

BEARING THE UNBEARABLE:
POST-TRAUMATIC STRESS AND COPING EXPERIENCES
OF THE TORTURED POLITICAL EX-PRISONERS
FROM DIYARBAKIR MILITARY PRISON
IN THE AFTERMATH OF THE 1980 COUP D'ETAT

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İSTANBUL BİLGİ ÜNİVERSİTESİ
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Bearing the Unbearable: Post-traumatic Stress and Coping Experiences
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the Aftermath of the 1980 Coup D'Etat

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- 1) Torture
- 2) Political Persecution
- 3) Trauma
- 4) Coping
- 5) Diyarbakır Military Prison

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Abstract

The purpose of this thesis is to explore the post-traumatic stress and coping experiences of the political ex-prisoners imprisoned and severely tortured in Diyarbakır Military Prison after the Turkish military coup d'état of 1980, for a course of time between 1980 and 1984. Firstly, the background to and the aftermath of the coup, in general, and Diyarbakır Military Prison, in particular, are explored; torture is discussed from a psychopolitical perspective; and traumatic stress and coping literatures are briefly reviewed. Then, two sets of studies, each of which is integrated in its own context, are introduced. In Study I, the narratives of 80 political ex-prisoners were evaluated with content analysis regarding post-traumatic stress, and relevant discourses or acts, when present, were coded as manifestations of post-traumatic stress, utilizing Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) criteria outlined in DSM-IV (American Psychiatric Association, 1994). The results revealed that only a few participants reported or showed stress manifestations in line with the criteria for a full diagnosis at the time of the interview; yet, many still suggested subthreshold PTSD or revealed a certain problem or difficulty almost 30 years after the primary traumatic experiences and in the absence of a systematic inquiry. Nevertheless, compared to studies indicating chronic PTSD following severe trauma, relatively low levels of current PTSD indications were encountered. In Study II, the narratives of 94 political ex-prisoners were evaluated with content analysis regarding their coping efforts during and after the process of constant torture. The predominant ways of coping used by the participants were identified as political awareness and stance, social coping, and obedience/acceptance, respectively, each of which has provided them critical sources to “survive” the inhumanity and atrocity they were subjected to. Each study’s results are elaborated along with the literature. Limitations of both and suggestions for future research are discussed.

Özet

Bu tezin amacı, darbe sonrasında 1980 ile 1984 yılları arasında bir dönem Diyarbakır Askeri Cezaevi'nde hapsedilmiş ve ağır işkenceye tabi tutulmuş siyasi tutukluların travma sonrası stres ve baş etme deneyimlerini araştırmaktır. Öncelikle, genel olarak darbenin ve özel olarak Diyarbakır Askeri Cezaevi'nin arkaplanı ve sonuçları ele alınmış; işkence psiko-politik bir perspektiften tartışılmış; ve travmatik stres ve baş etme literatürleri kısaca gözden geçirilmiştir. Sonrasında, her biri kendi içerisinde sentezlenmiş iki grup çalışmadan söz edilmiştir. Çalışma I'de, 80 eski siyasi tutuklunun anlatıları travma sonrası stres bakımından içerik analizi ile değerlendirilmiş ve mevcut olduğunda, alakalı söylem veya eylemleri, Travma Sonrası Stres Bozukluğu'na (TSSB) ilişkin DSM-IV'te (American Psychiatric Association [Amerikan Psikiyatri Birliği], 1994) belirlenen kriterlerden yararlanılarak travma sonrası stres görünümleri olarak kodlanmıştır. Görüşme zamanında katılımcıların pek azının tam bir tanı için belirlenen kriterler ile uyumlu beyan verdiği veya davrandığı, ancak primer travmatik deneyimlerden yaklaşık 30 yıl sonra ve sistematik bir araştırmanın yokluğunda dahi, pek çoğunun halen eşik altı TSSB ile örtüşen deneyimlerinin veya süregelen belli bir sorun veya zorluğunun bulunduğu fark edilmiştir. Bununla birlikte, şiddetli travma sonrasında kronik TSSB'ye işaret eden pek çok çalışmaya kıyasla, düşük oranda mevcut TSSB göstergeleri ile karşılaşmıştır. Çalışma II'de, 94 eski siyasi tutuklunun anlatıları devamlı işkencenin sürdüğü dönemdeki ve sonrasındaki baş etme çabaları bakımından içerik analizi ile değerlendirilmiştir. Katılımcıların kullandığı başlıca baş etme yolları, sırasıyla, her biri tabi tutuldukları insaniyetsizlik ve vahşetten "kurtulmaları" için kritik birer kaynak olan, politik bilinç ve duruş, sosyal baş etme, ve itaat/kabul olarak saptanmıştır. Çalışmaların sonuçları kendi kapsamlarında literatür ile birlikte değerlendirilmiştir. Ardından her iki çalışmanın kısıtlılıkları ve gelecek bilimsel araştırmalara yönelik öneriler tartışılmıştır.

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1. Introduction

Turkish military coup d'état of 1980 has caused tremendous impacts and led to permanent changes in the lives of numerous individuals, both Kurdish and Turkish communities, and the society as a whole. In the aftermath of coup, the media was strictly restrained; thousands of books, newspapers and journals were destroyed; universities were severely controlled; intellectuals and academics were intimidated; thousands of people were stripped of their rights, denied their freedom, and were subjected to incomprehensible sanctions; and countless individuals lost their lives. Torture was widespread in the prisons of the era. Diyarbakır Military Prison, in particular, is ingrained in the memories of the coup as the place where the most unimaginable atrocities occurred. This thesis is concerned with the post-traumatic stress and coping manifestations of the political ex-prisoners, who were captivated where the human evil prevailed and were subjected to relentless torture.

1.1. The Turkish Military Coup d'Etat of 1980

The political and social climate of the 1960's influenced by strong nationalistic movements worldwide inflamed the existing ethnic and religious conflicts in Turkey. After a period of relative calm following the 1971 military coup d'état, the tension escalated back within a few years (Alver, 2012; Demirel, 2003). By the mid-1970's, Turkey was in a political and social turmoil once again (ibid). The democratic regime seemed to be in danger (Demirel, 2003).

Yet the nationalism of "modern" Turkey has its roots much deeper. It is argued that the collapse of the "glorious" Ottoman Empire "turned into a historical scar of humiliation and failure, and gave birth to a traumatized Turkish nationalism obsessed with the preservation of the state" (Zeydanlıoğlu, 2010, p. 69). The political life after independence in 1923, was profoundly influenced by this trauma (ibid) that is yet completely unworked-through. With the transition to "modern" Turkey, an elitist manner of nationalism took over.

Kemalism, the ideology of the founder of “modern” Turkey, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, appointed secularism and nation-state as the basis of the contemporary level of civilization, which became the ultimate objective (Cornell, 2001; Zeydanlıoğlu, 2010,). Turkey entered into a nation-building process, which implicated “the negation of the ethno-religious plurality of the society” (Zeydanlıoğlu, 2010, p. 69). This nation-building process had impacts on different ethnic and religious groups. The Kurds, who have constituted a significant non-Turkish community residing in Turkey, were heavily influenced by it.

Towards 1980, in addition to the perceived urgency of the Kurdish movement and ethnic or religious/sectarian incidents that took place, the conflict between the opposing political groups in Turkey had become increasingly more violent. The state was strongly divided into camps in affiliation with left- or right-wing politics. The discord between the leading political parties rendered their coalition unlikely and necessitated cooperation with less considerable extremist parties (Demirel, 2003). Government authorities’ inability and unwillingness to put forth a viable solution prevailed, making it difficult to overcome the chaos and to reestablish the most basic rights of the citizens, which were severely damaged (Alver, 2012). Furthermore, the management of the conflict by the security forces was dangerously biased, as strong alignments with opposing political orientations existed and influenced the escalation and the intensity of the events (Alver, 2012; Demirel, 2003). Soon, the student unrest that had first begun as stone-throwing and stick-fighting confrontations, turned into a full-blown clash of the left and the right, pursued with armed weapons (ibid). Between 1973 and 1980, 5.000 people, according to official resources, and 10.000 people, according to unofficial resources, lost their lives (Birand, Bila, & Akar, 1999).

The polarization was massive and an effective way of dealing with it did not seem soon attainable. The rightful implementation of the law was not dependable, the authorities were incapable of coping with the violent battles and killings that occurred everyday, chaos

prevailed, and civil war seemed a highly close possibility (Demirel, 2003). Together with the insurmountable economical challenges posed by stagnation, rising inflation, and shortage of goods resulting from an ongoing foreign exchange problem, the public had grown impatient towards failing policies and was demanding effective action (ibid). In the course of time, the military, which had been intently watching for a while then, was convinced that in the existing social climate, a considerable portion of the citizens and major political actors, such as the civilian elites and the allies of Turkey, would not react a takeover with opposition (ibid). It is suggested that the military was also assured by the fact that “the concept of social contracts and the right to resistance did not have deep roots in the Ottoman-Turkish political traditions” (ibid, p. 270). Furthermore, the mainstream media was already calling for or implying the prospect of military intervention (ibid). Military officers were not expected to react negatively either, as, in accordance with their training, they considered such an intervention “not as unlawful and unethical, but as a special duty” (ibid, p. 259). Moreover, the majority of the army disapproved of the civilian life for they regarded it as corrupted (ibid).

On 12 September 1980, the military overthrew the government. After the announcement of the martial law, political parties and organizations and trade unions were shut down (Karacan, 2014). Sympathizers of political organizations and militant members, including right-wing and nationalist affiliates, were detained, arrested, tortured, executed, or forced to leave the country (ibid). The intervention was legitimized by the military with being “the ultimate guardian of the state” (Demirel, 2003, p. 259), which would not tolerate “the complete erosion of governmental authority” (Tachau and Heper, 1983, p. 25) and disintegration (Alver, 2012; Demirel, 2003). The military has, indeed, assumed a critical role in Turkey along the “modernization” process, staging three interventions and attempting others after the transition to the multiparty regime in 1946 (Alver, 2012; Demirel, 2003;

Tachau and Heper, 1983). (Another intervention, quite different than the previous ones in many respects, including its results, was attempted while this thesis was being written, which, due to its particularities, should be discussed elsewhere as it is beyond the scope of the present inquiry). Securing a privileged position throughout the Ottoman-Turkish history, this deep-rooted institution, which was the critical power in the “warrior state” of the past, had become “the primary agent of the modernization process” as well (Demirel, 2003, p. 255). It is argued that Kemalist values concerning “national and territorial integrity, secularism, and the achievement of ‘contemporary civilization’” were significant motivations in military’s intrusion in and manipulation of the disdained civilian politics (Demirel, 2003; Zeydanlıoğlu, 2010, p. 71). Yet, beyond the declared concern for the state and for the nation and the assumed attitude of the savior, it is suggested that “a wave of terror”, intimidating the very institutional existence of the military, had also been influential (Demirel, 2003, p. 259).

1980 military coup d’état is considered the most violent and oppressive and also the most transformative amongst all the military interventions in the history of “modern” Turkey (Gürbilek, 2007, as cited in Alver, 2012). Believing that diversity, whether ethnic, religious, or linguistic, was a threat to the integrity and the esteemed prospect of the civilization of the state, to establish national unity, forceful and coercive efforts at assimilation and Turkification began (Demirel, 2003; Zeydanlıoğlu, 2010). The military administration did not refrain from anything; every measure was considered fair. Military’s private understanding of “national interest”, completely disregardful of civil rights and the principle of civilian supremacy, and the legitimization of the state of emergency led to a rash of interrogations, detentions, arrests, and relentless torture in each (Demirel, 2003; Zeydanlıoğlu, 2010). Individuals in affiliation or in contact with ideological groups and political organizations were regarded as threats to be managed (Özman & Coşar, 2013). Considered as “enemies of the state”, countless people from different sections of the society but mostly Kurds and Turks

with left-wing political orientations became the subject of the military's ferocity. Kurds as a community, in particular, became the prominent target (McDowall, 1985; Zeydanlıoğlu, 2010).

Following the coup, the region of Turkey where significant Kurdish population existed came to be viewed as a particular source of threat and was subjected to unequal treatment (Zeydanlıoğlu, 2010). The Turkish army was heavily based in the region (ibid). This approach has been assumed as a state policy, being also the case in the previous military interventions, maintaining the Kurdish region under the emergency rule for prolonged periods (ibid). The military presence served the functions of control, intimidation and oppression, constituting a critical component of the administration of forced Turkification (ibid). During that period, 81,000 Kurds were arrested (McDowall, 2000; as cited in Zeydanlıoğlu, 2010). Furthermore, cultural and political representation of the Kurds was interfered, as media sources and organizations with Kurdish affiliation were deactivated (Zeydanlıoğlu, 2010). Forced migration and resettlement policies also made a severe impact. Meanwhile, the new Constitution effectuated in 1982 took it to an unprecedented level and banned the Kurdish language (Zeydanlıoğlu, 2010), the native language and the only available one for so many. Even the word "Kurdish" was prohibited (ibid). This destruction of language might be considered as a "linguistic genocide" (Hassanpour, 1997). Assigning Kurdish names for children was also forbidden (ibid). Moreover, the new Constitution, which is still in effect, asserted that all citizens of the Turkish Republic are 'Turks', deeming affiliation and expression of Kurdish identity illegal and bound to be persecuted (Zeydanlıoğlu, 2010), thus forcing Kurdish people either to separate from their identity or from the state (at least mentally). Thus, the authorities insisted on rendering "'Kurdishness' as an ethnic identity and language [...] in modern history of Turkey at best as a hidden backward identity and language, and at worst as a non-identity, a non-language" (ibid, p. 71).

Table 1: *Several Major Consequences of the Turkish Military Coup D'état of 1980*

The number of films that were banned	937
The amount of newspapers and journals that were destroyed	39.000 kg
The number of organizations that were closed down	23.667
The number of people who were detained for political reasons	650.000
The number of people who were blacklisted	1.683.000
The number of detainees for whom trials were launched by courts-martial	210.000
The number of detainees who were convicted to various sentences	65.000
The number of people for whom death penalty was proposed	6.353
The number of death penalties that were sentenced	513
The number of people who were executed	50
The number of people who were tried for being a militant	98.404
The number of people who were dismissed from work due to suspicion of crime	30.000
The number of people who were banned from receiving a passport	388.000
The number of people who were stripped of their citizenship	14.000
The number of people who became political refugees	30.000
The number of people who died suspiciously	300
The number of people who died in the prison	299
The number of people who died due to torture	171
The number of people who died due to hunger strikes	14
The number of people who were shot when fleeing	16
The number of people who died in shootouts	95
The number of people who committed suicide in the prison	43
The number of people who were given "normal death record"	73

“The cost of the coup”, Cumhuriyet Newspaper, 12 September 2000
 (Original: “Darbenin bilançosu”, Cumhuriyet Gazetesi, 12 Eylül 2000)

The coup has had extremely devastating consequences, some of which are presented in Table 1. It should be taken into consideration that killing, torture, maltreatment, and other violations of human rights and justice, particularly when administered by official authorities, are, by default, prone to concealment (Soyer, 1992). It is also important to remember that although numbers are very powerful in that they help communicate the magnitude of what happened, they are not powerful enough to represent all the immense losses, suffered individually, collectively (by communities of people), and as a society (all individuals and groups living in or affiliated with Turkey). Military intervention of 12 September 1980 has

had so many tremendous consequences – consequences that perhaps cannot be conveyed in a list. Thus, any statistical effort would fail to reveal the calamity of the 1980 coup d'état in its full extent and should be considered as a serious underrepresentation.

The influences of the coup can, and should, be discussed from many standpoints. Without a doubt, a major outcome that strongly permeated at all levels is the intensification and chronicity of polarization and conflict between Turkish and Kurdish authorities, resulting in massive losses for people. The scope of this paper, however, is limited to certain psychological manifestations of the personal and the collective experiences and mostly in the particularity of Diyarbakır Military Prison.

1.2. Diyarbakır Military Prison

Following the years after the coup, prisons became the primary arenas for the state to take control and to re-assert its sovereignty (Bozyel, 2012). Systematic oppression and atrocious torture practices that aimed assimilation prevailed in prisons, under the military administration (Türkiye İnsan Hakları Vakfı [Human Rights Foundation of Turkey], 1994). Of all, the infamous Diyarbakır Military Prison is considered the prison in which torture was the most extensive (e.g., Tolon, Gürbilek, & Savaşır, 1989).

Built by the Ministry of Justice in 1980 in Diyarbakır, in the southeast of Turkey, as a Type-E Prison, Diyarbakır Prison soon became a martial law military prison following the 12 September coup d'état. The military assumed control of the facility until the end of 1980's; yet, although not directly governing, the rules and the impacts of the military administration remained for much longer. The constitution implemented in 1982, on the other hand, is still operative. It is estimated that more than 5.000 political prisoners were held in Diyarbakır Military Prison between 1980 and 1984 (The Truth and Justice Commission for Diyarbakır Military Prison, 2012). Majority comprised of Kurdish people who were linked with left-oriented organizations; yet prisoners also included those with no political affiliation, who

were there solely on the basis of their “dissident” Kurdish identity. Some posit that Diyarbakır Military Prison resembled the “total institution” (Goffman, 1961; as cited in Fırat & Topaloğlu, 2012), which refers to a space in which individuals are enclosed, completely separated from the rest of the society and under total authority.

During the military administration, the military personnel were authorized massive power to “educate” the prisoners, which granted them felt entitlement to apply profoundly humiliating and brutal torture with complete disregard for the human rights (Ayaşlı, 2011; Anadol, Kürkcü, & Savaşır, 1989; Sarıoğlu & Savaşır, 1989; Tolon, Gürbilek, & Savaşır, 1989; Zeydanlıoğlu, 2010). The most incomprehensible practices of torture had become a constant of everyday in Diyarbakır Military Prison (see Table 2 for the common torture practices reported by a larger group of political ex-prisoners from Diyarbakır Military Prison). There, the state violence, applied to control, assimilate, and even to torment, was legitimized under the artifice of national security and benefit. It should be emphasized that in Diyarbakır, and in the other military-administered institutions of the 1980’s, the purposes of torture involved much more than gathering intelligence about deviant activities and illegal organizations (Zeydanlıoğlu, 2010). Torture ensued precisely from the state policy of punishing and destroying the assumed counter-civilizing and threatening “ethno-political resistance” (ibid, p. 74). Thus, a prevailing purpose of torture was the eradication of the identities deemed uncivil and dangerous. Furthermore, it was expected that “taming” the politicized Kurds inside would be instrumental in the discouragement and the mental and behavioral remise of the Kurds and ideological allies of the Kurdish movement outside (ibid). In this sense, torture was intended to intimidate, and thereby force to comply, not only the individual, but also the associated groups and even the society at large (Alver, 2012; Zeydanlıoğlu, 2010).

People who “lived through” Diyarbakır Military Prison described it as “*the hell in earth*”. What happened there has changed the lives of countless individuals. While some died in Diyarbakır, others went through “dying for living” (Yetkin & Tanboğa, 1993). Furthermore, many more suffered for the loved ones inside or for the (in multiple senses of the word) lost ones. The community of Kurdish people has also been severely affected. Consequently, both the individual and the collective trauma(s) and efforts at advocacy have been carried over and penetrated the following generations. Although less frequently recognized, Turkish affiliated people and the remaining non-Kurdish society in Turkey are also certainly bound of the effects of the coup and of Diyarbakır Military Prison. Even though it is very important to consider the influences of Diyarbakır Military Prison with regard to all these actors, the focus of this study is first and foremost the survivors, as individuals and as a group, who had been the target of the state terror and who, in turn, (at least mentally) broke off from the state (Westrheim, 2008).

The history of Diyarbakır Military Prison involves both oppression and resistance, both victimization and heroization, and both death and life. Through the emotionally laden experiences lived and narrated, it is deeply ingrained in the memories of the survivors and Kurdish people in general. Although the Kurdish movement was not born and is not constrained to Diyarbakır Military Prison (Fırat & Fırat, 2011), it has surely evolved there, impacting the course of the existing conflict for the decades to come (Demirel, 2003; Gambetti, 2005; Şahin, 2005; Zeydanlıoğlu, 2009, 2010; Westrheim, 2008). Confrontation with the past is critical in determining the future of the problem. The Truth and Justice Commission for Diyarbakır Military Prison was founded to help achieve this motive.

Table 2: *Common Torture Practices Reported by the Political Ex-Prisoners from Diyarbakır Military Prison*

<i>Torture Practice</i>
Forcing to recite ultra-nationalist Turkish songs or slogans
Forced practices of military training
Verbally insulting/ humiliating
Constant surveillance and intimidation
Threatening to rape, harm or kill the prisoner or a relative
Banning speaking in Kurdish during visits by relatives
Banning speaking and eye-contact between prisoners
Solitary confinement
Sensory deprivation (e.g., blindfolding)
Water and food deprivation
Sleep deprivation
Exposing to extreme temperatures of hot or cold
Forcing excessive exercise in extreme temperatures
Stress positions or forcing prisoners to stand for extended amounts of time
Forcing to fit in a small space (e.g., under a berth; altogether); beating, if not achieved
Depriving of medical care and purposeful maltreatment by the medical personnel
Burning with cigarettes
Electric shock
Asphyxia
Mock execution
Severe beating
Falanga
Hanging or Palestinian hanging
Stretching, squeezing, or crushing of limbs and genitals
Extraction of healthy teeth and nails
Hosing and bath tortures
Prompting a trained dog to attack naked prisoners, usually at genitals
Rat torture
Forced feeding of rat
Forced feeding of feces or contaminated (e.g., excrements or sputum of tuberculosis) food/water
Exposure to excrements
Stripping naked
Piling of prisoners on top of each other (frequently, naked)
Forcing to beat; sexually contact, assault, or rape; or urinate on another prisoner
Sexual humiliation, assault, rape
Forcing to witness (see or hear) others being tortured

Zeydanlıoğlu (2009), *Torture and Turkification in the Diyarbakır Military Prison*

1.3. The Truth and Justice Commission for Diyarbakır Military Prison

The Truth and Justice Commission for Diyarbakır Military Prison is a nongovernmental organization founded in 2007 by volunteer activists and professionals. The main purposes of the commission are to reveal the violent history of Diyarbakır Military Prison, to mobilize the

official confrontation with the truth, to advocate for justice on legal and societal grounds, and to contribute to the healing of the survivors, their loved ones, their collective being, and the society as a whole. To realize these purposes, the commission called for the survivors and the witnesses of Diyarbakır Military Prison to present their testimonies and between 2008 and 2010 has reached almost 500 people, mostly ex-prisoners, but also a number of family members and attorneys. It is important to note that those who were on duty at the prison, the court, and the military hospital at the time were also invited, but did not choose to respond.

1.4. Torture

Torture can be defined as the intentional infliction of mental, physical, or sexual pain on a living being or a group of living beings, by a person or persons, acting on will or on the orders of an authority, with the purpose of obtaining a personal or political benefit. It is afflicted both by civilians, for private motivations, and more systematically, by official authorities, for political reasons and also for personal exploitation. The motives of torture include gathering information, forcing confession or incrimination, breaking will and resistance, oppression, inducing fear, indoctrination, inflicting punishment, inducing shame, damaging mentally, and taking revenge (Maercker, Beauducel, & Schützwohl, 2000; Paker, 1996; Suedfeld, 1990).

Torture methods might be predominantly psychological, physical, or sexual; yet they often are not discrete, as an insult in one of these personal domains has the power to penetrate the very self of the individual, impinging on every other. Verbally inflicted torture, which mostly conveys bodily threats, can create agony and fear also experienced as physiological reactions or physical sensations. Similarly, bodily inflicted torture can cause severe agony and fear in the mind of the subject. The body retains a critical significance in the context of torture, as it is the source of both agency and vulnerability (Butler, 2004). It entails being a “subject”, but also bears being an “object”. In other words, “the skin and the flesh expose us

to the gaze of others, [...] to touch and to violence, and bodies put us at risk of becoming the agency and instrument of all these” (ibid, p. 26). The body, which constitutes the person’s physical (and sexual) boundaries, is also directly related to and representative of the mental, social, and relational boundaries. Torture cuts through these boundaries savagely. Accordingly, individuals and groups subjected to torture resist with their bodies. Hunger strikes and death fasts are prominent examples to bodily resistance. Another striking example is self-immolation as a protest and a powerful demonstration of commitment and agency.

The body is political, and so is torture. It is an act of power, domination, and oppression by one party of another, which is rendered unequal by forced conditions. It is suggested that in “modern” times torture is applied mostly by or with the involvement of governments and for the purpose of the preservation of the state (Cassese, 1990; as cited in Zeydanlıoğlu, 2010). When the security of the state is perceived to be threatened by internal or external agents, torture is employed as a state policy, along with other acts of power and oppression (Zeydanlıoğlu, 2010). These acts are not individual, but instead “implicitly sponsored, expected, or at least tolerated by the authorities” (ibid, p. x). Indeed, the powers of authority figures (e.g., Milgram, 1963) and of situational factors reinforcing institutional role identifications (e.g., Stanford Prison Study; Zimbardo, 1971) are well established. Obedience and duty may become the basis of committing violent acts against others. Both by the authority figure(s) and the follower(s), torture is legitimized as a requirement for maintaining law and order, for protecting the state and the citizens, and for keeping the nationally esteemed values such as civilization safe (Zeydanlıoğlu, 2010). Acts of torture have been conducted in at least three quarters, or 141 countries, of the world, between 2010 and 2015 (Amnesty International, 2015).

Seen as a “challenge to the state, its order, security, identity and integrity, whether in political, religious or ethnic forms”, any difference might be a source of conflict and the

subject of systematic torture (Zeydanlıoğlu, 2010, p. 69). The intolerance towards and the renunciation of the “other” seem to be closely related to the intent and the act of torture. The “otherness” is despised and the “others” are transformed into “the enemies of the state”, who pose “a threat to the state and rule of law, responsible for destroying ‘our’ nation and ‘our’ way of life” (ibid, p. 69). Such individuals are deemed “non-persons” deserving of any treatment devoid of humanity (ibid, p. 69). The particular identity, which is different from the prevailing political, ethnic, or religious adherence in the society, is the precise reason of torture (ibid). Yet, most detainees in “modern” Turkey, regardless of their charges, are subject to and under a constant threat of maltreatment (ibid). It has become an “administrative practice” (ibid, p. 68) against the “deviant”, to punish, to defeat, or to correct. In fact, from the 1980 military intervention to 2010, more than a million people have been tortured in Turkey (Türkiye İnsan Hakları Vakfı [Human Rights Foundation Turkey], 2008; as cited in Zeydanlıoğlu, 2010).

1.5. Traumatic Stress

Trauma is by definition overwhelming. Human-induced trauma may be particularly beyond endurance. Among the severest human-induced trauma is torture. Its course may be extensive (Başoğlu, 1992; van der Kolk & McFarlane, 1996).

Torture might inflict pain and injure the person in numerous ways. In addition to the bodily consequences, tremendous mental, social, and relational damages and losses might ensue. Immense and permanent changes in emotion, cognition and memory, as well as in physiological arousal, might emerge (Herman, 1992; as cited in Riolli & Savicki, 2010). When barbarism, that which should be the exception, becomes the norm (Arendt, 1958; as cited in Fırat & Fırat, 2011), the sense of safety and trust might be destroyed severely. In addition, loss of meaning and disbelief might prevail, which, alone, might be challenging to disentangle. Violating the personal boundaries, torture might harm the very self of the

individual, and one's perception of the world and others, thus affecting the individual's being in the world and relating to others. Overall, torture attacks the established safety, attachment, identity-role, existential meaning, and sense of justice of the person (Derrick, 1999). Moreover, regretful acts and guilt and shame might follow (Richey, 2007; Weinstein, Dansky, & Iacopino, 1996), as the resistance of the person might be seriously challenged by debility, dependency, and dread stimulated through torture (Farber, Harlow, & West; 1957). Sadness, disappointment, despair, terror or fear, and anger usually accompany these experiences. Accordingly, anxiety, depression or depressive states, irritability or aggressiveness, emotional lability, self-isolation or social withdrawal, confusion or disorientation, impaired memory and concentration, lack of energy, insomnia, nightmares, and sexual problems might also occur in the aftermath of torture (Goldfeld et al., 1988). Behavioral changes might emerge as well (Everly, 1995). In addition, physical health outcomes, which might be due to various aspects of the traumatic experience or its consequences both in the short and long term, are notable (Schnurr & Green, 2004; as cited in Riolli & Savicki, 2010). Psychological problems ensuing secondarily from the physical disability, loss of social status, and loss of educational or occupational opportunities following torture are also of major significance (Başoğlu et al., 1994a). Subsequently, the primary traumatic events might combine with the secondary issues, as well as general psychosocial stressors, with pre- or post-trauma onset, adding to the ongoing traumatization process (ibid). Moreover, torture may remain in the minds, and in the bodies, of the subjects as it was originally experienced even after many years, which might render its trauma chronic (Miller, 1992; as cited in Başoğlu et al., 1994; Sironi & Branche, 2002).

The torture literature frequently identifies traumatization and subsequent psychopathology, such as PTSD, clinical depression or anxiety, or adjustment disorder, along with severe changes in the personality structure, in individuals subjected to torture. Yet,

according to research, this is not the only course. Some studies point out to the less than expected amounts of mental distress and disability experienced by tortured individuals (e.g., Harel, Kahana ve Kahana, 1988; Shanan, 1989). Furthermore, others indicate an even more favorable course, which involves personal growth and transformation, for instance, in areas of self-perception, interpersonal relationships, and philosophy of life (e.g., Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1996). This does not necessarily exclude the negative experiences associated with the event. In addition, whether any of the changes, negative or positive, are directly related to the experience of torture is another debate. In sum, the stress might be of traumatic intensity or subthreshold, or positive changes that the person attributes to the event of torture might prevail in conscious experience. It is important to remember that trauma has a subjective sense and course; the same event might be experienced and remembered very differently by different people (Başoğlu & Paker, 1995; Van der Kolk & McFarlane, 1996). What is merely a challenge to one person might be severely traumatizing for another; although in case of torture it is difficult to imagine immunity from negative effects.

Conditions of torture, such as the intensity, perceived (un)predictability, perceived (un)controllability, and the relationship between the subject and the source of torture; individual-related factors, involving age, character, and pre-torture wellbeing; and support system, which is related to the social reaction as well as the received support, are considered significant influences in the experienced post-torture stress (Melamed, Melamed, & Bouhoutsos, 1990). In addition, the way individuals (and groups) cope with the traumatic event(s) is of critical importance (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). These factors might explain the conflicting results put forth by various studies of torture with different populations, including refugees, combat veterans and former prisoners of war, genocide survivors, and political activists. Frequently, high rates of psychopathology, such as post-traumatic stress, were found in refugees, combat veterans and former prisoners of war, and concentration camp survivors

(e.g., Miler, 1992; Solkoff, 1992; as cited in Başoğlu et al., 1994b). For instance, PTSD was diagnosed in almost 50% of the participants in various studies with former prisoners of war and concentration camp survivors (Goldstein, van Kammen, Shelly, Miller, & van Kammen, 1987; Kluznick, Speed, van Valkenburg, & Magraw, 1986; Yehuda, Kahana, Schmeidler, Southwick, Wilson, & Giller, 1995; as cited in Yehuda & McFarlane, 1995). Yet, in some studies conducted with violently tortured political activists, relatively low levels of traumatization and psychological morbidity were encountered (e.g., Başoğlu et al., 1994b). It is asserted that “prior knowledge of and preparedness for torture, strong commitment to a cause, immunization against traumatic stress as a result of repeated exposure, and strong social supports appear to have a protective value” (Başoğlu et al., 1994b, p. 76). In addition, being politically aware (Başoğlu et al., 1994b; Mollica, 1992; Ortiz, 2001) and finding an explanation or political meaning for the torture experience seems to facilitate the emotional processing of the trauma (Foa et al., 1992, as cited in Başoğlu & Paker, 1995), which is a critical factor in post-trauma health of the person. Political prisoners are likely to infer the political purposes behind their inhumane treatment (Başoğlu & Paker, 1995). They are also more likely to find a political reason on their behalf for being there and going through that terror (ibid). This might contribute to their positive appraisals of themselves and, hence, to their self-esteem (Başoğlu et al., 1996). Moreover, it is suggested that keeping the political attitude and struggle during imprisonment may help them “transform their captivity into a meaningful experience” (ibid, p. 346). Refugees, genocide survivors, and perhaps even prisoners of war differ from the political prisoners in that respect; they are not necessarily politicized as a group, notwithstanding the individual variation.

Some argue that as they are normal reactions to an abnormal event, diagnosing the intense emotional experiences of torture survivors as related to psychopathology, instead of considering them natural consequences of the severe treatment they bore, is denying the

reality of their experiences (Edkins, 2003). Likewise, it is posited that assigning psychiatric labels to torture survivors is unfairly pathologizing and stigmatizing (Başoğlu, 1992; Edkins, 2003). Furthermore, insisting on psychopathology might be forcing of yet another authority, beholding another dogma, entailing the risk of dismissing the survivors' agency and knowing. It should be remembered that the experience of torture is political (Başoğlu, 1992; Papadopoulos, 2007). Yet, entirely rejecting diagnosis and, hence, existence of possible psychopathologies, is also problematic, as it might mean blind rejection of severe health consequences of torture. It is necessary to establish a common ground, which sincerely recognizes the political aspect of the subjective experiences, memories, and narratives of survivors and, at the same time, provides a helpful explanation and support for the incapacitating problems associated with torture. With the same purposes, it is crucial to see through beyond the "victim" and recognize the "survivor" (Edkins, 2003; Ortiz, 2001).

1.6. Coping

Coping as a particular domain of psychological inquiry, with a focus on mainly external sources of stressors and following conscious processes (Endler & Parker, 1990), emerged in the 1960's and evolved during the 1970's, together with the increasing interest in the phenomenon of stress (Folkman & Moskowitz, 2004; Lazarus, 1993). By the early 1980's the scientific study of coping had expanded and since then a growing number of empirical works and measures have been produced (e.g., Billings & Moos, 1981; Folkman & Lazarus, 1980; Pearlin & Schooler, 1978).

The current understanding of coping is that it is "a complex, multidimensional process that is sensitive both to the environment and its demands and resources and to personality dispositions that influence the appraisal of stress and resources" (Folkman & Moskowitz, 2004, p. 747). Stress can be defined as "a relationship between the person and the environment that is appraised by the person as taxing or exceeding his or her resources and as

endangering wellbeing” (Folkman et al., 1986b, p. 572). Stressors move individuals to cope with behavioral demands and with the emotional reactions that are usually evoked by them (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

It is posited that stressors might impede an individual’s efforts at coping and readjustment, “depleting their physical or psychological resources, in turn increasing the probability that illness, injury, or disease or that psychological distress or disorder [or social disability] will follow” (Brown & Harris, 1978; Dohrenwend & Dohrenwend, 1974; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Pearlin, 1989; as cited in Thoits, 1995, parenthesis added). Indeed, the accumulation of research on coping demonstrates the significance of coping in mediating between stressful events and negative health outcomes (Endler & Parker, 1990; Folkman & Lazarus, 1980). At the same time, the concept of adaptation, which emphasizes the resiliency of the individual (or groups), adds to the significance of the inquiry of coping (ibid).

A widely accepted theory holds that the person and the environment are in an ongoing relationship, in which they mutually influence and are influenced by each other (Folkman & Lazarus, 1980). Two bidirectional processes are suggested to mediate the relationship between the person and the environment and the immediate or long-term outcomes of this relationship: appraisal and coping (Folkman & Lazarus, 1980, 1984). Appraisal can be defined as “a process through which the person evaluates whether a particular encounter with the environment is relevant to his or her well-being and, if so, in what way” (Folkman et al., 1986b, p. 572). Primary appraisal refers to the person’s assessment of the situation and whether there are risks involved in it (ibid). These stressful appraisals can be grouped as “harm-loss, which refers to damage that has already occurred; threat, which refers to harm or loss that has not yet occurred but is anticipated; and challenge, which refers to an anticipated opportunity for mastery or gain” (Folkman & Lazarus, 1980, p. 223). Secondary appraisal is the assessment of whether the harm or loss can be prevented, the situation can be countered,

or any benefit can be established, and if so, which ways to respond exist (Folkman et al., 1986b).

Stress appraisals are often accompanied with intense negative emotions (Folkman & Moskowitz, 2004) and one of the primary functions of coping responses is “to down-regulate negative emotions that are stressful in and of themselves and may be interfering with instrumental forms of coping” (ibid, p. 747). Thus, coping is strongly related with emotion regulation, and particularly with distress (ibid). It is posited that, to the extent that emotion regulation is directed at relieving negative emotions or fostering positive emotions consciously, it can be considered under the concept of coping (Folkman & Moskowitz, 2004; Littleton et al., 2007). Emotions are considered to be of critical importance throughout a stressful encounter, also as an “outcome” of coping efforts, as a “response” to a change, or as a “result” of reappraising due to any change in the process (Folkman & Moskowitz, 2004). They are unique sources of information about an individual, the surrounding environment, and their transaction (Lazarus, 1993).

In relatively recent research, the presence of positive emotions in stress and coping processes is identified, both in terms of their roles and as outcomes of these processes (Folkman & Moskowitz, 2004). A number of studies reported that significant positive emotions might be experienced, even under the most stressful conditions and when the individual is profoundly distressed (ibid). The co-occurrence of positive and negative emotions during the stress process is suggested to be indicative of “a degree of independence” of these emotions, meaning different patterns of coping might be influential in the experience of each (ibid). It is also argued that individuals “consciously seek out positive meaningful events or infuse ordinary events with positive meaning to increase their positive affect, which in turn provides respite from distress and thereby helps replenish resources and sustain further coping” (ibid, p. 766)

Coping is a response to appraisals (Carver et al., 1989; Folkman & Lazarus, 1980; Folkman et al., 1986a, 1986b) and emotions (Lazarus, 1993). Yet, each continues to affect one another all through the course of a stressful encounter (Folkman & Lazarus, 1988). Although conceptualized and operationalized quite differently throughout the literature, a mostly agreed-upon and inclusive definition of coping would be “the person's cognitive and behavioral efforts to manage (reduce, minimize, master, or tolerate) the *internal and external* demands of the person-environment transaction that is appraised as taxing or exceeding the person's resources” (Folkman et al., 1986b, p. 572, emphasis added) and in the context of a situation or condition that is appraised as personally significant (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Some researchers viewed coping as a style, involving personality traits and dispositions, while others viewed it as a process, involving varying responses to ever-changing person-environment relationship (Folkman & Lazarus, 1980; Lazarus, 1993). Although stability is more frequently recognized, and personality traits, coping dispositions, goals, intentions, and beliefs may indeed influence situational coping (Carver et al., 1989; Lazarus, 1993), processes of appraisal and coping seem to be more variable than stable (Folkman et al., 1980, 1986).

In any stressful encounter there exist more than a single way to respond (Thoits, 1995). This has several meanings. To begin with, people usually use more than one way of coping when dealing with stressors (Folkman & Lazarus, 1980). Moreover, there are alternative ways of reacting when faced with an adverse event (ibid). Different individuals might react to the same stressor differently. Even the same person might resort to different ways of coping at different times depending on the conditions. The alterations of threat and challenge emotions, which emerge under ambiguity in particular, are indicative of the changes in an individual's subjective experience and multiple meanings attributed to any encounter at any given time (Folkman & Lazarus, 1988). Examining a stressful interaction without acknowledging the change the process involves is inaccurate and, as it fails to recognize the

individuals' ability to "change troubled person-environment relationships through coping" it is also considered an understatement of human adaptation (Folkman & Lazarus, 1985).

There are two predominantly identified functions of coping in the literature: problem-focused coping and emotion-focused coping (Folkman & Lazarus, 1980). While the function of problem-focused coping is to change the relationship with the environment, the function of emotion-focused coping is to alter either the way distressing relationship with the environment is experienced or the relational meaning of the event or the situation, which can then help alleviate the stress even though the distressing conditions remain (Folkman & Lazarus, 1980; Lazarus, 1993). Problem-focused coping may predominate when people feel they have some control in managing or changing the situation, whereas emotion-focused coping may predominate when people feel all they can do is to endure (*ibid*). In some studies, an absolute distinction is assumed between problem-focused and emotion-focused coping; however, a major tenet of process-oriented coping research is that any coping process has simultaneously both functions (Folkman & Lazarus, 1980). If any consensus can be established in the literature, it is the distinction of problem-focused and emotion-focused coping (Endler & Parker, 1990). Yet, although its initial role in coping research is significant, this distinction might be too simple (Carver et al., 1989). Problem-focused and emotion-focused coping are not "conceptually clear, mutually exclusive, or exhaustive" (Skinner et al., 2003, p. 227). Furthermore, this broad distinction "runs the risk of masking important differences within categories" (Folkman & Moskowitz, 2004, p. 752). The fact that some concepts are "inherently fused" adds to the problem, as it renders coping difficult to categorize (Folkman & Lazarus, 1985, p. 167).

In addition to the problem-focused and emotion-focused coping, meaning-focused and social coping, both of which are regarded as critical ways of coping, are frequently identified in the literature. Meaning-focused coping involves responses that change the meaning or the

appraisal of the stress (Pearlin & Schooler, 1978). Although emotion-focused coping is considered to include the same function, many view meaning-focused coping as a separate way of coping due to its distinct quality. An influential idea in the literature of stress, and one that is related to meaning-focused coping, is that traumatic events or life crises may be also followed by positive changes through meaning attribution. With regard to social coping, although it is well established that the presence or absence of social support at times of stress moderates the effects of stress on psychological and physical health (e.g., De Longis et al., 1988; Thoits, 1995), “the social embeddedness of coping processes” is as much a matter of debate as the personal efforts to coping (Berg, Meegan, & Deviney, 1998; as cited in Skinner et al., 2003, p. 230). Although coping is mostly viewed as an individual or, less frequently, as an interpersonal phenomenon, it also might be collective in nature (Thoits, 1995; Wong, 1993). There are many other distinctions of coping in the literature, such as approach and avoidance (e.g., Littleton et al., 2007) or behavioral and cognitive. The former might be better thought as complementary rather than contradictory processes (Skinner et al., 2003). The latter is also problematic as any coping response may be engaged in through various modalities (ibid).

The coping literature lacks a well-established nomenclature, which is needed in order to accumulate and discuss findings from different studies (Skinner et al., 2003). It is quite remarkable that in numerous category systems developed in coping research, it is difficult to find a matching approach to categorization. In a comprehensive review study (Skinner et al., 2003), in which more than 100 category systems with 400 identified ways of coping in total were evaluated, it was found that none of them involved the same set of categories. A major challenge in coping research lies in the fact that “coping is not a specific behavior that can be unequivocally observed or a particular belief that can be reliably reported; rather, it is an organizational construct used to encompass the myriad actions individuals use to deal with

stressful experiences” (ibid; p. 217). In addition, “there is not a fixed number of adaptive processes, families of coping, ways of coping, or coping instances” (ibid, p. 218). Moreover, there are challenging issues regarding measurement and effectiveness that necessitate further discussions (Folkman & Moskowitz, 2004).

1.7. The Aims of the Present Thesis

This thesis is concerned with the post-traumatic stress and coping manifestations of the political ex-prisoners who were subjected to unimaginable torture practices during their imprisonment in Diyarbakır Military Prison after the Turkish military coup d'état of 1980 for a course of time between 1980 and 1984.

Studying torture has multiple functions, which are also simultaneously retrospective and prospective. First of all, it helps survivors of torture, their kin, and healthcare professionals who work with them, in the process of working through the trauma. Moreover, studying torture with a consideration for political inquiry advocates a stance against violation of human rights (Başoğlu, 1992), which provides solidarity with survivors, their families, and their communities, while also helps the advancement of human rights. Furthermore, it fosters historical confrontation, to which many societies are highly resistant, and thereby, it disrupts the “collective denial” that re-victimizes the survivors of political repression and torture (Fischman, 1991, p. 181). Studying torture also contributes to challenging the “fear, insecurity, lack of trust, and submission to repressive and authoritarian structures [that] became a way of life” (Lira, 1989; as cited in Fischman, 1991; parenthesis added). Thus, such an inquiry not only enables an understanding of the past, but also benefits the future of the problem. All these functions, either directly or indirectly, have therapeutic implications. Healing the political ameliorates the psychological and healing the psychological ameliorates the political – for the individual, for the communities, and for the society as a whole. This thesis aims to make a modest contribution in these regards.

2. General Method

2.1. Data Source

The current study is based on the interviews selected from the database of the Truth and Justice Commission for Diyarbakır Military Prison (2008-2010).

2.2. Procedure

The commission operated through a network of volunteers, who assumed responsibility in different phases of the project. A group of volunteers, all of who received training in prior (given by clinical psychologist Murat Paker [MP]) with regard to psychological considerations, conducted the interviews. The interviews, which were videotaped, were then transcribed by another group of volunteers, linked with the commission. All information was collected as a database, which has provided a source for varying academic purposes, as of the present thesis. The studies integrated in this thesis were formerly undertaken as separate clinical psychology theses, which were further analyzed and integrated in the present one. All were supervised by the same supervisor (MP).

The interviews were conducted between 2008 and 2010 in the following cities, where the participants resided at the time: Urfa, Antep, Mardin, Diyarbakır, Batman, Hakkari, Siirt, Mersin, Adana, Osmaniye, İzmir, Ankara, and İstanbul. Closed and intentionally secure places were arranged for the interviews, with the help of local cooperators. The participants were also given several forms by the commission. As considerable number of forms remained incomplete, in the present studies, only the demographic information obtained was used in addition to the interviews.

Before beginning, participants were provided information regarding the structure and the purpose of the commission. They were notified about the ethical rights they possessed as participants, such as the option to take a break or discontinue if they felt unable or unwilling

to go on at any point. Their informed consent was sought to obtain the forms, to conduct and videotape the interviews, and to use their information anonymously in relevant future studies.

Training Procedure

The volunteer academics and activists who participated in the work of the commission received training in 2008 in prior to conducting the interviews. The training involved introducing/establishing the interview protocol and providing psychoeducative information and guidance essential for careful and effective administration of the interviews. The following domains were covered in detail:

- The aim of the interviews
- Possible psychological profiles of the survivors
- PTSD manifestations
- Reactions to trauma
- The structure of the interviews
- Listening skills for receiving the testimonies
- Critical questions that should be addressed to the participants
- Positions that the participants may unconsciously attribute to the interviewers
- Possible emotional reactions that the interviewers may experience
- Referrals, when needed
- Self-care

The training was given by MP, who was also the supervisor of the present thesis and the former ones this thesis comprises. MP is a clinical psychologist, a psychotherapist, and a doctor of medicine by education. He graduated from Istanbul University Istanbul Faculty of Medicine in 1985 with a bachelor's degree in medicine, from Boğaziçi University (Istanbul, Turkey) in 1992 with an M.A. in clinical psychology, and from New School for Social Research (New York, USA) in 1999 with a Ph.D. in clinical psychology. While in the USA,

he worked as a psychotherapist and as the clinical director in a foundation that provided psychosocial support services to trauma survivors, until he returned to Turkey in 2005. Since then, he works as the founding director of the M.A. Program in Clinical Psychology in Istanbul Bilgi University and also as a part-time psychotherapist in private practice. His primary areas of interest and expertise are psychotraumatology and psycho-politics, and psychoanalytic, particularly relational, psychotherapies. He has written and contributed to many articles. He is also the author of three books and the editor of many others on various subjects in clinical psychology.

Interview Procedure

The interviews were of semi-structured nature. During the interviews several aspects of before, after, and the course of torture-laden imprisonment period were sought. The exploration began with a focus on the life of the individual prior to the imprisonment, with the individual's political background being queried. Then, daily life in the prison was explored, during which particular attention was given to the experiences of torture. Later, the emphasis was directed on how the individual perceived oneself to be affected by and on how one has been coping through these processes. Information regarding the names of fellow inmates and persons of authority or responsibility who had been there at the time were also sought.

The duration of the interviews were an hour and a half on average. Each interview was conducted by one or two interviewers, who were, based on availability, randomly matched with the participants. Almost all interviews were conducted in Turkish. Only the interviews that were conducted in Turkish, fully transcribed, and understandable were used in the present studies. The interviews were further examined and eliminated, and selections were limited to the ones that were compatible with the interview protocol. In each of the selected interviews, psychological aspects of imprisonment and torture were either openly questioned or were spontaneously revealed. Some of the critical questions directed at the participants in a

standard interview are demonstrated below in Table 3. It should be noted that as the interviews were of semi-structured nature, the individual interviews showed some variation in terms of content and order.

Table 3: *Questions Addressed to the Political Ex-Prisoners in a Standard Interview*

When, for how long, and exactly where/in which wards did you stay in Diyarbakır Military Prison?
For which accusations were you confined?
Did you have a political background, interest, or affiliation prior to the process?
What sort of (torture) practices were you subjected to during your imprisonment?
What sort of (torture) practices did you witness others being subjected to during your imprisonment?
Who administered these practices? Do you remember their names and tasks/responsibilities?
Have you experienced any physical/bodily or psychological health problems during or after being exposed to or witnessing these (torture) practices?
How have your experiences in Diyarbakır Military Prison affected you/your life?
How have you coped with these influences?

Data Selection and Coding Procedure

In Study I, two former clinical psychology theses on post-traumatic stress of in total 80 political ex-prisoners from Diyarbakır Military Prison were synthesized. The first of these was conducted by Sevda Arslan in 2011 with 30 participants and the second was conducted by Zeynep Güney in 2016 with 50 participants. Both used existing interviews selected from the database of the Truth and Justice Commission for Diyarbakır Military Prison, which they evaluated with content analysis. After close readings of the interviews, trauma-related discourses and acts of the participants, when present, were coded as post-traumatic stress manifestations, utilizing PTSD criteria outlined in DSM-IV (American Psychiatric Association, 1994). The current thesis integrated and reinterpreted the results of these studies.

In Study II, three former clinical psychology theses on ways of coping of in total 94 political ex-prisoners from Diyarbakır Military Prison were synthesized. The first of these

studies was conducted by İrem Doğan in 2011 with 15 participants, the second was conducted by Günseli Yarkin in 2013 with 30 participants, and the third was conducted by Ayşe Dicle Gençer in 2014 with 50 participants. (One interview was mistakenly used twice in these samples; the extra was eliminated in this study). All used existing interviews selected from the database of the Truth and Justice Commission for Diyarbakır Military Prison. After close readings of the interviews, Doğan (2011) proposed various coping efforts of the participants: Resistance, political awareness and giving meaning, political determination, obeying the torturer and accepting the conditions, social support, group belonging, self-sacrifice, problem-focused active need regulation, keeping hope alive, pursuit of justice, self-expression, humor, positive reinterpretation and growth, dehumanization and degradation of the torturer, affective disengagement, mental disengagement, behavioral disengagement, rationalization, suppression, denial, somatization, and death wish. Yarkin (2013) identified two more: social comparison and positive affect. Gençer further added two: dissociation and religious coping. In the present study, these previously identified ways of coping were reconsidered, and some were grouped together as they were regarded linked with each other and reflecting aspects of the same phenomenon and some were reconceptualized and renamed, while others remained as before but reevaluated in terms of content. One way of coping, somatization, was eliminated from analysis due to its controversy in the specific context of coping. In sum, ways of coping were re-categorized as: political awareness and stance (including resistance, political awareness and giving meaning, and political determination); social coping (including social support, group belonging, and self-sacrifice); obedience/acceptance; belief, hope, fantasy (including pursuit of justice, hope, and other future-oriented fantasies); regulation of needs or resources (previously conceptualized with a focus solely on needs and named accordingly as problem-focused active need regulation); humor; positive affect; positive growth; self-expression; social comparison; dehumanization of the torturer; disengagement

(comprising all modalities of disengagement); rationalization; motivated forgetting (previously named as suppression); denial; dissociation; death wish; and religious coping. All content relevant to coping was re-read and re-categorized.

This thesis allowed for both set of studies to be integrated separately in themselves and also to be discussed in tandem, making it possible to offer insight into the related phenomena of post-traumatic stress and coping in the particular context of torture and political identity.

3. Study I: Post-traumatic Stress

3.1. Method

3.1.1. Participants

This study includes 80 political ex-prisoners, who survived extreme torture in Diyarbakır Military Prison, where they were confined after the coup, for a course of time between 1980 and 1984.

Sample Characteristics

All participants were from Eastern Turkey and almost all were of Kurdish identity. All were male. Their mean age was 51.5. Most of the participants were married and some had children. The level of education of the participants varied; the majority constituted of high school (32.5%) and elementary school (27.5%) graduates, respectively. Perceived economic status of the participants ranged between low to middle.

3.1.2. Data Analysis

The data was evaluated with content analysis. After close readings of the interviews, trauma-related discourses and acts of the participants, when present, were coded as post-traumatic stress manifestations, utilizing PTSD criteria (criteria B, C, and D) outlined in DSM-IV (American Psychiatric Association, 1994). The primary analyses synthesized in this study were conducted in the previous works of Arslan (2011) and Güney (2016).

3.2. Results: Post-traumatic Stress Manifestations

Table 4: *Frequencies and Percentages of the Political Ex-Prisoners Reporting or Showing Manifestations of Post-traumatic Stress Compatible with the Symptoms of PTSD (DSM-IV)*

Symptoms	Frequencies (N=80)	Percentages
Symptom Cluster B: Persistent Re-experiencing		
Recurrent and intrusive distressing recollections of the events (e.g., images, thoughts, or perceptions)	35	43.8
Recurrent distressing dreams of the events	12	15.0
Acting or feeling as if the events are recurring	25	31.3
Intense psychological stress at exposure to cues	39	48.8
Physiological reactivity on exposure to cues	6	7.5
Meeting at least 1 symptom in Symptom Cluster B	63	78.8
Symptom Cluster C: Persistent Avoidance & Numbing of General Responsiveness		
Efforts to avoid thoughts, feelings, or conversations associated with the trauma	23	28.8
Efforts to avoid activities, places, or people that arouse recollections of the trauma	11	13.8
Inability to recall an important aspect of the trauma	1	1.3
Markedly diminished interest or participation in previously pursued activities	4	5.0
Feeling of detachment and estrangement	23	28.8
Restricted range of affect	5	6.3
Sense of a foreshortened future	15	18.8
Meeting at least 3 symptoms in Symptom Cluster C	9	11.3
Subthreshold: Meeting at least 1 symptom	48	60.0
Symptom Cluster D: Increased Arousal		
Difficulty falling or staying asleep	11	13.8
Irritability or outbursts of anger	24	30.0
Difficulty concentrating	4	5.0
Hypervigilance	4	5.0
Exaggerated startle response	1	1.3
Meeting at least 2 symptoms in Symptom Cluster D	11	13.8
Subthreshold: Meeting at least 1 symptom	28	35.0
Probable diagnosis		
Meeting all criteria	2	2.5
Meeting subthreshold level	18	22.5
Number of PTSD Symptoms		
0 symptom	4	5.0
1 symptom	15	18.8
2 symptoms	20	25.0
3 symptoms	15	18.8
4 symptoms	5	6.3
5 symptoms	11	13.8
6+ symptoms	10	12.5

DSM-IV, American Psychiatric Association (1994)

The interviews revealed that, although very few (2.5%) reported or showed stress manifestations in line with the criteria for a full diagnosis at the time of the interview, at least more than one in every five participants (22.5%) suggested subthreshold PTSD, or in other words, revealed minimum one symptom of re-experiencing, avoidance, and hyperarousal each. Many more revealed a certain problem or difficulty that continued to affect their lives. Frequencies and percentages of the participants reporting or showing stress manifestations compatible with the symptoms of PTSD (DSM-IV) can be seen in Table 4. As all participants met the criteria A and almost all met the criterion E, and the criterion F could not be adequately assessed due to the limitations of the available data, the analysis focused solely on criteria B, C, and D of PTSD.

Symptom Cluster B

Post-traumatic stress manifestations compatible with symptoms of re-experiencing were encountered in the majority (78.8%) of the participants, as shown in Table 4. Indeed, overall, the most common symptoms of PTSD (DSM-IV) suggested among the participants were of persistent re-experiencing. Intense psychological stress upon exposure to internal and external cues that symbolize or resemble an aspect of the traumatic events and recurrent and intrusive distressing recollections were the most significant manifestations, respectively.

Even after so many years, traumatic memories from Diyarbakır Military Prison were re-experienced through distressing images, thoughts, or perceptions (43.8%), such as scenes or sounds of torture, and/or through nightmares or distressing dreams (15%), and for many, as if occurring in the present (31.3%), and causing intense psychological stress (48.8%). Some also reported or showed physiological reactivity upon exposure to internal and external cues that reminded of their traumatic experiences (7.5%). Remembering is part of the emotional processing of the trauma, yet it may also be a sign of incapacitating traumatic stress.

Due to the excessive and prolonged trauma they were subjected to, many still felt and acted as if the traumatic experience was ongoing or the threat was ever-present:

“There were guardians who were watching us from the observation area. They used to beat the ones who broke the attention position during their sleep until they took their position back. We had to lie in the attention position at all times. I still lie in bed the same way. I still lie on my back, hands locked... It’s been 20 years, but it’s still the same.” (Participant #23)

Because the pain experienced in the now was still very much the same as the pain experienced then, remembering or talking about their agonizing memories was very hard to endure for some:

“I don’t know... That psychological pressure is still on me, you know. I feel like the words stick in my throat when I talk about it... I couldn’t get over with it.” (Participant #7)

“There, Ö. (comrade) used to sing ‘makber’ very well. I still play it time to time... but I loose myself whenever I play it, so they (significant others) don’t allow me to.” (Participant #23)

Accordingly, some of the participants felt extremely distressed, and sometimes experienced accompanying physiological reactivity, as they narrated their stories:

“When I was talking about it, mmm... I remember something (*his hand begins to tremble*)... and I choke... It’s very difficult, very difficult to tell, you know...” (Participant #11)

“I really don’t want to talk about it now. When I talk about it, I feel noxious, I feel like throwing up.” (Participant #29)

Symptom Cluster C

Post-traumatic stress manifestations compatible with symptoms of persistent avoidance and numbing of general responsiveness were frequently reported or showed by the participants. Although only 11.3% revealed stress manifestations in line with the criteria of three or more Cluster C symptoms as indicated by DSM-IV, when the subthreshold level of one symptom was considered this percentage increased to 60%. In other words, more than

half of the participants demonstrated at least a single way of persistent avoidance and numbing.

Many participants put efforts into avoiding thoughts, feelings, or conversations associated with the trauma. Accordingly, at some point during the interview, many felt reluctant to go on with what they were telling and refrained from talking or giving details about certain emotionally loaded memories (28.8%):

“I have stayed there for 37 days. That torture over there... It’s something inexpressible. I don’t know how to begin with, what to tell, you know... Talking about it – that’s another issue... Then, telling all the details, you know... There are too many details and I cannot possibly convey all.” (Participant #29)

In addition to the unbearability, unimaginability of their torture experiences – and as importantly, of their survival – contributed to their silence:

“Let me tell you something. After I was released I didn’t tell anyone about it – not even to my closest friend. I couldn’t tell. I couldn’t dare to. Why not? Because when you begin to talk about it, you question yourself – ‘Did we really go through this?’... Even though we did... Because who experienced this, cannot survive... Well, how could I survive despite such experiences? I’m afraid that if I tell, they’ll think that I’m lying, and they’ll be just right.” (Participant #23)

Some participants tried not to engage with stimuli, such as activities, places, or people, associated with and reminding of the traumatic memories (13.8%). At times, they even refrained from seeking the help they most needed:

“You experience a trauma, and then, sometimes, you question yourself; sometimes, you lose your connection with the reality. When you are released (from the prison), you experience an adaptation problem, and you just want to forget about them (what happened). When you want to forget, you don’t go to a doctor and seek treatment... For instance, there were many scars on my feet. I had been exposed to electric torture many times and I had many permanent burn scars on my feet and in the rest of my body. They stopped hurting after a while, but in a

medical examination it would be easy to tell that they are burn scars... You can't just go to a doctor and say 'You know, I was tortured and beaten in the prison, given electricity, my ribs were broken, the flesh on my fingers was smashed, my arm was broken, and my head too, and this and that'..." (Participant #19)

Limiting social contact was quite common and many reported feelings of estrangement and detachment from others (28.8%):

"Its effects... I don't like being in the society... I sometimes tell to my wife that I'm being unfair. I'm not happy, I can't be happy. Do I have a complaint about my wife? No, I don't. Is there anyone who can love me more that she does? No, it's not about that!.. I've got two kids. [...] It's (should be) a source of happiness for a person... I'm a retired teacher... and my wife works. I mean we don't have a serious economic problem either. Yet, am I happy? No, I'm not... I don't go out of home. I stay away from people and crowds as much as possible. I don't like it." (Participant #23)

The destruction of trust, the loss of meaning, being shunned by the society and sometimes even by their loved ones, feeling different from others, and the immense sadness and/or anger all contributed to social avoidance. In addition, getting used to and then feeling the lack of the collective life in prison, which was a powerful source of support, solidarity, and belongingness, had a crucial role:

"Of course, the first – the main – problem is about communicating with people, establishing a dialogue with others, expressing yourself in the society. [...] Socialization used to be the main tradition for us (in the prison). [...] After I was released, realizing that collectivity was superseded by individualization, that engraved us. That engraved us. It really did. We had serious difficulties in adjusting ourselves to individualization all of a sudden. We still do. I couldn't get over them completely." (Participant # 29)

Though much less frequently, some participants showed or reported a restricted range of affect (6.3%) and/or had diminished interest or participation in previously pursued activities (5%), including family gatherings. A sense of foreshortened future was also encountered

(15%) due to their severe losses, which seemed impossible to be compensated, and the disbelief and the despair that prevailed. Although problems of memory are common among trauma survivors, only a single participant (1.3%) showed an inability to recall an important aspect of the traumatic experience. More frequently, the participants intently refrained from talking about what they could not forget.

Symptom Cluster D

The participants also showed or reported stress manifestations suggestive of persistent symptoms of increased arousal, although less commonly than the symptoms of persistent re-experiencing and persistent avoidance and numbing of general responsiveness. 13.8% of the participants revealed stress manifestations in line with the criteria of two or more Cluster D symptoms, while 35% indicated subthreshold level of one symptom. In other words, more than one third of the participants experienced some sort of increased arousal.

Participants who reported or showed increased arousal mostly complained about irritability and outbursts of anger (30%):

“I feel irritable all of a sudden. It still comes up on occasions, you know... I lose my temper. I used to be pretty tolerant, but I feel like suffocated now. It’s probably related to the prison.”
(Participant #7)

“My health problems are... I have outbursts of anger. In fact, I’m very calm in general, but I have outbursts of anger.” (Participant #21)

Sleep difficulties were encountered in more than every one of ten participants (13.8%), as falling or staying asleep can be very difficult in the lack of a sense of security and a positive state of mind:

“We weren’t able to sleep at nights in dread that someone would take us and torment. It’s still the same for me.” (Participant #16)

“I wake up at night and pace back and forth.” (Participant #27)

Although less frequently, some suffered from incapacitating anxiety and hypervigilance (5%):

“What they did in the process of trials after our release was to make us constantly feel that fear. I was taken into custody arbitrarily so many times. We were taken into custody for the most foolish things... yet we always felt that fear. [...] We always lived in fear... and we always live in fear of being recaptured.” (Participant #7)

Concentration difficulties (5%) were also reported by a few. Only one participant (1.3%) showed exaggerated startle response. The low frequency of this symptom might be related to the time passed since the traumatic events.

3.3. Discussion

This study aimed to explore the posttraumatic stress experiences of the political ex-prisoners imprisoned and tortured in Diyarbakır Military Prison after the Turkish military coup d'état of 1980. The narratives of 80 political ex-prisoners, taken from their semi-structured interviews, were evaluated through content analysis. Their trauma-related discourses and acts were identified and post-traumatic stress manifestations were coded utilizing PTSD criteria outlined in DSM-IV (American Psychiatric Association, 1994).

The criteria for the diagnosis of PTSD in DSM-IV required the person to be subjected to or witnessed an event involving serious injury, death, or threat and experiencing responses that involve helplessness, intense fear, or terror (Criteria A); and manifesting the following, for a month minimum (Criterion E), with accompanying clinical distress or impairment in functioning (Criterion F): At least one symptom of persistent re-experiencing (Criteria B), which include having recurrent and intrusive distressing recollections of the event, having recurrent nightmares or distressing dreams of the event, acting or feeling as if the traumatic event is recurring, feeling intense psychological distress at exposure to internal and external cues that symbolize or resemble an aspect of the traumatic event, and showing physiological reactions upon encountering internal or external reminders of trauma; at least three symptoms of persistent avoidance and numbing of general responsiveness (Criteria C), which include refraining from thoughts, feelings, or conversations associated with the trauma, refraining

from activities, places, or people that are reminding of the trauma, having an inability to recall an important aspect of the trauma, showing markedly diminished interest or participation in previously pursued activities, experiencing a restricted range of affect, and having a sense of a foreshortened future; and at least two persistent symptoms of increased arousal (Criteria D), which include sleep problems, irritability or outbursts of anger, difficulties in concentration, hypervigilance, and exaggerated startle response.

The long-term negative mental health problems related to torture are repeatedly indicated in the trauma literature. Many difficulties or impairments are found to occur in the aftermath of being subjected to torture. PTSD seems to be the most common psychological outcome. Post-traumatic stress is apparently even more prevalent when the assessment involves subthreshold- or symptom-levels. Only 2.5% of the participants in this study reported or showed post-traumatic stress manifestations in line with the criteria for a full diagnosis of PTSD at the time of the interview; yet, when subthreshold PTSD was considered, that increased to 22.5%. In other words, almost 30 years after the primary traumatic experiences, and even in the absence of a systematic inquiry, many participants still exhibited post-traumatic stress at least in one way in terms of re-experiencing, avoidance and numbing, and hyperarousal each. Furthermore, overall only 5% of the participants did not report or show any manifestations; the remaining 95% all revealed at least one. Thus, certain stress experiences seemed to have become chronic for almost every participant.

Stress manifestations compatible with symptoms of persistent re-experiencing were encountered in the majority (78.8%) of the participants. As a cluster, it was the most common one. Re-experiencing through intrusive distressing recollections was extensive (43.8%). Images and sounds of torture still haunted many of the participants. Remembering agonizing memories in the initial aftermath of trauma is common and not necessarily an indicator of PTSD (Shalev, 1992). Yet when these memories, which are, indeed, truly difficult to process,

cannot be processed and integrated adequately, post-traumatic stress is sustained. As emotional memories are retained associatively, they can be easily prompted any time the individual encounters with a cue (van der Kolk, 1999). Unlike recollections, although recurrent and distressing dreams or nightmares are well noted in the trauma literature, only 15% of participants reported having them. Yet, this might be due to the participants understanding of what is expected from them in the interview, i.e. narrating the “real” events. They might have considered nightmares or dreams as irrelevant to the subject. Like recollections, having dreams in the aftermath of trauma may serve to integration. However, persistent dreadful dreams or nightmares that continue for extensive periods may also indicate a serious difficulty. Another aspect of post-traumatic re-experiencing is that in excessive and/or prolonged trauma, the person may continue to feel and act as if the traumatic experience is ongoing or the threat is ever-present. When the traumatic memories cannot be adequately accommodated into the existing mental schemas, the perspectives of time and context are lost and reminders of the trauma are perceived as current threats (Ehlers, Hackmann, & Michael, 2004). 31.3% of participants reported acting and/or feeling as if the traumatic events were recurring upon encountering trauma related stimuli. Some reported or showed physiological reactivity when they remembered or were reminded of their traumatic experiences (7.5%). Trembling or feeling noxious were some of the most common physiological reactions encountered. These reactions might endure as long as the traumatic memories remain unprocessed and the trauma continues to be re-experienced in the here-and-now. Almost half of the participants reported or showed intense psychological distress upon encountering with internal or external cues that symbolize or resemble an aspect of trauma (48.8%). In fact, it was the most prevalent manifestation of post-traumatic stress within the group. Accordingly, for many of the participants, talking about their experiences was stressful. It is common for survivors of torture to feel that they can neither talk about their

trauma nor be understood (Sironi & Branche, 2002). What they have been through feels unavailable for communication (Edkins, 2003).

Avoidance and numbing may provide respite from the overwhelming intrusive recollections of the event. Although only 11.3% of the participants reported or showed stress manifestations in line with the criteria of three or more symptoms for avoidance and numbing, when the subthreshold level of one symptom was considered this percentage arose to 60%. In other words, more than half of the participants revealed at least a single form of persistent avoidance and numbing. It might be assumed that those who chose to participate in such an interview, which necessitated remembering, talking about, and possibly encountering others from their traumatic past, relied less on avoidance in comparison to those who did not participate. Moreover, the political identities and efforts of the participants are likely to have encouraged confrontation with and expression of such experiences, and thus, decreased inclination towards avoidance (Maercker & Schützwohl, 1997). Still, many participants strived to avoid thoughts, feelings, or conversations (28.8%) and/or stimuli, such as activities, places, or people that were associated with the trauma (13.8%). Limiting social contact was quite common and many reported feelings of estrangement and detachment from others (28.8%). Some had major difficulties in adapting back to the life outside and to the society, and even to their relationships with their intimate others. A major reason behind this alienation is related to the fact that even their closest ones may “lack an experiential base on which to relate to them” (Fischman & Ross, 1990; as cited in Fischman, 1991, p. 180). Another reason might be that they feel unprotected and uncared by the society (Fischman, 1991), which feeds anger and resentment. Strong negative emotions of guilt or shame, and living in the shadow of the unhealed trauma seem as important. It seems that, although not all, many “survivors of torture have learned to live in an isolated situation, without dialogue” (Torres, 1986; as cited in Fischman, 1991, p. 180). At times, the need for avoidance even

interfered with seeking help for the troubling physical and psychological health problems that emerged during or after imprisonment. Individuals who are subjected to torture may, indeed, feel reluctant to approach health professionals and institutions (Fischman, 1991) due to past abuse by institutional authorities and ensuing distrust. The fact that medical personnel in Diyarbakır Military Prison were also actors of violence contributed to the survivors' uneasiness towards and tendency to avoid healthcare providers. Along with the avoidance of thoughts, feelings, or conversations and activities, places, or people that were associated with the trauma, and the feelings of estrangement and detachment, a sense of foreshortened future, or a disbelief in a "normal" life, was also encountered (15%) among participants. Their losses were massive, and so was their despair. Though much less frequently, some participants revealed a restricted range of affect (6.3%), particularly regarding joy, love, or intimacy, and/or had diminished interest in previously pursued activities (5%). Although problems of memory are common among trauma survivors, only a single participant (1.3%) showed an inability to recall an important aspect of the trauma. Yet, this may be accounted for with the self-report nature of the interviews.

Regarding increased arousal, 13.8% of the participants reported or showed stress manifestations in line with the criteria of two or more symptoms, while 35% indicated subthreshold level of one symptom. In other words, more than one third of the participants mentioned or were seen reacting to trauma reminders in a way that resembled how they reacted originally in the presence of the traumatizing threat. They mostly (30%) complained about irritability and outbursts of anger. In addition, sleep difficulties were reported by more than one in every ten participants (13.8%). Feeling unsafe, they had difficulty soothing themselves, thus falling or staying asleep. Moreover, efforts at avoiding nightmares likely had a role (Rasmussen, Smith, Keller, & Allen, 2007; van der Kolk & McFarlane, 1996). Hypervigilance (5%) and exaggerated startle response (1.3%) were much less common, which

may be partly explained by the time passed since the primary traumatic events. Likewise, although severe impairment in cognitive abilities following prolonged torture is reported in the literature (e.g., Goldfeld et al., 1988; Vasterling, Brailey, Constans, & Sutker, 1998), only a few (5%) participants mentioned concentration difficulties. Yet, a comprehensive assessment of the cognitive functioning would likely provide different results.

In sum, post-traumatic stress suggestive of clinical PTSD was very rare (2.5%), whereas subthreshold PTSD (22.5%) seemed significantly more common. Enduring for 30 years, post-traumatic stress encountered in participants seems to have become chronic. Yet, it is important to recognize that the results of this study differ from other retrospective studies of torture that reveal high percentages of PTSD (e.g., Goldstein, van Kammen, Shelly, Miller, & van Kammen, 1987; Kluznick, Speed, van Valkenburg, & Magraw, 1986; Yehuda, Kahana, Schmeidler, Southwick, Wilson, & Giller, 1995; as cited in Yehuda & McFarlane, 1995). The results are compatible, on the other hand, with studies of torture that reveal relatively low levels of traumatization (e.g., Başoğlu et al., 1994b). Lower levels of PTSD suggested in this study's sample may be due to the protective influences of the participants' political identities (Başoğlu et al., 1994b; Başoğlu & Paker, 1995; Mollica, 1992; Ortiz, 2001) and their resourceful repertoires of coping, such as political awareness and stance; social coping; belief, hope, and fantasy; regulation of needs or resources; and positive growth as a source of resiliency, which will be discussed in Study II. However, it should be recognized that the data used in this study is limited in clinical information it contains and no further assessment was possible either. Therefore, the results should be interpreted conservatively.

4. Study II: Coping

4.1. Method

4.1.1. Participants

This study includes 94 political ex-prisoners, who survived severe torture in Diyarbakır Military Prison, where they were confined after the coup, for a course of time between 1980 and 1984.

Sample Characteristics

Almost all participants were from Eastern Turkey and were of Kurdish identity. 69 of the participants (73.4%) reported prior knowledge of or interest or active participation in politics, while 10 (10.64%) reported being distant to politics before imprisonment and the political stance of 15 participants (15.96%) at pre-imprisonment remained unknown. Of the 94 participants, 92 were male and 2 were female. Although their number was considerably few with respect to male participants, the interviews of female participants were kept in the study, as it was akin to the distribution of prisoners in Diyarbakır Military Prison during that period. The mean age of the participants was 53.9. Most of them were married and some had children. The level of education of the participants varied. Similarly, perceived economic status varied too, from low to high-middle.

4.1.2. Data Analysis

The data is analyzed based on close readings of the interviews, followed by categorization of the ways of coping through content analysis. The primary analyses integrated and reconsidered in this study were conducted in the previous works of Doğan (2011), Yarkin (2013), and Gencer (2014). Due to the lack of consensus in the coping literature and in order to perform an explorative inquiry, the ways of coping reported or manifested by the participants are identified according to contributing authors' judgments of the content. Only directly observed or reported efforts are considered in this study as coping.

4.2. Results: Ways of Coping

Table 5: *Frequencies and Percentages of the Reported or Observed Ways of Coping of the Political Ex-Prisoners*

Ways of Coping	Frequencies (n=94)	Percentages
Political awareness and stance	91	96.8%
Social coping	85	90.4%
Obedience/Acceptance	64	68.1%
Belief, hope, fantasy	62	66.0%
Regulation of needs or resources	53	56.4%
Dehumanization of the torturer	48	51.1%
Social comparison	46	48.9%
Motivated forgetting	40	42.6%
Disengagement	39	41.5%
Humor	39	41.5%
Positive affect	29	30.9%
Positive growth	26	27.7%
Death wish	25	26.6%
Self-expression	23	24.5%
Dissociation	17	18.1%
Denial	12	12.8%
Rationalization	7	7.5%
Religious coping	3	3.2%

In the order of prevalence, the encountered ways of coping were identified as: political awareness and stance; social coping; obedience/acceptance; belief, hope, fantasy; regulation of needs or resources; dehumanization of the torturer; social comparison; motivated forgetting; disengagement; humor; positive affect; positive growth; death wish; self-expression; dissociation; denial; rationalization; and religious coping. The participants used first and foremost political awareness and stance as a way of coping; almost all made use of it at some point (n=91; 96.8%). Social coping was the second most common and was assumed by the majority of the participants (n=85; 90.4%). Obedience/acceptance was the next, although it was relatively less reported (n=64; 68.1%). Religious coping was the least used

way of coping, reported by only 3 participants (3.2%). Frequencies and percentages of all identified ways of coping can be seen in Table 5.

Both a higher order categorization (i.e., families of coping; Skinner et al., 2003) and an assessment of effectiveness are beyond the scope of this study, and each way of coping is explored solely in its own extent.

Political Awareness and Stance

Political awareness and stance was a source of endurance for almost all participants. 91 of the 94 (96.8%) reported making use of it during and/or after the period of imprisonment. The narratives that contained cognitions or behaviors of coping involving political awareness, political meaning-attribution, political determination, and resistance were included under this category. They were considered together as, although they might be of different intensities and their impacts and outcomes might vary considerably, they often served related functions, coexisted, and fused with one another.

Most of the participants were able to understand the motives behind their inhumane treatment:

“Here the rationale is ideologically emptying you and transforming you into your opponent. I mean, all that torture, all the practices, all the politics served that... As if saying ‘no matter how you’ve entered here, you’ll go out empty within, or even more, you’ll go out as transformed into your opponent... or else, there is no right to live.’” (Participant #12)

Political understanding or meaning-attribution also enabled them to be more prepared towards the oppression and violence they were subjected to:

“In a sense, the ruling powers regard us as enemies. This is the kind of a practice a person exposes one whom he considers an enemy. [...] We viewed it as expected due to our attitude towards the ruling powers.” (Participant #5)

What sort of political effort was employed changed according to what seemed possible at any moment. How it was employed varied as well. In one participant’s words:

“They would force us to lay on the ground in the courtyard, where there was a sewerage. They would bring us one by one above it. ‘Put your head in!’, they would order. Some would, others would not and then were forced into it. Personally, the greatest heroism I could do was not putting my head in myself.” (Participant #62)

Another participant explained the different ways to resist as:

“To resist is not complaining when being tortured, not singing the anthem aloud [...] or willingly, not giving information aloud, not following his orders instantly... You’re not saying that you’re resisting, but you’re revealing it with your attitude.” (Participant #6)

Therefore, the political stance assumed varied depending on the individual’s resources and the constraints of the situation, from completely internal efforts to observable acts. Yet each entailed the purpose of preserving one’s identity, values, and commitments, through countering the subjected oppression and the torment. While the solely mental modes of resistance also necessitated considerable effort, in bodily resistance more was at stake, such as risking more violent and/or prolonged torture or risking one’s life. In addition to resisting simultaneously the forced practices and torture, the participants engaged in organized resistance, including hunger strikes and death fasts. Narratives once again revealed that some ex-prisoners went beyond and chose self-immolation as a protest. An event that has been closely associated with the memories of Diyarbakır Prison, and one that is frequently told by the participants in interviews, is remembered as “the night of the four”, which refers to four prisoners’ burning themselves to death as a protest against the exposed inhumanity and as a powerful demonstration of commitment and agency, while the witnessing others felt forced to withhold themselves, all demonstrating incredible efforts of resistance.

Political awareness and stance of the participants seemed to have helped them significantly to be more prepared towards, to cope better with, and to go on with their struggle. Many of the participants conveyed that what happened in Diyarbakır Prison have

rendered them more politicized and more determined, both as an individual and as a community:

“Yet tremendous resistance has grown against the torture, the oppression, the depersonalization, the forced transformation into one’s opponent, or in general, the destruction policies regarding the struggle for Kurdish liberation... There the state wanted to exterminate the Kurds. Yet, there the Kurds revived.” (Participant #12)

The following statement of one participant reflected the opinions of many: “I didn’t get in as an advocate of this movement, but I came out as one.” (Participant #7).

Social Coping

Social coping was the second most used way of coping among the participants. 85 of them (90.4%) relied on it at some point in their efforts at coping. The narratives conveying group belonging, support, solidarity, and self-sacrifice and altruism were included under this category. Felt cohesion or unity, caring, loyalty, respect, and gratitude had been relieving and protective experiences for the most, particularly in their interactions with other prisoners and during their imprisonment. What rendered them even more powerful was that their source was not just individual relationships, but also the whole group.

Inmates were companions, which looked out for each other and were reliably there when needed. Particularly, younger and “stronger” individuals provided support for the older and “weaker” ones:

“After the beating we opened our eyes in cells. Friends were rubbing our hands and feet. [...] The next day they chanted slogans, song marches and ballads... They put us the old ones side by side and provided care for us...” (Participant 14)

The narratives revealed that some relationships that developed in the prison were quite enduring. The social closeness experienced, which significantly helped them in their coping, was so powerful that some participants reported having gone through severe distress after their release:

“You’ve shared the agony, the pain, the cruelty, the atrocity; you’ve shared everything. You’re leaving him there and you’re going out. It’s a miserable feeling. You’ll be free, but he’ll go on (with the inflicted torment)... One of the major features of imprisonment is feeling as if your whole life has passed there and as if you belong there... But the prison never broke off from us...” (Participant #6)

Obedience/Acceptance

Many of the participants reported feeling obliged to submitting to the orders or conditions imposed on them at some point; 64 of 94 (68.1%) shared stories of obedience/acceptance.

Severe helplessness and terror were common experiences, which led to obedience/acceptance:

“You are no longer you. You are a child before him... begging, miserable, and a being that does anything told – I’m not saying a person, because you are reduced to a being.” (Participant #54)

“It’s not one day, it’s not two days or three days. There’s (was) no place or no one we can (could) address our complaints. We have (had) to bear all that we’ll go through.” (Participant #37)

The terror of being subjected to severer and extended torture was ever present and at times obedience/acceptance seemed the only bearable option:

““Thanks Goodness; long live the army, long live the people’, we would say. The commander would say ‘Fuck your mother’, and we would reply ‘Thank you, thank you, thank you’. That’s how they had machined us, how they had taken us into submission...” (Participant #23)

Another participant conveyed that they had to accept captivity, that as Kurdish individuals they were “the captives of the Turkish state”. For some hopelessness was so pervasive that they relinquished their pursuit of a fair trial. Yet, others differentiated between bodily obedience and mental obedience and knowing that they preserved their internal stance they were relieved to a degree:

“We had surrendered bodily, but not mentally. I mean we advocated for our party and our ideology in the court, we’d say that we don’t regret, that we’re ready to die, but when we get (got) back into the prison, we’re (were) forced to read their national anthems... I mean we had surrendered at practice.” (Participant #67)

Showing obedience/acceptance could sometimes prevent future threat, harm or loss; yet at times even such submission was futile.

Belief, Hope, Fantasy

62 of the participants (66%) reported coping through belief, hope, or fantasy, which helped preserve a future-orientation. Many expressed having “the dream of tomorrow” and “the will to live again”. They told how their oppressors wanted to destroy their belief, hope, and fantasy, or imagination, which they strived to keep alive. To cope, one needed to retain some forms of life inside and an inner connection with outside, even if through the fantasy:

“We had the constant dream to open those windows and to see the children, the people, and the change for a while.” (Participant #17)

“If you want to survive, although you’re physically in the prison, your soul should be out there amongst flowers, gardens, and forests, amongst the people. And so you’ll live. That’s how I lived.” (Participant #54)

Under the circumstances in which the most basic needs were severely frustrated, coping through fantasies of meeting one’s needs were also encountered.

Fantasies of revenge, which seemed instrumental in coping, were reported by a few, but mostly, the participants wanted the justice to be served through legal or legitimate means. They demanded the responsible institutions and individuals to be publicly identified, tried, and punished:

“The state is extremely guilty from the oppression we were subjected to. The authorities of the period are guilty. At least they should apologize from those people, from those who were martyred, from those mothers and fathers... The authorities of the period should be tried.

Everything should be spoken, uncovered. Nothing should remain in the dark.” (Participant #51)

Furthermore, they wanted the past to be recognized, not just by official authorities but also by the people of Turkey:

“These have to enlighten the history, it’s a must... Those who committed these... we’ve all witnessed and encountered – people of Turkey should know that, people of the world should know that. One way or another it has to come into light.” (Participant #3)

As one participant put it, “it’s not just about the enlightening of Diyarbakır Prison; rather, it also serves to enlightening the darkness in Turkey as a whole” (Participant #68).

The work of the Truth and Justice Commission for Diyarbakır Military Prison seemed to have made a difference for the most. Many expressed their gladness and gratitude for the support and solidarity offered by the existence of the commission and for the feeling that they could tell their stories now. Belief in, hope for, and fantasy of a better future was encouraged:

“Bring forth this study, these interviews; bring forth Diyarbakır in all its truth. Diyarbakır has a truth, the wards have a truth... I mean, what I’d like is that you make use of this study in the best way possible, that you write extensively. Write extensively so that what we narrated remains as a legacy for our children... for the Turkish-Kurdish solidarity...” (Participant #14)

Although some have lost their imagination of justice and their future-orientation, for others, these have continued to be sources of strength and persistence: “But we give our word; we promise to provide a world without torture” (Participant #21).

Regulation of Needs or Resources

53 participants (56.4%) mentioned regulating their needs and/or resources while in the prison. This involved both renunciation of their needs and finding creative solutions with their resources to meet their needs. An example for the former is not asking to be taken to the doctor even if one was in severe pain, as medical examination and intervention was no exception to maltreatment and torture. Another example is requesting from their visitors not

to come anymore as it meant bearing torture (they used to reach the area of visit “beaten, crawling on the floor”, they had to stay in the attention position and look straight all through the meeting, and their every word was bound to be persecuted). Examples for the latter include, but are not limited to, finding solutions for taking a bath (as it was not a given possibility under the circumstances), reducing the impact of the exposed cold or hot weather, or providing themselves water when it was not given for days:

“We pulled out the strands from our socks, made a string with them, tied a sponge in one end, held it towards the ventilation across where there was rainwater, and then tried to contain that rainwater to drink.” (Participant #49)

They reported sharing their water and food even if it meant a single bite or sip per person. They also reported sharing beds, and even the toilets when mass diarrhea occurred due to spoiled food. In addition, to make it through the day and what it might bring, at times they chose to stomach what is difficult to:

“Excuse me for saying... they’re (were) pissing on the tea. Now if we tell (told) that to our friends they will (would) not drink it. So we told that there’s (was) sugar in it. Sugar means calorie – something to keep them (us) active for the next few hours.” (Participant #29)

It is important to note that they did not only regulate their needs or resources with respect to adversities, but they also searched for ways to bring pleasure and joy into the wards when possible, like creating tools for games, such as chess.

Dehumanization of the Torturer

48 of the participants (51.1%) dehumanized their torturers in their efforts at coping. Their depictions included “animal”, “creature”, “demon”, “psychopath”, and “pervert”. “Am I in hell?” was a question they seriously asked themselves in the face of the brutality of their torturers. Many told that they believed their perpetrators were specially selected and trained, as they showed “no sign of humanity” and were “completely devoid of human emotions”:

“Normal people have a certain look, a facial expression, a gesture or a mimic, and an

emotional expression. Even if you kill your enemy you demonstrate an expression of emotion. These seemed like they had masks on their faces. All white, like a wall, with no sign of humanity. You couldn't see any trace of emotion on their faces. I mean there was no trace of emotion on the faces of any of the soldiers in the internal security department of Diyarbakır Prison. Their acts weren't normal... Yet, they did what they did in such cold-heartedness, just like a machine... This can only be possible through a chemical induced externally.”
(Participant #7)

In another participant's words, there were two kinds of people, humans and “anti-humans, the torturers” (Participant #14). Dehumanization of the torturer helped them both to give meaning to the atrocities their torturers could commit and they were subjected to and, at the same time, to preserve their belief in humanity.

Social Comparison

46 participants (49%) compared their experiences with experiences of other people. They often compared Diyarbakır Military Prison to the Saigon's prisons in Vietnam and Nazi camps and their experiences with the experiences of the people tormented there. Some emphasized the similarities of their path: “Some resist, some choose death, some sacrifice themselves, and others follow [...] to live humanely” (Participant #54). Yet, for many, it was hard to conceive of any place or time in history in which what happened could be more incomprehensible than or even closely resemble what they went through in Diyarbakır:

“I don't believe that which were done in Diyarbakır Prison are occurring, had occurred, or can occur anywhere in the world. I don't believe that a place like that can exist or such oppression can exist. I don't believe torture to that extent can be afflicted.” (Participant #84)

The participants also compared themselves with other inmates on the basis of subjected brutality, sufferings, and strength. While some emphasized the individuals who had to endure more than they had endured or who were “stronger” or “more courageous” than them, others emphasized their own will and perseverance:

“I did not quit the struggle. [...] Some friends have done that; they let themselves go and they died. I didn’t quit it. I stuck to life with all my will.” (Participant #19)

In any case, social comparison has provided them a way to cope with their experiences, through promoting identification, motivation, or self-esteem.

Motivated Forgetting

40 of the participants (42.6%) could not adequately remember past events, acquaintances, faces, and other personally significant information. Some mentioned persistent difficulties or losses of memory. Although some memory problems might be due to the constant and severe physical traumas they were subjected to, the influence of the psychological trauma was also evident. Some participants could attribute the impairment in their memory to the distress and agony related to their traumatic experiences. In one participant’s words, “the mind rejects those bad days; it does not want to retain them”, (Participant #47) and as in another’s, disremembering functions to “clear the memory” (Participant #34), which otherwise might be a source of ongoing torment.

Disengagement

39 participants (41.5%) tried to deal with their painful experiences through disengaging from them affectively, mentally, and/or behaviorally. They tried to distance from the distressing events immediately after or “on [their] count to three” (Participant #1), or upon remembering or being reminded of associated memories.

Their efforts at disengagement were not limited to the past, but for some, have continued ever since:

“The truth is we don’t live with this every day. [...] If I lived with this everyday, my life would have stopped. They were not the kinds of things a person could accept. We’ve not lived with it, but we’ve never forgotten it either.” (Participant #6)

“One cannot go on living, thinking these things... cannot live with bringing these up constantly... I, for myself, don’t want to stay there. I want to bury them inside.” (Participant

#42)

The agony of remembering even prevented some from seeking the help they needed:

“You don’t want to go to a doctor and say ‘I went through that in torture and such damage has left on my rib’. You don’t have to tell, but because what happened is so concrete, because its indications are so visible, you feel like the doctor will read through you and will say that you are someone who went through torture... and so you don’t want to face that... That psychology of defeat kicks in. Towards the doctor and towards others, you feel the need to hold your head up high. [...] I haven’t asked for psychological assistance. I’ve tried to find my balance myself. In a way, I’ve chosen to heal myself.” (Participant #7)

Some participants were quite distressed during the interviews and tried to disengage from what they remembered, ending up saying “there is nothing else to tell” (Participant #22). One participant told the interviewers that although he was there to speak about Diyarbakır Prison, he has never read nor would read anything about it. For others, sharing their experiences with the commission seemed to be more hopeful, and perhaps more transformative:

“After I went out I’ve never went through this event – even in my head. I was determined not to talk about it in public. Believe me, this is the first time I’m talking about it openly. This is the first time I’m actually talking about it.” (Participant #23).

Humor

39 of the participants (41.5%) tried cope through humor in the process of or after their imprisonment and/or infused humor into their experiences while narrating them. They strived to find a way to laugh at their experiences, those that are even the most difficult to laugh at:

“It’s winter, they force(d) us to lay on the ground, they’re (were) hosing us... and we’re (were) laughing under these circumstances. Can you imagine?” (Participant #2)

Humor might entail denial. Yet, it might also serve other very important functions, which has been the case for many of the participants of this study. At times humor helped them cope with the absurdity of the world that surrounded them and the helplessness they felt:

“It’s written there. We’d see it and laugh. I personally laughed every time I looked at it. ‘Justice is the basis of the state’. It says so, but no, no (*laughs*), it has no basis at all.”
(Participant #72)

Humor helped easing the pain and processing of very hurtful experiences. It also helped the participants keep their hopes and to go on with their struggle:

“Everybody’s (was) looking at each other. On the one hand you feel (felt) like crying, on the other hand you’re (were) laughing, you’re (were) laughing at yourself. [...] We were trying to get up again, to break that downheartedness and to compensate for it with laughter.”
(Participant #17)

Positive Affect

29 participants (30.9%) reported experiencing some positive affect and/or showed positive affect when narrating their stories.

“It was like rearing up from death, like the dead running. We saw the revolution, we who lived there at the time. We saw how that wave (of resistance) embraced five thousand people. How excited we were...” (Participant #1)

As they went through Diyarbakır together as a group, in solidarity and in most honored struggle to preserve their identities, their ideology, and their case, it represented them more than the atrocities:

“Maybe it will remain as the worst memory in our lives... but also the sweetest one amongst those bad memories... because we perceive and accept it as a price to be paid for our grand ideal.” (Participant #65)

“I think I lived simultaneously the most beautiful and the most painful days of my life...”
(Participant #15).

They did not cry only out of pain, sorrow, and fear, but they also shed “tears of joy”, particularly when they achieved an organized resistance. The positive affect revealed by these participants was more than the outcome of events; it was a source of hope that helped them to cope with the adversity that surrounded them:

“That created a great spirit in us... I mean we’re (were) turning a new page in resistance, gaining a new power, making a new expansion...” (Participant #87)

Looking back, some participants felt relieved for that they “stood up from the ground”, “could transform” Diyarbakır Prison, and “did not leave behind a bad prison” (Participant #6). Although they “paid heavy prices” and suffered, they were “happy” because they “won [their] humanity back” (Participant #5). The work of the commission, as well, was experienced by many as a source of positive affect, which may have contributed to their coping at the time of the interview.

Positive Growth

26 participants (27.7%) expressed that in the process of their imprisonment in Diyarbakır Prison and in its afterwards, they and/or the Kurdish community have had some benefits, which seems to have helped them cope. They mentioned awakening, self-knowledge, maturation, and increased interest in the history and the matters of the world:

“What I went through in the prison has light up my way through my encounters in life after I went out. I mean, I’ve learned to be more accepting, to panic less, to be more courageous, and that everything will certainly have an end some day...” (Participant #31)

“I said to myself that as a Kurdish patriot, as a Kurdish democrat, as someone who takes part in the Kurdish struggle, I’m learning the Kurdish history from the enemy. I was truly saddened by that and I still feel the same when I remember it. For that reason, I read as much as I can. And I (now) know the Kurdish history very well. This is my guide now. I want to learn the Kurdish history from the Kurdish people themselves, not from Esat Oktay Yıldırım.” (Participant #64)

Some even expressed that they did not regret what happened:

“Actually I don’t regret what I went through, because my humane sides have become even more humane. Maybe I had shortcomings; they’ve matured. I’ve got to know life better. I’ve got to know people better. I’ve faced the facts.” (Participant #4)

In other words, to some “it has taught life and how to live” (Participant #1). Not only the emotional or relational experiences, but also the self-organized “education” in the wards contributed to that:

“We educated ourselves to improve ourselves, to widen our horizon, to care for the issues of the world and the country.” (Participant #13)

Accordingly, many regarded Diyarbakır Prison as a critical influence in the Kurdish growth, not only at the individual, but also at the collective level. This has had major implications for the evolution of the Kurdish ideology and organization, as well.

Death Wish

25 participants (26.6%) shared that they wanted to choose death, as it had become too painful to live. One participant narrated the burden of living as:

“A person of 60 years goes through all that torture and you can (could) only witness. What is death! Death is simple. What is death! You wish (wished)! You wish (wished) you could die!” (Participant #79)

Although in many instances death wish reflects a total helplessness/hopelessness, the narratives revealed that, the possibility of death might also have the function of helping one cope. Death meant “salvation”, the fantasy of which provided some relief:

“You cannot (could not) accept, so you wait (waited) for death, you wait (waited) for death. [...] I thought maybe like this, only like this, when we’re under the ground, we’ll (would) be free.” (Participant #60)

Self-expression

23 participants (24.5%) mentioned how expressing themselves helped them cope. Sometimes they shared their experiences and what went through their minds with their loved ones, while at others they expressed themselves through writing and art, which has been both relieving and protective:

“My body was in the prison, but my soul was outside... and I wrote. If I didn’t write I’d explode. If I didn’t paint, projecting what’s inside me to the panorama, I couldn’t handle all that prison stuff.” (Participant #54)

Self-expression also served to their pursuit of providing recognition to Diyarbakır Prison:

“What we want to do is to make sure this prison is not forgotten, that it’s passed on to the future generations.” (Participant #6)

Dissociation

17 participants (18.1%) talked about dissociative experiences, such as numbing or dream-like states, during or in the afterwards of terrorizing experiences, which were very difficult to endure consciously:

“Suddenly, as if we were in a dream, a terrifying noise, a shout...I mean, personally, I felt like I was in a dream, as if something had begun to occur while I was asleep and then I opened my eyes to see that the ward was turned upside down.” (Participant #70)

Denial

12 participants (12.8%) engaged in denial when they were in Diyarbakır Prison or when they talked or were reminded about associated experiences:

“I mean what we lived there was only as real as unreal. Something like this evolves in your mind: ‘what I lived is not real, but unreal’” (Participant #7).

“I personally regard these as un-lived. I think like that, I live like that.” (Participant #65)

While some denied the existence of what they experienced altogether, others rejected certain aspects of the events. For instance, some disavowed negative emotions, which were inevitable in a place like Diyarbakır Prison:

“Never ever a friend was upset. Never ever one felt scared.” (Participant #91)

Some discarded their knowledge:

“I maintain my optimism (*smiles*). We say that hopefully this is not really about the state. I mean hopefully it’s an individual case. I generally think about it as an individual case.” (Participant #25).

Rationalization

7 participants (7.6%) used rationalization at some point in their efforts at coping. They tried to render reasonable the experiences they had difficulty understanding otherwise. For instance, while talking about the unending beatings, one participant said:

“After a point, these felt kind of natural to us. I mean because you’re (were) under extraordinary circumstances. Being ordinary under extraordinary circumstances is extraordinary. You cannot (could not) be ordinary.” (Participant #8)

How they have survived such experiences was also inconceivable to some and they strived to make a meaning of it.

Religious Coping

The least used way of coping among the participants was religious coping. Only 3 participants (3.2%) relied on it at some point. Importantly, when they did, it was through identification with religious-political figures and through inspiration and encouragement from their stories:

“It’s a difficult task, but I have (had) the desire to preserve myself. (*Narrates a story in which Prophet Mohammed talks to God*)... Now, that sets an example, that shows the way: No, you will preserve yourself no matter what.” (Participant #58)

Rare reliance on religious coping can be accounted for by the political mindsets of the participants.

4.3. Discussion

This study aimed to explore the coping experiences of political ex-prisoners imprisoned and tortured in Diyarbakır Military Prison after the Turkish military coup d’état of 1980. The narratives of 94 political ex-prisoners, taken from their semi-structured interviews, were evaluated with content analysis. The encountered ways of coping were identified as: political awareness and stance; social coping; obedience/acceptance; belief, hope, fantasy; regulation of needs or resources; dehumanization of the torturer; social comparison;

motivated forgetting; disengagement; humor; positive affect; positive growth; death wish; self-expression; dissociation; denial; rationalization; and religious coping. The predominant ways of coping were found to be political awareness and stance, social coping, and obedience/acceptance, respectively.

The coping literature emphasizes the conscious quality of coping; however, it is not easy to establish how consciously any coping effort is being used. It might be quite controversial to regard several of the efforts identified in this study, such as dissociation or denial, as conscious processes. On the other hand, how consciously individuals (or groups) engage in commonly identified coping efforts, such as social coping, is also unknown. This is another subject of debate; yet, a wider understanding of the concept might consider these efforts under the rubric of coping, and due to their presence in the narratives of many participants, they are included in this study.

It is meaningful to evaluate the results of this study with the consideration for the political experiences and identities of the participants. As previously argued in the literature, political awareness, expectancy of torture, finding a political explanation or meaning for the subjected torture, determination for a cause, and “immunization” (Başoğlu et al., 1994b, p. 76) against adversity due to repetitive encounters seem to have protective impacts on the individual’s processing of trauma and coping (Başoğlu et al., 1994b; Başoğlu & Paker, 1995; Mollica, 1992; Ortiz, 2001). The narratives conveyed that as political ex-prisoners, the participants of this study had a strong idea about the political purposes behind their inhumane treatment in the prison and also about their own motives for being there and enduring that torment (Başoğlu & Paker, 1995). Through such an understanding, keeping the humiliating impositions and vicious attacks on one’s identity external and protecting one’s self seems to have become more possible. Moreover, having a political argumentation obviously helped them keep on with their struggle in the process, which contributed to their positive appraisals

of themselves and, hence, to their self-esteem (Başoğlu et al., 1996). Although the current study did not analyze the relationships between coping efforts and their adaptiveness, it is expected that political awareness and stance – particularly resistance – assumed by the participants have contributed to their wellbeing in the long-run (Paker, 2011).

Maintaining their political stance during their imprisonment, at a time when all political activity was interfered, also seems to have allowed the participants to make a “meaningful experience” out of their captivity (Başoğlu et al., p. 346). Accordingly, participants frequently shared or demonstrated experiences revealing positive affect. Likewise, reconstructing their narratives, many spoke about experiences reflecting positive growth (Tedeschi, 1999), which involved gains in areas such as awakening, self-knowledge, and maturation. Although this phenomenon of growth is frequently conceived as “*post-traumatic*”, it may also happen during the process of adversity (Papadopoulos, 2007). Indeed, many of the participants’ narratives revealed that they felt grown or empowered both in the process of their imprisonment and in it’s afterwards. Experiencing one’s own capacity to survive seems to have been a major influence.

The commitment for social change, which political prisoners are imprisoned and tortured for, is and further becomes a part of their identity (Lira & Weinstein, 1984; as cited in Fischman, 1991). Accordingly, the narratives of the participants conveyed that the extensive demonstration of political awareness and stance did not only stem from, but also strengthened the political identities of the participants. In most cases, those who were already political came out to be even more politically determined. The self-organized “education” (Westrheim, 2008) in the wards is considered to have a critical influence, not only at the individual, but also at the collective level, and therefore, Kurdish people as a community, as well, evolved to be more ideological and more organized in this course. Only the narratives of a few participants involved becoming depoliticized, whereas most of the participants who had

no political affiliation prior to their imprisonment reported becoming political agents within the process of their imprisonment. This is closely related to the extreme oppression and torture they were forced to withstand in Diyarbakır Military Prison. Political prisoners, who are subjected to severe mistreatment, may resort to violence or the law in their pursuit of justice (McEvoy, McConnachie, & Jamieson, 2007; as cited in Goldenberg, 2009). Accordingly, sometimes, fantasies of revenge were encountered, and although none of them reported acting upon such fantasies, many participants shared the joy and happiness they felt upon hearing the murder of Esat Oktay Yıldırım, their most violent perpetrator. More frequently, participants wanted the justice to be served through legal or legitimate means. Belief, hope, or fantasy as coping also seems to have had beneficial influences in many respects. It should be clarified that “hope, however, does not consist in crossing one's arms and waiting; [it is a mindset that can be expressed as] as long as I fight, I am moved by hope; and if I fight with hope, then I can wait” (Freire, 1970; as cited in Westheim, 2008, p. 14, parenthesis added). Likewise, belief and fantasy can be instrumental in taking action. Indeed, belief, hope, and fantasy, particularly when related to imagination of justice, provided a source of strength and persistence for the participants, encouraging them to go on with their political, and psychological, struggle. Such coping also has likely facilitated emotional recovery (Welsh & Brodsky, 2010). According to the narratives of some participants, humor, too, had a function that, besides easing the pain and helping processing of very painful experiences, supported preserving one's resistance and determination. When humor was too difficult to engage in, social comparison was another way of coping that helped the participants go on. Through downward comparison, their self-esteem enhanced and through upward comparison, their motivation increased (Taylor & Lobel, 1989).

The extensive use of social coping, which is referred here to encompass collective coping (Wong, 1993) as well, may be also better understood in the political context. As the

participants were imprisoned, oppressed, and tortured due to their shared identity as a group, this contributed to their collective being and solidarity. They were companions in life and in death. The strong solidarity they had, made it possible to put forth organized resistance, which involved impactful acts, instrumental in changing the inhumane conditions that were imposed on them. Social coping provided protection and relief also beyond the political context. Such efforts helped the participants maintain their sense of and belief in humanity, in the face of the inhumanity that surrounded them. Not only receiving support, but providing support, too, was fundamental (Midlarsky, 1991). It contributed to their self-perception and self-respect and, hence, to self-preservation. Moreover, the experienced social closeness between them was a powerful antidote against the hatred and the hostility they were exposed to. It was emotionally healing in a place where they were constantly inflicted with physical and psychological wounds. In addition, belongingness or “the community of sameness” seems to have provided the survivors a critical source of endurance (Helmreich, 1992; as cited in Goldenberg, 2009, p. 24). In a sense, they were “making family when there was no family” (Goldenberg, 2009, p. 24). It seems “the recreation of family, the support of survivors for other survivors with or without the telling of the trauma” (ibid, p. 25) has had a remarkably strong influence.

While most of the participants never gave up their political efforts, most of them also submitted to the orders or conditions imposed on them at some point. Indeed, obedience or acceptance was a must in a place like that to survive. On the other hand, obedience/acceptance participants felt bound to employ under some circumstances was not always completely devoid of politics either. Although at times there was mere submission due to the terror of torture, at others, participants responded by demonstrating bodily or verbal obedience/acceptance, yet simultaneously engaging in strong mental resistance. Furthermore, through rendering survival more possible, showing submission may also have had an important function in the long-term political struggle of the participants.

Many other ways of coping participants used, such as regulation of needs or resources and self-expression, were also meaningful with regard to their political identities. For instance, both are, in a way, related to not giving up. Likewise, the exceptional reliance on religious coping can be explained by the political mindsets of the participants. As religious coping is particularly resorted to at times or in conditions that involve unpredictability, uncontrollability, and difficulty in making meaning, it was rarely present in the narratives of the participants. It is meaningful that even when religious coping was used, it entailed identification with religious-political figures and seizing inspiration and encouragement from their stories. This is also a good example showing that any coping effort could serve more than one function. Similarly, for example, some argue that suicide or fantasizing suicide can be a means of resisting against torture (Liebling, 1999; McEvoy et al., 2011). Surely, the narratives also revealed ways of coping, such as disengagement, motivated forgetting, rationalization, and denial, which do not seem to be particularly associated with the political efforts of the participants. This points out to the severity of trauma, both “real” and subjective. After experiencing a severe trauma, such as torture, remembering may not be always possible or desired (Allen, 1999). Neither may be making meaning of the event(s) nor facing them. Remembering, reflecting upon, or engaging with the past may endanger re-experiencing. In addition, they all might bring further distrust of the humanity (Yüksel, 1992), which hinders posttraumatic recovery.

In sum, the narratives of the participants revealed that owning or (during the process of imprisonment) acquiring political identities was a remarkably valuable source of strength and perseverance for them in their efforts at coping. Yet, expecting political identities of participants to completely have assured their selves to remain intact seems bound to fail. Indeed, their selves have transformed (Butler, 2004), with both losses and gains (Ortiz, 2001). It is important to also note that, as the data used in this study is limited in clinical information

it contains and no further assessment was possible, the results should be interpreted conservatively.

5. Limitations and Future Research

It is estimated that approximately 5.000 people were confined in Diyarbakır Military Prison between the years of 1980 and 1984, the era of military junta. Almost 500 of them responded to the call of the Truth and Justice Commission for Diyarbakır Military Prison for the interviews. The studies this thesis encompassed consisted of 80 and 94 participants, respectively. Yet, they limitedly represent the population involved, due to the select nature of the samples. Because choosing to participate in such an interview necessitated remembering, talking about, and acknowledging traumatic experiences, survivors who had better psychological wellbeing and who coped better may be overrepresented in both groups. It should be noted that, after their release, some ex-prisoners committed suicide and some were seriously impaired. In addition, some perceived it as too challenging to participate. Ex-prisoners who died due to brutal torture or who chose self-immolation as a protest during their imprisonment and survivors who joined the armed forces of PKK after their release, who may have varied in their experiences of stress and efforts at coping, also remained outside of the studies.

A major limitation of both studies is that the interviews were not conducted by this author and with the particular research questions posited by the current studies. Therefore, a relative distance exists between the author and the narratives explored. Moreover, as the interviews were selected from a database, they did not serve the exact purposes of these studies; post-traumatic stress and coping experiences of the survivors were not exclusively or systematically elaborated. Furthermore, as the participants were no longer available, the only option was to make use of the interviews as they were (Goldenberg, 2009). Nevertheless, “secondary analyses ‘allow[s] wider use of the data from rare or inaccessible respondents’

(willing or alive)” (Heaton, 1998; as cited in Goldenberg, 2009, p. 25; parenthesis in the original). Another important point is that the interviews were conducted by volunteer activists or academics, and not by mental health professionals. Although they received training with regard to psychological considerations in prior, their inquiry into the psychological experiences of the survivors may have remained limited. It should be also noted that the interviewer consistency was compromised in both studies as the included interviews were selected based on adherence to the interview protocol and in order to increase the sample size. In addition, whether the interview was administered by one or two interviewers may have had different effects, which could not be controlled for.

Another limitation involves the use of retrospective self-reports as the only source for analysis. To begin with, the information obtained involves only what the participants revealed. In addition, as the interviews were conducted almost 30 years after the process of imprisonment and torture began, there is the issue of memory, which is affected both by the time and the trauma. Some events and experiences may have been barely remembered, misremembered, or forgotten due to the time or as a consequence of trauma, or may be intentionally disguised or underestimated, or on the contrary, detailed or overstated, to protect oneself psychologically. In other words, “while trauma may leave an indelible imprint, when people start talking about these sensations, and try to make meaning of them, it is transcribed into ordinary memory, and like all ordinary memory, it is prone to become distorted” (van der Kolk, 1998, p. 106). Yet, retrospective self-reports might be the only way to obtain information under such conditions. It is quite difficult to interview survivors immediately after traumatic events of such intensity, and therefore, these accounts “serve as a window into that period” (Goldenberg, 2009, p. 25). It is also important to mention the issue of continued stress, which made it difficult to distinguish both the effects of the traumatic event of torture and the changes in the processes of stress and coping. The conflict between the Turks and

Kurds did neither start nor end with the coup; therefore, both pre- and post-trauma contexts are of importance. A wide range of stressful life events stemming from the existing social and political context and other forms of violence may be of influence as well. For instance, threats, displacement, and loss of educational or occupational opportunities have been common within this group (Başoğlu et al., 1994b). Furthermore, in addition to earlier threats and difficulties, “liberation brought a period of continued uncertainty, danger, physical attacks and the gradual realization of the extent of their losses for the survivors” (Goldenberg, 2009, p. 24). Thus, stress and coping of the participants are likely to have been influenced by many factors and over an extended period of time. The retrospective nature of the study of post-traumatic stress disallows the examination of the stress experienced *then*, along with the stress experienced *now*. The study of coping efforts, on the other hand, reflect both how the participants have coped in the past and how they do cope in the present, but without allowing the possibility to distinguish between them. It could be very informative regarding the changes in post-traumatic stress and coping experiences, if the conditions permitted assessment of situational and personal factors and at different times before, during and after the course of events.

It should be noted that the native language of all participants was Kurdish, while the interviews used in these studies were conducted in Turkish due to necessities; i.e. language of the interviewers, the primary analysts, and the author of this thesis. Not speaking in their native language, and particularly of such emotionally laden memories, may have influenced participants' ability for self-expression. Furthermore, as the language was a primary domain of oppression and torture in prison (and also for the Kurdish people outside), conducting the interviews in Turkish may have introduced an additional source of stress; yet, positive conditions associated with the commission and the interview, such as its aim, are likely to have compensated for that.

Conceptualization and assessment of post-traumatic stress and identification of the ways of coping should be considered here as well. As the primary analyses were conducted earlier, DSM-IV was used instead of DSM-V in the first study (Study I). Assessment of the psychological information according to the current version of the DSM could have provided minor nuances in the language and results communicated. More importantly, assessment of post-traumatic stress with different measures or approaches might have revealed considerably different results. In fact, using a pre-established framework, such as the DSM, limits the inquiry, which does not suit well with the nature of qualitative studies. However, for secondary analyses, such a framework may be helpful and may provide introductory information. With regard to the second study (Study II), it is quite likely that another group of authors would identify, name, or integrate ways of coping differently; this is an enriching contribution of qualitative studies. On the other hand, it is important to mention here that “post-traumatic adaptation needs to be more clearly grounded in the survivors’ [...] own understandings of the process of their recovery – or failure to recover – from extreme trauma” (Goldenberg, 2009, 19.). How individuals who survived traumatic events define for themselves their post-traumatic adaptation and coping efforts remain yet as rarely studied (e.g., Carney, 2004; Suedfeld, 2001; Ungar, 2004; as cited in Goldenberg, 2009).

As the data used in these studies is limited in clinical information, their results should be interpreted conservatively. Comprehensive and in-depth clinical assessments might reveal more prevalent and/or severe psychological complaints or difficulties, and not only in terms of post-traumatic stress or coping. In other words, both sets of studies that this thesis aimed to integrate were explorative in nature and provide a sense of (I) post-traumatic stress and (II) coping experiences of the political torture survivors, each of which may be better understood and elaborated in future studies that allow more sophisticated designs. Studies designed according to the purpose, using more systematized measures, and conducted by mental health

professionals could reveal a richer understanding of the phenomena. Moreover, it could be useful to search for ways to understand the post-traumatic adaptation and stress and coping experiences of those who could not be included in these studies. Furthermore, as the conflict and its devastating consequences have been ongoing for decades, and does not seem likely to be over soon, focusing on transgenerational transmission of trauma at the individual, collective, and societal levels may be a critical area of inquiry to pursue. In addition, furthering knowledge and skills regarding implications for psychotherapy with affected individuals – survivors, those who suffered with or for them or for the lost ones, their kin, and the following generations – seems essential.

6. Conclusion

The Turkish military coup d'état of 1980 has caused tremendous impacts and led to permanent changes in the lives of numerous individuals, both Kurdish and Turkish communities, and the society at large. Along with numerous other harms and losses, those who were detained, questioned, or captivated in the prisons of the era, suffered from ruthless infliction of incomprehensible practices of torture. This thesis was concerned with post-traumatic stress and coping experiences of the tortured political ex-prisoners from Diyarbakır Military Prison, and synthesized two sets of related studies. In Study I, the narratives of 80 political ex-prisoners were evaluated with content analysis and trauma-related discourses and acts, when present, were coded as manifestations of post-traumatic stress, utilizing PTSD criteria outlined in DSM-IV. The results revealed that only a few participants reported or showed stress manifestations in line with the criteria for a full diagnosis at the time of the interview; yet, many still suggested subthreshold PTSD or revealed a certain problem or difficulty almost 30 years after the primary traumatic experiences and even in the absence of a systematic inquiry. Nevertheless, compared to studies indicating chronic PTSD following severe trauma, relatively low levels of current PTSD indications were encountered. In Study

II, the narratives of 94 political ex-prisoners were evaluated with content analysis, which revealed that the participants have resorted to various ways of coping during and after their imprisonment. The predominant ways of coping were identified as political awareness and stance, social coping, and obedience/acceptance, respectively. The narratives conveyed that each of these coping efforts was almost vital for the ex-prisoners to “survive”, both mentally and bodily, the inhumanity and the atrocity they were subjected to in Diyarbakır Military Prison, or in other words, to bear the unbearable. Overall, participants’ political identities and political efforts seem to have had a critical influence in relatively low levels of current PTSD manifestations and the resourceful repertoires of coping reported or observed. Comprehensive and in-depth assessments are needed to have a better understanding of both areas of inquiry.

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