistic products of an ideology emerging from the regime. As I've strived to defend all through this analysis, the civil society's consent needs to exist for them to properly function as memorial enclaves - however, it is inarguable that to some degree they may be "instrumentalized in particular institutional and discursive contexts – some of which, of course, will be governmentally constructed and organized" (Bennett 1999, 389). In this section, I tried to show how accidental, planned or inescapable populist rhetoric plays a role in this instrumentalization – which, it should be added, may not even be a conscious process.

6.4. Scientificity of the memory site: description/prescription

After the lengthy dissection found in the previous chapters, which included a nuanced observation of hegemonic mechanisms, symbolic power and populism (as they relate to collective memory and memory sites), we can conclude that analyses of memory sites excessively or solely preoccupied with ideology, human rights and/or dark tourism may not be enough to comprehend sites like these prison museums. If anything, these sites are the populist physical embodiments of the "people's" valiant overcoming of the past. The heretics have risen and become the ultimate judges of history. The museum's discourse motors the *raison d'être* of the (supposedly socially accepted) reigning regimes, it frames the validity of their rise and preserves their original popular spirit, regardless of the contemporary situation, even if it is contradictory, detrimental or irrational. In this process, they serve as an example of what the citizen, through consensus, must identify with[48].

Indeed, is not trivial that the old Tehran central jail's museum is not named after any of its incarnations (i.e. the Anti-Sabotage Joint Committee prison) but rather has adopted the name Ebrat. According to Abrahamian, already in late Qajar times punishments and executions as gruesome as amputations, decapitations, floggings and quarterings were carried out in public view and the bodies left on display as *ebrat* [example] for others to follow (Abrahamian 1999:, 21). Sadegh Khalkhali, appointed by Khomeini as the chief justice of the Revolutionary Courts in 1979, similarly enforced public displays of hanging and stoning, which "provided the public with a clear *ebrat*" (Abrahamian 1999, 126). The deaths and executions by the SAVAK in this particular jail were behind closed doors, kept from the public; now, visitors to the prison museum are expected to learn a lesson by getting to know the horrors that were kept away from them. Already in its name, Ebrat carries a heavy symbolism.

As to how the citizen might be willing to consciously or unconsciously accept this, from Bourdieu we understood that "the symbolic efficacy of words is exercised only in so far as the person subjected to it recognizes the person who exercises it as

authorized to do so […], only in so far as he fails to realize that, in submitting to it, he himself has contributed, through his recognition, to its establishment" (Bourdieu 116); now we can properly comprehend how in prison museums, memory is simultaneously *described* as it is *prescribed* (Bourdieu 1991, 134): they are indeed sites for *ebrat*. These museums are places where "the structuring power of words, their capacity to prescribe while seeming to describe and denounce while seeming to enunciate", is patent:

> Many 'intellectual' debates are less unrealistic than they seem if one is aware of the degree to which one can modify social reality by modifying the agent's representation of it. One can see the extent to which the social reality of something like alcoholism changes according to whether it is perceived and thought of as a hereditary weakness, a moral failure, a cultural tradition or a way of compensating for something (Bourdieu 1991, 128)

Thus, the 'heretic discourse' ceases being heretic, and the codification through which it observes memory transcends slogans and leaders to become an (*the*) "authorized" version of event, embedded into what (the state perceives as) the general public understanding of the social world. In the Iranian and Kurdish prison museums, "the people" overcame morally wrong, oppressive and all around abhorrent regimes. And it is taken for granted that this is "the way it had to be". The mixture of victorious empowerment and victimizing resentment that informs their narratives does exhibit these two 'contradictory assumptions' which might very well fly over the visitors' heads when uncovering 'truths' of those spaces [49]. Indeed, the 'cultural revolutionaries' of Iran and Iraqi Kurdistan became, precisely, the new political establishmentarians – partly through the civil society's initial bestowment to them of the entitlement to be authorized narrators[50].

I think it is fair to observe these prison museums as both sites of (what is thought of as) widespread collective memory – *socially valid* – as well as inevitable stalwarts of hegemonic and populist regimes whose discourse is actually *by default* (in the sense that it procreates itself). And "this politically unmarked political language is characterized by a rhetoric of impartiality, […] everything which expresses the

negation of political struggle as a struggle. This strategy of (ethical) neutrality is naturally accomplished in the rhetoric of scientificity." (Bourdieu 1991, 132) This is why, despite the political and populist undercurrents in these prison museums, there are not many overt references to politicians' discourses or the glories of the current regime, nor an emphasis on religion or ethno-nationalism, for that could entail a loss of 'scientificity': in order to embrace the majority of an heterogeneous population, the discourse needs to be regarded as impartial and apolitical as possible. Which is not to say that such currents are abandoned: they are discreetly smuggled.

And this is also why, by representing the fight of the "people" and not of particular political groups, the exhibitions still preserve their detached validity despite struggles, coercion and pseudo-authoritarianism including torture (HRW 2004, 2019), dysfunctional democracy, corruption and even nepotism (O'Leary and Salih, 35; Pring 2015) still operating in these countries. Yet, as we have seen, no matter how objective/scientific an approach might claim to be (Amna Suraka's displays even feature a couple of bibliographical references, including that of Human Rights Watch), it is still a fabrication. To address this, Bourdieu talks of the "theory effect":

> The theory effect, which may be exerted, in reality itself, by agents and organizations capable of imposing a principle of division or, if you like, of producing or reinforcing symbolically the systematic propensity to favour certain aspects of reality and ignore others, is all the more powerful and above all durable when the processes of objectification and of rendering things explicit are rooted in reality, and hence the divisions in thought correspond more precisely to real divisions. In other words, the potential force which is mobilized by symbolic constitution is all the more important when the classificatory properties through which a group is explicitly characterized, and in which it recognizes itself, encompass more completely the properties with which the agents constitutive of the group are objectively endowed. (Bourdieu 1991: 135)

Likewise, the manufacturing act (creating the reality of *the* "people" rising against previous regimes, despite public homogeneity being theoretically impossible) is a process of conceptualizing and reducing what the social world is and how it should be seen, and reinforcing that unitary 'people's' "claim to exist" (Bourdieu 1991, 134). To illustrate these processes, Bourdieu gives the example of Marxism:

> Science is destined to exert a theory effect, but one which takes a very particular form: by expressing in a coherent and empirically valid discourse what was previously ignored, i.e. what was implicit or repressed, it transforms the representation of the social world as well as simultaneously transforming the social world itself, at least to the extent that it renders possible practices that conform to this transformed representation. Thus, it is true that one can trace (virtually as far back in history as one wishes) the first manifestations of class struggle, and even the first more or less elaborated expressions of a 'theory' of class struggle (by speaking of 'precursors'), the fact remains that it is only after Marx, and indeed only after the creation of parties capable of imposing (on a large scale) a vision of the social world organized according to the theory of a class struggle, that one could refer, strictly speaking, to classes and class struggle. (133)

Hence, "when scientific discourse is dragged into the very struggles over classification that it is attempting to objectify, it begins once again to function in the struggles over classification" (Bourdieu 1991, 225). At this point, and not only with Bourdieu's reasoning but with the added input provided by the analysis of these sites through hegemony and populism, we have in some regards returned to the original Foucauldian preoccupation with power and knowledge.

These prison museums, with their tortuous and dark insight into the just-lived past, connect with a wider network of an actually novel (yet supposedly ages-old) remembrance by being its natural exhibitionary offspring. In them, we can observe a silent yet violent confrontation between 'scientific', impartial, apolitical accounts (whose philosophy/theory/framework is quietly underscored) and active condemnations of the past, the consternation of which (also quietly) rises to the surface under the guise of trauma. And yet, through the presentation of such 'scientific mythologies', they have the capacity to "produce their own verification, if they manage to impose themselves on collective belief and to create, by their mobilizing capacity, the conditions of their own realization" (Bourdieu 1991, 226). For this very reason, I've found it much more sensible to explore and describe how they physically present themselves and (re)assert themselves as institutional organs corroborating *the* history, *the* truth, *the* memory, rather than trying to understand to

which extent they are successful in this endeavour – for, how could such success be gauged?

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION

With this thesis, I intended to make sense out of two prison museums. I accumulated as much possible rhetorical evidence traceable in these sites by visiting them, and then set out to detect and employ the theoretical tools which could be of most use for their analysis. I've attempted to address this issue in the most multifarious conceptual way: by resorting to different sets of academic literatures and constructing a research that connects them organically. In this endeavour, I strived to respect the spirit of area studies: merging historically specific observations and a respect for the cultural characteristics of each place with a multi-disciplinary approach. The main aim of this research was to find out what do these memory spaces tell us about the countries' perception of themselves. The main question was: how do power and collective memory intersect in the physical exhibited formulations and narratives found in these prison museums? It is now time to arrive at certain conclusions.

First, by conducting this comparison, I found out these are significantly different sites in some regards, and this might be due to the different natures of their cultures, peoples and governments, plus the distance existing between present and commemorated events: they are the result of intricate and distinct processes of memory formation and subsequent adopting by the society and the regimes. Their narratives derive from particular developments, and such a disparity is clearly noticeable in their exhibitions, in terms of form and content. Besides the brute emotion they obtain from violence and trauma, they are remarkably intense sites, but for different reasons. Briefly summarized, Ebrat is rigidly concerned with the clear vilification of the previous regime through highly artificially mediated displays and substantial amounts of apparently documented evidence; all the while, it appears to

be more focused on the history of the memory site at hand (though it implicitly goes beyond it through tacit discursive associations). Amna Suraka adopts a more austere and symbolic presentation, not as evidently reproachful, yet chooses to carry a much wider memorial responsibility in its shoulders -in terms of the historical events it chooses to cover and illustrate. I hope the motives behind these museum characteristics and divergences will have become patent throughout the analysis.

Second, I believe it will have also become clear that differences in exhibition and intent notwithstanding, the logics, implicit mechanisms and overall 'spirit' of these two museums are, in fact, not so dissimilar. By introducing concepts such as symbolic power and fascistic memory, I have inferred that in very significant dimensions, it is quite possible to appreciate how they share a common way to approach their societies, pasts, and presents. They enjoy a commanding urban/memorial position in the construction and imagination of the 'people' – a role which should not be underemphasized – and they resort to the fixing of those kinds of memories which are perceived to be the most valid, widely accepted and adaptable to the current epistemes. I've pointed out the major historiographical tools and shortcuts employed within the museum spaces.

Third, I posit that when armed with the mechanisms of hegemony and utilizing the power of trauma and victimology, we can observe how both museums, following the aforementioned epistemes, have retroactively imposed social and political 'theories' ('philosophies' in Gramsican terms) critical of the past yet complicit with the present. These 'theories' retrospectively rediscover the past after having emerged semi-chaotically in tumultuous times. In Kurdistan, an ethnic-nationalistic narrative forged mostly in the aftermath of the Anfal events and from which all history is interpreted, despite such a perception not existing in previous eras; in Iran, a religious-populist interpretation of the past, spawned during the regime's consolidation in the 80s (through all sorts of mechanisms, including myths obtained during the 'imposed' war with Iraq), in which the harmony between politics and Shiism is portrayed as always

having played a major role in history and as embodying the very spirit of the Iranian people. The fact that utilizing these 'theories' is an anachronistic effort does not deter their producers: they have acquired sufficient hegemonic validity to legitimize them.

Fourth, I advance the possibility of contemplating these prison sites as symbolic representatives of vague concepts and empty/floating signifiers which are derived from those countries' political populist trends. The idea here is that the populist reason applied to the discourse of the hegemonic group is reflected in the memory sites inasmuch as they are the spatial/physical embodiment of such notions.

Fifth and last, considering that this look at memory sites has revealed an alternative sociological pathway to make sense out of the national psyches of Iran and Kurdistan, I've reached the conclusion that this type of research could be valuably extended to other nodal points in their urban/memorial networks (museuographical enclaves, memory sites, public spaces, etc.) so as to better understand the collective memory most embedded in these countries, which has hitherto been rather understudied.

FOOTNOTES

[1] A similar but slightly modified partition can be found in another of his lectures, in which he speaks of the difference between "Reich's hypothesis" (the mechanisms of power are repression) and "Nietzsche's hypothesis" (the basis of the power-relationship lies in a warlike clash between forces) (Foucault 2003b, 16). Another interpretation is dividing the state's techniques between "coercion-technologies" and "self-technologies", whose "subtle integration" conforms the foundations of power relations (Foucault 1993, 203).

[2] Gramsci, who will be addressed eventually in this analysis, reached similar conclusions in his discussion of the emergence of the modern state.

> Gramsci does not argue that the nineteenth century witnesses an expansion of the state, but rather, an increasingly more sophisticated internal articulation and condensation of social relations within a given state-form. Varying relations of force and different degrees of (dis)equilibrium between 'levels' of the social formation, accompanied by a redefinition of the political itself, does not constitute an extension or expansion of the state, but an internal transformation of its constitutive dimensions (Thomas 2009, 140)

[3] Cuno refers to a survey conducted by the American Association of Museums in 2001, which showed that museums were deemed trustworthy by 87% of the respondents, over books and other media. Through their research, Thelen and Rosenzweig found out that "Americans put more trust in history museums and historic sites than in other sources for exploring the past", including actual witnesses and college professors, and certainly movies and TV. Unfortunately no research of this kind has been conducted in the Middle East so far, therefore I attach these references concerning the perception of museums with a substantial degree of caution.

[4] This passage rejects black and white approaches and invites us to focus on the grey; social life is observed as a field with infinite permutations and relations flowing over time. This cautious approach is also somewhat highlighted in the following fragment.

After making clear the need to go beyond the aforementioned repressive aspects of state power, Foucault, offers the following reflection:

> The relations of power, and thence the analysis that must be made of them, necessarily extend beyond the limits of the state. First of all, because the state is far from being able to occupy the whole field of actual power relations and, further, the state can only operate on the basis of other already existing power relations. The state is superstructural in relation to a whole series of power networks that invest the body, sexuality, the family, kinship, knowledge, technology and so forth. True, these networks stand in a conditioning-conditioned relationship to a kind of "metapower" structured essentially around a certain number of great prohibition functions; but this is metapower with its prohibitions can only take hold and secure its footing where it is rooted in a whole series of multiple and indefinite power relations that supply the necessary basis for the great negative forms of power (Foucault 1980, 122)

[5] So far much has been said about "society", which, let us insist, if devoid of power relations, "can only be an abstraction" (Foucault 2003a, 140). Even though this concept will be further explored later in the extent to the fact that museums are sites in the realm of the social (public spaces), I consider it proper to take a moment to underscore, through Foucault, how 'society' is a relatively recent idea, insofar as it was 'discovered' by the agents of power with the advent of the aforementioned modern state. I am not referring to the study of society, or sociology, which he claims was the offspring of the general tendencies of surveillance and examination of the 19th century (coupled with the thrust towards inquiry that developed in the previous centuries) alongside other human sciences such as psychology (Foucault 2000, 59), but the realization on behalf of the government that a society exists and must be addressed.

> What was discovered at the time –and this was one of the great discoveries of political thought at the end of the eighteenth century- was the idea of *society*. That is to say, that government not only has to deal with a territory, with a domain, and with its subjects, but that it also has to deal with a complex and independent reality that has its own laws and mechanisms of reaction, its regulations as well as its possibilities of disturbance. This new reality is society. From the moment that one is to manipulate society, one cannot consider it completely penetrable by police. One must take into account what it is. (Foucault 2000: 352)

Thus we find ourselves in a world dominated by what he elsewhere refers to as "social orthopaedics", of governments struggling to more actively regulate and dictate the goings-on of the citizens, whether it is through their bodies, their minds or

their lives; and moreover, to further examine and control them through the type of power referred to as 'panopticism', which he proclaims the reigning characteristic of our political reality. We should of course leave behind the obvious architectural origin of such concept and transpose it to the social world; surely we do not live in a constant panopticon, inasmuch as there exist private spaces – but when it comes to our actions 'outside', and needless to say when it comes to the public space (from hospitals and schools to museums or shops), the power's preoccupation with "whether an individual was behaving as he should, in accordance with the rule or not, and whether he was progression or not", its strive for a knowledge organized "around the norm, in terms of what was normal or not, correct or not, in terms of what one must do or do not" (Foucault 2000, 59), skyrocketed to the point of becoming one of its essential functions. When examining what 'governing' essentially is, Foucault takes on the quote of Renaissance humanist Guillaume de la Perrière, "government is the right disposition of things, arranged so as to lead to a convenient end", adding that

> The things, in this sense, with which government is to be concerned are in fact men, but men in their relation, their links, their imbrication with those other things that are wealth, resources, means of subsistence, the territory with its specific qualities, climate, irrigation, fertility, etc; men in their relation to those other things that are customs, habits, ways of acting and thinking, etc.; lastly, men their relation to that other kind of things, accidents and misfortunes such as famine, epidemics, death, etc. (Foucault 1991, 93)

Hence territory, property, etc. are only part of the functions of governance over a society of citizens; government is a potentially well-oiled machinery relying on tactics, defined "as a right manner of disposing things so as to lead not to the form of the common good, as the jurists' texts would have said, but to an end that is "convenient" for each of the things that are to be governed" (Foucault 1991, 95). This is the essence of the positive understanding of government, which transcends laws and prohibition and dips into a deeper arrangement of the relations within society, with whom, as others like Claude Lefort have acknowledged, power maintains a complex and particular tension, particularly in democracies (Lefort 1986a, 279)

[6] Up until the 80s, the utilization of museums for indoctrination purposes was of course acknowledged and debated but generally cast in a naïve, positive light, such as in Theodore L. Law's *The Museums as a Social Instrument* (1942), which highlighted the didactic properties of such spaces (mentioned in Alexander 1996, 221). Even though academic preoccupations with power relations in the museum -or "ideology", even though, as Foucault asserted, that is a problematic term- didn't broadly emerge up until the late 80s with Bennett's work or in scholarly compilations such as *The Museum Time-Machine* (Lumley 1988), already we can find allusions to the issue in earlier works of museum historiography, such as Alexander's *Museums in Motion* (1996, originally published in 1979). The book does include an interesting yet theoretically limited discussion on the origins of "history museums", which in their origins were galleries of great battles, which displayed the "glory of the nation" -"the odor of propaganda" clinging to them (Alexander 1996, 81)-; the preservation of old buildings, which attempted to "use historical structures as a means of stimulating national pride" and gave "psychological stability to a government in power" (Alexander 1996, 83); or open air heritage museums, which served as a "home of national inspiration" (Alexander 1996, 84). Although Alexander's work was conducted in the late 70s and does not properly talk in serious terms of ideology or power, and seems mostly unconcerned by such aspects, he notices how such spaces may feature an "emphasis on a common national background", which has "important psychological values" (1996, 91). In fact, as his study shows, already in the 19th century a conceptual debate exploded about whether historical houses should be those of great personalities and important historical events, becoming patriotic "shrines", or rather should they be preserved as "useful documents of the past" due to particular "architectural or aesthetic worth" (Alexander 1996, 89-90). Alexander also refers to the main problematic of such museums as being the "conflict between fluid history and static museum objects" (Alexander 1996, 94), an issue which will be tackled as the present paper progresses.

[7] As noted also by philosopher Adrian Parr, "in the course of remembering the social field is prompted to connect what previously seemed to be disparate events, giving rise to a memorial cultural activity that aspires to explore the material of the past with the understanding that collective remembrance is productive and real as compared to being expressive and symbolic" (Parr 2008, 182), which is to say, museums are effectively producers and ontologues in this endeavour, not just passive representatives.

[8] Azoulay's essay, published in Sherman and Rogoff's influential collection of case studies *Museum Culture. Histories, discourses, spectacles* (1994), highlights intriguing aspects of Israeli museification yet falls prey to insisting too much on ideology and consequentially not offering a more nuanced approach. Azoulay begins by stating that

> Some of the practices that shaped the public space, created its Jewish meaning, and signified its Zionist identity were creating a continuum of settlements, archaeological sits, and guided hikes in every part of Israel; distributing path indicators, setting up public structures and monuments; and reshaping urban and cultural spaces. Israeli history museums have played a major role in this enterprise. (Azoulay 1994, 85)

The picture presented falls very much in line with the Foucauldian/Bennetian spectrum explained in the preceding pages, talking of museification procedures as having been "instrumental" in the establishment of the popular history of the country, constructing an authority that has "often been employed by the museum in order to extend its sphere of influence beyond the public space and shape the private space of individual historical subjects" (Azoulay 1994, 86). When talking about the Tower of David Museum of the History of Jerusalem, Azoulay talks of how the 'objective' story of the city presented there brushes over not only the Jordanian rule, but also Palestinian claims (Azoulay 1994, 87) – which is a somewhat unsurprising, obvious insight - and discusses how alternative claimants to the true story might set up museums in order to earn a piece of the hegemonic cake (Azoulay 1994, 104).

> The public space is traditionally an arena of competition between various cultural agents that are involved in a struggle for cultural hegemony. An important dimension of this competition is the way a society deals with its past – how the past is sequestered from forgetfulness; exposed, gathered, formulated, and reformulated in discourse; presented

> and displayed in specially designated spaces. This is all the more true in a society, such as the Israeli society, that is still in a revolutionary stage, undergoing processes of crystallization. […] In Israeli society, the establishment and control of sites of collective memory (*lieux de la mémoire*) through which the presence of the past is determined often seems to be an existential question, and it has never stopped being a burning political issue. (Azoulay 1994, 89)

Keeping in mind that the article was written in the mid-90s and therefore in a period in which the country was experiencing notable political tumult -as well as still recovering from the stringent sequels of late 80s historical reinterpretation trends-, it is curious that the author deems its society "still in a revolutionary stage", a claim I would disagree with. Precisely the fact that a "demonopolization of the past" (Azoulay 1994, 99) or "cracks in the hegemonic image of the past" (Azoulay 1994, 107) are potentially taking place in the public sphere and its museums is a sign that the civil 'battleground' is in the open, and therefore multifarious voices not only are in contention (a situation explained by Foucault in the lines above) but also allowed to exist. However, this would mean that the country's political milieu has managed to reach the required level of democracy and multiculturalism to embrace Witcomb's desires for a less ideology-based creation of cultural ontologues. Yet, if Israel is 'crystallizing' still, what can be said of the political regimes of Iran and Iraqi Kurdistan? I would argue that despite appearing consolidated, repeated accusations of corruption, faulty democracy and controversial inner and external politics consistently trouble their continuity, and thus one would expect a classic nation-building type of exhibit in their museums, devoid of any multicultural subtleties that might endanger their position. By that I mean that a closed-off and monolithic discourse (or a certain "ideology", with a thousand quotation marks) is expected from and logical of them, similarly to the case of official Israeli institutions, who also share a similar degree of what Luke refers to "victimology" (Luke 2002, 39) - and the need to 'create' a nation out of trauma. Azoulay's account reveals interesting subtleties in those museum's portrayals, but still the condemnation of ideology is excessively on-the-nose, given it is but a natural dynamic of such places. Still, the article concludes with an observation that speaks volumes to our cases:

> Two contradictory assumptions concerning the link between past and present can be extracted from the discourse of preservation in Israeli society. On the one hand, the past

> is bound up with the present and dictates it: in the matter of the historic rights that the people of Israel claim over to the land of Israel, for example. On the other hand, the past is absolutely separated from the present, as exemplified by the concept of "historic truth" that is supposedly found beyond the threshold of the present and its rival ideologies, waiting to be discovered. What makes possible the coexistence of these two assumptions in the same ideological field is the attempt of the exhibiting subject to blur the traces of its interests in promoting one image of the past rather than another. As long as the exhibiting subject is in power and its position is part of the hegemonic culture, it can present its image of the past as a transparent and construct a position of an "innocent visitor", an observer who is expected to slide from the representation to what is represented without noticing the crude seams that had to be stitched for the purpose of producing it. (Azoulay 1994, 107)

[9] As Trouillot more eloquently put it,

> Between the mechanically "realist" and naively "constructivist" extremes, there is the more serious task of determining not what history is –a hopeless goal if phrased in essentialist terms – but how history works. For what history is changes with time and place or, better said, history reveals itself only through the production of specific narratives. What matters most are the process and conditions of production of such narratives. Only a focus on that process can uncover the ways in which the two sides of historicity intertwine in a particular context. Only through that overlap can we discover the differential exercise of power that makes some narratives possible and silences others (Trouillot 1995, 25)

For it is power, as Trouillot also argues, which plays an important role in this construction:

> Power is constitutive of the story. Tracking power through various "moments" simply helps emphasize the fundamentally processual character of historical production, to insist that what history is matters less than how history works; that power itself workstogether with history; and that the historians' claimed political preferences have little influence on most of the actual practices of power. […] Power does not enter the story once and for all, but at different times and from different angles. It precedes the narrative proper, contributes to its creation and to its interpretation. Thus, it remains pertinent even if we can imagine a totally scientific history, even if we relegate the historians' preferences and stakes to a separate, post-descriptive phase. (Trouillot 1995, 28-29)

[10] Warnings against hypocrites abound in the Quran, prominently in *Al-Baqarah* 2:6-10, "There are some who say, 'We believe in God and the Last Day' yet they are not believers. They seek to deceive God and the believers, but they only deceive themselves, though they do not realize it. In their hearts is a disease, which God has increased. They will have a painful punishment, because they have been lying".

[11] Though there is no room here for a proper dissection of Bourdieu's concept of habitus, which he explores in *Distinction*, a brief summary will help us better understand how it might be applied to memory and history. Habitus is a "practice-unifying and practice-generating principle, the internalized form of class condition and the conditioning it entails" (Bourdieu 1984, 101). From this we can derive that the dominant or hegemonic class will be most successful, or enjoy a better outcome of its discursive apparatus, the more homogeneous and coherent their network of habituses permeates the general population. "The habitus is necessity internalized and converted into a disposition that generates meaningful practices and meaning-giving perceptions; it is a general, transposable disposition which carries out of a system, universal application –beyond the limits of what has been directly learnt- of the necessity inherent in the learning conditions." (Bourdieu 1984: 170) Certainly Bourdieu is primarily preoccupied with taste -even though he investigates the inherent link between habitus and political opinion (Bourdieu 1984: 438)- yet the concept's focus on 'meaningful practices and meaning-giving perceptions' is directly related to the present theorizing inasmuch as the subject has the disposition to and necessity of adhering to a version of his or her past and memory.

[12] A subject is free to think as he or she wishes. This is true inasmuch as he or she is the owner and enforcer of her or his "technologies of the self". But now the state is able to conduct and affect such thinking more effectively; and to be seen as an authority not only in the realm of law, but also in the interpretation of history. The arrival of compulsory education or mass media, or the steady rise of museums as respectable places offering the "right" knowledge, binds the subject closer to the state more than ever before: "This form of power that applies itself to immediate everyday life categorizes the individual, marks him by his own individuality, attaches him to his own identity, imposes a law of truth on him that he must recognize and others have to recognize in him. It is a form of power that makes individuals subjects. There are two meanings in the word 'subject': subject to someone else by control and dependence, and tied to his own identity by a conscience or self-knowledge. Both

meanings suggest a form of power that subjugates and makes subject to" (Foucault 2003a, 130) Luke precisely delves into the whole concept of knowledge to explain why museums cannot ever be "culturally pure enterprises" and are instead "very important political structures":

> Museums are involved integrally in concentrating and compounding many discrete domains of knowing into the compact nodes of specific knowledge. Such knowledge often is represented as being totalistic, but of course it is not. New knowledges are always developing in society, but few are cumulative or conclusive. Many diverse cultural interpretations of the same bodies of ever-changing knowledge are constantly seeking ratification in museum institutions. […] Museums are effectively embedded in establishing certain rules to stabilize regimes of artistic, historic or scientific interpretation. The social ontologies of the how, what, where, when, who, and why constituting "technology", "nature", "history" and "culture" often find their first and most accessible articulation in the material displays exhibited at museum settings. (Luke 2002, 222)

[13] This is no place to genealogize theories on hegemony, for the concept itself has existed for centuries in some shape or another prior to being undertaken by Gramsci's Marxist prism (see Boothman 2008; Laclau 1985), and even under his pen it underwent several "models" and modified approaches (Thomas 2009, 63-68), so what follows is a very succinct summary of its conceptual core in the version I deem most relevant for our purposes. Prior to that, his writings should be taken with a certain grain of salt, as they feature some notably dated impressions; namely his division of Western and Eastern types of state, which is certainly not applicable in its nominal form nowadays. In his view, the Western states were rooted in civil society, with the state being superseded and consent, hegemony and position being the main logics, while in the (old) East, the state enjoyed "pyrrhic predominance" (Thomas 2009, 199), there was no proper civil society to speak of, as the state had the ultimate upper hand, ruled by force, and thus coercion and domination were in the order of the day (Thomas 2009, 160). "In the West there is a "proper relation" between state and society. "Proper" here would mean not only that the two spheres cannot exist separately from each other, but that the state is (1) limited and circumscribed and (2) responsive and subordinate to civil society. While a state may exist in the East without a civil society, in the West it is impossible to have one without the other."

(Fontana 2006, 33) Fortunately, civil society did eventually arrive to the Middle East, and we can observe our examples parting from the 'western' model.

[14] Moreover, according to Laclau and Mouffe, one of the main theoretical breakthroughs derived from Gramsci is the identification of hegemony with practices that "do not have a necessary class character", where "stagism is renounced in a thoroughgoing manner" (Laclau and Mouffe 2000, 58), a new myth is presented (Laclau and Mouffe 2000, 74), and which, last but not least, feature a character that goes way beyond the 'political' and into the identitary and spiritual, into the national-popular, in the sense that a "class does not *take State power*, it *becomes* State" (Laclau and Mouffe 2000, 69).

> It is in this movement, from the 'political' to the 'intellectual and moral' plane, that the decisive transition takes place toward a concept of hegemony beyond 'class alliances'. For, whereas political leadership can be grounded upon a conjunctural coincidence of interests in which the participating sectors retain their separate identity, moral and intellectual leadership requires that an ensemble of 'ideas' and 'values' be shared by a number of sectors – or, to use our own terminology, that certain subject positions traverse a number of class sectors. Intellectual and moral leadership constitutes, according to Gramsci, a higher synthesis, a 'collective will', which, through ideology, becomes the organic cement unifying a 'historical bloc. […] For Gramsci, political subjects are not –strictly speaking- classes, but complex 'collective wills'; similarly, the ideological elements articulated by a hegemonic class do not have a necessary class belonging. […] The collective will is a result of the politico-ideological articulation of dispersed and fragmented historical forces. From this one can deduce the importance of the "cultural aspect", even in practical (collective) activity. An historical act can only be performed by "collective man", and this presupposes the attainment of a "cultural-social" unity through which a multiplicity of dispersed wills with heterogeneous aims, are welded together with a single aim, in the basis of an equal and common conception of the world'. Nothing more distant from this 'collective man', 'welded together with a single aim', than the Leninist notion of class alliance.[…] For Gramsci the organic ideology does not represent a purely classist and closed view of the world; it is formed instead through the articulation of elements which, considered in themselves, do not have any necessary class belonging (Laclau and Mouffe 2000, 66-68)

[15] At some point Gramsci would go as far as to claim, not unproblematically, that "in reality civil society and State are one and the same", which can lead to some head-scratching (Gramsci 2003: 160); inasmuch as 'political society' and 'civil society' are closely interconnected, they are still distinct elements – there is a "dialectical unity of political and civil society, and not their identity of fusion" (Thomas 2009,

69) – as Gramsci says elsewhere, "the State is the entire complex of practical and theoretical activities with which the ruling class not only justifies and maintains its dominance, but manages to win the active consent of those over whom it rules" (Gramsci 2003, 244).

[16] These are spheres that "cannot be assigned equal 'weight' in the social formation – their equilibrium, like that of consent and coercion, is a stable disequilibrium" (Thomas 2009, 192). In the words of Fontana, intellectuals "provide both vertical and horizontal mediation. That is, within both political society (such as administrative and public agencies) and civil society (such as sects, interest groups, political parties) intellectuals act as agents of reciprocal communication, and they simultaneously connect civil society with political society" (Fontana 2006, 29) Moreover, Thomas mentions that "a class' potential for political power therefore depends upon its ability to find the institutional forms adequate to the *differentia specifica* of its own particular hegemonic project" (Thomas 2009, 227).

[17] They are ingredients in the current historic bloc, "in which a hegemonic class combines the leadership of a block of social forces in civil society with its leadership in the sphere of production" (Simon 1982, 28).

> Of equal importance is the maintenance of power *after* state power has been gained. […] Even when a social group has become dominant and holds power firmly in its grasp, it must continue to 'lead' as well. Hegemony can never be taken for granted, but has to be continually fought for afresh. This requires persistent activities to maintain and strengthen the social authority of the ruling class in all areas of civil society, and the making of such compromises as are needed to adapt the existing system of alliances to changing conditions and to the activities of the opposing forces. (Simon 1982, 38)

The rediscovery and reinterpretation of events recent and remote, and the museification and memoralization in spaces of such events, on behalf of the dominant group, I believe, can be seen as part of these 'activities' to ensure the co-optation of the masses is never interrupted. If "a hegemonic class is one which succeeds in combining the interests of other classes, groups and movements with its own interests so as to create a national-popular collective will" and "a collective will

can only be forged by a process of intellectual and moral reform that will create a common conception of the world" (Simon 1982. 61), prison museums, as sites of discourse, can undoubtedly contribute to such project. As permanent physical spaces, sites such as the prison museums that occupy us, facilitate (moreso than other activities or processes) the immanency of a particular understanding of the social world – which does not rely in artificial, external ideologies, but rather, on the 'common sense' (Gramsci 2003, 441) established within the society by the hegemonic 'philosophy' of the time, philosophy here being understood as follows:

> The philosophy of an epoch is not the philosophy or this or that philosopher, of this or that group of intellectuals, of this or tat broad section of the popular masses. It is a process of combination of all these elements, which culminates in an overall trend in which the culmination becomes a norm of collective action and becomes concrete and complete (integral) 'history'. The philosophy of an historical epoch is, therefore, nothing other than the 'history' of that epoch itself, nothing other than the mass of variations that the leading group has succeeded in imposing on preceding reality. History and philosophy are in this sense indivisible. They form a 'bloc' (Gramsci 2003, 345)

Gramsci is here using the idea of an 'historical bloc' as "a social and political space relatively unified through the instituting of nodal points and the constitution of tendentially relational identities" (Laclau and Mouffe 2000, 136).

[18] In the words of Gramsci,

> The state, when it wants to initiate an action that is not too popular, will preventively create the public opinion desired, that is, it organizes and centralizes certain elements within civil society. […] Thus there is the struggle for the monopoly of the organs of public opinion: newspapers, parties, parliament, in such a way that one force models opinion and thus the national political will, reducing opposition to atomistic and disorganized dissent. (Gramsci 2003, 914)

[19] Through the deep analysis of Laclau and Mouffe, we can conclude that, in effect, what is at stage here is some typology of balance between political and civil societies and, within them, the logics of equivalence, "a logic of the simplification of the political space", and of difference, "a logic of its expansion and increasing complexity" (Laclau and Mouffe 2000, 130). Thus, given the openness of society – attempting to 'scientifically' locate the essence of which would be the "height of

utopianism" (Laclau and Mouffe 2000, 143), there is no actual nucleus to hegemony, but we cannot speak either of lack of nodal points:

> Every form of power is constructed in a pragmatic way and internally to the social, through the opposed logics of equivalence and difference; power is never *foundational*. The problem of power cannot, therefore, be posed in terms of the search for the class or the dominant sector which constitutes the centre of a hegemonic formation, given that, by definition, such centre will always elude us. But it is equally wrong to propose as an alternative, either pluralism or the total diffusion of power within the social, as this would blind the analysis to the presence of nodal points and to the partial concentrations of power existing in every concrete social formation. (Laclau and Mouffe 2000, 142)

[20] In a few of his lectures (Foucault 2013, 229; 2000, 16), Foucault talks extensively about Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus* and brings into consideration an interesting factor on how the protagonist of the tragedy eventually acquires knowledge about his actions, how he learns the 'truth' about his existence -information which will eventually stripe him of his position as king. He comes into possession of this knowledge through a system of halves: first he learns part of it through communicating with the gods and prophets; then through his own process of remembering and by listening to the comments of his wife/mother Jocasta; and finally by the means of witnessing accounts from a couple slaves/shepherds. Although in the play this obtaining of information is related to the solving of a crime (the killing of King Laius), the whole process essentially amounts to the person's making sense of himself. This mechanism, dubbed 'sumbolon' by Foucault, sheds light into the fragmentation of knowledge, or rather, how an individual might acquire 'truth'(s) by accumulation and contrast. Furthermore, "the entire Oedipus play is a way of shifting the enunciation of truth from a prophetic and prescriptive type of discourse to a retrospective one that is no longer characterized by prophecy, but rather, by evidence." (Foucault 2000, 23) If a modern-day citizen is to seek the essence of her or his life, society and history, there's several channels he or she can consult: the upper echelons, which may be coated with pseudo-religious or prophetic qualities (such as holy texts) or might just be the claims of figures of authority (governmental or elsewhere) he or she is inclined to believe; the self (one's own conception of things); the people in the immediate surroundings which may be deemed trustworthy; and the lower echelons, subjects completely unknown to him or

her and totally unremarkable but who have the value of having witnessed events relevant to the knowledge being pursued, of being *şahit*. Through piecing together these sources, the person may be able to arrive at some sort of truth; and needless to say, the discourse offered in a museum may contribute substantially in this process, as it might include both the upper and lower echelons.

[21] Elsewhere (Foucault 2000: 10; 2013, 203), Foucault goes back to Nietzsche to emphasize how the latter insisted on the idea that 'knowledge', alongside other concepts such as religion or poetry, has no origin (*ursprung*), but rather, it is an invention (*erfindung*). Moreover, Foucault concludes that knowledge is in fact the result of violence, of tension, of forces at play. "If we truly wish to know knowledge, or know what it is, to apprehend it at its root, in its manufacture, we must look not to philosophers but to politicians – we need to understand what the relations of struggle and power are" (Foucault 2000, 12). And needless to say, if knowledge is manufactured, so is "history", as well as its related concepts which are of importance for our purposes, such as "collective memory".

[22] Thus, even though apparent political stability has been re-established after war, revolution or upheavals, the ghosts of the previous conflicts haunt over the current society and its institutions, and the 'enemies' of the past are not forgotten; even a "Peace Museum" such as the one in Tehran can be very much riddled with war discourse and condemnation. If there is a "silent" or dormant war (case in point, Lebanon), and if as we established power is not plain repression, there must be semblances of contenders, or groups of people who defy the state. And this might translate into the museum.

> The work of preservation that expropriates the past from oblivion reproduces images of the past as well as the conditions and means of its reproduction. This is a political project, and it often involves political struggle. […] The conflict taking place in the present in the field of preservation and representation of the past is over establishing one picture of history as the dominant one. It is analogous to, or at least continuous with, the former conflict that took place in the actual field in the past. (Azoulay 1994, 107)

[23] Moreover, struggles of opposition against specific states or governments, against their potential pastoral "government of individualization" (Foucault 2003a, 129), should there be any, are not merely opposed to the blatantly violent actions of those in power, their physical treatment of civilians, the elite as a class, or whatever polemical political decisions they might undertake; but rather, they are "elite discursive battles over meaning and interpretation" (Crane 2000, 12), against the whole "regime of knowledge", that is being adopted, the penetration into subjects' moral and intellectual nature and their ultimate acceptance of such reality.

> What is in contention in the representation of the past is not merely images of the past that compete with one another but also the control over the means of representation and dissemination of this past. The struggle between those who currently possess these means and those who seek a greater access to what has been denied to them (Azoulay 1994, 101)

[24] Thus, a 'war of position' is to some extent always talking place, inasmuch as it "confirms the impossibility of any closure of the social" (Laclau and Mouffe 2000, 136). Since "civil society is characterized by a plurality of ideological/cultural conceptions and moral/intellectual systems of knowledge, […] it is here that the 'war of position' assumes importance. […] The war of position is a cultural conflict involving ideology, religion, forms of knowledge, and value systems." (Fontana 2006, 36). So, it is a war in which alternative bids try to usurp the hegemonic conception of the world. Through such war of position, the claimant class can prompt the "progressive disaggregation of a civilization and the construction of another around a new class core" (Laclau and Mouffe 2000, 70), which is what happened in our historical cases. Thus, according to post-Gramscian readings, hegemony cannot take place unless there is some degree of antagonisms within the indeterminacy of society, which assures the existence of hegemonic/articulatory practices (Laclau and Mouffe 2000, 145).

> It is also necessary that the articulation should take place through a confrontation with antagonistic articulatory practices – in other words, that hegemony should emerge in a field criss-crossed by antagonisms and therefore suppose phenomena of equivalence and frontier effects. […] Thus, the two conditions of a hegemonic articulation are the presence of antagonistic forces and the instability of the frontiers which separate them. Only the presence of a vast area of floating elements and the possibility of their articulation to opposite camps – which implies a constant redefinition of the latter – is

> what constitutes the terrain permitting us to define a practice as hegemonic. Within equivalence and without frontiers, it is impossible to speak strictly of hegemony. (Laclau and Mouffe 2000, 135-36)

Surely Laclau and Mouffe appear notably Foucauldian when mentioning the 'war of position' is basically a "demilitarization of war", but their analysis goes way further in highlighting that such war of position also "introduces a radical ambiguity into the social which prevents it from being fixed in any transcendental signified" (Laclau and Mouffe 2000, 137). In other words, society is by its nature a fully unattainable, uncontrollable spectrum, which is by default permanently open; therefore, hegemony is

> a political type of relation, a form, if one so wishes, of politics; but not a determinable location within a topography of the social. In a given social formation, there can be a variety of hegemonic nodal points. Evidently some of them may be highly overdetermined: they may constitute points of condensation of a number of social relations and, thus, become the focal point of a multiplicity of totalizing effects. But insofar as the social is an infinitude not reducible to any underlying unitary principle, the mere idea of a centre of the social has no meaning at all. (Laclau and Mouffe 2000: 139)

The opposite to a hegemonic conception of society would be, quite clearly, totalitarianism, in which the unity is (absurdly) presupposed and enforced. Their analysis leads them to conclude that "no hegemonic logic can account for the totality of the social and constitute its centre, for in that case a new suture would have been produced and the very concept would have eliminated itself", and therefore, "the openness of the social is, thus, the precondition of every hegemonic practice" – consequentially, the hegemonic formation, as we have conceived it, cannot be referred to the specific logic of a single social force". (Laclau and Mouffe 2000, 142)

[25] Moreover, Salibi's concept of "war over history" makes sense through a Foucauldian lens, since in his view, despite there being adversarial positions on key subjects, there is a regularity in historical knowledge, a homogeneity he refers to as a "very closely woven web".

> The fact that the epistemic web is so tightly woven certainly does not mean that everyone is thinking along the same lines. It is in fact a precondition for not thinking

> along the same lines or for thinking along different lines; and that is that which makes the differences politically pertinent. If different subjects are to be able to speak, to occupy different tactical positions, and if they are able to find themselves in mutually adversarial positions, there has to be a tight field, there has to be a very tightly woven network to regularize knowledge. As the field of knowledge becomes more regular, it becomes increasingly possible for the subjects who speak within it to be divided along strict lines of confrontation, and it becomes increasingly possible to make the contending discourse function as different tactical units within overall strategies (which are not simply a matter of discourse and truth, but also of power, status and economic interests). (Foucault 2003b, 207)

[26] In the tumultuous field of truths and power relations, the agency of the visitor should not be underemphasized. In fact, some would go as far as to claim that, since the visitor brings to the site his or her own baggage of knowledge and experience, he or she partakes in the "writing of the museum's fictions":

> The displacement of attention and concern away from the curatorial achievement – the authority and the coherence of the collection – to the visitor's experience – the authority and coherence of the person – transforms the context of representation and interpretation. Objects become meaningful not so much in terms of outside reality […] but in terms of experiential reality, one which is based in the visitor's own individual or cultural biography. […] The visitor recognizes himself or herself in the objects and displays of a gallery, and in those acts of recognition appropriates curatorial power. (Macdonald and Silverstone 1990, 187)

The more state-sponsored discourse has invaded and possessed society and its members individually, the less distinct will be their different 'cultural biographies'; however, the singular visitor will always, to some extent, have an agency of his or her own. Still, as institutions attempting to organize the past and infuse it with meaning, regardless of their aims, these prison museums, whose purpose is to represent the unfortunate and traumatic experiences of "the people", also succumb to the creation of silences and the endeavour of forgetting certain things. Trouillot is very adamant about this, arguing that historical narratives "are made of silences, not all of which are deliberate or even perceptible as such within the time of their production" (Trouillot 1995, 152)

> Silences enter the process of historical production at four crucial moments: the moment of fact creation (the making of *sources*); the moment of fact assembly (the making of *archives*); the moment of fact retrieval (the making of *narratives*) and the moment of retrospective significance (the making of *history* in the final instance). These moments are conceptual tools, second-level abstractions of processes that feed on each other. (Trouillot 1995, 26)

[27] In fact, knowledge may have been invented; but its sources and points of support are so multifarious it is fair to assume its production and evolution do not adhere to a conscious and organized logic. That is to say, we shan't overrate 'ideology', for it is only a limited tool in a sea of power relations that go well beyond it. If used, we should contemplate ideology in a post-Gramscian sense, as not "being identified with a 'system of ideas' or with the 'false consciousness' of social agents", but instead as "an organic and relational whole, embodied in institutions and apparatuses, which welds together a historical bloc around a number of basic articulatory principles" (Laclau and Mouffe 2000, 67). In fact, I would claim, if anything, what is in display in museums are conceptions of the world devised by specific groups but accepted by the majority of the population. They display 'philosophies' in the Gramscian sense:

> Philosophy, in the positive sense in which Gramsci uses it, is a conception of the world which tends to raise the level of awareness of historical determination and to increase the capacity to act an entire social class; ideology, on the other hand, is conceived as corresponding to the perceived interests of a class fraction, directed to the resolution of immediate problems. (Thomas 2009, 280)

Thus, philosophy is "therefore not at all a question of finally discovering the adequate expression of a previously misrecognised essence; rather, it is a question of the production of the present as a more-or-less coherent ensemble of social relations, which is comprehended in theoretical terms by the production of a philosophy or Weltanschaaung as a more-or-less coherent ensemble of superstructures in a hegemonic apparatus" (Thomas 2009, 290). In Gramsci's words,

> Philosophy is a conception of the world and philosophical activity is not to be conceived solely as the 'individual' elaboration of systematically coherent concepts, but also and above all as a cultural battle to transform the popular 'mentality' and to diffuse the philosophical innovations which will demonstrate themselves to be 'historically' true to the extent that they become concretely –i.e. historically and socially- universal (Gramsci 2003: 348)

[28] Of course, an alternative research of prison museums would be to look at the 'specific interests of the interpreter', and what would be required is a "more complete analysis, in each particular case, of the specific interests of the interpreter […] according to the relative position of the work being interpreted and the

interpreter in their respective hierarchies at a given moment; and to determine how and where they guide the interpretation." (Bourdieu 1991, 156)

[29] As Foucault would have it, the creation of *a* history and *a* memory, and therefore the creation of an exhibition space showcasing them, is not merely rooted in ideologies or theories, but in sets of practices; and what this paper attempts is to trace which those practices are, and how they 'accepted' in their regimes of truth or epistemic eras (Foucault 1991, 75), which might disregard some events or facts over others. Museums are universally accepted codifications of information, and we should look at the existing interplay between this "code that governs ways of doing things (how people are to be graded and examined, things classified, individuals trained, and so on) and the production of true discourses that served to found, justify, and provide reasons and principles for these ways of doing things. "[The] problem is to see how men govern (themselves and others) by the production of truth" (Foucault 1991, 81). As previously mentioned, the objective here is far from compiling a comprehensive genealogy of museumifications; yet knowing their existence as sets of practices or programs guided by an intent on producing a specific discourse is valuable for our purposes: "These programmings of behaviour, these regimes of jurisdiction and veridiction aren't abortive schemas for the creation of a reality. They are fragments of a reality that induce such particular effects in the real as the distinction between true and false implicit in the ways men "direct", "govern" and "conduct" themselves and others" (Foucault 1991, 82). The idea is echoed by Luke:

> Museums formalize our norms of how to see without being seen by ratifying well-practiced forms of vision or re-focusing little-used modes of imagination. Using its representations of arts and artefacts, a museum rewrites conventional understandings that are made manifest or left latent in the audience's encounters with its narratives as each visitor starts learning how one must act in these spaces or why one should deal with its artefacts. As one set of disciplinary conduits for imposing the normalization poised to impel persons to more easily impersonate the normative ideals of the political regime, history museums might be approached as exercises in governmentality by which disciplinary discourses, the order of things, or specific intellectuals all can affect the behaviour and consciousness of museum visitors to advance various governmental agendas (Luke 2002: 39)

[30] Halwbachs argues that the most persistent and influential of those group settings is the family, for there is practically nothing that the individual cannot think without reflecting on his own peers – his or her position is "determined not by personal feelings but by rules and customs independent to us that existed before [them]" (Halbwachs 1992, 55), and thus it is practically impossible to escape family thoughts, which "become ingredients of "most of our thoughts", whether it be a city or a profession (Halbwachs 1992, 61). Furthermore, it is also inside the family that the individual is most particular, and for this very reason it is the group the societal common sense might find most barriers in pervading:

> "In the relatively intimate milieu of our family we examine each other for long periods and in all of our aspects because of the daily contacts that we establish with each other. This in turn creates in the memory of each a singularly precise and rich image of all the other members of the family. It is then not the region of our social life in which we are least dominated and guided, in our judgement of those close to us, by the rules and beliefs of society? Here people are considered according to their individual nature and not as members of religious, political, or economic groups" (Halbwachs 1992, 70)

This notwithstanding, we cannot ignore the fact that families are in fact directly connected to society as a whole, as its members partake in extra-familial activities which fall into the sphere of other groups:

> If in every society there exists a type of organization which is imposed upon all families, in every family there develops in addition a particular mentality, since a family possesses traditions that are peculiar to it. […] Families are like many species of the same genus: since each of them is distinguishable from other families it can happen that, whether they are unaware of each other, whether they oppose or influence each other, a portion of the recollections of one family pervade the memory of one or several other families. Furthermore, since the general beliefs of a society reach family members through the mediation of those among them who are most directly involved in the collective life of the outside world, it can happen that these beliefs are either adapted to the family's traditions or, inversely, that they transform these traditions. […] But even if a family is only feebly influenced by other groups, inevitable transformations will still be produced within: deaths, births, sickness, aging, slackening or increase of the individual organic activity of its members. […] More often those among them who do not isolate themselves completely from other domestic societies or from the surrounding society in general will find that their kin are no longer today what they used to be in the past. They will then reorder and bring up to date the totality of family memories by comparing what old people have to say, which may be unreliable, with the testimony of members of other families. They will also look for analogies, current notions, and the whole bundle of ideas prevalent in their period outside their group but displayed around it. It is in this way that history does not limit itself to reproducing a tale told by people contemporary with events of the past, but rather refashions it from period to period not only because of

> other testimony has become available, but also to adapt it to the mental habits and the type of representation of the past common among contemporaries. (Halbwachs 1992, 74-75)

In other words, there is an influx of outside memories and interpretations of the past that invade the apparently closed familial sphere, which in their turn are modelled after contemporary currents of thought. In other words, "each family ends up with its own logic and traditions, which resemble those of the general society in that they derive from it and continue to regulate the family's relations with general society" (Halbwachs 1992, 83).

[31] Not dissimilarly to this approach, Olick talks of "profiles" when applying this type of thought - not to society, but to political discourse:

> Because collective identities are constituted in part by their sense of continuities through time, images of the past are almost always in one way or another definitive features of political cultures, though they can play more and less leading roles in different cases […]. I use the concept of profile to describe the unique contours, more and less smooth, of political meaning systems at given points in time. These comprise diverse meaning elements, including images of the past, identitarian claims, rhetorical styles, attributions of present responsibility, policy characterizations, types of heroes, sense of inside and outside, moral and practical practices, and procedures. The notion of profile is used to capture the irreducibility of these meaning systems to their discrete elements, the necessity for viewing them as wholes greater than the sum of their parts. Indeed, it is this generalized and irreducible character of epochal profiles that makes it possible for a period to be represented in powerful "condensation symbols" or emblematic images. […] Collective memory is thus not just cause or product of what is really going on, but part of the self-definition process that is at the very heart of politics, even when politics appears to be about some more tangible result. Neither a tool for pursuing interests nor the foundation of identity, remembering is a central medium in which identity and interest are negotiated and contested (Olick 2007, 108-109)

[32] Besides religion, according to Halbwachs there's actually a myriad collective frameworks from which memory can emerge, including those of professions. There might be as many collective memories as "there are functions and that each one of these memories is formed within each of these groups of functionaries, through the simple play of the professional activity" (Halbwachs 1992, 141), and we might even go as far as to consider particular "techniques" to be the repository of their own collective memories. Thus, a shoe maker, a bazaar merchant, a soldier and an oil worker would not be sharing the same memories inasmuch as their own personal

realities and pasts and the history of their profession is clearly distinct. Yet, as it happens with families, these individual subjects and their groups exist in "two realms within society", that of the "technical activities" and that of "personal relations", two areas which are "in fact involved with each other" (Halbwachs 1992, 160). As an example, Halbwachs talks of the interaction between a seller and a buyer, a transaction in which, supposedly, the two individuals adopt these roles by dismissing whatever role they may play in other groups (as fathers, compatriots, etc), but this barrier can be easily torn down. The seller, "in order so to persuade him he must get to know the client. In this way, two persons confront each other, and the sale takes the form of a debate, an exchange of proposals, of a conversation between people who, momentarily, forget that they are buyer and seller." (Halbwachs 1992, 165) Hence the two realms of the technical and the social collide with and inform each other. "Thus every activity that has as its goal the production of commodities, their sale, and, more generally, the valorization of wealth, also shows a twofold aspect. It is a technique but, on the other hand, those who practice it must take their inspiration from the needs, customs and traditions of a society" (Halbwachs 1992, 166).

[33] This is also true of the actual origins of religious doctrines: "despite its claims to be self-sufficient, because religious memory extended its sway over lay and profane groups and wished to strengthen this sway, it had to take the form of a doctrine that responded to the concerns of the time" (Halbwachs 1992, 113). In this sense, religion (Christianity in Halbwachs's analysis, but adaptable to Islam) had to "obscure a part of its tradition: namely all those aspects of its doctrine that clashed too violently with the ideas of lay circles and that were not at all consonant with the experience –even if it is reduced and distorted- of societies very different from [previous] communities", and therefore the religious establishment "can divert its attention from certain of its traditions if its doctrine remains intact as to its essentials, and if it does not lose too much force or substance while it gains greater freedom of movement" (Halbwachs 1992, 114). Nowadays, even though it has become disengaged from "temporal society" -with whom it was immersed in and which, to some extent, did inform and

modulate religion in its inception (Halbwachs 1992, 95-97)- it exists within it, and sometimes its rites -Halbwachs gives the example of the Christian communion (Halbwachs 1992, 99)- connect the individual subject with its very present preoccupations through the fledging of older-than-time procedures. Not only that; in notably or even passively religious societies, the religious establishment

> had a hold on groups strong enough that their entire life was controlled by it; nothing could appear which was not marked by it from the start. Intellectual, moral and political activities undoubtedly have their own preconditions. Those who exercise them follow tendencies that, basically, do not emanate from religions. But as long as these activities are not developed to the point that one becomes aware of what is in fact not reducible to religion in each of them, they will not demand their independence. (Halbwachs 1992, 114)

[34] In *Tafsir al-Mizan*, his famous exegesis of the Quran, Iranian Shii scholar Mohammed Hossein Tabatabai, one of the most prominent thinkers of his era, would attribute it to Allah (Tabatabai 1981, *Suratul Baqarah*: Verses 47-48).

[35] One of the conclusions to derive from Halbwachs is that, precisely, "if recollections were preserved in individual form within memory, and if the individual could remember things only by forgetting human society and by proceeding all by himself- without the burden of all the ideas that he has acquired from others-to recapture stages of his past, he would become fused with his past; that is, he would have the illusion of reliving it", and therefore "there is hence no memory without perception. As soon as we locate people in society it is no longer possible to distinguish two types of observations, one exterior, the other interior". (Halbwachs 1992, 169)

[36] Yet Olick's analysis is on point when considering other social dimensions or historical events ongoing in these regimes; for example, as researched by Abrahamian, the commemoration of the 1st of May has notably evolved in Iran since 1979, in a way very much tied to the perceived necessities and opportunities deemed worthy by the hegemonic class (Abrahamian 1993, 60).

[37] The issue of forgetting was also addressed by Halbwachs:

> Forgetting is explained by the disappearance of these frameworks or of a part of them, either because our attention is no longer able to focus on them or because it is focused somewhere else. […] But forgetting, or the deformation of certain recollections, is also explained by the fact that these frameworks change from one period to another. Depending on its circumstances and point in time, society represents the past to itself in different ways: it modifies its conventions. As every one of its members accepts these conventions, they inflect their recollections in the same direction in which collective memory evolves. […] We should hence renounce the idea that the past is in itself preserved within individual memories as if from these memories there had been gathered as many distinct proofs as there are individuals. (Halbwachs 1992: 173)

[38] Before looking at spaces' relationships with power, it's fair to consider whether prison museums fall into the qualification of being "heterotopian", a widely discussed Foucauldian concept. In his understanding, heterotopias are "places that are designed in the very institution of society, which are sorts of actually realized utopias in which the real emplacements that can found within the culture are, at the same time, represented, contested and reversed, sorts of places that are outside all places, although they are actually localizable" (Foucault 1998, 178). Or, as a commentator puts it, they amount to some sort of "counter-sites" (Barrett 2012, 105). At first sight prison museums don't seem to have the "ability to juxtapose in a single real place several emplacements that are incompatible in themselves" nor are they "utterly different from all the emplacements that they reflect or refer to" (Foucault 1998, 181), à la cinema, considering they claim to represent what this space 'really' was, even though part of their exhibits might relate to events very much outside the prison walls, as we shall see. But it is true that they "always presuppose a system of opening and closing", in the sense that "one is constrained to enter or one has to submit to rituals and purifications", "with a certain permission and after a certain number of gestures have been performed" (Foucault 1998, 183), which in our case means paying the entrance fee. Most importantly, they are "connected with temporal discontinuities" and "open into what might be called heterochronias. The heterotopia begins to function fully when men are in a kind of absolute break with their traditional time". Foucault does in fact refer to museums in regards to this particular aspect:

> Museums and libraries are heterotopias in which time never ceases to pile up and perch on its own summit, whereas […] up to the end of the seventeenth century still, museums and libraries were the expression of an individual choice. By contrast, the idea of accumulating everything, […] the idea of constituting a place of all times that is itself outside time and protected from its erosion, the project of thus organizing a kind of perpetual and indefinite accumulation of time in a place that will not move – well, in fact, all of this belongs to our modernity. (Foucault 1998,182)

Even though Foucault is referring to more classical examples of archival institutions and museum collections, his observations on the permanency, immobility of such spaces, as well as how they constitute a 'break' in the real-life timeline of the visitor –immersing him or her in some sort of frozen vignette displaying how the space used to be (through a balance between 'authentic' remains and 'fabricated' exhibits)- are surely useful for our purposes. And it is also why it seems only natural to observe how such functions and configuration are affected by power, for "space is fundamental in any form of communal life; space is fundamental in any exercise of power" (Foucault 2000, 361). Indeed, the idea that power configures spaces, which are then the source of power (Hirst 2005, 3), is quite useful when looking at museums, due to their perceived authority in matters regarding validity.

[39] He also recalls German political scientist Peter Riechel's classification of the different types of "media" of collective memory. According to the latter, museums and memorial sites, as well as films and photos, are part of the "aesthetic-expressive" media, while speeches/commemorations are of the "affective" kind and historiography or documentation are "instrumental-cognitive" (Olick 2007, 100). I would disagree with such a rigid separation of "types" and argue that some media can be cross-genre. Yes, "museums naturalize a vision of the past in a way quite different than a political speech, which is more transitory in its impact", perhaps museums and speeches may "not only have different effects but also construct different pasts, more or less inclusive, more or less direct, more or less evocative, more or less malleable" and indeed "remembering as the mediation of past and present changes with context, technology and epoch" (Olick 2007, 99). Yet these different media, the tighter the hegemonic collective memory field is knit, may not

be so disparate from each other in terms of ultimate significance; moreover, given the fluidity of memory itself, so the effects and aims of a particular media be fluid and multifarious.

[40] As an example, Susan Crane, investigating memory in the museums, goes as far as to assert that new modes of knowledge consumption, namely the Internet, offer museum-like experiences:

> What any individual expects from a museum may or may not correlate with the desires or intentions of curators, but there appears to be a significant desire for museums on all sides. If the zeitgeist is the spirit of an age, ours is the age of the "cite-geist" or an age of citation, of desire to be able to refer to what is known or considered to be important and valuable information, whether stored in databanks, archives or museums. To put it another way, the "cite-geist" is museal consciousness. To each era its own forms of memory: the recent and evolution of the Internet, like a museum, like any of the prosthetic cultural devices created to supplement mental memory functions, offers an externalized, technologized memory that replicates certain brain memory activities without supplanting them. The Internet has revolutionized access to knowledge, the ability to refer to it, and where it can be found, and replicates without fulfilling the intention to find meaning in a way that parallels the museum of modernity. (Crane 2000: 12)

[41] Tackling the emerging concern about prejudice in museums in the late 80s, a curator lamented the fact that in some quarters it was still assumed "that museums are neutral environments and that museum activities can be carried without bias. But museum curators are only human. They have their own political allegiances and religion or lack of faith. They may be blinkered by their class background, their race, or their sex" (Kirby 1988, 99). What this passage illustrates is that, even if a museum wasn't the direct project of a government, its creators would hardly be exempt of some degree of subjectivity.

[42] In other words, a space will be liberating and/or oppressive when there is a conjunction between the architect's original aims and "the real practice of people in the exercise of their freedom" (Foucault 2000, 355). He gives as an example the *Familistère*, designed by Jean Baptiste Godin de Guise, which was designed as a space for 'liberty' but possessed intrinsic panoptic qualities.

> It is true that for me, architecture, in the very vague analyses of it that I have been able to conduct, is only taken as an element of support, to ensure a certain allocation of people in space, a *canalization* of their circulation, as well as the coding of their reciprocal relation. So it is not only considered as an element in space, but is specially thought of as a plunge into a field of social relations in which it brings about some specific effects (Foucault 2000: 361)

[43] The "high symbolic value" of the historical house, in the opinion of one scholar, "has led to their being used by different ideologies as simplified messages portraying cultural identity", because "as opposed to other types of museums in which emphasis is put on the signifying power of the objects and collections, and the building as container has to be adapted to the possible discourses and narratives, the chief purpose of the historic house museum is to ensure that the building is in all aspects at one with the more or less original collections" (Risnicoff de Gorgas 2004, 357-358), an observation that is validly applicable as well to prison museums, which also, in their quality of being memory sites, also hold an unarguable 'symbolic value'.

[44] Interestingly, McLuhan advocated for a bombardment of the senses in the museum, which he thought had become too linear, and book-like. He was thus one of the earlier advocates of the multimedia experience (Goodman 1999, 269; Wesemael 2001, 811).

[45] But how is this communication connected with power? Again, let us look at Foucault:

> Relationships of communication imply goal-directed activities (even if only the correct putting into operation of directed elements of meaning) and, by modifying the field of information between partners, produce effects of power. Power relations are exercised, to an exceedingly important extent, through the production and exchange of signs, and they are scarcely separable from goal-directed activities that permit the exercise of a power (such as training techniques, processes of domination, the means by which obedience is obtained), or that, to enable them to operate, call on relations of power (the division of labor and the hierarchy of tasks) (Foucault: 2003a, 136)

Based on this idea, we can come to the conclusion that not all relations of communication include power, but that, in Foucault's terms, some "blocks" might be formed in which "the adjustment of abilities, the resources of communication, and

power relations constitute regulated and concerted systems" (Foucault 2003a, 136). The example he gives prominently is the educational institution, in which both communication and power are exerted in sometimes interlaced ways: the "activity to ensure learning and the acquisition of aptitudes or types of behaviour works via a whole ensemble of regulated communications […] and by means of a whole series of power processes." (Foucault 2003a, 136) The aim in the present work is not so much to argue for the idea of museums being one of such "capacity-communication-power" blocks, but once we've ascertained they are endowed with communicative resources and that they present a necessarily manufactured narrative of truth or history, I feel they can be referred to what Foucault calls 'disciplines', which show "the way in which systems of objective finality and systems of communication and power can be welded together" through displaying "different models of articulation, sometimes giving pre-eminence to power relations and obedience, sometimes to goal-directed activities, sometimes relationships of communication" (Foucault 2003a, 136) Certainly at first sight museums would be of the kind giving pre-eminence to communication rather than indoctrination or power – but, as established by the preceding framework, in their condition as exhibition spaces of a constructed discourse, there is a presence of power within them, no matter how diffuse or flimsy.[46] The same way that when an official candidate is 'consecrated' by the party in an election, a "transmission of political capital" (Bourdieu 1991: 195) takes place, the opening of the museum 'invests' into the space not so much the political programme of that authorized delegate, but, in a classic populist turn, the claims to the "memory" of the people. It is a blatant act of self-consecration as the delegate of all popular voice, of monopolizing collective truth – an 'oracle effect' of uttering not only 'I am the group, I am, therefore the group is' but also 'I exist only through the group' (Bourdieu 1991, 209-211) in a fledging of a peculiar jumble of modesty (inasmuch as his individual persona vanishes) and authority (since he gives voice to a whole group). And thus the prison museum endows itself with and perpetuates its own authorized and elevated language.

> The 'elevated' style is not merely a contingent property of philosophical discourse. It is the means by which a discourse declares itself to be authorized,

> invested, by virtue of its very conformity, with the authority of a body of people especially mandated to exercise a kind of conceptual magistrature (predominantly logical or moral depending on the authors and the eras) (Bourdieu 1991, 152)

[47] I suspect Laclau, given the exactitude of his model, would probably be inclined to argue they are not, as he rejected others such as early republican Kemalism in Turkey, whose "homogenization of the nation proceeded not through the construction of equivalential chains between actual democratic demands, but through authoritarian imposition" (Laclau 2005, 212). As he briefly but thoroughly illustrates, populism is a concept that has been (mis)understood in many ways, or insufficiently explained, devoid of a precise meaning –it has even been disregarded as vague given it deals with ambiguous concepts as "the will of the people", the "masses", etc. (Laclau 2005, 3-10).

[48] As noted by Dickinson, Blair and Ott:

> A memory place proposes a specific kind of relationship between past and present that may offer a sense of sustained and sustaining communal identification. […] Memory places may function as the secular oracles for the current moment of a civic culture, offering instructions in public identity and purpose not only through proclamation, parable, or proverb, but even more importantly by modes of interaction and contact in the place. As much as they may be read as historical, their rhetoric is principally present, prospective, and imperative. They typically nominate particular acts and agents of history as normative models for present and future modes of "being public" (Dickinson, Blair and Ott 2010, 27)

[49] Luke offers an observation that is very much related when discussing the visitor's (or the scholar's) gaze:

> One must be extremely cautious about either being too critical of any museum's exhibits or becoming coopted too fully by any museum's power play. By criticizing how power works, one must not simply critique one limited set of political engagements by the established social formations in order to substitute his or her own apparently different, but also quite limited, ends to the service of the same means. All too often, the means for always being in control of the power plays simply erase the substantive agendas of any alternative set of critical ends. So the would-be cultural revolutionary merely becomes a new political establishmentarian. (Luke 2002, 226)

[50] As observed here by Bourdieu:

> Heretical discourse must not only help to sever the adherence to the world of common sense by publicly proclaiming a break with the ordinary order, it must also produce a

new common sense and integrate within it the previously tacit or repressed practices and experiences of an entire group, investing in them with the legitimacy conferred by public expression and collective recognition. […] The efficacy of heretical discourse does not reside in the magic of a force immanent to language, such as Austin's 'illocutionary force', or in the person of its author, such as Weber's 'charisma', but rather in the dialectic between the authorizing and authorized language and the dispositions of the group which authorizes it and authorizes itself to use it (Bourdieu 1991, 129)

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APPENDICES

A. TURKISH SUMMARY / TÜRKÇE ÖZET

Bu çalışmanın amacı, müzeye dönüştürülmüş olan iki eski gözaltı/sorgu merkezini güç bağlamında analiz etmek ve karşılaştırmaktır; Süleymaniye'de (Küzey Irak) bulunan Amna Suraka ve Tehran'da (İran) bulunan Ebrat. Bu alanlar, önceki rejimlerin polis ve istihbarat birimlerinin suiistimalleri ve tacizlerinin kınandığı bellek mekânlarına dönüştürülmüştür. Tez, milli kimliğinin birer timsali olarak davranan bu mekânları daha iyi anlamak amacıyla, bu müzeleri ve sergilenen teorik söylemi, sosyal bilimlerin ilgili teorileri ile bir araya getirmektedir.

Böylelikle, bu alanların tarih, bellek ve mekân ile kurmuş olduğu ilişkilere odaklanılmıştır. Bunu yaparken, hem öznel detaylar hem de kapsayıcı özellikler göz önünde bulundurulmuş. Varılan sonuç ile müze-grafik temsil, biçim ve içerik açısından bu iki alan oldukça farklılık gösterse de, ikisi de, nasıl daha geniş ve kalıcı bir tarihin icat edilerek bellek üzerine yapılmış benzer faşizan yatırımların paylaşıldığı önerilmektedir. Buna bağlı olarak, bu iki müzenin, popülizmin travmadan istifade etmeyi şart koşan mantığına itaat edilerek geliştirilmiş hegemonyacı projelerin sonuçları olarak ve milletlerin kimliklerinin inşa edildiği daha geniş bir kentsel-bellek ağının düğüm noktaları olarak gözlemlenebileceğini savunuyorum.

Bu tezin temel amacı, iki cezaevi müzesinde iktidar ve kolektif hafıza mekanizmalarının birleşimini incelemektir: Irak, Süleymaniye'de bulunan Amna Suraka ve İran, Tahran'da bulunan Ebrat. Bunlar, bu yüzyılın başlarında ziyaret edilebilir müzelere dönüştürülen önceki rejimlere ait iki eski gözaltı / sorgu merkezidir. Tez, mevcut rejimlerin kendi toplumları ve tarihleriyle ilgili daha iyi bir anlayışa sahip olmaları için, bu sergi alanlarında mevcut olan söylemleri araştırmayı

ve analiz etmeyi amaçlamaktadır. Bunu yapmak için sosyal bilimlerin çeşitli teori ve kavramlarına başvurulmaktadır.

Giriş niteliğindeki ilk bölümde, tezin metodolojisi açıklanmaktadır. Metodoloji, teorilerin ve kavramların analiz edilen bölgelere uygulanmasına dayandırılmıştır. Araştırma, bu alanlarda yürütülen özel bir saha çalışması ile başlamaktadır: sergiledikleri söylemin gözlenmesi, müzelere yapılan eleştirel ziyaretler sonucunda gerçekleştirilmiştir. Mekânlar hakkında bilginin toplanması ve yeniden üretilmesinden sonra, bu müzelerin doğasını ve mevcut rejimlerle olan ilişkilerini daha iyi anlamak ve anlamlandırmak için teoriler öne sürülmüştür. Bu yapısal ve metodolojik özeti takiben, "cezaevi müzesi" kavramı incelenmiş ve tarih müzesi ile bellek alanı arasında bir ara nokta olarak tanımlanmıştır. Güç ile bilginin fabrike edilmesi arasındaki ilişki konu alınmıştır ve müzeler üzerine üretilmiş başka çeşitli teorik perspektifler ("karanlık turizm" ve uzlaşma konularında başvurulanlar gibi) ile karşılaştırılmıştır. Giriş bölümü ayrıca, incelenmekte olan iki alanın tarihçesini ve daha sonraları nasıl müzeleştirileceklerine ilişkin tarihsel olayların özetlerini içermektedir. Bunu yapmak için, Irak Kürdistanı ve İran'la ilgili geniş tarih literatürüne, özellikle de önceki rejimlerle ilgili şiddet ve baskı olaylarına başvurulmaktadır. Son olarak, giriş bölümü, iktidar ve müzeler arasındaki bağların çalışmasına adanmış iki alt bölüm içermektedir. İktidarın incelemesi temel olarak Michel Foucault'un ("yönetişim" konusundaki bakış açıları da dâhil olmak üzere) yazılarına dayanırken, iktidarın müzeler ile olan ilişkisi, hem bugün hem de ortaya çıktıklarında, Tony Bennett'in konuyla ilgili çalışmalarından da beslenmektedir.

İkinci bölüm, iktidar ile tarih arasındaki bağlantıların bu müzelerde açıkça veya dolaylı olarak nasıl sergilendiğini analiz ederek başlar. İlk olarak, modern tarih yazımının "ulusal konunun" ve "ulusal tarihin" ortaya çıkmasına ve kabul edilmesine nasıl yol açtığı incelenmiştir. Bu iki müze, genelleştirilmiş bir "insan" üreterek ve bu ülkelerin belirli bir versiyonunu öne sürerek bu kimlik oluşumuna katkıda bulunmaktadır. Ernest Gellner, Anthony Smith, Eric Hobsbawm ve Michel Rolph-Trouillot'un yazıları bu süreçleri daha iyi anlamak için kullanılmıştır. Ana

sonuçlardan biri, bu müzelere ulusal bir tarihin “ontolojileri” olarak işlev görme görevi verilmiş olmasıdır. Bu ülkelerdeki vakaların kültürel özelliklerini “tarih” ve “kimlik” üretme çabalarını daha iyi anlamak için sırasıyla Kürdistan ve İran'la ilgili olan Mahir A. Aziz ve Ervand Abrahamian'ın çalışmalarına başvurulmuştur. Bu bölüm, bu müzelerde bulunan ve tarihi “özgünlük” vermek için kullanılan ve söz konusu açıklamalara, bir ispat oluşturma süreci içinde kullanılan ana unsurlardan bazılarını inceleyerek devam etmektedir. Son olarak, müzelerde bulunan bazı sergi salonlarının (Amna Suraka'daki 'Anfal' soykırım ve sürgün odaları) ve Ebrat'taki 'Tanınmış Rakamlar Koridoru' hakkında daha ayrıntılı analizler eklenmiştir. Andıkları olayların çok ötesine geçen (az ya da çok açık), ek olaylara odaklanarak ve daha makro-tarihsel bir söylem benimseyerek ulusun bütün tarihini somutlaştırma gibi daha katı bir görev benimsemişlerdir. Bunu yaparken, tarihi yeniden yazmakta ve günümüzün algılanan ihtiyaçlarına ve güncel epistemlere uygun olayların bir versiyonunu göstermektedirler.

Üçüncü bölüm, bu tarih üretimine katkıda bulunan kavramlardan birini tanıtmaktadır: belirli seçkinlerin kültürel ve politik hegemonyası. Bu bölüm, bu müzelerde (Pierre Bourdieu'nun yazılarıyla anlaşıldığı gibi) yer alan sembolik baskınlık türlerini ve vatandaşları terapötik olarak yönetme girişimlerini ve rejimin anayasasındaki nüfusun pastoral liderliklerine sunma çabalarını dikkate alarak başlamaktadır. Bu analiz daha sonra bu hafıza alanlarının hegemonik bölgeler olarak düşünülmesine dayandırılmıştır. Hegemonyanın epistemolojik bir araç olarak nasıl kullanılabileceğini daha iyi anlamak için, Antonio Gramsci'nin ve çağdaş yorumcularının birçoğuna, özellikle Benedetto Fontana ve Ernesto Laclau / Chantal Mouffe'un yazılarına başvurulmuştur. Bu teorik arka plan, bu müzeleri yalnızca ideolojik ve propaganda amaçlı alanlar olarak görmek yerine, devlet ile toplum arasındaki düzensiz bir uyumun sonucu olarak anlatılarının inşasının daha eksiksiz bir resminin çizilmesini sağlamaktadır. Ebrat'ta sergilenen bazı eserlerin analizi göstermektedir ki Şah rejimi altında acı çeken insanlar, hegemonik seçkinlerin bir kurgusu olan İran toplumunun tamamını oluşturması gereken belirli bir dini ve muhafazakâr vatandaş türüne aittir. Benzer şekilde, IŞİD'e karşı mücadelesinde tipik

“Kürt savaşçısına” adanan Amna Suraka'daki bir salon da Kürdistan’ın çok yönlü toplumunu hegemonik sınıfın ilgi alanına giren prototipe indirgemektedir. Bu bölüm, Foucault'a geri dönerek ve bu hegemonik eğilimlerin, bu hapishaneler ve onlardan geçen insanlar hakkındaki bazı “gerçeklerin” inşasına nasıl katkıda bulunduğunu daha iyi anlamak için kısaca Gilles Deleuze'ye başvurarak devam etmektedir. Bölümün son kısmı bu gerçekliğin hegemonik rejimlerinin özellikle bu bağlamlarda nasıl ortaya çıktığını incelemektedir. Onlara, bu ülkelerin sivil toplumundaki karmaşık düşünce mücadelelerinin sonuçları olarak bakarak, hegemonik söylemlerin bütüncül olmadığını ya da toplumdaki herkese ulaşmadıklarını ve onlara karşı her zaman isyan (veya sapkınlık –heresy-, Bourdie’ya göre) ihtimalinin bulunduğunu söyleyebiliriz. Bununla birlikte, İran ve Kürdistan’ın tarihi ve politik koşulları ve devletin kamusal anıtsallaştırma tekeline sahip olması nedeniyle, mevcut anlatıların değiştirilmesini hedefleyen alternatif iddiaların önünde büyük engeller bulunmaktadır.

Dördüncü bölüm, güç ile hafızanın oluşumu arasındaki ilişkiye odaklanmaktadır. Maurice Halbwach’ların kollektif bellek üzerine yaptığı çalışmaların kullanılmasıyla müzelerde sunulan anıların varsayılan olarak toplumsal etkileşimlerin ve kabullerin yanı sıra günümüzün endişe ve gerekliliklerinin ürünü olduğu savunularak başlanmıştır. Bu kavramsallaştırmaya sosyolog Jeffrey K. Olick tarafından yapılan araştırma eşlik etmektedir. Bu bölüm, bu cezaevi müzelerinde inşa edilen hafızanın, İran durumunda, özellikle de dini hatıraların farklı türdeki grup hatıralarının birleştirilmesinde ve manipülasyonunda nasıl yerleştiğini göstererek devam etmektedir. Bu tür hafıza alanlarının neden ve nasıl kullanıldığı, Pierre Nora’nın lieux de la mémorie kavramı ve ardından Silke Arnold de-Simine’nin müze alanındaki travma üzerine yaptığı araştırmalarla ilgili bir yorumla araştırılmaktadır. Bu bölüm ayrıca, bu yapıların, neden özellikle, bu tarihsel dönemde müzeleştirildiklerini de açıklamaktadır. Çünkü bu yapılar, 21. yüzyılın başlarında gerçekleşen daha geniş bir kültürel-anıtsal çabanın bir parçasıdır: Ebrat için bu 'devrimci' karakterinin kaybı sonrasında İran rejiminin gerekli sürekliliği; Amna Suraka örneği için, Bağdat’taki Baas rejiminin yıkılışı ve eski savaşçı Kürt siyasi

elitleri arasında büyüyen bir anlayıştır. Bu bölümde daha sonra, bu hafıza mekânlarında sergilendiği gibi, bellek inşasında kullanılan en önemli tekniklerden biri olan filme alınan veya belgelenen ifadeler incelenmektedir. Bölümün son kısmı, filozof Adrian Parr tarafından Deleuze hakkındaki okumaları üzerinden oluşturulmuş "faşist bellek" kavramının keşfedilmesine ayrılmıştır. Bu teorik araç, bir ülkenin hatıralarının açık uçlu ve kapsayıcı bir anlatımını sunmak yerine, bu hapishane müzelerinin onu kesin ve tartışılmaz olarak düzeltmeye çalıştığını göstermemize izin vermektedir. Bu bölüm, özellikle Ebrat'ın, 70'lerde yaşanan olaylarda Şah rejimini teşrih etmesini ve hafıza sahasının, travmanın ana failleri olarak gördüklerini kınama konusundaki meşguliyetini ve kararlılığını inceleyerek sona ermektedir.

Beşinci bölüm, güç ve mekân arasındaki bağlar ve şimdiye kadar tartışılmış olan noktalarla nasıl ilişkili olduğu hakkında daha geniş bir tartışma sunmaktadır. Özellikle, bu cezaevi müzeleri temsil ettikleri hatıraların fiziksel düzenlemesi olarak anlaşılmaktadır. Blair, Dickinson ve Ott'a referansla, bu tür mekânlarda yer ve hafıza ilişkisinin analizi üzerinden, olayların gerçekleştiği bir mekânı kullanmaya ilişkin retorik potansiyeli araştırılmıştır. Ayrıca, Bennett'in müzenin "daimi" özelliği konusundaki düşüncelerinden yararlanışmıştır. Ek olarak, Allison Landsberg'in "protez bellek" nosyonuna ve Iwona Irwin-Zarecka'nın "hafıza tekniği" hakkındaki bulgularına bu mekanların halka belirli bir tarih sunmak için fiziksel alanlarından nasıl faydalandıklarını detaylıca incelemek için başvurulmuştur: özellikle, mahkumlara ait eşyaların sergilenmesi, insan figürlerinin varlığı ve hücrelerin teşhiri. Bu bağlamda, bu iki alan belirgin şekilde farklılık göstermektedir: Amna Suraka, daha sade ve sembolik bir sunum yapmayı tercih ederken ve Ebrat, olaylara ilişkin daha figüratif ancak kitschy bir açıklama sunmaktadır. Bu bağlamda, kısaca, gerçek travma alanları motive edilirken ortaya çıkan gerilimleri daha iyi anlamamıza yardımcı olan Jean Baudrillard'a, özellikle bir sitenin 'gerçek varlık' ile yapay rekreasyon yoluyla yeniden inşası arasındaki denge konusunda, başvurulmuştur. Daha sonra, bu sitelerin "resmi" hafıza temsilcileri olarak "rüşvet" mekanizmalarının daha iyi anlaşılması için Bourdieu'ya dönülmüştür. Bu yüzden, "müzakere etme yetkisi" veya bu müzelerin açılışı için izin verilen "otorite eylemleri" gibi kavramlar

incelenmiştir: egemen seçkinlerin birikmiş meşruiyetinin fiziksel alanda bu gibi sebepleri nasıl mümkün kıldığı gibi. Son bölüm Bourdieu ile devam etmektedir. Sosyolog John Urry'nin yazılarına başvurularak, bu hafıza alanlarını geçmişe dair belirli bir anlayışı taşıyan diğer işaretleme türlerini de içine alan, kamusal heykel veya benzer müzeler gibi 'işaretler' olarak görmek irdelenmektedir.

Altıncı bölümün temel amacı, bu alanların iktidar ve bilgi lensleri ile tartışılması tamamlandıktan sonra, bu sitelerin hegemonik anlayışının ötesine geçmek ve onların rejimlerin popülist politik söylemleriyle bağlarını incelemektir. Bu durum, Laclau'nun popülist nedenin teorik çerçevesine dayanarak açıklanmıştır. Bu ülkelerin hegemonik elitlerinin nasıl halkın nihai temsilcisi rolünü benimsedikleri tartışılmaktadır. Burada müzelerin kendilerinin popülist olduğu değil, daha ziyade suretler veya baskın siyasal söylemlerin bir yansıması gibi davrandıkları analiz edilmektedir. Bunu yapmanın bir yolu, Laclau'nun “boş belirteçler” olarak tanımladığı genel ve belirsiz kavramlara başvurmaktır: “devrim”, “direniş” veya “ezilen” gibi fikirler - bu hapishane müzelerinin oluşturmayı amaçladığı fikirler. Bu bölüm, daha önce bir önceki tartışma ile çok ilgili olan Bourdieu’nun talimat / tanım kavramına son vermeden önce, “travma” kavramına ve bu sergi alanlarında nasıl kullanıldığına bakmaya devam etmektedir.

Bölümlerin ve iç organizasyonlarının özetlenmesinden sonra, şimdi çalışmamın ana sonuçlarının kısa bir versiyonunu sunacağım. İlk olarak, bu karşılaştırma yapıldığında, bu iki alanın bazı açılardan oldukça farklı alanlar olduğu sonucuna varılmıştır. Bu, kültürlerinin, halklarının ve hükümetlerinin farklı tabiatlarının yanı sıra, güncel olaylar ve anıtsallaştırılan olaylar arasında var olan mesafeden dolayı olabilir: bunlar karmaşık ve farklı hafıza oluşturma süreçlerinin ve ardından toplum ve rejimler tarafından benimsenmenin sonucudur. Anlatıları belirli gelişmelerden kaynaklanıyor ve bu dengesizlik sergilerinde biçim ve içerik bakımından açıkça göze çarpmaktadır. Şiddet ve travmadan elde ettikleri kaba duyguların yanı sıra, bu alanlar, farklı nedenlerden dolayı, oldukça etkileyici mekânlardır. Kısaca özetlendiğinde, Ebrat, son derece yapay aracılı göstergeler ve önemli miktarlarda açıkça belgelenmiş

kanıtlar aracılığıyla önceki rejimin netleştirilmesiyle titiz bir şekilde uğraşmaktadır; ayrıca, eldeki bellek mekânının tarihine daha fazla odaklanmış gibi görünmektedir (her ne kadar zımni söylemsel bağlantılar aracılığıyla ötesine geçse de). Amna Suraka daha sade ve sembolik bir sunumu benimsemiştir, açıkça sitemkâr değildir, ancak omuzlarında - üzerini örtmek ve açıklamak için seçtiği tarihi olaylar bağlamında- çok daha geniş bir anı sorumluluğu taşımayı seçer. Umuyorum ki bu müze özelliklerinin ve farklılıkların ardındaki nedenler analiz boyunca açık bir şekilde anlatılmıştır.

İkinci olarak, sergi ve niyet açısından farklılıklara rağmen, bu iki müzenin mantıkları, örtük mekanizmaları ve genel 'ruhu' açısından aslında birbirinden çok farklı olmadığına inanıyorum. Sembolik güç ve faşistik hafıza gibi kavramları tanıtarak, çok önemli ölçüde, toplumlarına, geçmişlerine ve şimdilerine yaklaşmak için ortak bir yolu nasıl paylaştığını fark etmenin oldukça mümkün olduğunu düşünülmektedir. “İnsanların” inşasında ve hayal gücünde - vurgulanması gereken bir rolde - komuta edilmiş bir şehir / anıt pozisyonunu karşılamaktadırlar. En geçerli, kabul gören ve günümüzün epistemlerine uyarlanabilir anıların sabitlenmesine başvurmaktadırlar. Bu bağlamda, müze alanlarında kullanılan başlıca tarihî araçlara ve kısa yollara dikkat çekilmektedir.

Üçüncü olarak, hegemonya mekanizmalarıyla donatıldığında ve travma ve mağduriyetin gücünden yararlanıldığında, söz konusu epistemleri takip eden her iki müzenin de geriye dönük olarak sosyal ve siyasal 'teorileri' (Gramsican terimlerinde 'felsefeleri') dayattığını gözlemleyebileceğimiz belirtilmiştir: geçmişe karşı eleştirel bugünün ise farkında. Bu “teoriler”, karışık zamanlarda yarı düzensiz bir şekilde ortaya çıktıktan sonra geçmişi geriye dönük olarak yeniden keşfeder. Kürdistan’da, çoğunlukla Anfal olaylarının ardından yapılan ve daha önceki dönemlerde var olmayan bir algıya rağmen, tüm tarihlerin yorumlandığı etnik-milliyetçi bir anlatı; İran’da, 80’lerde rejimin konsolidasyonu sırasında ortaya çıkan, dini-popülist bir yorum (Irak’a “dayatılan” savaş sırasında elde edilen mitleri içeren her türlü mekanizma yoluyla), ki siyaset ve Şiilik arasındaki uyum, tarihte her zaman önemli

bir rol oynamış ve İran halkının ruhunu somutlaştırdığı şeklinde tasvir edilmiştir. Bu "teorileri" kullanmanın bir anakronistik çaba olduğu gerçeği, üreticilerini caydırmaz: onları meşrulaştırmak için yeterli hegemonik geçerlilik kazandılar.

Dördüncü olarak, Bu cezaevi alanlarını, belirsiz kavramların sembolik temsilcileri ve bu ülkelerin politik popülist eğilimlerinden türetilmiş boş / değişken göstergeler olarak düşünme olasılığını ileri sürülmüştür. Buradaki düşünce, hegemonik grubun söylemine uygulanan popülist nedenin, bu tür kavramların mekânsal / fiziksel düzenlemesi olduğu kadar hafıza bölgelerine de yansıyor olmasıdır.

Beşinci ve son olarak, bellek alanlarına bu bakış açısının İran ve Kürdistan'ın ulusal psikolojilerinden anlam çıkarmak için alternatif bir sosyolojik yol ortaya çıkardığını göz önünde bulundurarak, bu tür bir araştırmanın Kentsel / Anıt Ağları (Müzecilik), Hafıza Alanları, Kamusal Alanlar, vb.) daha önce anlaşılmamış olan bu ülkelerde çokça gömülü olan kolektif belleği daha iyi anlamaya yarayacağı ileri sürülmüştür.

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