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Aslı Çavuşoğlu conducts literal, metaphorical excavation in Warsaw

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Contemporary artist Aslı Çavuşoğlu is taking part in an ongoing project in Warsaw with two other artists from Poland that was launched by the POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews -- an excavation project delving into the history of the Polish capital.

Çavuşoğlu is joined by Malgorzata Kuciewicz and Simone De Iacobis in the project. She met the two artists during an artist-in-residence program in Warsaw.

The A-I-R Laboratory at CCA Ujazdowski Castle in Warsaw is creating an excavation site at 2B Karmelicka Street, where the Evangelical Church was based between 1769 and 1944. The project, titled "The Cut," intends to uncover the hidden past of Warsaw through a simple gesture of literally excavating the ground. Local communities of the city are also invited to join them and share their ideas throughout the week.

"We take Warsaw as a case study -- a site to be discussed through the lens of the past to shape the future. Through our practice we are interested in a public debate that can bring on some ideas about the overlooked elements of the cityscape," Kuciewicz told Today's Zaman in emailed comments about the project.

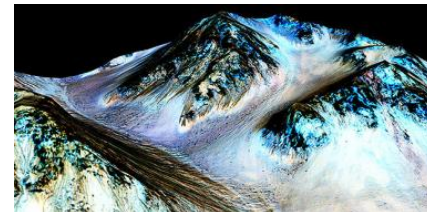
According to Kuciewicz, it's not only psychical substance they expect to excavate, but through the excavation they hope to unearth memory and consciousness among the inhabitants of the site.

"After the Jewish genocide the entire city of Warsaw was nationalized by communists in order to have freedom to run reconstruction on the -- otherwise disputed -- properties. The ownership of the properties still remains an issue in today's Warsaw when it comes to the development of the land," De Iacobis says about the history of the city.

Eighty-six percent of Warsaw was destroyed during World War II and after 1945 the eagerness to rebuild the city with the social force of the new Polish people was at its peak, Kuciewicz adds, noting that the ghetto area was erased, along with its inhabitants, from the memories of the area's later inhabitants as well.

De Iacobis underlines that the excavation is a "tool rather than a target" -- through which they can ask some questions such as "Who owns the ruins?" and "Who has the right to change the city landscape?" to all the citizens.

Çavuşoğlu says the area is inhabited by middle-class citizens from different backgrounds. "We started to share our ideas with the inhabitants in July. We've met the directors of the buildings surrounding the site, because they would be the ones who would be exposed to our intervention every day," she explains. "We tried to reach them with flyers and presentations. We would like to make an open excavation where passersby can interrupt," Çavuşoğlu added.



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The team is planning to work for five days on excavating the site and on the final day of the excavation they will organize a critical discussion at the spot together with Jerzy Elzanowski, an architectural historian, to explore the relationship between architecture, violence and commemoration. After the event, the excavated land will be filled with the soil extracted from the spot. A tree will be planted at the spot to mark the excavated part.

Çavuşoğlu, who has conducted several other excavation projects previously, points out that each excavation is a destruction. "But in the case of this one, it will be the 'destruction of the destruction' as we'll be unearthing the ruins of World War II," she says.

Keywords: Aslı Çavuşoğlu , Warsaw , POLIN Museum , Malgorzata Kuciewicz , Poland , excavation

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