

Another Necropolitics

Author: Bargu, Banu

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The election of June 7 was a watershed moment in Turkey because the success of the Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP) practically eliminated an anti-democratic electoral threshold of 10 percent - one of the highest around the world - that was put into place under military rule after the 1980 coup d'état. This threshold meant not only that political parties unable to gather at least 10 per cent of the national vote lost the right of representation in parliament but also that the votes they were able to gather would be proportionately distributed among the other parties that succeeded in passing the threshold, thereby enabling successful parties to gain a higher number of seats in the parliament. HDP's electoral success, which corresponded to 80 seats in parliament, was therefore momentous both as a symbolic conquest for the coalition of forces that came together within it and as a big blow to the Justice and Development Party (AKP), which suffered not only the loss of its parliamentary majority but also the benefit of overrepresentation that the electoral threshold bestowed upon it as the majority party since 2002. Lost, or at least suspended, with the election results, of course, was President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's ambition to transform Turkey's parliamentary system into a presidential one, an ambition that required a super-majority of AKP, without which such a constitutional change would necessitate resorting to a popular referendum whose results would be either unfavorable to Erdogan's plans or unpredictable at best. Tarnished in the election, therefore, was also Erdogan's personal political reputation, having forcefully campaigned for the move toward presidentialism despite the existing constitutional ban on the active partisanship of the republic's president.

That HDP's victory was temporary, however, became painfully apparent in the renewed elections that were held on November 1, elections called by President Erdogan due to a hung parliament unable and unwilling to establish a ruling coalition. In this second election, while HDP still managed to pass the electoral threshold, thereby retaining its symbolic victory, it suffered a significant loss in votes (losing a quarter of its seats and maintaining only 59). By contrast, AKP, considered by most commentators as firmly moving on a declining curve of popularity prior to the elections, managed to make a surprising comeback, both regaining its majority in parliament and increasing its support by 4.5 million votes, or almost nine points, thereby reaching an all-time high of 49.47 per cent. The social democratic CHP neither lost, nor gained much ground (2 additional seats were gained in parliament, bringing their number to 134) whereas the ultranationalist MHP, like HDP, suffered the most, losing half its seats in parliament (declining to 40).¹ The new election gave AKP 317 seats in a parliament of 550, which, while falling short of the super-majority necessary to change the constitution singlehandedly, was sufficient to revive the proposal of a new presidentialism, along with the hitherto failed efforts for writing a new, civilian constitution to replace the current one drafted in the aftermath of the 1980 military coup d'état.

How should we read this surprising reversal that took place within the span of a few months? What happened in the summer of 2015 that led many voters to rally to AKP's support? While many commentators expressed worries that the election might be rigged, these allegations have largely been unfounded.² The most important reason for this reversal was the conjuncture of escalating violence between the two elections, coming from different quarters at once. Most importantly, Turkey became the target of deadly suicide attacks carried out by Islamic State militants, first in Suruç, killing 33 young socialists, and more recently, in Ankara, killing 102 demonstrators participating in a peace rally. With the execution-style murder of two police officers in their sleep

in Ceylanpinar, the peace process that was already stagnant prior to the June election broke down completely, marking a speedy devolution into armed conflict between the army and PKK (Workers' Party of Kurdistan) within Turkey's borders. PKK's attack on Daglica, which killed 16 soldiers, was another momentous development that escalated the conflict.³ This was complemented by Turkish military airstrikes over northern Iraq and Syria, nominally as part of the coalition against Islamic State led by the United States but also in tension with it (insofar as the target has been the Kurdish forces in the region).⁴ Armed conflict claimed a significant death toll of soldiers, policemen, PKK militants, and civilians, including children, a toll that quickly climbed to several hundreds.⁵ Meanwhile, a more diffuse and largely civilian violence was also on the rise, inflicting significant physical damage on HDP headquarters and offices around the country by acts of arson and vandalism and targeting Kurdish citizens with multiple hate crimes.⁶ The police took little action to prevent the mobs roaming the streets and authorities conspicuously refrained from prosecuting those who participated in these collective acts of discriminate violence.

With the escalation of armed conflict inside Turkey, compounded by the memory of the protracted war that has claimed 40 thousand lives, the transborder position of the Kurdish population, and the volatility of politics upon the collapse of former states in the region, both the securitization of public discourse and the militaristic polarization among the civilian population have also escalated and with great speed.⁷ Meanwhile, the declaration of self-government in Kurdish towns, ⁸ the emergence of urban militia, composed especially by members of youth organizations affiliated with PKK, such as YDG-H (Patriotic Revolutionary Youth Movement), in the name of defending neighborhoods from state intrusion, and the diffusion of armed conflict into cities in the form of trench warfare have further precipitated the widespread security operations in those towns, now declared by the government to be curfew zones.⁹ Hence, entire cities have been put under lockdown, special operations forces and snipers have surfaced, targeting any violators of the curfew regardless of their civilian status, and casualties have escalated, reviving the specter of the "state of emergency" rule that remained in force for two decades in the southeastern provinces, even after military rule had formally ended in 1983.

In the public sphere, the interim government was subjected to fierce criticism for instrumentalizing conflict as a way to buttress AKP's electoral base on nationalistic grounds rather than working toward reactivating the peace process, as well as for being negligent in taking the necessary precautions against Islamic State militants and affiliates, some of whom operating and organizing in Turkey were allegedly known to intelligence agencies and local security personnel of the Turkish state.¹⁰ Concomitantly, HDP also bore the brunt of criticism for not taking a stronger stance against PKK's war tactics, on the one hand, and for not taking a stronger stance in favor of growing Kurdish radicalism, on the other, thus finding itself in the swiftly shrinking ground of democratic politics. This shrinkage manifested itself in the even swifter contraction of the public sphere as some of the vocal critics of the government in the media lost their jobs or were intimidated into silence while the arrests and persecution of journalists continued apace.¹¹

However, the depiction of this bleak interregnum between the two elections of 2015 would remain incomplete if we were to overlook the necropolitical violence perpetrated by the security forces of the state. By necropolitical violence, I mean not the sovereign violence of the state that "take[s] life," nor the biopolitical violence of governmental power that "let[s] die," or "disallow[s] life] to the point of death," according to Michel Foucault's famous categorization of the modalities of power.¹² Foucault has taught us that the right to punish by death is not only the sovereign act par excellence but also reflective of a primary form of necropolitics. Even though he does not use the term necropolitics, Foucault's famous analysis of the brutal execution of Damians the regicide offers a reading that discusses the intimate link between the brutal display of this killing and the restorative performance of sovereignty. By contrast, Foucault suggests, biopolitical violence is not extractive, but it is exercised indirectly, through a selective affirmation and encouragement of life, often by way of the functioning of racism. Following Foucault, Henry Giroux affirms the logic of biopolitical exposure and neglect when he points us to how structurally subaltern and marginalized populations situated at the intersection of race and class are

rendered disposable, a development exacerbated by neoliberal governmentality.¹³ In contrast with the sovereign right to kill, the biopolitical form of exposure is a more diffuse or circuitous form of necropolitics.¹⁴ However, neither of these forms is the necropolitics I want to call attention to. Nor do I have in mind the violence that Achille Mbembe famously refers to when he characterizes the "subjugation of life to the power of death."¹⁵ Mbembe's conception of necropolitics skillfully points us to a modality of power operative in concrete spaces of exception, a power whose operational logic is one of destruction. Necropower, in his formulation, either decimates populations through massacres or else commits populations to unliveable conditions in which they are continually exposed to violence and deprived of a properly human life, where they are destined to a "death-in-life."¹⁶

To be sure, all these forms of death-making are amply present in the myriad of ways that violence is performed in Turkey's geographies of exception where the state takes the life of those who rebel and resort to arms, where populations are differentially exposed to violence and rendered disposable. On the other hand, PKK's resort to violent struggle by way of rural and urban guerrilla warfare and its history of terror tactics constitute the means to assert its proto-sovereignty to further the Kurdish cause, exhibiting its own forms of necropolitical struggle.¹⁷ Notwithstanding these forms of violence, and side by side with them, however, there is a more spectacular and morbid form of violence that is often disregarded. This is the violence that takes as its object the realm of the dead - the corpse, the act of burial, funerary rituals, the graves and cemeteries as sites of burial and commemoration, and forms of mourning and reverence. In distinction from other forms of death-making, I use necropolitical violence to denote those acts that target the dead bodies of those killed in armed conflict, by way of their mutilation, dismemberment, denuding, desecration, dragging, and public display, the destruction of local cemeteries and other sacred spaces that are designated for communication with and commemoration of the dead, the delay, interruption, or suspension of the conduct of funerary rituals, the imposition of mass or anonymous internment, the pressure for clandestine internment, and the repression and dispersion of funeral processions for the newly dead. At issue is not the reduction of the living to "the status of living dead,"¹⁸ but something else altogether: the dishonoring, disciplining, and punishment of the living through the utilization of the dead as postmortem objects and sites of violence.¹⁹ Necropolitical violence, then, refers to an entire ensemble of diverse practices that target the dead as a surrogate for, and means of, targeting the living.²⁰ In the interregnum of 2015, the state security forces' resort to necropolitical violence revitalized the legacy of the "dirty war" of the 1990s during which it had become an important facet of the conflict. However, the practices of necropolitical violence systematically pursued during the war, ranging from the mutilation of dead bodies and their staged photography to enforced disappearances, condemned only as "unavoidable excesses" of war, had largely been discontinued with the ending of the regional state of emergency.²¹ The revival of necropolitical violence, while not a *sui generis* cause of the irruption of the new political conjuncture in Turkey, can nonetheless be read as the symptom of its advent, signaling the hold of insecurity over the masses as a factor that fans the desire for militant securitization and the assurance of political stability, on the one hand, and the radicalization of insurgent violence and the separatist desire, on the other. As such, necropolitical violence has wide reaching implications, both in the way it hyperbolically announces the pervasive state of fear and enmity and by way of its role in the reproduction this state of insecurity, now generalized to include not only the living but also the dead. Necropolitical violence is also important in what it implies for the possibility of reconciliation between the Turkish and Kurdish peoples in the occasion of the cessation of violent conflict and the establishment of social and political peace. Finally, on a more theoretical register, the close analysis of necropolitical violence is crucial in order to critique unitary and limited conceptions of necropolitics so that we can develop a more accurate understanding of the heterogeneity of its manifestations and their political ramifications.

Dead Once, Dead Twice

On August 15, 2015, the image of the naked and bloody corpse of a woman was leaked to the press. The body

lay face down on the street next to a cardboard covered with plastic - a makeshift stretcher with which she was likely (to be) carried - before the feet of three men, all wearing civilian clothes. They were photographed below the shoulders, as standing casually around the body, and one had a pair of blue vinyl gloves, suggesting that he had inspected or handled the body.

As the images of the woman's naked dead body went viral on social media, it incited a river of derogatory and vitriolic ultranationalist commentary, celebrating her death and the exposure of her body. This was soon followed by furious reactions and fierce condemnations by human rights and women's organizations. The body in the images belonged to Kevser Eltürk, also known as Ekin Wan, a PKK militant and guerrilla, who had allegedly died some days earlier on August 10 in a confrontation with the security forces in the rural district of Varto (tied to the city of Mus).²² Upon the uproar caused by the leak, the Governor of Mus issued a statement: It has been established that some images of a female member of the PKK terror organization, who was rendered ineffective as a result of the clash with our security forces in a rural area of the Varto district of our province on August 10, 2015, are being published on some social media sites. Criminal and administrative investigations have been launched against the person or persons who have photographed, published, or served to social media those images that are unacceptable to the public or the governor's office.²³

As it is clear from this statement, what was unacceptable to the Governor's Office and what became the cause of the public investigation was not the circumstances of the Kurdish woman's death, nor its postmortem denuding, but its photography for public display and the distribution of these images to social media and their ensuing digital circulation.

In response to this violent display of the dead body, armed clashes took place in Varto between the security forces and PKK militants, with four casualties.²⁴ Kurdish women took to the streets in various different provinces on August 16 and after, with posters that read: "Ekin Wan is the naked form of our resistance," "Ekin Wan is our honor," and "It is dishonorable to play with a people's honor through its body."²⁵ Another evocative slogan read: "When the state undresses itself for torture, women dress on the resistance."²⁶ Prominent Kurdish women's organizations condemned the violence in stark terms.²⁷ On August 23, a Kurdish woman carried out a naked protest in front of the parliamentary building in Stockholm, lying facedown on the ground with red paint over her body, reenacting the scene that was disseminated in the image.²⁸ Peace activists and feminists in Ankara and Istanbul also staged demonstrations. Members of parliament from HDP filed a parliamentary motion that asked for a written explanation from the Minister of Interior about what happened, posing questions regarding the circumstances of the woman's death, whether she was killed in a clash or captured alive and killed under torture. Asking for official clarification, their motion underscored the observation that the ligature marks on the body evinced torture and suggested that Eltürk was also dragged around in the streets tied by a rope around her neck.

Outrageous as it was, the dissemination of the image of the postmortem naked display of Eltürk's body was not exactly exceptional. On the one hand, while still infrequent, such violence to the dead body is not unique to this case - in October 2015, for example, there surfaced the video of another lifeless body, belonging to a male militant called Hacı Lokman Birlik, as he was being dragged on the streets of Sirnak behind a military truck to which he was tied with a rope.²⁹ On the other hand, the Eltürk incident invokes other acts of violence with which it shares significant commonalities, acts directed at the dead body, its remains, burial, and commemoration in variegated ways. For example, what are we to make of the fact that between July 25 and August 5, some two dozen citizens of Turkey who crossed into Syria to fight against Islamic State and who lost their lives in Kobane were held at the border in trucks until their corpses almost decomposed in the scorching heat of the summer?³⁰ Is the policy to delay the entry of dead bodies back into Turkey for burial by their families not another modality of necropolitical violence that both enables and supplies context to the Eltürk incident? Similarly, how else can we interpret the development of civilian resistance aiming to stop the bombing and demolition of cemeteries and shrines dedicated to fighters who are revered as martyrs? In an especially

poignant move, Kurdish activists mobilized their lives as human shields to protect graves from physical destruction by the security forces, who in turn argued that the graves were being used to shield ammunition.³¹ Is the profanation of values held sacred by the local population not another form of necropolitical violence whose deployment imbues the Eltürk incident with a different significance? Overall, the sheer variety of these tactics and their repetition should at least be taken as an alarming sign that the denuding and display of Eltürk's dead body is not so exceptional. It should also prompt us to reconsider our conception of a homogenous necropolitics that is often oblivious to the violence deployed on the dead, and through them, on the living. The Eltürk incident thus offers itself as an exemplary case that sheds light on the multiple significations of necropolitical violence in contemporary Turkey. Most obviously, this violent targeting of the dead body points us to a remarkable dehumanization concretized in the body of the Kurdish guerrilla.³² Beyond the construction of the enemy as existentially "alien" and "other" in fundamentally antagonistic terms, which might still recognize her humanity, such postmortem violence reveals an absolutization of enmity.³³ Both the undignified treatment of the insurgent's body and the intensity of popular reactions on social media in the wake of the release of the image, reeking personalized hatred and disgust, suggest not only that the reduction of the enemy to something less than human is at work here, but that this reduction overlaps with the racialization and alterization of Kurdish identity. As a result, the desecration of the dead becomes a new site of articulating identity, of producing the ethnic, spiritual supremacy of the Turkish nation. The sovereign anxiety concerning ethnic separatism seeks to affirm the unity of the nation by designating some bodies as the threats that should be eliminated in order to produce a "pure" Turkish body by contrast. The production of some bodies as violable after death renders necropolitical violence as a means of the exclusionary construction of citizenship and its "others," a construction articulated through the divide between loyal subjects and treacherous subjects.³⁴ Hence, the politics over the dead becomes a means of "the production and contestation of sovereign limits of national politics and subjectivity."³⁵

At the same time, the dehumanization of the enemy merges with its sexualization and transformation into a vehicle of moralistic reprobation. In reading the necropolitical violence perpetrated upon Eltürk's body, it is impossible to overlook the patriarchy that has thoroughly infused it. At stake is the interweaving of feminization and denigration, not just racialization and alterization. According to Nazan Üstündag, such war over the dead reveals the "desire to punish beyond death as well as the state's inscription of itself into the most intimate relationships."³⁶ The projected effects of targeting a woman's body, its denuding, the staging of the scene in the form of a duality between the naked dead woman lying on the street at the feet of the fully clothed men standing around her, the photographic recording of the scene, and its dissemination to the public are calculated on the basis of this sexualization, without further necessitating the allegations of rape, which were nonetheless made. Regardless of the truth of these claims, the general economy of such a staging, it seems to me, is predicated on transforming Eltürk's nakedness into nudity, equating her subjugation to submission, and reinscribing her failed insurgency as a sexually and morally transgressive act, a promiscuity that is therefore considered deserving of the fate she suffers. The desired effect of the scene is that it will take away her "chastity," and not just her dignity, with the wager that this abjection will fall well beyond what is acceptable to dominant norms of being a woman.³⁷

While the sexualized character of this instance of necropolitical violence has rightly provoked many feminists to condemn the attack as "femicide," the key point, in my opinion, is not that she is killed as a female Kurdish guerrilla but that her body is considered to be a pliable instrument for the punishment of the Kurdish people as a whole.³⁸ There is an instrumentalization of the body as a woman's body, to be sure, since at issue is its denuding and dishonoring, as the means by which the humiliation of an entire people is aimed for and put into practice. This rests on a prior and implicit equivalence between the chastity and modesty of a woman with the honor and chastity of a nation.³⁹ Thus, once that chastity is violated, the expectation is that the people embodied in that chastity will be dishonored. What this implies is that, in tandem with this sexualization but not

crucially dependent on it, there is also a more general logic of surrogation in such practices of necropolitical violence.⁴⁰ This is because the effectiveness of such violence is crucially dependent on the synecdoche between the part and the whole, the particular and the general: not only between the woman's honor and the nation's honor, but also between the guerrilla's body and the Kurdish body politic, the local insurgency and the transborder nation. Such substitutions cannot work if the guerrilla's body were not taken as the embodiment of the struggle for liberation, if the dead body - man or woman - signified as a martyr of the struggle were not imagined as the generative source of the Kurdish nation in the first place.

As the "internal enemy" is punished with utmost visibility, undoubtedly emboldened by the voyeurism incited by the sexualization of the body and its violation, the spectacular and mediatized form of necropolitical violence does more than exacerbate the dehumanization of the enemy. Enabling the announcement of the forceful restoration of the state's sovereignty otherwise wounded by the insurgency, it also reproduces the effects of that sovereignty viscerally and visually, through the dissemination and circulation of the images of desecration. This (en)forced visibility that displays how an insurgent body is punished thus dictates the parameters of how the proper body must be constituted by way of contrast. Thus, in the same instrumentalization of the body what is being affirmed and reproduced is precisely the how of the proper female citizen, defined through those patriarchal norms of chastity, honor, obedience, submissiveness, as well as the more general political norms of citizenship, such as being a dutiful subject of the law and the duty not to endanger the unity of the country and its future, against Eltürk's defiance of those norms (though, of course, she can be considered as compliant with another series of norms practiced by her insurgent ideology and its attendant imaginary).

Finally, there are serious psychic implications of necropolitical violence, embedded as this act is within a practice of counterinsurgency warfare. Within the context of this struggle, the dead have tremendous power, Hisyar Özsoy tells us: "the Kurds resurrect their dead through a moral and symbolic economy of martyrdom as highly affective forces that powerfully shape public, political and daily life, promoting Kurdish national identity and struggle as a sacred communion of the dead and the living."⁴¹ Insofar as these deaths are inscribed within the imaginary of nationalist liberation and are endowed with a (re)generative power through their martyrdom, they have come to constitute a site of political contestation between the state and the Kurds. On the one hand, dead bodies are transformed into the symbolic vehicles of subduing the insurgent population. "Despite this diversity of its forms and contingency of its applications," Özsoy argues, "this politics constitutes a systematic technique of sovereign rule whose objective is to obstruct the politico-symbolic construction of death, to clearly dissociate the dead from the living, and to prevent the dead from being regenerated into the Kurdish national-symbolic."⁴² On the other hand, dead bodies also become the objects of resignification and reappropriation, giving rise to mobilizations and uprisings. In response to different forms of necropolitical violence, Özsoy draws attention to how "funeral ceremonies are transformed into massive protests, wherein the dead are immortalized through the institution of martyrdom, and the spectral power of the martyr is exchanged or processed into the core of national struggle and identity."⁴³ As a result, the dead body and, relatedly, different sites of death become deeply politicized as a new battleground upon which the ongoing conflict continues to be waged.

Beyond the Politics of Mourning

State violence in Turkey is not new. The Eltürk incident should be considered as part of a *longue durée* of the state's deployment of extralegal violence on its citizens: without even going back to the deep wounds left by atrocities of the early twentieth century on Armenians, non-Muslim minorities, the Kurds, Alevis, and the leftist political opposition, it is sufficient to consider the last few decades: the rampant torture within military prisons during the early 1980s, enforced disappearances, extrajudicial killings, enforced population displacements, and the "dirty war" of the 1990s, Operation "Return to Life" of the year 2000, i.e., the security operation into some twenty prisons in order to quash the hunger strike of political prisoners and transfer them into super-maximum security prisons, as well as, more recently, the police violence unleashed upon unarmed crowds during the occupation of Gezi Park and the ensuing mass mobilizations around the country. Being mindful of this history

does not mean we should underestimate the importance of the present moment, but it does caution us against attributing an absolute primacy and exceptionality to it. While the necropolitical violence we witness today has gained a different visibility with the broad reach afforded by social media, it is embedded within a deep-seated tradition of statecraft not unique to Turkey, a tradition that has to be further studied, theorized, and critiqued. The Turkish variant of this tradition has never shied away from deploying violent means in order to protect its sovereignty and unity against the forces it designates as threats to its security. Furthermore, in the Turkish case, it is necessary to note that this tradition has commanded a longevity that, despite some ebbs and flows, has resisted a neat distinction between periods of democratic politics and military rule. It might be helpful to recall that while the first elections after the 1980 coup d'état were held in November 1983 and that elections have been regularly held since then, martial law was only gradually phased out by 1987 and was replaced in the eastern and southeastern provinces with a regional "state of emergency" lifted only at the end of 2002. The low-intensity warfare waged against the armed struggle of Kurdish separatism spanned these decades of civilian rule, continuing into the present, with certain periods of ceasefire but without resolution.

In light of this continuity between the present and the past and across different regimes, where must we turn in our striving toward the resolution of Turkey's internal conflict and our hope for a peaceful, democratic, egalitarian future? Commentators who have written on the death of Ertürk have frequently drawn upon Judith Butler's powerful work on mourning as a potential recourse to our contemporary predicament.⁴⁴ When Butler asks what lives are grievable, she is really launching an investigation on our assumptions about what lives are deemed worthy as lives, as liveable and therefore grievable lives.⁴⁵ Mourning a lost life not only asserts our relationality in a deep, constitutive sense, but also exposes the power of that relationality to de-constitute and undo us, laying bare our vulnerability to one another. For Butler, the acknowledgement of this sociality entails the acceptance of the vulnerability of others as well as our own. However, some lives are politically disqualified and prohibited from being publicly grieved; "they cannot be mourned because they are always already lost or, rather, never 'were,' and they must be killed, since they seem to live on, stubbornly, in this state of deadness."⁴⁶ Situated within a field of power relations and norms of recognition that condition its differential distribution, vulnerability can be denied and transformed into grounds of further violence - this is precisely what sovereignty does, according to Butler - or it can be affirmed as a mutual condition that constitutes the normative ground of a new politics, a politics that might enable us to oppose the conditions that render some more vulnerable than others.⁴⁷

Butler's work is deeply insightful in showing us how the denuding and display of dead bodies is precisely the kind of sovereign boundary-making that separates who is grievable from who is not, who is loyal from who is not, who belongs to the nation from who does not, and who is deemed worthy to live and who is not. Whatever the justifications put forth for these distinctions, and regardless of whether those justifications are simply expedient or really legitimate, what is clear is that selective mourning for the dead is reflective of a deeply polarized country where the affective boundaries of the nation are violently policed, where grievability not only is differentially distributed but gains meaning only by way of being inscribed within one or the other of the antagonistic and increasingly mutually exclusive nationalist imaginaries wherein deaths are resignified as martyrdom. While the politics of mourning can easily affirm the already existing proclivities for war, Butler notes, it may also lead to new political relations that build collective resistances instead: "And whereas some forms of public mourning are protracted and ritualized, stoking nationalist fervor, reiterating the conditions of loss and victimization that come to justify a more or less permanent war, not all forms of mourning lead to that conclusion."⁴⁸ However, the question remains: given these conditions of differential and antagonistic grievability, continually deepening the rift among the peoples of Turkey, does the recognition of our common corporeal vulnerability hold the promise of the path that could lead out of the current impasse? Can the politics of mourning, one that insistently questions the permissible boundaries of mourning, and perhaps insists on publicly mourning those deemed ungrivable, enable us to transcend the already existing identifications and

psychic attachments to create the mutual ground of solidarity and the will to live together?

Butler's humanism seems less compelling in a political context whose contours are delineated by the politicization of death, where mourning is already deeply implicated within the lines of demarcation already drawn by necropolitics.⁴⁹ If the denuding and exposure of Eltürk functions as a surrogate for the disciplining and punishment of the living, thus transforming the dead body, its burial, funeral rituals, and the practices of public grieving into sites of contention and violence, does the adoption of a counter-politics of mourning not still enclose us within the same political framework? Despite its suggestive potentiality to make us recall our fundamental sociality and mutual vulnerability, thereby helping forge new solidarities that cut across the binary of who is and is not grievable, does it not lock us into a reactive position vis-à-vis power, even while it gives us the ability to refuse the division between lives, to critique the conditions that lead to the differential distribution of vulnerability, to refuse to participate in the drive toward securitization in denial of the unchangeable fact of our vulnerability? Perhaps the ability to mourn together is already a tremendous accomplishment, one that can be thought of as the fragile flower of the desire for peace that should be protected and cultivated at all costs. Nonetheless, it still seems to be a far cry from the active, creative, constituent power of collective imaginings that can move us beyond the very norms already delineated by dominant power relations, since the very foundations of modern state sovereignty, at least as they have been articulated in the Hobbesian paradigm that remains hegemonic, are based precisely on our corporeal vulnerability, which therefore necessitates (or, at the very least, permits) the security provided by sovereignty. How, then, can we expect the same foundational principles to lead to a substantially different outcome, to transcend the imaginary of the state? Perhaps we need to rely on a more affirmative ontology of ourselves based on "transindividuality," which challenges the common binary between the individual and society and suggests a conception of subjectivity in which relationality is not predicated on mutual vulnerability.⁵⁰ However difficult this re-orientation might prove to be, it is especially in this moment of political urgency that we need the critical-theoretical space to think and imagine otherwise, to invent novel practices of common life and subjectivities, from the ground up, insisting on a new imaginary that is independent from the politics of life and death signified by sovereignty itself. ⁵¹

None of this is to replace the very concrete and absolutely urgent political imperative to further the struggle for peace, to seek the immediate cessation of hostilities, and to hold the politicians and officials accountable for civilian harm and for the multifarious modalities of necropolitical violence whose infliction continually undermines and disables the possibility of peace. Neither does it mean that we should shy away from the critique of the violent tactics of the Kurdish movement, whose destruction of lives cannot be condoned or explained away simply by reference to the asymmetric relations of power and the oppressive conditions out of which it emerges. Might does not make right, no doubt, but it is rarely the case that a wrong can be made right by might. It is important to insist on the question that Étienne Balibar has thoughtfully raised: "[U]nder what conditions can we think a politics that is neither an abstraction from violence ('nonviolence') nor an inversion of it ('counterviolence'-especially in its repressive forms, state forms, but also in its revolutionary forms, which assume that they must reduplicate it if they are to 'monopolize' it) but an internal response to, or displacement of, it?"⁵² Insofar as violent conflict remains the primary determinant of politics, it seems to me, the aspiration to build a common life on the basis of an affirmative conviviality and the search for a new political imaginary beyond sovereignty are bound to remain tethered to the hegemonic model of statehood and harried with the continuous threat of securitization.

In the electoral interregnum of 2015, and even more pronouncedly since then, the prospects of peace in Turkey have come to look bleak indeed. In a political conjuncture marked by forms of death-making, it is difficult to speak of alternatives that move us beyond the predicaments of the present. These predicaments are exacerbated with the resort to necropolitical violence, which is not only symptomatic of the existing state of insecurity, but also one of its determining forces, contributing further to the radicalization of conflict. Necropolitical violence does more than designate which bodies are violable after death, thereby constituting the

injunction to redraw the affective boundaries of the nation through the absolutization of enmity. Its ambition to discipline and subdue the living through the surrogation of the dead points us to the limits of culture and erodes the bonds of sociality altogether. This is precisely why we must insist on peace. Can we create a politics of solidarity, conviviality, and collective action beyond the common ground we discover in the simple humanity of mourning the loss of lives or the violence encountered after death? Can we look beyond the politics of mourning, beyond the politics of life and death that provides its conditions of possibility, to create an alternative where the "common weal" is really held, shared, experienced, produced, and consumed in common, where this commonality leads us to reconfigure our modes of political engagement and togetherness? Necropolitics reminds us that already there are forms of death beyond death. It is incumbent on us to find and advance forms of common life beyond the life we are made to live.

Footnote

Notes

1. For the composition of the Grand National Assembly of Turkey, see "Türkiye Büyük Millet Meclisi Milletvekilleri Dağılımı" [Distribution of Members of Parliament in the Grand National Assembly of Turkey], https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/develop/owa/milletvekillerimiz_sd.dagilim.
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5. For a tally of civilian deaths and human right violations, see Türkiye İnsan Hakları Vakfı [Human Rights Foundation of Turkey], *Curfews in Turkey between 16 August 2015 - 12 December 2015, Fact Sheet*, <http://en.tihv.org.tr/curfews-in-turkey-between-16-august-2015-12-december-2015/>.
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Turkey], Fact Sheet on Declared Curfews between 11-25 December 2015 and Violations of Right to Life Against Civilians, available at: <http://en.tihv.org.tr/fact-sheet-on-declared-curfews-between-11-25-december-and-violations-of-right-to-life-against-civilians/>. Also see Peoples' Democratic Party, "Urgent Call for Solidarity and Action," Press Release, December 23, 2015, available at: <https://hdpenglish.wordpress.com/2015/12/23/urgent-call-for-solidarity-and-action/>.

10. See, for example, the commentary by journalist Ezgi Basaran, "15 Yildir Takip Edilen Adam Nasil Diyarbakir-Suruç-Ankara'yi Planladi?" [How Did The Man Being Followed for 15 Years Plan Diyarbakir-Suruç-Ankara], *Radikal*, December 14, 2015, <http://www.radikal.com.tr/yazarlar/ezgi-basaran/15-yildir-takip-edilen-adam-nasil-diyarbakir-suruc-ankarayi-planladi-1491958/>.

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12. Michel Foucault, *History of Sexuality*, Vol. 1, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage Books, 1990), 136, and Michel Foucault, "Society Must Be Defended": Lectures at the Collège de France, 1975-1976, ed. Mauro Bertani and Alessandro Fontana, trans. David Macey (New York: Picador, 2003), 240-41.

13. Henry A. Giroux, "Reading Hurricane Katrina: Race, Class, and the Biopolitics of Disposability," *College Literature* 33, no. 3 (2006), 175.

14. For the discussion of how biopolitical abandonment and violence plays out within the domain of racialized queer politics, see Jasbir K. Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times* (Durham: Duke University Press), 33-36.

15. Achille Mbembe, "Necropolitics," *Public Culture* 15, no. 1 (2003), 39.

16. Mbembe, 21. Following Mbembe, Lambel argues that the prison, along with the colony and the territories under occupation, should also be considered as a site of necropower insofar as it destines bodies to a living death through "mass warehousing." Sarah Lambel, "Queer Necropolitics and the Expanding Carceral State: Interrogating Sexual Investments in Punishment," *Law & Critique* 24 (2013): 229-253. Also see Stuart J. Murray, "Thanatopolitics: On the Use of Death for Mobilizing Political Life," *Polygraph* 18 (2006), 191-215.

18. For still other forms of the politicization of death, especially as part of resistance movements and prison struggles, see Banu Bargu, *Starve and Immolate: The Politics of Human Weapons* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014).

18. Mbembe, 40.

19. Instead of what Agamben calls "bare life," as life that is produced as sacred by the operation of sovereignty, perhaps what we are faced with is "bare death" - one that is defined by its vulnerability to the operation of sovereign violence but also one that becomes the vehicle of disciplining other bodies and rendering them targets of further violence. Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998).

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23. Diken, "Mus Valiliği, Çıplak PKK'li Kadın Cesedi Fotoğrafının Gerçek Olduğunu Duyurdu" [Mus Governor's Office Announced that the Naked Corpse of Woman Affiliated with PKK Is Real], August 16, 2015, available at: <http://www.diken.com.tr/mus-valiligi-ciplak-pkkli-kadin-fotografinin-gercek-oldugunu-duyurdu/>. For an analysis of the euphemisms used by the state, see Tanil Bora, "Ölü Ele Geçirme" [Capturing Dead], *Birikim Haftalık Yazılar*, October 14, 2015, available at: <http://www.birikimdergisi.com/haftalik/7250/olu-ele-gecirme#.VphjMOMkZt>.
24. Sevim Salihoglu et al., "Mus İli Varto İlçesinde Meydana Gelen Olayları Araştırma Ve İnceleme Raporu" [Fact-finding and Investigation Report of the Incidents that Took place in the Varto District of Mus Province], *İnsan Hakları Derneği Özel Raporu* [Human Rights Association Special Report], August 20, 2015, <http://www.ihd.org.tr/mus-ili-varto-ilcesinde-meydana-gelen-olaylari-arastirma-ve-inceleme-raporu/>.
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45. Judith Butler, *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (New York and London: Verso, 2004), 20.

46. *Ibid.*, 33.

47. *Ibid.*, 30.

48. *Ibid.*, xix.

49. It is not just that certain bodies have been rendered ungrievable, mourning itself has become a tool of government. Let us recall that a day of national mourning was officially declared after the passing of King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia but not after the Suruç bombing where 33 citizens were killed.

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51. Does the Kurdish turn toward a federative politics of "democratic autonomy" within the existing borders of Turkey in place of the hitherto dominant goal of establishing a separate nation-state hold such a promise? Might it transcend the horizon of sovereignty and cut across the antagonistic positionality of both nationalist imaginaries? I will not be able to pursue these questions in depth within the limits of this essay. However, for a recent theoretical assessment, see Bülent Küçük and Ceren Özselçuk, "The Rojava Experience: Possibilities and Challenges of Building a Democratic Life," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 115, no. 1 (January 2016): 184-96. According to Küçük and Özselçuk, "democratic autonomy, in its critique of the nation-state, places itself in a relation of deconstructing, rather than destroying the state and, thus, does not rule out the possibility of coexistence with a state form, even a Kurdish state form" (194). The authors thus suggest that neither the critique of the nation-state nor that of the centralized, bureaucratic state should be construed as equivalent to the critique of the state-form or of sovereignty as such. In a more enthusiastic assessment of the way this politics is being played out in Rojava, Nazan Üstündag argues that "the state is being unmade," even though she recognizes that, through the mechanism of internal and external representation and the performance of certain functions, there is also the ongoing possibility of the state being remade. See Nazan Üstündag, "Self-Defense as a Revolutionary Practice in Rojava, or How to Unmake the State," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 115, no. 1 (January 2016), 208.

52. Étienne Balibar, *Violence and Civility: On the Limits of Political Philosophy*, trans. G. M. Goshgarian (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015), 22.

AuthorAffiliation

Banu Bargu

Banu Bargu is Associate Professor of Politics at the New School for Social Research. Her research focuses on theories and practices of sovereignty, biopolitics, and resistance. She is the author of *Starve and Immolate: The Politics of Human Weapons* (Columbia University Press, 2014), which received APSA's First Book Prize given by the Foundations of Political Theory section. She is currently working on new book manuscript that aims to rethink the materialist tradition, especially in light of the posthumous publication of Louis Althusser's work on the aleatory. Banu can be reached at banubargu@newschool.edu

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