EMERGENT IMAGES:

FRAMES OF COUNTERINSURGENT WARFARE

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EMERGENT IMAGES:

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Emergent Images: Frames of Counterinsurgent Warfare

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DECLARATION OF ORIGINALITY

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- this thesis contains no material that has been submitted or accepted for a degree or diploma in any other educational institution;
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ABSTRACT

Emergent Images: Frames of Counterinsurgent Warfare

This thesis addresses contemporary transformations in political violence, image-making, and digital culture by focusing on the frames and visibilities of counterinsurgent warfare. The empirical basis of this work is an archive of images comprising photographs and videos that circulated on the internet during various recent counterinsurgency operations. Discussion of these images is complemented with observations made during cyberethnographic fieldwork conducted while assembling the archive. Following a reflection on the problems of an archive framed through a human rights perspective that searches for facts and evidence regarding violations, this thesis approaches the images in the archive with a focus on the relationship between image-making and political violence. Placed in the context of counterinsurgent governmentality, the images in the archive are taken as exemplary of counterinsurgency as a war waged in the visual field. An analysis of the different frames and visibilities of the counterinsurgency operations is followed by reflections on their implications for a witnessing of the war. Particular attention is paid to images shared via social media by the state's forces, which are discussed as acts of violent display with a special meaning-making force that (re)inscribe gendered, racialized and sexualized forms of sovereignty and identity.

ÖZET

Olağanüstü İmgeler: İsyan Karşıtı Savaşın Tertipleri

Bu tez, isyanları bastırmak üzere yapılan savaşların nasıl tertip edildiğine ve bu savaşların görünür ve görünmez boyutlarına odaklanarak siyasal şiddet, imge yaratımı ve dijital kültür ekseninde gerçekleşen dönüşümü kavramaya çalışır. Bu çalışmanın ampirik temelinde ise isyan karşıtı harekâtlar sırasında üretilip internete yüklenerek yayılan fotoğraf ve videoların oluşturduğu bir görsel arşiv yer alır. Tez, metodolojik olarak hem bu imgelerin analizine hem de arşivin oluşturulma aşamasında gerçekleştirilen siber etnografik saha çalışmasında yapılan gözlemlere dayanır. İlk aşamada, bu arşiv çalışmasından yola çıkarak insan hakları odaklı bir yaklaşımın varsaydığı ‘olgu’ ve ‘delil’ kavramları sorunsallaştırılır. Ardından, arşivdeki kaynaklara imge ile siyasal şiddet arasındaki ilişkiyi incelemek için başvurulur. Arşivdeki imajlar, isyan karşıtı bir yönetimsellik tarzı (*counterinsurgent governmentality*) bağlamında ele alınarak isyan karşıtı savaşın görsel alanı da kapsayan bir savaş hali olduğunu göstermek için kullanılır. İsyan karşıtı operasyonların tertip ve görünürlük şekillerinin analizinden elde edilen sonuçların savaşa tanıklık etme imkanlarını nasıl etkilediği tartışılır. Bu doğrultuda, devlet güçlerinin sosyal medya aracılığıyla paylaştıkları imgeler de konu edilir. Bu imajlar, cinsiyetçi, ırksallaştırılmış ve cinselleştirilmiş egemenlik ve kimlik biçimlerinin (yeniden) inşasında özel bir anlam yaratma gücüne sahip şiddetli teşhir eylemleri olarak tartışılır.

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CHAPTER 1

ENTERING FRAMES OF WAR

1.1 Introduction

No gunshots fired - the only trigger pulled is that of a camera, icing out one of the many visual projectiles that would travel through various online social media platforms much like a scattershot. The eyes staring at the objective, staring at *us* once the image starts circulating on the internet, from behind the balaclava leave no doubt that this photograph of a masked and armed member of the Special Forces in full attire posing in front of a mirror in the bedroom of a private home is carefully staged. Who is *us*? As much as this image potentially constitutes community, it aims to destroys others. Here at least, it is written on the mirror with a lipstick, "*love is experienced in a different way*". Although this kind of love ultimately spells death, this image neither captures outright killing or the arbitrary destruction of urban space, nor is it immediate evidence of civilian death or the forced migration suffered by hundreds of thousands of people. Taken in the Yüksekova district of the Hakkari Province in 2016 during one of the indefinite, round-the-clock curfews, this photograph[1] urges us to ask: "[w]here does violence emerge into visibility, and what visibilities does violence create? [...] where does the rifle scope leave off and the camera lens begin?" (Feldman, 1997, p. 31). It raises compelling questions regarding the production of the visible behind these modes of visualization and its pertaining political iconographies. Images like this one, so many of which swept the internet during the counterinsurgency operations in Turkey's Kurdistan, possess a force in their own right and strike as a distinct form of violence.

[1] The image itself is included later in this thesis, where it will also be discussed more extensively.

In this thesis, I want to address contemporary transformations in political violence, digital culture and image-making in their interconnectedness as historically conditioned social practices. Grounding my work empirically in a sample of images circulated on the internet during the recent counterinsurgency operations in the Kurdish provinces, my aim is to investigate the relationship between these images and violence. What do the images represent and, in fact, do they only represent? In how far is image-making itself involved in the violence and conversely, what kind of images does violence produce? Interest in the visual making of conflict raises the question how visuality, power, domination, and control are interrelated within historically specific and politically constructed conditions of vision and visibility (Hochberg, 2015, p. 4). Though such an undertaking implies a distancing from the immediate site of violence, it should be emphasized that we are dealing with a problem that "is not separate from or secondary to actual war experience but is *primary* war experience" (Apel, 2012, p. 151). There are sound reasons for attending to the questions of how violence appears, how we see a conflict, and the respective role of images.

Generally, I am led by the assumption that photography and video have acquired a privileged position when it comes to representing political violence. They in many ways create the legibility or illegibility and the perceived reality of events (Mirzoeff, 2011; Azoulay, 2008). At times, when no other evidence or traces are available to establish what actually happened, images can in fact constitute the phenomenon itself (Sontag, 2003). In many cases images moreover tend to be present and active participants to a scenario or event (Butler, 2009; Nichols, 2010). With respect to the situation during the curfews, these three aspects all seem equally

valid. In addition, it seems fair to say that the rise of digital and social media has led to an increase in the speed and quantity of images of violence.

More specifically, I would contend that the scope of war is not restricted to the conquest of territories and the physical defeat of 'the enemy', but that war is also quite crucially waged in the visual field, as a 'contest of images' (Apel, 2012) and as struggles to appropriate "the 'immateriality' of perceptual fields" (Virilio, 1989, p. 10). War thus includes the instrumentalization of images - and visual aesthetics more generally - in battles over memory and meaning. Images, fantasy, spectacle, and myth are therefore not opposed to 'reality', whether historical or material, but play an important role in the formation of individuals and the state (see Taylor, 1997, pp. 29-30). For that matter, we are never simply dealing with mimetic representations, but always with 'ways of seeing' (Berger, 1972), visions and representations that are permeated by power, gendered, sexualized, racialized, and that are active in the construction of 'self' and 'other' within broader scopic regimes. Approaching the relationship between practices of violence and representation, one should try to conceive of frames of war as enmeshed between politics and aesthetics. This presupposition helps us to grasp how violence is framed so that the lives of 'others' become less grievable (Butler, 2009) and how violence can ultimately appear as lawful and rational (Feldman, 1994, p. 409). Following Ranciere, we can therefore take aesthetics as refering to a particular 'distribution of the sensible' that delimits sense experience. In this thesis, aesthetics is at stake primarily as a 'distribution of the visible' and its implications for politics as a form of experience that "revolves around what is seen and what can be said about it" (Ranciere, 2004, p. 12-13). In this respect, images have to be considered in their relationship to distinct 'systems of visibility' and the modes of attention infused by the latter (Ranciere, 2009, 99).

Roughly outlined, this is the framework within which I will undertake an analysis of violence, images, and bodies in the curfew zone.

The breakdown of the so-called 'Peace Process' between the Turkish state and the PKK led to a spiraling down into a new episode of intensified armed conflict. While the declaration of round-the-clock curfews and the designation of special military operation areas in different Kurdish provinces by the Turkish state stir up memories of the so-called low-intensity warfare of the 1990s, the concentration of the conflict on major cities like Sur, Cizre, Nusaybin and Şırnak points to a transformation in the articulation of political violence. Here, urban warfare as 'counterinsurgency operations' in the afore-mentioned cities is, as we will see, best understood in the context of a "concatenation of biopower, the state of exception, and the state of siege" (Mbembe, 2003, p. 22). In the course of the operations, residential areas were held under attack with heavy arms, which led to a vast destruction of urban space. Local citizens were deprived of their access to food, water and health care supply. Alongside the high number of casualties among the state's forces and the Kurdish militias, many civilians died while some of the corpses were left waiting on the streets or in freezers. In the areas under curfew, outright and invisible, physical and symbolical death co-existed.

Since access to the respective areas from the outside was temporarily suspended, verifiable information, even regarding casualties, were hard to obtain. Journalists, human rights organizations, activists and 'citizen journalists' were working under the constant threat of being detained, if not executed. Meanwhile, Turkey's military involvement in Syria and the extension of the state of exception to the entire country after the coup-attempt of 15 July 2016 contributed to aggravating the already severe situation, both in terms of a countrywide crackdown on initiatives

opposing the war and, arguably, of a further militarization of the Turkish society. This minimal perspective leaves out the unending series of major events and transformations the country is going through in the last years. The sheer number and spatio-temporal density of events, Hamit Bozarslan holds, are detrimental to the formation of memory in general and the possibility of collective memory more particularly (Bozarslan, 2018). Commenting on recent developments Bülent Küçük and Ceren Özselçuk use the metaphor of 'time-lapse photography' to describe how social life has accelerated (Küçük & Özselçuk, 2019a, p. 1).

This might actually be more than a neat figure of speech that aptly captures the quick and constant fading away and forgetting of previous events: time-lapse photography can be taken as a direct allusion to the broad range of images of light and sound as which many events reach their distant observer. I would suggest that acceleration is a phenomenon related not only to the speed with which events occur, but also to the communication infrastructure through which these are experienced. Here, I am referring to the endless feeds and the non-stop instantaneous 'last-minute' (*son dakika*) rhythm through and with which events circulate as news on the internet, which I would argue, has become a privileged, if not the primary source for information. This might be due just as much to censorship and government-alignment in the sphere of mainstream and conventional media as to a more general shift in communicating and relating to the world brought about by smart phone and social media use. In any way, in the face of this shift an acceleration may have taken place that is accompanied by the proliferation of a multiplicity of images.

The areas under curfew, as zones of exception, were at least no exception in this respect. Despite the above-mentioned difficulties regarding direct access to the curfew zones, relatively many photographs and videos were produced by various

actors and later circulated on the internet. Overall, the circulation of the visual material – sometimes even as video livestream – on the internet enabled de-territorialized, albeit virtualized, spectator's vision of different dimensions of violence. Though generally speaking authorship of the images is rather hard to determine, it seems safe to say that an important share of the image-production was done by members of the state's executive forces.

Hence the title of this thesis: *Emergent images* first of all refers to images that, despite general restrictions on media access, emerged from the curfew zones and from within the flood of visual bits and pieces that surround social media users every day. As *Frames of counterinsurgent warfare*, they are images of a distinct form of emergency. Guided by the overall interest with the relationship between images and violence, I will approach these images from the perspective of the 'frames' and 'visibilities' of counterinsurgency. Emergent images can however further be read as an allusion to the idea that counterinsurgent warfare is an actualization of sovereign violence, which causes images of identity, community, the nation and the state to emerge into visibility. Therefore however, I see reason to take these images not only as 'emergent' but also as 'exceptional', notwithstanding wellfounded arguments to maintain a difference between both terms. I understand the curfew area as a 'zone of indistinction' between constituted power and constitutive violence, where order and community are (re)made in a lethal mode of inclusion by exclusion (see Agamben, 1998, 2005). Exceptional violence has thus to be seen as a medium of both: communication and excommunication. During counterinsurgency, effects of male and national sovereignty are produced through the mobilization of bodies and spaces as templates and surfaces for inscription, which through their capture as images become constitutive of community. The constitution of community

operates exactly through the excommunication of gendered, sexualized, and racialized bodies. These are the movements between images and violence that I would like to trace in the course of this thesis, which will take the following route.

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A discussion of the archive that I will subsequently be basing myself on, the second chapter is supposed to provide insights into the initial stages of the research process. In my opinion, it is necessary to highlight that the archive was assembled according to a distinct rationale. During the time, the so-called Peace Process broke down and the curfews were declared, I was working in at *Hakikat Adalet Hafıza Merkezi* (*Hafıza Merkezi* [HM], engl.Truth Justice Memory Center) in Istanbul, under the roof of which the archive was compiled with a concern to document counterinsurgency warfare with respect to potential human rights violations and a (future) coming to terms with this violent episode. From the very beginning, the images were framed through a particular narrative and apprehended as factual representations and possible evidence that could support respective truth claims. My attempt to elucidate the particularities of this archive and the kind of problems, limitations and challenges it faced is, to an extent, a reflexive engagement with my active involvement in this process somewhere between distant spectatorship and engaged observation. Thus, I would like to show how my understanding of this archive changed in this process, before I go on to describe how I am planning to 'actualize' the archive in an attempt to use the archival material in order gain an understanding of the relationship between violence and image-making. In this context, I will also provide genealogical accounts of the state of exception and 'counterinsurgent governmentality' in Turkey's Kurdistan, along the lines of which I hope to understand the recent counterinsurgent warfare. Pointing out the historical

and structural context that prevents us from seeing them as disjunctive or accidental *ex nihilo* outbursts of spectacular violence, this chapter seeks not only to re-frame but also to 'decenter' the images in the archive of the curfews.

In Chapter 3, I will try to trace the different frames and visibilities that we encounter with respect to the curfews. Relying on the images in the archive of the curfews and additional observations made during cyberethnographic fieldwork conducted while collecting the material for the archive, I am interested in the production of distributions of the visible surrounding counterinsurgent warfare. As a panoramic overview comprising media images, the site of the curfew area, the field of culture, operational images and digital media, the first section should serve to show how counterinsurgent warfare is seen in Turkey, what kind of visibilities emerge in this war. These are important questions with respect to the rationalization, naturalization, and/or legitimization of violence as well as the construction of identities. The second section will follow up on previous observations in order to deal with the problem of witnessing, which will be discussed through the concepts of 'percepticide' (Taylor, 1997) and 'transparency of evil' (Keenan, 2004a).

Chapter number four is titled *Images with a special force*. Here, I will analyze images that more or less directly involve the state's Special Forces, the Gendarmerie and Police Special Operations Teams (*JÖH* and *PÖH* by their Turkish abbreviations). These images seem to have exerted a special force with respect to their performative and communicative power. It is in this context that I would like to 'read' a selection of images as 'digital postcards', which disseminate (ex)communicative messages. The argument I want to pursue is that images of staged acts of violence – acts of 'violent display' (see Fujii, 2018) - may be said to attempt to most graphically (re)inscribe belonging, to (re)invoke a particular order, and/or to

(re)institute power and sovereignty. Here, valuing Judith Butler's (2004, 2009) criticism of sovereignty in ontological, epistemological, and ethical terms does in my eyes not contradict acknowledging the important role sovereign images, imaginations and imaginaries play at the intersection between (material) reality and fantasy that we encounter in the images. During my analysis, the themes of love and memory have emerged as the primary thematic keys in analyzing acts of staging and inscription of bodies and space that speak to the gendered, sexualized, racialized, and colonial modalities of counterinsurgency warfare. Alongside explicitly staged images, I will try to incorporate an analysis of the distribution of visibilities into my discussion here. Therefore, attention will be paid to differences in the modes of exposure and practices of optical colonization. Reaching the conclusion, I would like to hope that my thesis can contribute new insights and raise further questions regarding contemporary articulations of the interplay between political violence and image-making in the context counterinsurgency.

1.2 Shortcomings

Some major shortcomings of this work should be made note of right at the outset. As Ramazan Aras notes, the subjective and collective experiences of political violence in Turkey's Kurdistan have profound effects on community, identity, and memory (see Aras, 2014). Although most of the images analyzed here clearly also address the local populations, this research does not include their experiences of and reactions to this war in the visual field. A thesis written at Sabancı University that so far remains unpublished, examines the emotional responses to the Special Forces graffitis among politicized Kurdish youth in Istanbul. In fact, if we follow the lead of the book *O Sesler [These Noises]* by Nurcan Baysal (2018), we can assume that for the local

population, counterinsurgent warfare in Diyarbakır was primarily relayed through an auditive experience (which does not mean, however, that people would not also have been exposed to the digital battlefield).

On another plane, because this research centers around the staged acts of violence of the Special Forces, the agency of other bodies will appear to be mostly obliterated. Therefore, I feel compelled to emphasize that this is not the result of my forgetting or neglect but of the production of the visible by said actors, which I am trying to critically engage with. However, there is dire need for research on counter-discourses, on possible ways of countering the dominance of the counterinsurgent mode of visuality. Next, the focus on the images of the Special Forces, which I judge to be connected by strong visual resemblances irrespective of the particular locus of production, bears the problem of disregarding or overriding the particularities of localized conflict. Adnan Çelik has convincingly shown that our understanding of the historical trajectories of conflict depends on a decidedly local focus that does not stop at a simple opposition of the state and the PKK (Çelik, 2014).

Furthermore, I will refer to the remediation of counterinsurgency warfare movies, video games, TV series etc. by way of contextualization, but will not go into details regarding the broader field of militarized media and the implications this could have in terms of a (civil) war economy. Madra and Yılmaz recently discussed the Turkish economy's general shift toward construction and defense industries (see Madra & Yılmaz, 2019). Neither will I be able to account for different armed actors' (village guards, Sadat, JITEM etc.) interest in war, nor can I discuss the role of the holdings that are in possession of major companies in both media and defense. Finally, a discussion of the destruction of urban spaces in Turkish Kurdistan in the framework of capitalist accumulation is beyond the scope of this project, though I do

agree with authors that see counterinsurgent governmentality as based on the 'clear-hold-build' mantra.

With respect to conceptualizing the very content of the thesis itself, I was confronted with the difficulty of selection. Pursuing particular themes meant choosing only a certain number of images that speak to the problem and thus to leave out the rest of the material. In effect, the thesis is the outcome of a double selection process: selection during the compilation of the archive and selection of images and themes for this thesis. I hope that I have made clear the rationale and the questions that guide these themes. Nonetheless I would still like to at least mention the category of images of destruction of urban space, often captured in after-images of ruin, as a major category in terms of its quantity that has not made it into the thesis. Perhaps the images of the curfews can guide research that adopts an explicitly spatial perspective.

1.3 Writing violent images: A few notes on methodology & ethics

In approaching images of violence, I am led, first of all, by a line of reasoning that finds that "there is no simple recourse to the visible, to visual evidence" (Butler, 1993a, p. 17). If my thesis is to be understood as an act of 'reading' the images, then this raises a quite fundamental question: who is delivering these acts of reading? Although I am definitely not interested in searching for any origins, I do think that it is important to reflect on positionality. Within a force field, that is, the intersection of different material and discursive practices, I understand this to be the position taken up by the subject that is about to speak. To be sure, one could attempt to define different markers that would circumscribe this position. However, none of these would eventually do justice to the complex argument that acts of looking are always

already social. Here, I would rather hold that I am ultimately unable to really give a full account of myself, of this 'I' that looks and speaks throughout this thesis (see Butler, 2005). Judith Butler has expressed this realization by suggesting that "I am not fully known to myself, because part of what I am is the enigmatic traces of others" (Butler, 2004, p. 46). In heavily relying on the realist practice of citation, I strive perhaps not only to produce a work that fulfills scientific standards, but also to render visible and audible some of these enigmatic traces and voices.

But these considerations should not serve as a smoke screen that obfuscates questions of responsibility. Positionality then also implies the way the subject is positioned and positions itself with respect to violence and injustice, that is to say, the subject's implication in history and the multidirectional memories related to it (see Rothberg, 2013). Early on, my memory and perception of violence was shaped by questions of individual and collective responsibility, denial, and repression. Brought up and socialized in Germany, the question 'how something like Auschwitz was possible' and what would need to be done for such a thing not to occur again had always been at the heart of this concern. The Nazis had accumulated an astounding archive of their machinery of destruction. What had been an archive of destruction, a technology indispensable for the execution of total war, the Shoah, and mass atrocities, would turn into evidence for the crimes against humanity of Nazism after its military defeat. Yet despite the seeming abundance of documents and evidence that point to the realities under Nazism, many contemporaries would claim that they had not known, not seen anything. In the aftermath, a huge gap appeared to prevail between (objective) evidence on the one and (subjective) interpretation on the other hand. Only later would the violence of the past be transformed into a resource for the present that was supposed to instruct a historically articulated ethics founded on a

negative principle. The question of Nazism, as I understand it, is inseparable from the question of how an entire society could either actively or passively comply with a regime that murdered millions of people. Now, as I was entering the frames of war in Turkey, it seemed to me that hardly anything regarding even the gravest violations remained hidden, but that this did not make a difference.

For me, the encounter with the images from the curfew zones, especially with the smiling faces and brazen attitudes of the state's Special Forces, provoked a stream of associations including the photographs in German SS-commander Karl Höcker's album from Auschwitz, which show leading Nazis enjoying their time off duty in a retreat in the immediate vicinity of the extinction camps. I had always felt that it was in these frames that the all-too familiarly human and the inhuman converged most distinctly. To me, the question 'what am I capable of' became quite crucial in this respect. This concerns my potential to and distance from violence as well as my capacities to oppose it. One actually quite simple thing I came to realize during the counterinsurgent war in Turkey was that there was a major gap between knowing what to oppose on a rather abstract level and knowing how and where to oppose it. Confronted with the images from Turkey's Kurdistan, I felt largely unprepared.

Was I not living in the same country in which this war was supposed to be waging at the same time? Why was there so little that would speak to this reality in the streets, shopping malls, cinemas, bars etc.? Or rather, how could silence prevail although there was in fact so much that seemed to scream out the message of war at everyone? The curfew operations also quite clearly revealed that war had extended into and spread across cyberspace. While the many images circulating online certainly reconfigure the distribution of the visible with respect to war, it is much

harder to tell in how far 'spectatorship' in terms of the interrelations between perception, affection, and action are affected by this (see Ranciere, 2009, 103). Personally, I was terrified to see, beyond the overall lack of an effective opposition to war despite these images, that people I knew personally were sharing images of violence with endorsing messages and sometimes more or less directly 'pronouncing death sentences'. How did people arrive at the conclusion that they were entitled to such judgments? How could it be possible that any one image could provoke reactions so disparate?

The experience of daily exposure to the images of the curfews as I was tracking them down was pervasive, crawling though flesh and skin, creating the feeling that there was no escape route out of this mirror labyrinth of violence and its manifold images, but nothing really that could be done about it, either. Like in Paul Celan's poem *An Eye, Open*, images were flowing in uncontrolledly, stinging the wide-open eyeballs that refused to turn away from them. Never look away. However, this imperative did not come as a mode of disengaged registration. For Celan, the tear replaces the eye's normal lens. An image that is entering the eye is never recognized as such. Instead, it is always perceived in combination with the tear. Emphasis on the profound role of violence and injury in terms of epistemology is found not only in Celan but also in Adorno, who, in his Minima Moralia, developed the striking notion that "[t]he splinter in your eye is the best magnifying-glass" (Adorno, 2005, p.50).

While I am certainly concerned to understand the perpetration of violence, I will therefore repeat that I am reading the images in this thesis as a clearly positioned spectator. Violence and war do not only endanger life most generally, but also work to establish a blinding and deafening matter-of-fact truth that threatens any possible

mode of witnessing. Political violence effectuates a repression of multiplicity that Diana Taylor cogently captures when noting that "[w]e profit from the violence or we're undone by it. Can we even dream of opening up any other spaces?" (Taylor, 1997, p. 25). With this thesis, my efforts could be described as counter-hegemonic as far as they are directed toward the deconstruction of what I perceive as distinct truth effects - while other truths perhaps disappear behind images of war. My hope is that I would be able to open up a space where something else can become visible and speakable; not so much for us to be able to judge, but in order to understand and return to a place where communication is possible.

Though we should definitely not forget that every image and therefore every event among the *Images with a special force* that I will be analyzing in this thesis is to some degree singular and unique, I do think that it will overall become clear that the resemblances between many of the images also attest to a 'collective character'. Through contextualization, I aspire to ground the images in a 'political energy field', in which specific performative and discursive registers combine in distinct ways, thus allowing for the assumption of specific positions (Theweleit, 1987, p. 24n.20). It is from such a perspective that I would like to inquire into the reality-structuring and meaning-making force of performativity as reiterative and citational practice (Butler, 1993b; Taylor, 1997). In this undertaking, I am sharing Judith Butler's assumption that "the subject is constituted through the force of exclusion and abjection, one which produces a constitutive outside to the subject, an abjected outside, which is, after all, 'inside' the subject as its own founding repudiation" (Butler, 1993b, p. 3). Violence, I would hold, plays an important role in these processes of subject constitution.

This thesis consequently centers on grave violence and its graphic images. But writing violence, that should go without further proof, can almost never make a contribution as far as the cessation or resolution of violent conflict is concerned. Nor could this particular project dare to come up with any tangible suggestions for these kinds of pragmatic goals. Consequently, such writing might quickly see itself confronted with the accusation of aestheticizing suffering and domination. There are certain iconoclastic tropes that hinge on the charge that this aestheticization would either result in nothing but pornographic exploitation or even further and reproduce violence. I am suspicious of the possibility of a non- or pre-aesthetic ground, which such judgment would seem to require – especially in times that are characterized by multiple ways of mediating perception. So, from where are these critiques delivered?

Here, I feel myself closer to Ariella Azoulay and would prefer to see a problematization of the all-too-easy opposition between the aesthetic and the political (Azoulay, 2012, p. 1). Perhaps, we are thus better advised to ackowledge "acts of aestheticization as intrinsic to power" (Feldman, 1997, p. 58) and to move the aesthetics of political violence to the center of our concern. Nazan Üstündağ (2013) has even put forward the claim that we could conceive of the modality of state violence through the concept of a 'pornography of the state', which permeates society in its entirety. If a pornographic aesthetic is already part and parcel of acts and modes of violence and moreover throroughly penetrating all fields of perception, then there is no Archimedian point from which a distance could be maintained. This rather begs us to engage with these kinds of problems and to refrain from conceiving culture and violence as external to one another, as this might ultimately only lead to an anestheticization of violence (see Feldman, 2015, pp. 26-27).

It is nonetheless important to me, to emphasize that violence is always done to someone; it is not a free-floating discursive signifier but a quite material force grounded in relations and producing tangible effects. As Nordstrom (1997) puts it: every new bullet produced, is another bullet likely to strike fatally. Although I will be dealing with such instances in the mode of writing, I will not include any images of bodies dead-frozen into frames by force. All the while, I am writing from a relatively safe space, not knowing what, for example, it feels like when the walls surrounding and supposedly protecting the body are shattered. Privileged with safety, time and a certain distance from reality, I am hoping that my "journey through the labyrinth of violence [can be] an exploration of the possibility of witnessing and memory in the zone of violence and terror" (Feldman, 1995, p. 227). In attempting to work through the enframing and structuring effects of violence, I wish to make a contribution to the task of problematizing the aesthetics of domination and challenging dominant history.

CHAPTER 2

RE-FRAMING WAR: ARCHIVES OF VIOLENCE

> *Only that historian will have the gift of fanning the spark of hope in the past who is firmly convinced that* even the dead *will not be safe from the enemy if he wins. And this enemy has not ceased to be victorious.*
>
> *The tradition of the oppressed teaches us that 'the state of emergency' in which we live is not the exception but the rule.*
>
> Walter Benjamin, *On the Concept of History*[2]

This thesis has its beginning at the transition from archiving 'peace' to archiving 'war'. The so-called Peace Process between the Turkish state and the PKK marked a moment of qualified optimism after a long war that is usually taken to have started on 15 August 1984. On this day, led by Abdullah Öcalan the PKK launched its guerilla war against the Turkish state with a coordinated assault on two military bases in Eruh and Şemdinli in the border regions of the Turkish Southeast. Almost 30 years later, the reading of a letter from the imprisoned PKK-leader Öcalan during the 2013 Newroz celebrations in Diyarbakır officially initiated negotiations for conflict resolution. But following a trajectory along the Dolmabahçe Accord (February 2015), the pro-Kurdish Peoples' Democractic Party's (HDP) resounding success in the parliamentary elections of June 2015, and the resumption of clashes in the Kurdish provinces around August 2015, negotiations broke down. In fact, there seems to be evidence that the National Security Council already developed strategies to completely quash the Kurdish movement in the longest meeting of its history in October 2014. In part, this was a response to the much-loathed surge of the Kurdish movement in Syria, which had repercussions for Turkey as well, where thousands of

[2] See theses no. VI and VIII of Benjamin's *On the Concept of History* (Benjamin, 2003, p. 391-392).

Kurds took to the streets in protest of the state's attitude regarding the Islamic State's siege of the city Kobani. More specifically, the counterinsurgent war that the Turkish state launched in Turkey's Kurdistan in 2015 was legitimized through a discourse of sovereignty and territorial integrity. It was presented as a reaction against the declaration of 'self-government' by the Kurdish youth militia YDG-H (*Yurtsever Devrimci Gençlik Hareketi:* The Patriotic Revolutionary Youth Movement) in different Kurdish cities. In line with the Kurdish movement's general framework of 'democratic autonomy', the YDG-H adopted a strategy of 'autonomous self-defense', erecting barricades and digging ditches in urban areas, thereby effectively challenging the Turkish state's hegemony.

The arguably most intense and concentrated episode of counterinsurgency warfare took place in the major Kurdish cities, where the Police and Gendarmerie Special Operations Teams (mostly referred to as *Polis Özel Harekât (PÖH)* and *Jandarma Özel Harekât (JÖH)*) played the leading role in fighting the Kurdish youth militias. In 2015 and 2016, indefinite round-the-clock curfews were declared in at least 11 provinces and 49 districts lasting for at least 299 days (see TIHV, 2016). During this time, residential areas were targeted with heavy arms, access to basic food, water and healthcare supply was cut off, people were burnt in basements and, at times, corpses of the dead were left lying on the street or had to be conserved in freezers. But as mentioned already in the introduction, the counterinsurgent war moreover produced a huge number of images that predominantly circulated via social media. At that time, I was volunteering at *Hafiza Merkezi* (HM) in Istanbul, an NGO working at the intersection of human rights and memory. The political aim of HM's work is to establish the truth about human rights violations in the past and to help foster a collective memory with respect to these violations. Before the Peace Process

descended into war, an episode of violence that is in fact without precedent, HM had been engaged in documenting the Peace Process. Now that the latter had disintegrated, it was decided that the images of the war had to be hold fast of. This resulted in a comprehensive visual archive, the 'archive of the curfews'[3], which is the empirical basis of my thesis.

In this chapter, after having briefly sketched the conditions of emergence of the archive above, I will take a little more space to explain why need for an archive was felt, before I go on to introduce and problematize the kind of material that was archived and the structure of the archive. A separate section will deal with the problems that arise from the fact that the archive of the curfews is both a site that tries to 'document' radical destruction and a site of violence quite literally. Subsequently, the focus will shift to the severe challenges an archive animated by a human rights narrative that looks for 'facts' and 'evidence' regarding violations, encounters under present conditions. Here, we have to take seriously the notion of archival war that indicates a conflict between the civil game of truth-claiming on the one and the matter-of-factness of violence as truth-making on the other hand as far as the social construction of 'truth' is concerned. Though I do not want to abandon my view that we are dealing with violations, I will nonetheless try to look beyond the archive's framing through a human rights lens and focus on an understanding of the practice of violence. In this vein, the archive and curfews are re-framed through genealogies of exceptional regime practices and counterinsurgency. These genealogies are indicative of something like an archive of emergency and violence, which should help us understand the current conditions of counterinsurgent governmentality and normalized emergency in Turkey's Kurdistan. The argument I

[3] This is how I will mostly refer to this particular archive.

am pursuing here, is that we can observe a liberalization of the state of exception, which is the necessary presupposition for counterinsurgency to be waged so openly as a war in the visual field.

2.1 Archiving the curfews

2.1.1 Opening the archives

Archives have been a topic of widespread interest and concern for several decades. It seems that in a time of increased technological capacities like ours that is struggling to respond to the demands of history, the "archive presents itself as the ultimate horizon of experience" (Comay, 2002, p. 12; see also Nora, 1989). Although their suspicious and ambiguous character is often stressed (Ahıska, 2006; Starn, 2002), archives, as Michel-Rolph Trouillot noted, are "the institution that organize facts and sources and condition the possibility of existence of historical statements" (Trouillot, 1995, p. 52). This also applies to the area of human rights and transitional justice, where we can roughly situate the *Hafıza Merkezi's* activities. In this field too, archives play a prominent role. At least with the emergence of the discourse of transitional justice that usually envisioned a transition from a violent (dictatorial, totalitarian etc.) past to a non-violent (liberal-democratic) future, starting in the 1980s and 90s, archives have repeatedly been used as an important record of past violations and atrocities (Doğan & Bayram, 2018). In the context of attempts to come to terms with nation-states' histories of violence, injustice and impunity, it is often assumed that archives, witnesses, institutions like truth commissions and other records and documents will fuel such processes of reckoning.

In Turkey, the first years under the rule of the AKP government had led to diverse 'openings' (*açılım*) with respect to minority rights and past injustices –

including ‘Kurdish openings’ - that were also accompanied by official calls for a return to and opening of the archives (Nalçaoğlu, 2009). In this period, ‘history’ and the archives turned into contested sites that in comparison with earlier years could be discussed in relative freedom. However, Meltem Ahıska claims that the relationship of archives to knowledge and power would be rather ambivalent in Turkey, since we are dealing with an established history not only of classification or reparation of documents but also with social indifference towards and even destruction of archives (Ahıska, 2006). A quite recent and striking example of this erasure of archival records came to daylight last year during an interview with former state minister, Algan Hacaoğlu. Hacaoğlu, who was in charge of human rights related issues as a minister in the 90s, told that the files of the so-called ‘unsolved murders’ (*faili meçhûl cinayetleri*) had been periodically sent to SEKA (the Turkish Celluloid and Paper Factories) in order to be burned (Doğan, 2018). To be ‘cleaned’, erased or destroyed has been the fate of many archives until today. Verne Harris, who has been working in archives in South Africa during and after Apartheid, shares comparable experiences. He recounts that in order to maintain a monopoly on truth, governments would engage in widespread destruction of public records and attempt to confiscate and destroy non-public records. Importantly, Harris adds that archives were eliminated directly and indirectly through “informal harassment, media censorship, various forms of banning, detention without trial, imprisonment and assassination” as methods of silencing unwanted voices (Harris, 2000, p. 2). When thinking of silenced and destroyed archives we therefore have to include such diverse practices and incidents as media censorship (see Yeşil, 2015), the criminalization of the newspaper *Özgür Gündem*, and the ‘unsolved murders’. Examples of relatable practices of silencing are numerous in Turkey.

Notwithstanding these severe problems, the Peace Process between the state and the PKK that seemed to continue despite the growing authoritarianism of the ruling AKP, appeared as some sort of silver lining. Around 2013-2014, a dose of optimism prevailed with respect to a possible coming to terms with the country's history of violence, injustice and impunity. When the Process collapsed, it was I would say, despite and because of the troubled history of archives in Turkey, that there was a strong determination to preserve the images of the curfew operations. Not least because other reliable information from the curfew areas were hard to obtain at that point.

2.1.2 The archiving structure

All of the images that would make it into the archive were recorded in the different spaces of the government-imposed curfews including Cizre, Nusaybin, Yüksekova, Sur, İdil, Silopi among others.[4] A common feature of the images is that they have all been published online on platforms like YouTube, Twitter and Facebook[5] from where they were collected between February 2016 and August 2016. Incidents depicted by the images range from August 2015, which was understood as the beginning of this wave of curfews, to August 2016 respectively. While authorship of the images cannot always be ultimately confirmed, it seems fair to say that overall the images' producers include mainstream media reporting crews, local and independent journalists and photographers, activists, civilians, oppositional

[4] According to the Human Rights Foundation of Turkey "between August 16, 2015 and August 16, 2017, there has been at least 252 officially confirmed round-the-clock [all daylong] and open-ended curfews in 11 cities and at least 45 districts of Turkey within the last 2 years" (TIHV, 2017); for an overview of violations of fundamental rights between August 2015 and August 2016 see TIHV (2016).

[5] It should be added that none of the visuals were uploaded as private content so that the only requirement for access was a connection to the internet.

combatants and members of the state's executive forces. The total of roughly 2,000 photographs and around 500 videos comprises different dimensions of violence such as the destruction of urban infrastructure and residential areas, forced migration, usage of heavy arms, after-images of the ruin, 'eyewitness testimony', violations of the right to life etc. These, at least, were some of the categories employed while assembling the visual material into a preliminary archive that should document the curfews from a human rights perspective.

With a growing number of visual images of violence being produced and circulated worldwide, the discussion of how to use these as direct or circumstantial (corroborative, contextual/demonstrative, refuting) evidence has gained momentum in the last one or two decades (see Gregory, Caldwell, Avni & Harding, 2005). The gradual admission of images to the sphere of law and human rights occurred in the face of the proliferation of technically produced images (Vismann, 2008). This actually illustrates that developments leading to shifts and changes in disciplines can perhaps also effect changes in the boundaries of archives and in what is regarded legitimate archival content (Manoff, 2004, p. 14). In fact, Cornelia Vismann underlines that the relationship of law and images has been particularly troublesome, as the polysemy of images would constitute a threat to the order that law had to sustain. Only by applying a certain frame, can law possibly reduce images to unequivocal meaning and thus ground it in a foundation that makes them legible (Vismann, 2008, p. 5). Obviously, the categories of the archives of the curfews were inspired by types of violations that could apply in the contexts of human rights and international criminal law, rather than by other analytical keys to the topic of violence. What is contained in the archive is therefore *a priori* assumed as fixed in its meaning as visual material that could possibly serve as legal evidence in the struggle

for human rights. We will see the problems related to this assumption later in this chapter.

Unlike this 'arrest of interpretation' that undergirds the 'archive of the curfews', it is not overstated to say that in terms of its *topos* the archive is de-territorialized, without any fixed location. In contrast to 'traditional' archives or say at least national archives, it has a fundamentally different architecture. To be sure, like other archives this archive too is 'hypomnesic' in that it is a site of 'consignation', a place outside of memory and anamnesis where the traces of the latter are inscribed (Derrida, 1996, p. 11). But as a fully digital archive it is quite different from the monumental buildings and dusty files that characterize many archives up until today. Instead, through several ways such as peer-to-peer transfer, upload and download from 'clouds', flash discs etc. the archive can easily change location (at an instant actually). Likewise, it can be multiplied and reproduced to such an extent that it is hard to even speak of any original archive. In a sense, it is at least secondary anyway: the principle source of the archive of the curfews is the 'universal archive' of the internet (see Apel, 2012). This is not without implications with respect to the gathering of evidence. Images circulating online are not only problematic in terms of possible manipulation. More often than not, they moreover have unclear 'chains of custody', where original authorship, as happened in many cases, cannot ultimately be determined, which usually renders them inadmissible to courts.

Of course, it should immediately be noted that the archive only draws from a seriously limited part of the internet – YouTube, Twitter and Facebook respectively. What is particularly interesting about these platforms is their policies of content moderation, which aim to remove inappropriate content. While a small NGO like

Hafiza Merkezi is certainly unable to assemble an exhaustive archive of all the visual material springing from the different curfew zones, we encounter another interesting opposition here. NGOs browse through the contents of these platforms in order to collect material that could possibly serve as evidence for human rights violations, whereas the subcontracted content moderators of Google, Twitter and Facebook might delete just the content they are looking for. The work of content moderation is limited to 'cleaning' the companies' platforms from 'dirty' material. Questions regarding the referents of violent images that lie outside of these platforms, do not have any relevance, representations of violations are not traced and pursued but simply deleted.[6] Alongside the debatable regulations and community guidelines that inform the process of content moderation, we further need to pay attention to cases where a country's domestic law enters the equation. Worldwide, Turkey is leading in requests for 'geo-blocking' of specific contents. Moreover, the country has recently made important legal rearrangements. The adding of article 8/A to the existing law no. 5651 enables executive organs to extend the already widespread censorship to the sphere of the internet and, as recent analysis has shown, has in the majority of the cases been used to ban web sites and contents related to Kurdish issues (Akdeniz & Altıparmak, 2015, 2017).[7] As a result, proxy servers, VPN (Virtual private network) connections and other tools played an essential role in collecting material for the archive.

[6] As I will not be able to go into details with respect to this topic, which is nonetheless striking in so many terms, I want to refer the reader to the documentary film *The Cleaners* (Block & Riesewieck, 2018). In any case, private companies' content moderation adds another twist to the politics of the archive. In the documentary, it is especially Syrian activists who voice concerns that they are racing against moderation in their attempts to preserve for the future any documents and evidence of the civil war.

[7] In fact, according to the authors article 8/A was also the legal basis of the decision to block access to the photographic and video images of Hacı Lokman Birlik, who, after his death, was tied to an armored vehicle and dragged through the streets by the special forces. The images had first been shared by a Twitter-account named *JİTEM*.

Beyond those limits of the archives that were either consciously set – by excluding what was considered to lie completely outside of the context of the curfew – or arose from the sheer incapacity to collect all potential material or from the focus on certain online platforms, there are thus at least three different reasons for why visual images might be absent from the archive. First, especially online images are transitory, which is why they could have been deleted by content moderators but also by their uploaders themselves. Secondly, we have to assume the existence of a 'shadow archive'[8] of all the images that were recorded but not uploaded. Thirdly, under the given circumstances of a curfew, where media is mostly banned from the field and civilians are kept from recording, it is more than likely that images of certain events do simply not exist. Especially the third consideration points to a major problem. This has to do with the way, as Derrida suggested, the techniques and technologies as well as the form and structure of the archive are crucial to the structure of what is being archived. His claim was that "[t]he archivization produces as much as it records the event" (Derrida, 1996, p. 16). As far as the archive of the curfews is concerned, it seems fair to say that the archiving structure is not restricted to but culminates in the site of the archive, while previously extending through a whole channel of (digital) media starting with the lens of the recording camera.

The trouble here lies in what Eduardo Cadava takes as one conclusion of Ernst Jünger's work, namely that the historical emergence of photography and mass media carried with them a tendency for events to be events only if they are technologically reproducible. But the promises of immediacy and presence that are encoded in the registers of information, communication, and representation, so

[8] This term has been coined by photographer Allan Sekula, who understands a shadow archive to be a "historical reservoir of images that functions to construct the enabling conditions for the emergence and cultural intelligibility of any image" (Pugliese, 2007, p. 250). Here, I refer to the shadow archive as something hidden from light and exposure, thus something that is not evident.

Cadava, do not bring us closer to reality. He contends that "[w]hat we encounter is the distance without which an event could never appear: a distance that comes in the form of an image or reproduction" (Cadava, 1997, p. xxv). In other words, in the image the event is reduced to a reproducible structure and a standardized format. On the one hand, the objectivity attributed to the photographic image partially derives from this standardized format and it seems fair to say that this also is what eventually made it admissible to the archive of law. But on the other hand, it is exactly what constitutes images' facticity that tends to contribute to (re)producing a 'mythology of modern wars' (Hüppauf, 1993, p. 55). The coherence and consistency of the image's frame and surface might actually disguise the disjointed and abstract nature of modern political violence and warfare. With violence being as prosthetic and technological as it is, so that space, time and motion are reduced to abstract quantities, one could follow Jacques Ranciere in wondering whether or not images can actually reveal anything beyond the distribution of the visible (senses) that is already in place (Ranciere, 2014, p. 33).

What this archive nonetheless attempts is to document reality in its disappearance by means of digitalization, while effectively creating the 'event' after its breakdown in 'reality' through the archive. In this respect, every image is a trace. The work of Forensic Architecture (FA) has shown that these visual traces can be aggregated in order to reconstruct what had previously been destroyed. The group makes use of the synthetization and cross-verification of a huge amount of data – what Eyal Weizman calls an 'image-complex' - in this process (Weizman, 2015). In fact, FA has mounted an investigation of the killing of Tahir Elçi (see Forensic Architecture, 2019) based on material that in parts resembles the images that make up the archive of the curfews. Leaving behind the 'era of the witness' (Wieviorka,

2006) in the light of an increased invisibility or inaccessibility of state violence, FA's ambition is to build a "relation between animation of material objects and the gathering of political collectives" (Weizman, 2014, p. 9). Although the group conducts meticulous investigations to reconstruct incidents of state violence, its overarching concern seems to be to offer a provisional ground on which a community can organize itself in order to articulate truth-claims. The data neither speaks for itself nor does it acquire any efficacy simply by being presented. Of course, these reconstructions cannot help to turn back time and literally 'repair' reality, either. In a similar vein, the archive of the curfews captures something in its irreparable destruction, an irretrievable disappearance, so that a return appears to be impossible. But in this regard, the archive's call for a new beginning, the emergence of a new community, is a stifled one – while in dire need of grounding, the archive, as we will see, is currently hiding underground.

2.1.3 An archive of destruction

The archive of the curfews is the outcome of a destruction of memory and experience much more incisive and eruptive than the structural breakdown Nora, who I cited at the outset, had in mind. Even though, as both Nora and Derrida seem to suggest, the existence of an archive always, in a sense, presupposes a collapse of memory and experience, here, we are dealing with an archive that literally centers on the recording and archiving of an experience of radical destruction. The violence that has shaken many of the major Kurdish cities has led to a fundamental destruction of space, time, memory and experience, which can impossibly be captured in the frame of an image. In dealing with the curfews, I would like to suggest, we confront a reality that radically exceeds its factual elements, a non-coincidence of facts and

truth, verification and comprehension (see Agamben, 1999, p. 12-14). This makes interpretation of these images of destruction so difficult. Cadava has lucidly described this predicament, writing that "[t]he limits, the borders, and the distinctions that would guarantee our understanding of the image have been shattered by an explosion from which no determination can be sheltered" (Cadava, 2001, p. 36). In the face of such radical destruction, do we not find that the discourse of proof, facts and evidence is destitute and the means for representation torn (see Nichanian, 2009)? Can the archive somehow bypass the danger of subjecting the experience of violence to a 'game of proof' (Nichanian, 2002, p. 134), where the insistence on factuality in terms of positive law and history threatens to deny and transform memory and mourning? Extending Nichanian's argument on testimony one has to ask whether the relationship between event and archive does not necessarily reach a limit, because the archive can always only reproduce its own structure in the event. Is the latter thus not reduced to being archived in the archive? For that matter, does the archive not declare to be a 'past' what remains all too present for those subjected to violence as long as mourning remains interdicted? Is there any way the archive could contribute to redemption? Or, perhaps it is time that we ask ourselves how much the archive itself is implicated in the violence.

After all, what we see is that destruction and preservation appear to go hand in hand: there is no violence without the archive, but in turn also no archive without violence (see Keenan, 2004b). Historically speaking, it is not at all uncommon that the destruction of memory and archive is paralleled by the proliferation and production of new archives; we just have to think of a few outstanding examples like Nazi Germany, the Red Khmer, and ISIS. Something I have previously skipped, while pointing to the relationship between archival structure and event now becomes

evident. Archival technologies are essential to the production of the event of violence itself. Political violence today cannot be thought independently from the archival technologies and the techniques of verification that it bases itself upon. Not least were (some of) the images themselves, before they were at some point transformed into archival documents, essential partakers to the war - missives turned missiles.

2.2 Archival wars: From 'truth-claiming' to 'truth-making'

We have already read that neutral signification is impossible as far as the archive is concerned. The importance of making proper note of the human rights related context of the archive can therefore not be stressed enough. Eventually, it provides the story that animates the entire archive. In this sense, the latter is a counter-archive intended to give the moorings to an alternative narrative. If not existing structures of domination, the archive's purpose is at least to challenge incidents of state violence. Once assembled, as Smith puts it, an archive projects claims on history and cultural meaning, through which it is brought into juxtaposition and competition with other archives. Writing about archives of images, she reflects on the stakes of this archival contest, arguing that every single image "negotiates not only the past of its split-second historical referent but also a photographic past of other images" (Smith, 2004, p. 10).

In this respect, how is the archive of the curfews implicated and in competition with other archives? To be sure, what allows the mapping together of the different spaces that had been subjected to state-imposed curfews seems to be the presumption of the Turkish nation-state as a responsible and accountable actor located at the center of the counterinsurgency operations in these areas. We could say that the archive 'addresses' at the national level via the state, which moreover seems

to be perfectly in line with the general purview of human rights, international law and transitional justice. At the same time, however, one could perhaps identify that exactly in being founded on the notion of human rights, the archive transcends and challenges this national level. It has been argued that archives are political primarily because in them, power and authority are employed to weave together a distinct time-space, an imaginary that can create "the feeling according to which we would all be heirs to a time over which we might exercise the rights of collective ownership" (Mbembe, 2002, p. 21). From this perspective, the archive of the curfews, by virtue of its human rights narrative, virtually challenges state sovereignty through its invocation of 'humanity' and a corresponding legal framework that delineates legitimate state conduct. This rather 'universal(ist)' aspect of the archive would thus seem to command an institution of the rule of law and a delimitation of state sovereignty, the latter being overdetermined by respect for human rights (Hazan, 2010, pp. 54-56.). This however is primarily a normative position, from which evidence is produced only in the second step.

It is therefore important to recognize that underneath the above-mentioned 'arrest of interpretation' that took place in this archive, "the very idea of what constitutes evidence has a history [...] which implies definite techniques and procedures, concrete institutions and specific social relations, that is, relations of power" (Tagg, 1993, pp. 4-5). In the case of the curfew images, this becomes markedly clear when we juxtapose this archive with smaller compilations of the Special Forces' graffiti in the open edit online encyclopedia *Uludağ Sözlük* or on the web site *Kamupersoneli.* In the latter case, the graffiti are declared to be 'legendary', a signification very much in line with the predominantly celebratory comments that surround images of even the gravest violations circulating on Twitter, YouTube and

Facebook. This shows that the site of the archive – and perhaps the site of the struggle between them – is positioned between history and memory as well as between objectivity and subjectivity. Here, actors try to seize the opportunity to re-appropriate history from within certain political constellations (Ahıska, 2006, p. 21), which is why, as Verne Harris puts it, "all working with archive, all archiving, draws us into the dynamics of power relations" (Harris, 2000, p. 6). The transformation of archival data into historical narratives is, according to Hayden White's powerful argument, a subjective act (White, 1987). In the scope of this project, one may thus conclude that none of the images in the archive of the curfews can 'speak for itself', an assumption still often enough maintained, but that making them speak will always require the intervention of a human interpreter.

Consequently, an image does not contain truth, but only (its) traces that mark the starting point for the 'game of truth-claiming' (Azoulay, 2012, p. 117). Accordingly, participation in this game is motivated by a 'civil concern for truth'. Though primarily shaped along the requirements of legal evidence and justice, the archive's narrative kernel also endowed it with the potential to stand as evidence that could question and challenge the Turkish state's archive(s). This struggle is perhaps best situated in what Allen Feldman describes as the embroilment "in archival wars of naming and unnaming, including what can be named as war, enemy, and violence" (Feldman, 2015, p. 186). In this respect, the notion of counterinsurgency as pure policy grounded in an archive of names such as 'separatist terrorism', 'anti-terror operations', 'cleaning', 'traitors' etc. with its corresponding distribution and delimitation of the speakable and visible is challenged in order to bring it back onto the terrain of politics (see Ranciere, 2004). In contesting the state's archive, such civilian claims to truth strive to reject easy binary oppositions and urge for openness

by inviting the 'other' into the archive. This at least, is what the idea of 'archives for justice' (Harris, 2000, p. 11-12) would mean. However, there is hardly any exaggeration in claiming that we have witnessed a major eclipse of the civil arena in Turkey in the face of recent political developments so that archives, once again, are repressed rather than opened.

Trying to defuse the criminalizing efforts to expel the other party of the conflict from legality and humanity, and to lay claim to a recognition of the relational dimensions of the violence, 'civil' engagement itself eventually came under permanent risk of being criminalized in Turkey. In fact, the 'Academics for Peace', who signed a petition demanding an immediate end to the violence and a return to mutual negotiations, may have been among the last who made a publicly visible attempt to, if indirectly, make the archive of the curfews speak. Though they were not basing themselves on this particular archive in their claims, I would suggest that there is a indirect way these two connect, since it must be assumed that in following the events, many of the signatories had previously been exposed to a number of the images that make up the body of the archive.[9] Moreover, it can be distinguished that both the petition and the human rights narrative animating the archive are congruent in their interpretation with respect to the violence represented in these images. The signatories of the petition, it can further be argued, made a courageous attempt of mobilizing their professional expertise and the authority of the field of science in order to substantiate their claims. However, these efforts were harshly sanctioned and rather than gaining the political momentum necessary to become the legitimate

[9] This surfaced during the trial of signatory Hazal Halavut, for example, who explicitly stated that her signing of the petition was partially a result of her reception of the violent images of the state's Special Forces on social media (BIA Haber Merkezi 2019).

archons of the archive, the 'Academics for Peace' stand accused.[10] This action taken by academics across Turkey presents us with a case of solidarity and an engagement in 'ethical witnessing' that definitely marks a difference with respect to the situation in the 90s. Yet at the same time, it also quite clearly draws attention to the possibilities of such witnessing, something I will get back to later.

In a sense, then, the archive of the curfews marks a moment of waning hope, not only as an archive documenting the destructive nature of counterinsurgency, but also, perhaps, in attesting to the eclipse and deferral of 'transitional justice' and 'peace'. Since the countrywide imposition of the state of exception in July 2016, the entire field of human rights is on the defensive.[11] Documentation of the grave violations that occurred in different places during the state's 'anti-terror operations' was caught in a temporal trap. The archive appears to be stuck between a concern for the immediate cessation of the violence, the possibility of a future dealing with what will have been a violent past, and the underlying suspicion that none of these might ultimately take place (the latter deriving from a history of impunity and 'unfaced' violence). Most importantly, no matter how great the concern for 'truth' animating it, the archive has failed to contribute anything with respect to immediate relief, as it had to remain undercover and secret. It is banned from any effective social presence, not least because it is missing its *archons*. Without the latter, actors capable of

[10] The lawsuit opened against human rights lawyer Tahir Elçi after he had called the PKK an 'armed political movement with considerable support in the society' on a talk-show program on TV could be read from a similar perspective. Elçi intervened into the dominant tropes of 'terror' and 'war on terror' in order to discuss the problem in political terms, but this utterance aligned him with the PKK in the eyes of the state (Akdeniz, Molu & Altıparmak, 2016). Darıcı goes a step further in reading Elçi's death as a watershed that not only marks the end of an era of human rights in Turkey's Kurdistan. He proposes to understand this even as the allegorical "death of the symbolic father and the rise of youth, with their distinct form of politics, as the central actors in the Kurdish movement" (Darıcı, 2016).

[11] This is most evident in the elaboration of strategies to 'defend human rights defenders', where the double defense clearly attests to the recent increase in vulnerability and criminalization of human rights related activities. Nevertheless I will get back to the problematic notion of locating the foreclosure of this field in the post-2010 episode.

exerting political power and control over it, the archive will also remain without community. Here, one should also note the following. Although its structure, as noted above, protects the archive from easy confiscation and destruction, which definitely is an advantage from the perspective of mere preservation, it has to be clear that the archive inevitably requires 'territorialization', a solid grounding and a visible presence in society if it is to matter.

Finally, with respect to the 'game of truth-claiming' we need to pay attention to the possibility of irresoluble conflict and its implications for the rules of the game. In the past years, the legal and political framework that would guarantee a comparably pluralistic and inclusive 'game' has become increasingly disintegrated and suspended. Hence, it seems that we have to take the notion of 'archival war' as quite literal. In a moment of sovereign self-assertion manifesting itself through a generalized state of exception and intensified counterinsurgency warfare, archival practice has to continue in a rather clandestine manner, so that one day light might seep in through the cracks.

2.3 Actualizing the archive

Many of the thoughts developed here only arrived with a certain lateness.[12] While this archive was being compiled, the predominant concern was to urgently save the images before they would disappear. With direct access to the areas under curfew temporarily banned, work on the archive was largely guided by the hope to be able to

[12] In a previous version, I had employed the notion of 'belatedness'. Later, I would find inspiration in Meltem Ahıska's reflections on lateness (Küçük & Özselçuk, 2019b, p. 173), which is adopted here in order to describe the alienation that was necessary, after a period of intense engagement with this archive in the discursive framework of human rights. 'Exile' – both in relation to the archive and to the social order that is its context – was essential to the changes in thought that crystallize in this thesis.

avoid the opening up of another ‘dark hole’ in history (Ahıska, 2006, p. 22). Metaphorically speaking, this came down to reassembling the traces of the dead in order to prevent their erasure. In a way, then, I would submit that the archive is more or less implicitly motivated by a notion of historiography, in which violence and suffering can be imagined as future ‘treasures’ to humanity (Didi-Huberman, 2014, p. 81-82). In other words, there was a hope that archival work, in its attempt to rescue the dead - from that enemy who has not ceased to be victorious - could ultimately contribute to more than a mere collection of images of violence. Consigning these traces was led by the belief that “the opposite of forgetting is not memory but justice” (Derrida, 1996, p. 77).

At this stage, the ambiguity of the archive as a site of both destruction and preservation, the arbitrary nature of evidence, factuality and ultimately of truth in the archive, the relationship between images and violence, the politics of the archive, all these were left largely unquestioned. The general stance adopted during the process is in fact almost perfectly summarized by Meg McLagan and Yates McKee, who suggest that “faith in the optical veracity of the photographic image does not derive solely from the medium, of course, but from an epistemology of truth that lies outside of the medium” (McLagan & McKee, 2012, p. 19). To be honest, I am still more than uncertain with respect to what this archive and these images can do for us. And yet, the latter are ‘images in spite of all’ (Didi-Huberman, 2006). In spite of all the horrors and destruction, they remain with us as traces that bear the potential of becoming ‘instants of truth’. Derrida would contend that the future will show what the archive will have been. For the time being, it indeed seems as if the archive of the curfews would be potential most of all.

Meanwhile, collecting the images of the curfew zones in order to assemble this archive certainly did not leave me untouched. Surveying and downloading images of violence from different geographical locations, I was first of all struck with my personal loss of awareness for the difference between places as I was 'moving' from one city to another in the blink of an eye, all the while remaining firmly seated in an office in Istanbul. A fundamental distance stood between me and the actual experience of warfare, which for the first time really made it clear to me how much of my phenomenal grasp of the world relied on circuits of mediation. I was wondering: how does this primarily distant vision influence our understanding of violence? What kind of zones of blindness and invisibility emerge when, if that really is the case, other sensory modes of experience are secondary or even relatively suspended? Alongside this perceptual and experiential distance, the temporal context of my engagement seemed to me absurd and sickening. What was the point in secretly preserving evidence of violence that should one day contribute to a legal or cultural coming to terms with the past, while in fact the violence of the curfews was continuing? Emergency strangely meant that it was in a way both too late and too early (see Meister, 2011). In any case, the images were not secret at all. They enjoyed a glaring presence and visibility all across the net.

There was a growing sense of alienation that seemed to result from the gap between this unbridgeable distance on the one and the initial confidence with which I was nonetheless able to 'see' violations despite a prevailing atmosphere of silence or celebration on the other hand. This also triggered a return to my personal archive, so to speak, my assumptions, prejudices, opinions and truths, the ground of which seemed to have melted away.[13] The experience this loss of certainty caused is

[13] In trying to describe this experience, I found Adorno's essay on delusion and truth compelling (Adorno, 1997, p. 230-231). There, he claims that it is not individual judgment, but the prevailing

comparable to what Nicholas Mirzoeff, with respect to distant observers of the Iraq War, describes as a 'war psychosis'. Mirzoeff identifies one symptom of this psychosis to be an almost compulsive search for more images and any kind of reliable information. I would agree with Mirzoeff that the underlying motivation of this behavior is to "find some evidence to prove the new... view of the world wrong" (Mirzoeff, 2005, p. 81), but would add that it might also be rooted in the desire to overcome distance and regain certainty through immediate insight. But as already discussed above, images neither fulfill the function of proving something wrong nor will they really reduce distance.

What remained was the insight that images could at times not only serve as evidence against violations but that they could also work in favor of authority: the 'banality of images' (Mirzoeff, 2011, p. xiv). In this respect, the issue that arises is to what kind of questions could this archive possibly respond beyond the initial concern for human rights? What happens if we look at these images in the context of their uses and circulation before they entered the archive? No doubt, questions regarding the identification, documentation, proving and maybe even judging of violations are of great import. Not least are the possibilities of converting violence into justice the point of origin of this thesis. Furthermore does archival practice geared towards similar goals certainly persist. However, in what follows, my attempts are directed primarily towards understanding the relationship between image-making and political violence as socially mediated practices. As a re-framing of the archive in its entanglement with phenomena such as counterinsurgency warfare, a normalized state of exception, sovereign violence, mediation and technology, these reflections are

authority – ergo, a socially enforced opinion – that would eventually determine truth. What was particularly striking in this regard was to reflect on how the marginalization of one's own opinion could weaken the presumed validity of countless propositions, which this opinion is based on. It is largely through grounding one's own opinion in a social fabric that confidence is restored.

oriented toward an 'ontology of actuality' (Foucault, 2007, p. 95). In a sense, it is as a sociologist *cum* human rights worker that I engage in a subjective reading of the images in the archive in order to make the latter speak.

The images of the curfews are images of an episode of rather spectacular violence. Such images tend to circulate in a selective visual economy so that they are often perceived as exceptional and scandalous (Hochberg, 2015, p. 14), while impressions of 'suspended violence' - the routinized violence of everyday life - remain mostly invisible to external viewers (Azoulay & Ophir, 2005). It is therefore important to relate spectacular images back to the 'structural part of emergency rule' (Azoulay, 2012, p. 238). In order to grasp how urban counterinsurgent war can be conducted as policy, we need to develop an understanding of counterinsurgent governmentality as a condition of permanent emergency. Below, I will provide a genealogical account of exceptional rule and counterinsurgency in Turkey's Kurdistan. If we understand history as congealed practice (materialized and formalized to varying degrees) that engenders the presence by mediating all emergent practice, then I would contend that these genealogies indicate something like an archive of emergency and violence. This archive serves as a repertoire of techniques and technologies, which were partially mobilized during the counterinsurgency operations in 2015-16. Conversely, we could say that the 'archive of the curfews' retains the traces along which this other archive of violence reaches recognizability. Here, we encounter recurrences, reiterations and absorptions of previous instances of state violence.

2.4 The other archive: State violence as counterinsurgent governmentality

This is perhaps a good opportunity to revisit the earlier-mentioned 'openings'. Viewed in the context of the 'government against the state' discourse that the ruling AKP was mobilizing at that time (Günay, 2013, p. 179-180), it retrospectively looks as if the return to the archives was intended as a closure. What was at stake was perhaps neither to really open the archives nor to destroy them, but to instrumentalize them as a potent source of legitimation. In its attempt to quickly divest itself from all responsibility for the debt and dead of the past by loading all crimes onto the military or the 'deep state', the government may have sought to "abolish and anaesthetise the past" (Mbembe, 2002, p. 23).[14] However, this campaign of 'facing with the past' was not only one-sided in trying to impose monosemy on the archives, denying the notion of history as struggle, and presenting the government as the only active historical subject (see Günay, 2013). It was moreover reductive in neglecting that the structural conditions that had made this 'past' possible still largely continued to exist. Besides, as it was argued in the introduction to an issue of the journal *Toplum ve Kuram* on 'Remembering the 90s', there is sufficient reason to speak of a continuity of violence in the period after the AKP's ascendency to power in 2002 (Toplum ve Kuram, 2014, p. 23-24).

Since around 2010, especially after the massacre of civilians in Roboski in 2011, the question of whether 'we would return to the 90s' started to gain currency (see Üstündağ, 2014). But perhaps we would better follow Bahar Şahin-Fırat in asking: 'did the 90s ever end?' and 'when did the 90s actually start?' (Şahin-Fırat, 2014, p. 390). This is not to deny the singularity of the violence and suffering

[14] The intention behind avoiding a real renegotiation of and working through the past is, as Adorno put it, "to close the books on the past and, if possible, even remove it from memory. The attitude that everything should be forgotten and forgiven, which would be proper for those who suffered injustice, is practiced by those party supporters who committed the injustice" (Adorno, 2003, p. 3).

inflicted on people in the Kurdish provinces of Turkey in the 90s. It is to acknowledge that the history of the Turkish Republic has always also been a history of exceptional measures and violence, particularly as far as the so-called Kurdish question is concerned. It is key to account for this more extensive historical context of continuous and systematic policies of exception (Bezwan, 2014, p. 43).

Towards the centennial turn, the experience of the 90s, meaning the scope and degree of violence Turkey's Kurdistan had been subjected to, became more and more visible to the remaining parts of the population. This caused a turn in the way the conflict was problematized. Taken together, the prevailing silence in the remaining provinces and the simple fact of a *de facto* state of exception rule for most of the republic's history in the Kurdish provinces led scholars to pursue arguments, which previously only İsmail Beşikçi had dared to pronounce. Though still marginal, a strand of academic discourse started to view the 'Kurdish question' through the lens of (endo-)colonialism (see for example Beşikçi, 1991, Başkaya, 1991, Jongerden, 2007, Üstündağ, 2013, Küçük, 2013, Fırat-Şahin, 2014, Ünlü, 2014, Göral, 2014). Central to the argument is the notion that the Kurdish provinces are categorically different from the remaining parts of Turkey throughout at least the history of the Republic. Ünlü (2014, p. 420) takes the fact that the Turkish Aerial Forces have, with one or two exceptions, been used against Kurdish uprisings only as an illustration of this reality. In light of the systematic and structural violence, Kurds and Kurdistan have been subjected to, that is, the widespread use of techniques like disappearance, execution, and punishment during the war with the PKK, the denial of the Kurds on a constitutional level and practices of everyday racism, there are sufficient grounds to approach the problem through a colonial lense, as Özgür Sevgi Göral contends (Göral, 2014).

I tried to stress that the history of the Turkish nation has always also been a history of violence and exceptional practices. The emphasis is on histories in plural: neither should we conceive of history as one monolithic process on the national scale nor should we understand the state, law, and sovereignty in such strictly centralized and flat terms. Maintaining a framework that is sensitive to the interplay between central and local factors (Das & Poole, 2004, p. 21-22), we should try to grasp spatio-temporal differences in regime practices – deriving from relationships of force that vary across space and time - that produce differential power relations. Hence, there is no need to assume a history of equally distributed violence. If violence is to be understood as relational practice, then it is important to trace the tension between centralized and authorized domination and "dispersed, regional, and enclosed spaces of violent exchange" (Feldman, 1991, p. 2). A genealogy of constituted power as (very much material) truth effect has to give primacy to the (marginal) site of localized conflict, or to be even more precise, to the site of the body within it. This will make it possible to account for "gendered, racial, ethnic, colonial, and sexual subjects to whom the rules of civil restraint are inapplicable" (Feldman, 2015, p. 165). That is to say, such an approach allows for a genealogical understanding of unequal distributions of precarity through which some lives will be more expendable than others (Butler, 2009).

To be sure, I do not at all want to eradicate contingency and suggest that there never was a moment when reckoning seemed possible in Turkey. But addressing history today, after the breakdown of the Peace Process and a return to the 'war on terror' paradigm that has added a set of emblematic names like Sur, Cizre, Nusaybin[15] etc. to our repertoire, the echo of Benjamin's claim "that 'the state of

[15] In a certain register these names do not only denote geographic locations, but refer to an experience of violence that should not just easily be reduced to a realist code – *bodrum* (basement) being perhaps

emergency' in which we live is not the exception but the rule" (Benjamin, 2003, p. 291) is hard to escape. This routinized state of exception is entangled in a history of legal arrangements that procure a culture of impunity (Şahin-Fırat, 2014, p. 392) and a history of the silencing of those, who try to claim a space to address these injustices. Consequently, it needs to be emphasized that no real work upon the past has occurred up until today, neither on an objective nor on a subjective level. At the moment, we no longer see a 'government against the state' engaging in 'openings'. Instead we are bearing witness to what Achille Mbembe identifies as the core of the state's constitutive violence, namely "the possibility, which can never be dismissed, of refusing to recognise (or to settle) one or another debt" (Mbembe, 2002, p. 23).

2.4.1 A brief genealogy of exception

Conflict and struggle in Turkey's Kurdistan have been continuing for more than a hundred years. It seems quite appropriate to assume that the 'origin' of the state's special interest and relationship with the Kurds reaches back beyond the foundation of the Turkish Republic. At least during the last decades of the Ottoman Empire, in a period of centralization and modernization that would also entail secularization and the coming into being of a nation-state, we find that the status of the Kurds increasingly moves into the focus.[16] Yet even if a genealogy of the conflict would thus lead us into the late-Ottoman period, it can still be maintained that "the catastrophic troubles (ethnic discrimination, assimilation, forced displacements,

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the most important of them. In this sense, my approach that is utilizing the generic lens of the 'curfew' is highly problematic.

[16] According to Selim Deringil, in its attempts to become a modern empire during the course of the 19th century, together with other techniques and technologies the Ottoman Empire adopted a colonial approach (Deringil, 2003). Barış Ünlü traces the 'modern Kurdish issue' back to the 1840s, while also suggesting that we understand the transition from empire to nation-state as a prolonged historical process rather than a sudden rupture – also with respect to the center's approach regarding the Kurds (Ünlü, 2014).

executions, imprisonment, torture and killing) toward Kurds were triggered by the foundation of the Turkish nation-state in 1923" (Aras, 2014, p. 2). Meanwhile, the concerns of the late-Ottoman regime and the early Republic were not only with the possibility of a (semi-)autonomous political formation of the Kurds, but definitely also with the question of manifestations of 'Kurdishness' itself. Although the 'Kurdish problem', which is to say Kurdishness, was being represented as an attempt to deal with backwardness, religious reaction and banditry in official discourse, it should be emphasized that the Turkish project of creating a modern nation outright targeted the Kurds in their very social existences and positions, both private and public (Yeğen, 2006, p. 140; Şahin Fırat, 2006, p. 125). The effort to bring about a secular, modern and homogeneous nation naturally implied a major intervention into the religious, traditional and heterogeneous social fabric that was to be incorporated. Thus, one of the goals of this project was to do away with Kurdishness, which, as the Kurdish intellectual Bedirxan already pointed out early on, the emergent Turkish modernization sought to assimilate and dissolve.

The so-called 'Reform Plan for the East' (*Şark Islahat Planı*), drawn up in 1925, is crucial to understanding the specific strategies of the newly founded Republic regarding the Kurds. Consisting of 28 articles, this plan outlines the following measures: general prohibition of the (Kurdish) mother tongue, assimilation, forced migration, ban from civil service for Kurdish people, increase of boarding schools etc. The first article of the plan states that martial law would be valid until all of these articles had been implemented (Yıldız, 2001, pp. 245-248). In order to monitor and implement the assimilation policies that comprised above-stated measures, the so-called General Inspectorate (*Umumi Müfettişlik*) was established. Although the Inspectorate was in place for 25 years, from 1927 to 1952, the success

of this comprehensive strategy is overall considered to have been minor (see Koçak, 2003).

In fact, rather than assimilating or effectively resettling the Kurdish population, the republic's policies provoked a series of rebellions and uprisings in different places such as the Sheikh Said rebellion (1925), the Ağrı rebellion (1930), and the Dersim rebellion (1938). In order to crush these rebellions, the state deployed military units in the respective areas and resorted to a high level of violence.[17] These policies, strategies and regime practices are central to understanding the so-called Kurdish question. Martial law and the state of exception have ever since been essential instruments in the repression and assimilation of Kurdish identity. To this end, measures like forced displacement, demographic engineering and extra-legal executions have been employed up until today. The state's policies towards the Kurds are grounded in a regime of exception, the centerpiece of which are military methods. Governing by virtue of a state of exception thus plays the role of a constitutive principle. It is a structural phenomenon inseparable from the Kurdish question.

But this also means that with respect to Turkey's Kurdistan, Weberian and especially Eliasian theorizations of pacified communities under an established monopoly of violence may be misleading. Here, a perspective that incorporates Foucault's inversion of Clausewitz's paradigm, thus identifying war as the principle of history, seems more useful. It helps us to single out the important role of *de facto* sovereignty as compared to *de jure* sovereignty, while nonetheless enabling us to account for the materialization of 'less ephemeral effects' such as political, legal,

[17] Üngör observes that the newly founded Turkish republic "had no functioning monopoly of violence" (Üngör, 2012, p. 757) and particularly with respect to the Kurdish people had to resort to violence and military occupation in its attempt to achieve pacification and integration.

familial, economic and other apparatuses. The argument to be made here is that sovereign power is actualized in historically structured environments, where the relationships of force of prior wars have transpired and been re-inscribed into "institutions, economic inequalities, language, and even the bodies of individuals" (Foucault, 2003, p. 16). In this respect, what apprehending "war as a regime of truth, and truth claiming as forms of war" (Feldman, 2015, p. 1) accomplishes is a reversal of perspective, where law and legitimate rule are but more or less stable effects of always contested force monopolies.

This would once again become very relevant, when the PKK launched its guerilla war against the Turkish state in 1984. While the official strategy consisted in brushing those incidents off as the acts of '3-5 marauders' in the first years, it was soon discovered that the scope of the conflict was much larger and more serious than first conceded. Although martial law had already been declared in 1978 and continued up until 1987, it really was only in that same year that the state acknowledged that there was a distinct problem in the Southeastern provinces. Basing itself on the State of Emergency Law that had been passed per decree (*KHK*) on 27.10.1983 (Tapan, 2007, p. 121), on 14.07.1987 the parliament approved a recommendation of the National Security Council and declared the state of exception first in 11, later in 13 provinces[18] in Turkey's Kurdistan (see Yıldız & Hughes, 2003, p. 18-21). Furthermore, a so-called 'OHAL-Governor' (*OHAL Valisi*: literally 'State of Exception Governor', mostly translated as 'super-governor') with vast and special authority was assigned to the respective provinces. Throughout the 90s, executive

[18] The State of Emergency replaced martial law on July 19, 1987 in Bingöl, Diyarbakir, Elazig, Hakkari, Mardin, Siirt, Tunceli, and Van as well as the so-called 'neighboring provinces' Adiyaman, Bitlis and Mus. The provinces Batman and Şırnak came under emergency rule as soon as they were established (Jongerden, 2007, p. 139).

forces acted as the sovereign in the respective areas, well outside the limits of legality, resulting in localized constellations of force and power that sprang out of the specific relations between actors (Göral, 2016, p. 124). Until 2002, when it would finally be lifted in the last two remaining provinces, the state of emergency would be renewed for 46 times in periods of four months each. All the while, the state would refrain from a formal declaration of war, not least in order not to officially recognize the opposing party (Bezwan, 2014, p. 47).

This further has to be seen in the context of the new constitution (1982), on account of which the state acted in its war against the PKK. As Jongerden put it, with this constitution the state – as in fact most modern nation-states do - legislated for its own survival against (internal) threats (Jongerden, 2007, p. 317-318). In light of the foregrounding of the indivisible integrity of the State with its territory and nation as well as the existence and sovereignty of the State, legitimation for state conduct became explicitly self-referential (Ertür, 2016, p. 181). In practice, this has at least since the early Sheikh Said mostly meant a relentless fight against Kurdish opposition, which is perceived and acted out as permanent emergency, leading to an operationalization of the *raison d'etat* as counterinsurgency, thereby dispensing with the rule of law and legality (Sancar, 1997, p. 85-86). Here is where Agamben discerned the structural link between biopolitics and the sovereign power to kill – the break "between what must live and what must die" (Foucault, 2003, p. 254): the state's permanent resort to the state of exception. Accordingly, law is continuously refounded through a "suspension of law by law" (Gökarıksel & Türem, 2019, p. 185n.9). Considered within a biopolitical framework, sovereign power appears as the indispensable underside not only of the rule of law but also more generally of

modern forms of normalizing and regulatory power that procures (self-)government (Agamben, 2005).

There may have been comparable relief after Abdullah Öcalan was captured in 1999, a time when the PKK had been militarily weakened and the EU-accession process started to gain significance for Turkey (subjection to jurisdiction of ECHR, harmonization packages). But despite the lifting of the state of exception in 2002, it was observed that this initially brought few significant changes in the daily reality of the local population (Yıldız & Hughes, 2003, p. 20). Perhaps one could still argue that the EU process brought a slight breeze of change and a relative liberalization until 2005. Yet it is imperative to note that the year 2007 already saw the declaration of so-called 'temporary security zones'. Taking account of the doubts regarding substantial changes in regional regime practices between 2002 and 2007, the question is whether this was not only a concealed *de jure* return to state of emergency rule that had persisted *de facto* anyway.

If we finally return to recent events, we find that the counterinsurgency measures after the breakdown of the Peace Process, read against this historical backdrop, can be said to constitute another example of how the state of exception is brought into play in order to govern the Kurdish population in the Southeastern provinces. In 2015 and 2016, indefinite round-the-clock curfews were declared in at least 11 provinces and 49 districts lasting for at least 299 days (TIHV, 2016). In juridical terms, the counterinsurgency operations were conducted on account of Article 11/C of the Local Administration Law, which stipulates that it is within the governor's duties and responsibilities to guarantee tranquility and safety within his/her administration district. In order to provide for tranquility and safety, the governor is liable to take the measures necessary (Demir, 2016). In other words,

martial law or a state of exception no longer required formal declaration. Consequently, the Turkish state refused to define these operations as a war as it had already done in the 90s and instead pursued them as policy. If historically *de facto* emergency rule has been one of the central modalities of regime practice in Turkey's Kurdistan anyway, then the recent counterinsurgent war has shown that the state of exception has been completely liberalized in legal terms, too. The curfews, in this respect, constitute a temporary intensification of violence within a regime of generalized exception.

2.4.2 Counterinsurgent governmentality

The overarching concept of 'counterinsurgent governmentality' (Feldman, 2015) is in my eyes suited to account for the scattered topographies of biopolitical (self-)government including surveillance and discipline on the one and containerized (bio- or necropolitical) counterinsurgent warfare on the other hand (and the blurry boundaries between them). It is in these terms that we can grasp how sovereignty frequently ascertains itself within governmentality (see Butler, 2004). Along this line, the global war/s on terror[19] are perhaps best understood as the "contemporary instantiation of the combination of war power and police power" (Neocleous, 2014, p. 14). This perspective enables us to weave a link between counterinsurgency (i.e. war/s on terror), emergency, security and repetitions of constitutive sovereign violence, which always draw from the provisional grounds of constituted power. In this vein, attention needs to be paid to colonial genealogies and accumulated techniques and technologies of power that can be mobilized in the present. While I

[19] I would propose that we should best think the global *war* and *wars* on terror together in order to highlight the similarity of the interconnectedness in discursive, technological, and infrastructural terms on the one, and the multiplicity of localized conflicts and their particular historico-political genealogies.

have already tried to provide a genealogy of the normalization of emergency powers above, I would assume that counterinsurgency begs further elaboration.

In the years leading up to 1993, the Turkish state came to the realization that its war against the PKK had so far not succeeded to weaken the latter, neither militarily nor in terms of support among the local population. Due to a general military strategy still attuned to a front war against a clearly defined enemy, the state was unable to respond to the guerilla war of the PKK. The total of 300,000-365,000 forces (incl. gendarmerie, village guards and special units) including roughly half of the Turkish land forces (counting 185,000 soldiers) deployed in the Southeast in 1993 (Jongerden, 2007, p. 64) did not change this fact. At this stage, a shift occurred away from the 'old war' paradigm to the doctrine of 'Field Dominance and Non-Accomodation of the PKK' ('*Alan Hakimiyeti Kurma ve PKK Örgütünü Bölgede Barındırmama*') that was laid down in 1991 and initiated around 1992. A thorough modernization and reorganization of the armed forces was initiated that would mark the shift to counterinsurgency warfare.

Between 1993 and 1995 an increase in troops from 185,000 to 360,000 took place, while the more flexible corps-and-brigades structure supplanted the rigid structure of divisions and regiments, thus enabling quicker response and higher mobility (Jongerden, 2007, p. 68). In 1993, the Special Warfare Department (*Özel Harp Dairesi*), which had been founded in 1952 under the name of the Tactical Mobilisation Group (*Seferberlik Tetkik Kurulu*) in the framework of the NATO's 'Secret Operation Concept', was transformed into the Special Forces Command (*Özel Kuvvetler Komutanlığı*) and explicitly tasked with counterinsurgency measures (Kılıç, 2009, p. 11-12). At the same time, the Special Actions Teams (*(Polis) Özel Harekat Timleri*) that had already been organized in 1983 under the Special

Operations Branch Directorate (*Özel Harekat Şube Müdürlüğü*) and the Special Operations Group Authority (*Özel Harekat Grup Amirliği*) were promoted to active combat. The same holds for the Special Teams (*Özel Tim*), which were established within the Gendarmerie General Command (*Jandarma Genel Komutanlığı*). The Police and Gendarmerie Special Forces numbered a total of 15,000-20,000 men in the 90s (Jongerden, 2007, p. 70). Berivan Tapan notes that most members of these teams were of a strongly nationalist profile (Tapan, 2007, p. 125). Together with the infamous Gendarmerie Intelligence and Anti-Terror Unit (*Jandarma İstihbarat ve Terörle Mücadele*, JİTEM), which had been founded in 1983 and was operative already since 1987 (Kılıç, 2009, p. 12-14), the Special Forces basically operated as death squads.

The shift towards counterinsurgency further created the need for knowledge about the local population and military affairs - particularly counterinsurgency. In this period, officials drew from the lessons of the Kurdish rebellions in the 1930s and from other countries' experiences with guerilla war (Jongerden, 2007, p. 71). It is therefore not surprising that the Turkish state's so-called 'low-intensity warfare' would bear strong resemblances with episodes of state violence in other countries. The widespread use of extralegal measures and techniques at the hands of those identified with the state would resonate with experiences from the 'dirty war' in Argentina (Suarez-Orozco, 1992), state(-sponsored) terror in Guatemala (Afflitto, 2000), the Irish conflict (Feldman, 1991), and the Spanish state's conduct in the Basque conflict (Aretxaga, 2000). This also underlines the general link between counterinsurgency and state-sponsored terror worldwide. Although this exceeds the scope of this thesis, it would certainly be interesting to trace the production, proliferation and circulation of the techniques and technologies of

counterinsurgency. Let us take this as a reminder that analyses in this area should include different scales and trajectories.

In Turkey, this general 'update' seemed imperative from the perspective of the state, because while official discourse clearly defined the PKK as the target, it was rather difficult to identify and localize the enemy in the field. Discerning between civilians and guerillas proved to be problematic. Implemented in 1985, the so-called 'village guard' system, through which a share of the local population was to be tied to the state and armed in order to support Turkey's fight against the PKK[20], was considered an important tool in this respect. For simultaneously, the system, that from 1993 was expanded to include so-called 'voluntary village guards' (Tapan, 2007, p. 117-118), was supposed to serve as an instrument to mark the division between loyal and disloyal citizens, between friend and enemy (Balta-Paker, 2010; Çelik, 2018).

What this clearly demonstrates is that counterinsurgency does not target clearly defined, individual enemies but entire populations. In attempting to inscribe a separation between a (good) 'host population' and (evil) 'insurgents' before disposing of the latter, counterinsurgency, as Nicholas Mirzoeff suggests, is productive of 'necropolitical regimes of separation' (Mirzoeff, 2011, p. 279). To be sure, this strategy itself is nothing short of a crisis, because the classifications underlying this separation are themselves arbitrary and violent. In Turkey's Kurdistan, counterinsurgency took the form of 'low-intensity warfare', in the course of which one could witness the disappearance of the frontline as "society as a whole

[20] It should be emphasized that the village guard system has its own genealogies that lead back to the Ottoman era, where the founding of the so-called Hamidian regiments (Özar, Uçarlar & Aytar, 2013, p. 9) and the *Aşiret Mektepleri* (School for Tribes) (Rogan, 1996) mark the transition from imperial borderland to bordered land (Ünlü, 2014, p. 415-416). This turn towards endocolonization, Janet Klein contends, should be interpreted as the gradual transformation of the empire into a nation-state (Klein, 2011, p. 23).

becomes a 'front zone'" (Jongerden, 2007, p. 309). The counterinsurgent warfare in the 90s was a period of intense violence, in which mobile and semi-autonomous forces conducted targeted enforced disappearances and extra-judicial killings, while entire villages were forcibly evacuated and numerous people displaced. In the meantime, these villages as well as forests were burnt down, so as not to leave any hospitable environment to the PKK at any price. Thus, none of these measures should be regarded as negative side effects or collateral damage, as Joost Jongerden reminds us, contending that "the objective of counter-insurgency almost invariably has to become one of environment-deprivation" (Jongerden, 2007, p. 310).

As recounted before, the counterinsurgent strategy served to contain the PKK significantly by the end of the decade. Adnan Çelik states that the conflict subsequently moved from rural areas and villages to the cities – where many had fled during the forced evacuations in the 90s (Çelik, 2018). Here, new Kurdish political parties were founded, but the Turkish state continued to refuse to really view them as legitimate political interlocutors. Finally, in the aftermath of the 2009 local elections, a large operation was run against members of the Kurdish KCK. On the other hand, children in the Kurdish cities increasingly started acting in a form of radical urban 'street politics', engaging in daily clashes with the police (Darıcı, 2016). In the meantime, in the 2000s, it is possible to observe a gradual professionalization of counterinsurgency (Balta Paker, 2010, p. 428-429) as well as a tendential abandonment of the strategy of having 'Kurds crush the Kurds' ('*Kürdü Kürde kırdırtma*').[21]

[21] This regime practice, which originated in the late-Ottoman Empire, can perhaps be considered in light of different arguments, according to which Kurdish identity had finally received explicit, albeit negative recognition in the course of the first decade of the 21st century (Yeğen, 2009; Saraçoğlu, 2009; O'Connor & Baser, 2018; Ergin, 2014). Moreover, scholars have discerned a perception that divides between good (apolitical) and bad (political) Kurds (Kurt, 2019; Küçük, 2015).

But here another aspect needs to be considered. The shift towards counterinsurgency implies a general internalization of war and a revolutionized threat perception that now primarily targeted internal enemies (see Balta Paker, 2010). According to Mark Neocleous, this transformation, which is undergone by the majority of modern states, would have culminated in a circular logic between security and emergency (Neocleous, 2006, 2007). Elsewhere, it has been proposed that the principle of this concatenation of security and emergency is that "*every citizen is a potential terrorist*" (Agamben, 2014). It might therefore not be too much of an exaggeration to suggest that counterinsurgency has to be a boundless and protracted if not endless war. This is in part because it is a war, which is primarily fought against an image: 'terrorism' (Mitchell, 2011). This link between counterinsurgency and the 'enemy-image' might be due to the fact that the former is a comprehensive and multidimensional war effort operating under the paradigm of security. We are dealing with an inherently apolitical mode of governing effects rather than causes, which requires extensive checks and control, statistical calculation, anticipation, pre-emption etc. Security as permanent detection and anticipation of risks and threats by means of increasingly developed prosthetic technologies results in perpetual fear and terror, leading to a condition of pervasive state and police control, which involves an increasingly growing discretionary margin of the police (see Agamben, 2014; Agamben, 2015).

Zeynep Gambetti has cogently shown the discursive changes in Turkey, in the course of which the 'terrorist' label finally devolved into a signifier apt to delegitimize and often criminalize all political opposition (Gambetti, 2013, p. 133-134). Although today terrorist images have proliferated in such a manner that one could almost call it schizophrenic, it should be underlined that my reading of the

images will show that we are dealing with unequal distributions of such images based on the articulation of particular political and cultural demands, colonial genealogies, and ethnicized as well as racialized typifications.

Another important aspect is to view rather spectacular forms of warfare like the curfew operations in connection to more suspended forms of violence like security controls, detentions etc. In fact, surveillance and discipline have been an integral part of the long-term regime that prevails in the Kurdish provinces. This quite obviously includes the use of visual technologies such as satellite images, surveillance cameras (*MOBESE*), drones etc., through which different visibilities are created and maintained. Another important aspect is the compartmentalization of space and population that virtually amounts to regimes of separation where "[a]lmost half of the Kurdish cities are allocated to military quarters, barracks for the families of soldiers, teachers and bureaucrats and the office of the governor, which are usually built next to each other and very well-protected" (Kurt, 2019, p. 7). In fact, despite official initiation of peace negotiations in 2013, it can be maintained that the general 'regime of separation' did not only remain in place but was even intensified.[22]

Around the same time, the 'stone-throwing children' that had acquired increasing visibility and interest since the late 1990s seemed to have reached a certain stage of maturity. Darıcı has suggested that the creation of the YDG-H in early 2013 as an explicit youth movement might mark the transition to a transformed and matured political subjectivity that situates the young activists, who had

[22] This includes the persistence and renewed expansion of the village guard system (Milliyet, 2013; Özar, Uçarlar & Aytar, 2013, p. 10) as well as the construction of high-tech security military outposts (Aslan, 2013) and so-called 'security dams' – supposed to cancel out the PKK's capacity to move - in the Kurdish region (İHD, 2013). One also needs to take into account, that lawfare seems to have replaced outright warfare as the primary tool in dealing with Kurdish political subjects in this period. This is shown be the high number of arrests and incarcerations of people with an alleged affiliation with the PKK or the KCK (Bianet, 2011; Bayir, 2013; Hürriyet, 2014).

previously been considered abject, at the center of the Kurdish movement (Darıcı, 2016). In line with the Kurdish movement's general strategy of democratic autonomy, the YDG-H adopted an approach of 'autonomous self-defense', which led them to erect barricades and dig trenches in the neighborhoods of the major Kurdish cities. The months between October 2014, when the organization took self-defense to a new level during the Kobani protests in Cizre, and August 2015, when the Peace Process finally collapsed completely, saw an intensification of the struggle in urban space. As mentioned before, the state responded to the situation by declaring curfews in different districts and neighborhoods of the Kurdish cities.

The curfew operations need to be seen in context with an all-out war of the Turkish state against the PKK that even includes interventions in Iraq and particularly in Syria. Since August 2015, we have observed a constant increase in troop numbers of *JÖH/PÖH.*[23] By virtue of a decree, legal precautions were taken so that those Special Forces, who had gained experiences in urban warfare in Turkey's Kurdistan in 2015-16, could join (temporarily limited) cross border operations. When the Turkish state launched its operation 'Olive Branch' on the Syrian city of Afrin, a precedent was created as *JÖH/PÖH,* under the command of the Turkish Armed Forces, engaged in an aggressive war on foreign territory. It is therefore perhaps not too surprising that, at least in terms of the highly gendered, racialized and chauvinist visual imagery, the operations in Syria would resemble the operations in Turkey's

[23] In the course of the curfew operations, it was announced that an increase of troops of the Gendarmerie and Police Special Forces was to take place. It was decided that both units numbers were to be raised from 12,500 and 7,800 respectively to 20,000 each by the end of 2016, thus amounting to a total of 40,000 Special Forces; to this we need to add plans to construct 280 new police stations in the Turkish Southeast (Hürriyet, 2016). According to the performance report of the General Directorate of Security, the number of Police Special Forces surged from 11,000 at the beginning of 2016 to an estimate of 25,000 in 2018, while further hiring is foreseen (see EGM, 2018). Even if most recent numbers on this topic diverge, it is predicted that the troop numbers of both Police and Gendarmerie Special Forces will further and significantly increase in the near future.

Kurdistan to a great extent. After the shift towards counterinsurgency in the 90s, we might be witnessing another revolution in military affairs at the moment. In a recent report commissioned by the Center for Middle Eastern Studies that is known for its close ties to the state, we can read that urban warfare in residential areas is at the center of a new paradigm. The report emphasizes the deficits of the counterinsurgency operations in the Kurdish cities and the need for quick improvements in terms of education, equipment, information, and technology (Korkmaz, 2018). The plans to open a 'School for warfare in residential areas' appear to be in line with this paradigmatic shift (Eş, 2017). The more important it seems that we try to understand this new kind of urban warfare-based counterinsurgent governmentality spearheaded by the Special Forces, in which war and police power clearly converge.

CHAPTER 3

WITNESSING IMAGE WARS

The purpose of this chapter is to offer a panoramic view of counterinsurgency as a war waged in the visual field and discuss its implications for the witnessing of the war. The broader approach taken here to the visual field derives from the assumption that "in modern warfare and the accompanying culture of war that capitalism produces as a permanent feature of modern society, the contest of images is as critical as the war on the ground" (Apel, 2012, p. 1). It is primarily power and control over the way war is narrated that is at stake in the framing of war in the visual field (Gürsel, 2012; Apel, 2012). The aesthetics of violence are crucial to a war that is fought over memory and meaning as much as over territories. The struggle for power and control over signs operates through the production of visibilities and their respective contestation. Since it is not limited to a purely discursive plain, but also requires forms of 'staging', we are compelled to deal with the performative dimension of power to comprehend this struggle (Gambetti & Jongerden, 2015, p. 9). In more general terms, as Gambetti and Jongerden rightly point out, "[t]he dialectics of power and resistance, appropriation and re-appropriation, symbolization and re-symbolization operate in manifold ways" (Gambetti & Jongerden, 2011, p. 379).

Here, what first of all needs to be accounted for, is how newly emerging (communication) technologies are incorporated into existing regimes of violence, control and domination (this endeavor would also have to include an analysis of the fundamental changes in attention economies and communication infrastructures, something I won't be able to do here.). Generally speaking, these developments do not only alter the visibilities of violence, but also change the very way violence is

executed. In dealing with images of the curfew zones, one needs to be aware that violent acts in such 'zones of indistinction' are never completely contained in that particular space, especially not when it comes to images. Following W.T.J. Mitchell, transformations undergone by both image-making and political violence need to be explained with recourse to the intricate link between them (see Mitchell, 2011). In consequence, the following question is an important one: "[W]hat does chronic political violence do to systems of representation, and how are depictive practices and genres altered by the impact of concerted terror and material destruction?" (Feldman, 1995, p. 228-229).

Thoroughly mediatized today, I would contend that (modern) political violence is a comprehensive mode of political communication that entails both a continuous militarization of media and a mediatization of violence. Therefore, we need to conceive of the technologies of violence and those of the dissemination of events as interconnected problems as far as the issue of representation is concerned. If moreover, it is granted that the very circuits of perception that make reality sensible are themselves historical, we are led to the area of aesthetics. Consequently, what is required is a double perspective that can mediate between the historico-social conditions and the specific site of violence. A history of the mediation of perception and its relationship to violence is essential to the broader understanding of the perception of 'history' based on specific configurations between body, space and time. Likewise, posing the problem of epistemology in historical terms has us moving onto the terrain of a 'politics of truth', where, also with respect to images, we can start to problematize what Pierre Bourdieu has called the "construction of visions of the world" (Bourdieu, 1989, p. 18). I would like to suggest that this is how we would need to approach problems pertaining to the interconnected areas of aesthetics

and violence, including the rationalization, naturalization, dematerialization and/or legitimization of the latter.

The first section of this chapter is therefore intended to draw a general picture of the production of distinct distributions of the visible. I will try to trace the different frames and visibilities that we encounter through media images, the curfew-site, culture, operational images and finally through digital media. Here, I basically bring together images from the archive of the curfews with observations I made during the cyberethnographic fieldwork (Kuntsman, 2004) surrounding the compilation of the archive. Overall, this panoramic overview should serve to show how counterinsurgent warfare is seen in Turkey, what kind of visibilities emerge in this war and how this works to demarcate the limits of the legible and intelligible reality, of identities, and of legitimate war (see Butler, 2009). In the second section, I will deal with a problem that continues to be of great interest among scholars: the problem of witnessing. Based on the findings of chapter 2 and section 4.1, a 'double crisis' of witnessing is indicated, which is discussed at the hand of the concepts of 'percepticide' (Taylor, 1997) and 'transparency of evil' (Keenan, 2004a) respectively.

3.1 Image wars

3.1.1 Media images

In 1992, on 22 March, one day after the massacre during the Newroz celebrations in Cizre, a group of journalists comes under attack by the state's forces while trying to report from the area, although they are visibly waiving their improvised white flags. Shots are fired, people are running and screaming, journalist Faruk Balıkçı, who is filming these moments with his camera, falls to the ground. The camera comes to

rest on its side and continues recording from this angle. It feels like a déjà vu in reverse as I watch this scene in the documentary film *Savaşın Tanıkları [The Witnesses of the War]* (Solmaz, 2012). Only a few months earlier had I downloaded, archived and repeatedly watched a video of a group of people accompanied by journalist Refik Tekin, who, 24 years later on 20 January 2016, are attacked as they are trying to carry a corpse out of a neighborhood under curfew in Cizre. Among the many videos and images of journalists in the curfew zone being hindered from recording and sometimes even detained, it is especially these two images that pose an uncanny reminder of the high prices, which are to be paid for a contestation of the war's visibilities. Moreover, these images underline that emergency measures like curfews serve as instruments by means of which the sovereign attempts to radically alter the distribution of the sensible into his favor. Ever since the Vietnam and Gulf Wars, Jean Baudrillard and many others have discussed media images as central weapons of modern warfare and contended that reporting of the war in the media had produced a stream of images that ultimately did more to conceal rather than reveal the reality of war. By now, this insight seems trivial.

In Turkey too, mainstream media have traditionally contributed to reproducing the state-enforced visibilities and actively disseminated war propaganda and 'enemy-terrorist' discourses (Arcan, 2013; Çırakman, 2011; Yeşil, 2015). Adaklı shows how similar campaigns started spreading towards the end of the Peace Process (Adaklı, 2015). As mentioned above, when the counterinsurgency operations were initiated, Kurdish journalism and independent reporting were largely obstructed. On the other hand, however, some journalists were permitted to not only visit the curfew areas but also to join the Special Forces during their operations. In these cases of embedded journalism, journalists of the TV channels *Show TV*, *Star TV* and *A Haber*,

all known for their close ties to the AKP government, reported from among the Special Forces as these roamed through the neighborhoods tracking down ‘terrorists’. Nazlı Çelik’s reporting from Yüksekova aroused special controversy (Figure 1). HDP deputy Abdullah Zeydan charged Çelik with actively participating in carefully staged scenarios that completely misrepresented reality and filed a parliamentary inquiry. In turn, Çelik gave a harsh response from the news desk defending her professionalism and the truth of what she had presented. Rather than discussing the ‘truth’ of these images, which I find to be quite difficult, I would like to make a few remarks on the framing of this kind of embedded journalism and on the visibilities the latter creates. First of all, it needs to be underlined that any of the frames produced by this kind of journalism are orchestrated by the armed forces. It is them and not the journalist who is in control of the frames. The scene to the left is even filmed literally through the eyes of the Special Forces, with the camera positioned for an over-the-shoulder-shot as the rifle fires at some target in the distance that remains well beyond recognition. Before anything else, this one-sidedness is what characterizes embedded journalism. Although we watch and hear a lot of gunfire and occasional explosions in the different sequences, we do not witness any visible encounters with the insurgents at all. Then Nazlı Çelik is shaken by the detonation of an explosive (middle): A controlled explosion defuses a bomb allegedly planted by the Kurdish militias. The camera is always around. It films how more explosives detonate, how Çelik discovers the tunnels dug by the insurgents, how she stands in



Figure 1. Nazlı Çelik reporting from Yüksekova

the middle of one of the trenches, and how the Special Forces allegedly engage in combat. It is this mix of spectacular and visceral exposure of seemingly everything that is perhaps supposed to evoke the feeling that the audience is really granted exclusive insights. And yet, without Çelik's instructions on how to read these images, they would not reveal much. She in turn, is most likely to have been instructed by the armed forces. Ultimately, we are confined to the perspective of those who are in charge of the action, the Special Forces. With respect to the question of the 'reality' of the events shown here, one could conclude that truth appears as a matter of first-person-narrative, or perhaps better, first-person-shooter.

The same holds for *Şahit Olun (Bear Witness)*, a documentary show of nine episodes hosted by military expert Mete Yarar.[24] The show's claim that the audience is bearing witness to the 'truth' is stubbornly underlined as Yarar is repeatedly announcing that 'You are now witnessing' and once even that 'This is not fiction'. In contrast to Nazlı Çelik's reporting from Yüksekova, the host seems in fact to be less concerned with immediately embedding every image into a narrative. The show indeed confronts us with different categories of images that would be worthy of discussion. For example, aerial images much like those discussed in section 4.1.4 are shown in a casual manner, often to accomplish the transition from one scene to another through this intersperse. In at least one of the episodes, we are inside an armored vehicle seeing some visual technologies being used there. Elsewhere one of the Special Forces comments that they were 'technologically superior'. However, these and many other questions are left undiscussed and uncommented. Maybe that is because we are promised to 'witness real people', the experience on the ground. The show's focus is primarily with the hardships of the Special Forces and the local

[24] For a more detailed discussion of the show see Çaylı (2016).

population. Since the local population has however either fled the areas or is allegedly to afraid of the 'terrorists' to talk, Yarar is playing advocate for them, while for the most part, it is the Special Forces who share their point of view. Given that the host moreover does not intervene to extract further information of their understanding of notions such as 'cleaning the neighborhoods' it seems that we are in fact dealing with mere technicalities that are assumed to be common sense.

In the different cases of embedded journalism as well as in *Şahit Olun* it mostly looks as if the counterinsurgency operations would be conducted in some post-apocalyptic ghost towns, which underlines the sense of self-enclosed alienation that emerges from the Special Forces' personal comments. But other video material does exist. In these videos that were broadcasted by the news agency *Anadolu Ajansı*, we see how insurgents surrender themselves to the armed forces. Later, it would turn out that we were in fact watching carefully arranged mise-en-scènes. This image stems from a video shot in Nusaybin, which would shed light on what actually happened in the alleged moment of surrender (Figure 2). The police in this frame is



Figure 2. Mis-en-scene of a scenario of surrender in Nusaybin

giving the young people directions, ordering them to bring forward the injured person and then to lie down in a specific formation – scenes we do not see in the Anadolu Agency broadcast. The Special Forces had not only threatened and forced the young people to assume the roles of actors and extras in these scenes, but according to one of the male youngsters, who were arrested that day, had even applied torture (Evrensel, 2016). In a similar video that revealed a previous mise-en-scène from the Sur district in Diyarbakır, we even see that two young men are coerced to take of their clothes at gunpoint, before they are made to wear the garments in which they would finally be filmed (Artıgerçek, 2017). The 'official' media frames were undone by such alternative 'versions' that – although this cannot ultimately be verified – are likely to have been uploaded to the internet by the Special Forces themselves.

3.1.2 Visibilities in the curfew zone

As we have already seen in chapter 2, the emerging Turkish nation-state developed extensive policies to transform pre-national heterogeneity into a homogeneous national order of space and time (Öktem, 2008). This 'ethno-nationalist incorporation of time and space' (Öktem, 2004), in the course of which destructive and constructive policies went hand in hand, was and continues to be an intensive struggle particularly in Turkey's Kurdistan, where the material and symbolic strategies of (re-)appropriation have been most visible. Here, a prolonged history of demographic engineering was from the very beginning accompanied by what Öktem calls 'toponymical strategies' (Öktem, 2004, p. 565), including inscriptions through which the natural and built environment are signified and incorporated. If not destroyed, evacuated or left to decay, the majority of the village and street names

was changed in order to 'Turkify' them. These kinds of symbolic appropriations of space derive their significance from the fact that "[t]he visibility of signs of power (or the corresponding lack of visibility of marginalized groups or cultures) serves to reinforce the founding of a social imaginary of strength and superiority by materially reiterating it" (Gambetti & Jongerden, 2015, p. 9). Today, Turkish flags just like nationalist iconography, symbols, and slogans are spread throughout the region, covering schools, public institutions and administrative buildings, monuments in urban space, bridges, billboards, mountain slopes etc. In many places, one can encounter largely written slogans like "How happy is the one who says I am a Turk" (*Ne mutlu Türküm diyene*), "One language, one people, one flag" (*Tek dil, tek halk, tek bayrak*), "One Turk is equal to all World" (*Bir Türk dünyaya bedeldir*), and many more. The onset of the conflict between the state and the PKK had brought about an intensification of the state's toponymical strategies (Zeydanlıoğlu, 2008, p. 7-8). The region was plastered with hundreds of inscriptions, particularly those areas that were considered disloyal (Öktem, 2004, p. 569). Simultaneously, more destructive practices like the burning down and forced evacuation of villages complemented the set of spatial strategies in the 90s (Jongerden, 2007).

Since the beginning of the 21st century however, a visual, discursive and bodily re-appropriation and re-symbolization of urban space had taken place in the Kurdish cities that had come under pro-Kurdish rule (Güvenç, 2011). Signs, symbols and names had played a central role in this 'return of the Other' in public space into which elements of Kurdish identity and history were now incorporated (see Jongerden, 2009). The counterinsurgent meant a revival of Turkification strategies. This does not only concern the razing to the ground of large proportions of the urban environment of cities like Nusaybin, Şırnak, and Sur. At the same time, symbolic re-

appropriation of space occurred in the form of yet another renaming of streets – replacing figures of the Kurdish movement with ‘martyrs’ of the Turkish cause and village guards who lost their lives in the war against the Kurds - the removal of multilingual and Kurdish signboards, and the destruction of numerous Kurdish monuments (Oran, 2017). Although ultimately, these strategies were officially implemented at the hands of the trustees, who were later appointed by the government to rule the municipalities in place of the elected HDP politicians, they were basically prefigured already during the curfew operations, when the Special Forces used graffiti in order to provisionally name the streets after their ‘martyrs’ (Figure 3). Moreover, the respective areas, particularly sites of symbolic value like the city walls of Sur, minarets etc., were ostentatiously flagged.

But the visual, symbolic, and bodily registers of the dirty war of the 90s and the recent operations are not exhausted by these rather spatial and discursive strategies. The white Renault Toros, the death squad JITEM (the ‘team’), walkie-



Figure 3. The graffiti to the left reads 'Police Special Operations Team Martyr N. Ademoğlu Street'

talkie sounds, masked and bearded men, tanks roaming the streets, enforced disappearances: These can all be viewed as imagistic impressions of the general climate of fear (see Göral, 2016) that delineate the visibilities of the conflict. As Ramazan Demir recalls from his childhood in the city of Şırnak in the 90s, the state frequently resorted to violent spectacles in order to deter the local population, for example using ropes to tie the bodies of dead guerillas to the back of armored vehicles and drag them through the streets (Demir, 2015). Footage of one of these incidents, in which a young boy, who had unknowingly disobeyed a curfew in Cizre, is subjected to this gruesome practice, is part of Sami Solmaz's documentary and had been reported by the newspaper *Özgür Gündem* under the heading 'Humanity is being dragged around'. In fact, this practice seems to have been revitalized in 2011, when a photograph appeared on the internet on which the bodies of two killed guerilla-fighters, who had been dragged through the streets of Hakkari, are seen dropped on the yard of the Gendarmerie Command in front of a bust of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk that writes 'How happy is the one who says I am a Turk' (Avcı, 2011). Thus, 'Humanity is still being dragged around', as one newspaper's headline suggested (Evrensel, 2015a) with respect to another uncanny repetition of this unlawful practice. During the curfews in 2015, Hacı Lokman Birlik was killed by the Special Forces, before he was dragged all the way through the streets of Şırnak until the police station. The major difference between the incidents in the 90s and those today appears to be that it is the Special Forces themselves who first record these images and then circulate them on the internet, thus generating increased visibility and addressing a wider audience.

Hegemony in the visual field is however not only about making visible but also about withdrawing from visibility and quasi-ghostly presences. In the 90s, when

people referred to JITEM as the ‘Team’, the paramilitary force’s existence and appearance were surrounded by fear and secrecy. In that sense, Irfan Aktan is not exactly right when arguing that drones were the new JITEM (see below). There are in fact new actors that the local population describes as masked and bearded ‘teams’ of men with palpable accent in their Turkish. Whereas their presence throughout different reports and testimonies is quite pervasive, they remain all the more invisible or ‘faceless’ in terms of photographic images. The only traces they have been leaving were the graffiti tags on the walls in the curfew zones: ‘*Esedullah Timi*’ (Figure 4) and ‘*Cundullah Timi*’ appear to be the chosen names of the new paramilitary squads and their absence in images is especially striking considering the hypervisibility of *JÖH* and *PÖH*.



Figure 4. ‘Signature' of the ‘Esedullah Team’ in Silvan, Diyarbakır: ‘The Esedullah Team is here’

3.1.3 Counterinsurgency as popular culture

The assumption that images play a crucial role in shaping a society's cultural understanding of war (Hallin & Gitlin, 1994, p. 161) should not be taken as a statement limited to war reporting and the broader genre of documentary film and photography. We should broaden the scope to think about images circulating in the wider circuits of culture, including movies, TV series, commercials etc. Building their argument on Guy Debord's *Society of the Spectacle*, Brad Evans and Henry A. Giroux contend that contemporary spectacle would significantly operate through spectacles of violence, in which violence is framed, edited, narrativized and circulated for consumption (Evans & Giroux, 2015). While the authors' focus lies on the more general penetration of culture with different forms of violence – an analysis that loses nothing of its pertinence in the light of what I am about to argue – the examples presented here primarily point to a militarization of media and culture, where militarization denotes the "step-by-step process by which a person or a thing gradually comes to be controlled by the military *or* comes to depend for its well-being on militaristic ideas" (Enloe, 2000, p. 3).

Already when the curfew in the Sur district of Diyarbakır was still continuing, the rapper *SAT5*, whose real identity remains unknown, uploaded a music clip to his song *Yalnızım Atam (I am lonely, my Atatürk)*, which had obviously been shot in the heart of Sur and in which the rapper frankly repeats the gestures of physical and symbolic (re-)appropriation of urban space previously executed by the Special Forces (Figure 5), while reinforcing these gestures with nationalist and militarist lyrics. The Governor's Office would subsequently declare that it had not issued any permission for such a venture and had suspended one police from duty as a consequence (Diken, 2016). The problem however primarily seemed to be that the



Figure 5. Selection of frames from SAT5's music clip shot in Sur, Diyarbakır.

project had been conducted without the knowledge of the superiors, since in 2017, the Gendarmerie General Command itself even commissioned another rap song with quite similar lyrical content, which it then shared on its Twitter Account. Although the video was not set in an area under curfew, it was shot with actual members of *JÖH* acting as its protagonists (Gazete Karınca, 2017). This, then, with its anti-Kurdish lyrics seems to be the official soundtrack of counterinsurgency. It is reminiscent of the different videos from the curfew zones, in which the Special Forces expose the respective neighborhoods to nationalist songs and marches, which they play from the speakers of their armored vehicles. This practice seems to have found its way out of the disciplinary institution of the prison (see Demirel, 2009) onto the streets.

To be sure, nationalism and militarism have generally been all but foreign to Turkish culture in the past. Particularly since the 2000s, an accelerated political and especially cultural assertion and dissemination of an ethno-nationalist self-image based on the exclusion of internal and external enemies has been observed (Çırakman, 2011). By the same token, earlier periods had seen the broadcasting of

militarist shows like the documentary formats *Anadolu'dan Görünüm*, *Silahlı Kuvvetler Saati*, and *Savaşta Barışta Türk Ordusu* as well as the fictional series *Şefkat Tepe* and *Sakarya-Fırat*. Since 2010, another wave of movies and series has hit the markets, including the movies *Dağ I & II, Can Feda,* and *Bordo Bereliler 1 & 2* and TV series like *Savaşçı*, *Söz, İsimsizler*, and *Börü*. One major difference is that today these series air on the most watched channels (*Savaşçı*, *Söz, İsimsizler*) and on new streaming services like BluTV (*Börü*).

With respect to the first three, Kırbıyık summarizes that we are basically dealing with unidirectional, mythical, heroic and strictly anti-Kurdish stories of legitimate and uncompromising military violence for the purpose of a re-conquest of the Turkish nation's territory (Kırbıyık, 2017). This is in fact a pertinent characterization of the general imaginary undergirding all of the movies and series. *Börü,* telling the story of a team of the Police Special Operations Forces (PÖH), does not palpably differ in most regards. There is a strong intertwinement between the fates of individuals and the nation resulting in a projection of the protagonists' private and individual troubles and losses onto the whole nation - presented as a warrior community of conquerors - and vice versa. The series is permeated by a Manichean world-view, in the framework of which the rise of 'evil' is seen to be an outcome in part of one's own lack of vigilance, in part of a major international conspiracy. Once again, torture and violence are the necessary and inevitable means to end disharmony and the Special Forces, openly presented as the 'crazy' folks, are entering the war willing to sacrifice themselves so that others can live – or, we might read: "absent sacrifice there is no sacred presence of the sovereign" (Kahn, 2008, p. 173). In this sense, *Börü* too is much like a like a first-person shooter that completely omits the 'enemy'-perspective.

What particularly struck me in this series was how real events like the killing of the *Kaymakam* (District Governor) in the Derik district of Mardin, the massacre at the Reina night club in Istanbul, the curfews in the Kurdish cities, and the coup attempt of 15 July 2016 are swiftly translated into one coherent cinematic narrative and delivered to screens for immediate consumption. These instances of remediation of violence do not only indicate that increased capacities for circulation are closely related to processes of the commercialization and commodification of violence (Theweleit, 2017, p. 51), but also raise the question in how far real experiences of dehumanizing violence are quickly incorporated into and reproduced in the cultural realm (see Pollock, 2015). Counterinsurgency warfare is a thrilling spectacle with happy end. This outlook substantiates Evans and Giroux's claim that spectacle "works precisely at the level of subjectivity by manipulating our desires such that we become cultured to consume and enjoy productions of violence" (Evans & Giroux, 2015, p. 32).

But there is more to the story. At the venue of the premiere of the military blockbuster movie *Bordo Bereliler II*, the audience got the chance to visit an exhibition of the domestically produced weapons, which had been used as requisites for the movie as the filmmakers were proud to announce. This seems symptomatic of a shift of militarism from spectacle to interactive experience (see Stahl, 2010). In my own neighborhood, passersby are informed that they can even join the side of production: A large screen thrones over the premises of the Şişli branch of the Turkish Armed Forces Foundation, advertising the defense industry's most recent creations like drones, and ending with a call to support the foundation with donations. Counterinsurgency becomes an experience, a lifestyle, and ultimately totally banal and normalized - war is a product like any other. Certainly, I have so far

only presented some spotlights and I could impossibly give a full portray of the cultural field in this thesis, but I would nevertheless suggest that these developments bring evidence to the assumption that culture and violence are strongly intertwined.

This means that violence permeates culture but certainly also, the curfew area teaches us, that conversely, culture plays an important role in informing and inspiring violence. Because if textual markers such as the 'I want to play a Game, JÖH PÖH', which refers to the torture-laden *SAW* movies (Figure 6), or allusions to the TV series *Diriliş Ertuğrul* are inscribed onto the surfaces of walls, one necessarily wonders in how far such cultural imaginaries and cinematic inflections become productive during the performance of acts of violence (see ten Brink and Oppenheimer, 2014). From the graffiti left behind by the Special Forces we can conclude that this imaginary further spans Turkish mythology, poems of the Turkish nationalist Nihal Atsız, and songs recorded by the likes of Bülent Serttaş, Merve Özbey, Hidra, or Hande Yener and Serdar Ortaç, as well as viral online videos. Although an analysis of the various citations and their impact on the performance of violence would eventually require further research, I would conclude at this point that we not only



Figure 6. Graffiti inspired by the SAW movies: 'I WANT TO PLAY A GAME, JÖH PÖH'

have to be watchful of how violence seeps into culture. We moreover have to acknowledge that an intense circulation of images is already in place before any violence is executed, that is before any graffiti or other staged acts of violence are photographed and shared online.

3.1.4 Operational images

Images from the curfew zone attest to another way in which violence operates through the visual field. Confronted with technologies like night and aerial vision, surveillance cameras, drones, and unmanned air vehicles, one is provoked to argue that speed and acceleration are a matter not only of the circulation of images, but also of the techniques of perception more generally, that is, of speed facilitated by military and communication technology. In the previous chapter, I have already tried to point out that in the 90s one essential dimension in gearing the armed forces toward counterinsurgency purposes was to restructure them in a way that would grant greater flexibility and capacities for swift response. In the same period, the Turkish Armed Forces were equipped with high-tech binoculars and night vision systems, jets and tanks were upgraded with night vision technologies, and the superior helicopter models Kobra and Super Kobra as well as equipment for winter operations were acquired (Balta Paker, 2010, p. 415-416). In line with these developments, the armed forces were now able to 'illuminate' the night and relativize distance through enhanced vision. Here, one needs to address the conflict parties' ability to seize images of the 'enemy' at an instant, which is essential to a war that has much to do with recognition and visibility (Cadava, 1993, p. 22). This too is implied in the earlier cited conceptualization of war as the appropriation of perceptual fields. Consequently, great efforts have been made since the 90s to

advance capacities in the visual field.[25] First, this process saw the further development of night and aerial vision systems as well as surveillance technologies such as *MOBESE (CCTV)* cameras that are spread all over the Kurdish cities. Quite significant in this respect is the more recent introduction of armed unmanned air vehicles (*SİHA* in Turkish) that were first developed in 2014 and then started to be operated by the Turkish Armed Forces since 2015 (Aktan, 2017). Until June 2017, the Land Forces Command had acquired 18 armed vehicles of the *Bayraktar TB2* type from the developer *Baykar Makina* (Karakaş, 2017).

The two images provided here are part of a broader array images of night-vision, aerial vision and heat-detection cameras – in fact, they really are snapshots from video sequences that I could not have included here. The first one (Figure 7) being most likely to show the screen of a ground vehicle equipped with extended



Figure 7. Target images on the screen inside of an armored vehicle in Silvan, Diyarbakır

[25] Note also that in many places the declaration of curfews included a ban on the private use of drones as well (Sözeri, 2016). The latter have started to play an increasingly important role for journalism, too, as for example drone images from the Gezi Protests demonstrate.

vision gadgets, the second seems to stem from the recordings of a *SİHA* with aerial vision capacities (Figure 8). What we see in the videos is that the vision technologies are programmed to detect contrasts and movement. The reticule automatically tracks down the human bodies appearing on the screen. In neither of the materials, these bodies display any awareness of having become a target. They do not look as if they were about to attack – who would they attack at that moment anyway? In most cases, I would not even be able to tell if those bodies carry any weapons. With respect to the weapons that work through highly developed technologies of vision and the agents that command them, it can be observed how much they are withdrawn from visibility. Yet at the same time, they serve to make everything else utterly visible and finally produce equally visible effects – targets are shot twice: first captured as images, then struck to death. The voice-over comment in Harun Farocki's movie *Images of the World and the Inscription of War* states: "Preserving photograph, the destroying bomb, these two now press together" (Farocki, 1988). Indeed, the execution of human beings via these technologies is in visual terms hardly distinguishable from taking photographs; only the body remains frozen even after the



Figure 8. Aerial images from Bağlar, Diyarbakır

trigger is pulled. Due to the way these images work as essential elements for the execution of an action, Farocki preferred to call them ‘operational images’ and they played a major role in his more general struggle with ‘registering the visible’. These efforts are motivated by the realization, as Volker Pantenburg suggests, that “[p]resent work processes, just like hi-tech military operations, can no longer be analysed by close observation, since their most important aspects have drifted into a sphere of non-visibility” (Pantenburg, 2017, p. 55).

Therefore, questions regarding the visibilities and invisibilities of violence are crucial. To be sure, they compel a reconsideration of the ‘realism’ commonly associated with the camera and the latter’s capacity to capture the ‘reality’ of warfare at all, a reality that arguably has “become disjointed, opaque, and characterized by abstract mediation” (Hüppauf, 1993, p. 45). This disparity between ‘realism’ and ‘reality’ should however not discourage us from grappling with the reality of modern war. The transformations brought about by technological development demand to be accounted for in order to understand the changes undergone by warfare and their implications for images. In an attempt to situate Harun Farocki’s work, Georges Didi-Huberman has provided a worthy description of this effort:

> To talk about war in terms of disappearance will ultimately lead one to say: ‘The Gulf War did not take place’. Harun Farocki, however, obviously wants to understand how it took place and how, even if outside our field of vision, it changed the vision – but also the reason, fantasies, emotions and gestures – of those returning from it. (Didi-Hubermann, 2014, p. 123 [my translation])

For what kind of response do the two images above allow regarding this problem? In this respect, I would first of all point out that we are explicitly not dealing with images of the objects themselves, but that we are rather assuming the camera’s perspective in both examples. Importantly, in the case of the air vehicle, we do not even have a reference as to where its operator is located. The cameras and weapons

as well as the persons operating them, as was already observed, usually remain hidden to their environment. Yet at the same time, these processes play an essential role in making this environment appear as a mere image on a screen. The degree of virtualization involved here is reminiscent of video games.[26] A rich amount of data and visual information stands in stark contrast to significantly reduced sensory experience. Vision too is limited to the edges of the frame. Moreover, the technology displayed in the videos almost seems to choose its targets automatically. In the face of increasingly developing prosthetic technologies, it is indeed possible to register a gradual dematerialization and de-realization of violence "as sensory points of reference vanish in a surfeit of optical targets" (Virilio, 1989, p. 19). All these factors combined, one also wonders what kind of framing for the agents' decisions and choices remains left.[27] Ultimately, it would seem as if human agency was increasingly decentered as far as the carrying out of acts of violence is concerned.

Here, one needs however to be careful not to blindly follow a discourse that often surrounds modern war technologies and has already substantially affected the language that is adopted when talking about warfare. This changing image of war is expressed through terms such as surgical strikes, smart bombs and the

[26] In this respect, we should once again note a convergence of military affairs and entertainment culture. Although I was not able to validate a similar observation for the case of Turkey, it is still noteworthy that different authors have pointed out that the US military has recruited drone operators from among video gamers (Graham, 2016; Stahl, 2018). We can also observe how quickly real war is translated into a gaming experience as the case of *Afrin SİHA* shows, a game developed at the Department of Computer Engineering of Necmettin Erbakan University in Konya, in which users operate drones in order to destroy enemy targets (TRT Haber, 2018). This spilling over of war into 'entertainment' was also registered with respect to the popular first-person shooter Counter-Strike, in which nick names of many players seem to point to an alignment with one of the sides in the counterinsurgent war (140journos, 2017). Finally, an almost complete dissolution of reality occurred when on 31 May 2017, the TV channel *A Haber* broadcasted a news that was allegedly showing the killing of PKK members by a combat helicopter. The video actually stemmed from the video game *Arma III*, in which users create simulated war scenarios (Arabacı, 2017). Characters and weaponry that correspond to the Turkish Armed Forces and the Special Forces are available for both games.

[27] For Paul Virilio, one defining characteristic of these technological developments is the loss of laterality with regards to vision. As opposed to non-assisted human vision these camera-eyes confront reality in a mode of frontality. According to Virilio this is the mode of aiming (Virilio & Lotringer, 2008, p. 232).

‘neutralization’ of targets/terrorists. These are only a few examples of a register that supports the myth of warfare as sterile and bloodless (non-)event without accidental casualties. According to such tropes, by ‘reducing the human factor’ modern technologies would serve to reduce the margin of error and prevent ‘non-rational’ factors from intervening during the execution of violence. This does in fact contribute more to the erasure and clouding of responsibility than it refers to the reality in the field. In fact, Aktan (2017) sees a continuity between former paramilitary structures and drones in that both largely operate in a more than ambiguous legal framework through a mode of invisibility that conceals responsibility and accountability but is every so often disrupted by the production of violent effects.

Although official discourses during the curfews in the Kurdish cities significantly followed the narrative of clinical, professional, and rational warfare, the graffiti and images produced by the Special Forces as well as the sheer scale of destruction through bombing of the urban fabric revealed this to be a myth. From this perspective, it would indeed seem as if in counterinsurgency we are dealing with an imagination of ‘cleaning’ that inevitably hinges upon ‘dirty’ wars (Sùarez-Orozco, 1992, p. 239-240; Taussig, 2005). Conversely, juxtaposed with images of high-tech weapons, tanks and drones, the many images of *JÖH* and *PÖH* are revealed to be just as mythical. The former category of images enables us to recognize the myth behind notions of individual heroism and exposes warfare as large-scale destruction by technological means that transcends any individual’s capacity to make sense of its experience. This contradiction does not necessarily need to be resolved. Rather than trying to impose one totalizing logic, it would seem that we should acknowledge that

war is a fragmentary process characterized by different visions and visibilities, in the course of which different modes of violence produce different effects.

3.1.5 Counterinsurgency online

So far, we have seen different ways in which the curfew zones came to visibility, but most importantly, it was via social media that images of counterinsurgent warfare circulated. Therefore, we first need to make note of a substantial transformation in the visual field. Despite all censorship and limitations, the conflict in Turkey's Kurdistan was primarily mediated through conventional media like television and newspapers in the past. However, at least since the Roboski massacre in 2011, different actors in the conflict have started to make more and more extensive use of social media (Üstündağ, 2019). In Turkey, the experience of social media use during the Gezi protests had supported celebratory accounts of theses media's role in widening individuals' fields of vision, democratizing the production and flows of knowledge and challenging authority. However, only two years later the counterinsurgent war of the state would culminate in a comprehensive archive of violence and the most widely used social media and internet platforms (Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Instagram) became saturated with a huge slide of openly accessible images of violence in the curfew zones.[28]

Thus, cyberspace too appeared to be a battlefield, where a contest of images (Apel, 2012) was fought. As Üstündağ (2019) observes, though divided politically, both sides to the conflict were united in their interest for and relentless agitation

[28] In fact, I should mention that all of the images discussed so far, though perhaps initially published elsewhere or intended for other purposes, sooner or later circulated on the internet from where they were downloaded and incorporated into the archive of the curfews. As far as contemporary visual economies are concerned, this shows how complex and manifold the dynamics of remediation, re-contextualization etc. are today.

around these images. Countless photographs and videos were shared by the numerous accounts that popped up in this episode. Among the most active accounts related to the security forces were *JÖH* (Gendarme Special Forces), *Özel Kuvvetler* (Special Forces), *Türk Özel Kuvvetleri* (Turkish Special Forces), *Derin Kuvvet* (Deep Force), *BÖF* (Operations [against] the Separatist Organization), *Terör Gerçekleri* (Terror Truths), *Terör Analizleri* (Terror Analysis), and *PKK Gerçekleri* (PKK Truths), some of which had more than a hundred thousand followers. On the other hand, oppositional accounts like *Firat Nuçe* (Euphrat News), *Botan Press*, *Nerina Azad*, or *Turkey Untold* would often share the very images posted by the security forces' or Turkish nationalist accounts, but frame them with entirely different captions and comments. Here, it became most obvious that within the borders of the Turkish state, (at least) two communities looking at the same images were deeply split as regards their interpretation (Hochberg, 2015, p. 8; Taylor, 1997). Overall however, if there can be any fair estimation of this, the security forces seemed to have had the upper hand in this image war, as they operated with the greatest freedom producing images in the curfew areas.

Yet at the same time, the great interest for these online images derived perhaps not only from the fact that social media have become the primary tools for communication. I would contend that the images posted by *JÖH* and *PÖH* were revelatory of dimensions of counterinsurgency warfare that usually remain invisible in other discourses. They stood in contrast to the mainstream media's framing of and official government discourses on the operations. The general tension between states' official discourses around war on the one, and images produced by single soldiers on the other hand has been the topic of academic debate, too. Struk and Anden-Papadopoulos concur in arguing that soldiers' pictures can provide us with a

radically different insight into modern wars (Struk, 2011, p. xvi; Anden-Papadopoulos, 2009). A prominent case in this respect are the Abu Ghraib photographs, which have been argued to demystify discourses about the clinical and compassionate character of contemporary warfare (Anden-Papadopoulos, 2009, p. 924) and reveal its actual ethical standards (Sontag, 2004). Judith Butler has noted that these images are significant 'snapshots', i.e. traces of the more general and systematic tactics of a war on terror that is fought through dehumanizing registers (Butler, 2007, p. 964). Given their ability to undo or disrupt the frames procured by official institution, these kinds of images tend to become objects of contention. Struk refers to an example from Nazi Germany to demonstrate that authorities are often enough less concerned with actual practices of violence and torture than with their photographic representations: taking photographs in the concentration camps was prohibited and prosecuted (Struk, 2011, p. xiii). Likewise, after photographers had strongly contributed to the allied victory over Nazis by creating powerful visual impressions, they were later kept from covering the Vietnam War, when it turned out that their images rather served to discredit the American cause (Virilio, 1994, p. 55-56). During the curfews in the Kurdish cities, images of mutilated bodies of dead guerillas fighters and images of other violations were uploaded to the internet by the Special Forces themselves. In two cases, legal investigation was opened against those responsible for these images (Evrensel, 2015b; BIA Haber Merkezi, 2016). In a press release, former Prime Minister Davutoğlu even tried to contain these incidents with a 'black sheep' rhetoric when announcing that the recording of these images was detrimental to the anti-terror operations, which otherwise would be conducted most professionally. The contrast between the general shield of impunity regarding violations within the scope of the counterinsurgency operations on the one, and the

dissemination of images of these very violations on the other hand is indicative of the great importance attached to the visibilities of the operations.

We should not forget, however, that the images we are looking at are the product of visibilities created and commanded by the Special Forces. With every frame, we have to be aware that this is their view of the war and that we are dealing with an explicit gaze, in which it might be exactly the communicative power of the images that is at stake. In the encounter with this gaze, several authors across different contexts highlight the ordinary appearance of images of killing, torture, and abuse and the seeming banality with which they are staged (Gregory, 2016; Butler, 2007; Anden-Papadopoulos, 2009; Hochberg, 2015). Theweleit reminds us that staging has been a central feature of political violence all along and that the internet and social media are important primarily in so far as their emergence has resulted in a multiplication of platforms on which perpetrators of violence can exhibit their actions (Theweleit, 2017, p. 48-51). Acts of staged violence thus acquire an increased visibility as potentially all people with an internet connection are now their audience (Apel, 2012, p. 3). Moreover, what is perhaps so striking about the ordinary appearance of violence is that it mirrors how "[m]any of us exhibit our most intimate details in play, in love, in desire, in consumption, in the social, and in the political throughout our rich digital lives" (Harcourt, 2015, p. 18). Considered in the context of what Harcourt calls the 'expository society', i.e. an endless imperative to communicate, 'share', and exhibit oneself in the digital sphere, it does no longer appear too surprising that the Special Forces too would upload content that shows their reality.

As far as the staging and photographing of acts of violence is concerned, one can indeed confirm that it is nothing new. Already in the course of the state's

campaign to suppress the rebellion in Dersim in 1938, photographs of violence, in which the troops arguably staged themselves as sovereign, decorated the pages of different newspapers, thus allowing for a kind of mythical communication with the 'public' (see Demirel, 2006). In some frames, soldiers even pose with the cut off heads of the rebellion's leaders in their hands. Further have seen that the Hacı Lokman Birlik incident is preceded by similar practices in the 90s. But the huge slide of images that would surface on different social media platforms during the recent counterinsurgency operations indicated that the Special Forces themselves were now engaged in a twofold war: one in urban space, one in cyberspace. In fact, many of the images uploaded by *JÖH/PÖH*, like the one referred to in the introduction chapter, depict acts that would not make much sense if it was not for their circulation as images. These masculinized spectacles of violence address an audience that is not immediately present during their staging.

Kuntsman and Stein have coined the term 'digital militarism' to describe not only how war is carried into cyberspace but how more specifically militarized dispositions are integrated with social media commonplace (Kuntsman & Stein, 2015, p. 13). And indeed, many images of *JÖH* and *PÖH* are not exactly 'spectacular' in the sense of radical or extreme. There are a lot of images that rather converge with the general Instagram standard as well as pictures that could be mistaken for holiday memory snapshots if stripped of their context. The curfews still continued as an edited video of the *PÖH*/*JÖH* operations dedicated to the 'heroes of the fight against terror' was uploaded by the account *Türk Özel Kuvvetleri*. Although the footage partially resembles the visual registers of embedded journalism, the purpose of these kinds of videos seems to be a monumentalization of the Special Forces, dead and alive, that is backed up by epic scores. Accordingly, some curate

highlight reels of their favorite basketball players on Youtube, while others assemble the 'Top 5' of the police's rude and aggressive attitude towards people in the curfew zone. Courtesy of channels like *ASKER TV*, YouTube users can also access a range of video material that shows the Special Forces in training and demonstrating their skills in special showcases. Even roughly edited short films consisting of different scenes of the curfew operations in Sur for instance, which appear to have been created by 'fans' of *JÖH* and *PÖH*, can be found on the internet. In fact, by simply searching for 'JÖH PÖH' on YouTube one will come across countless videos, in which the Special Forces act in the role of the people's chosen heroes. The most frequent image of these heroes is that of the hyper-masculine, fearless, educated, invincible, and ultra-cool warrior, who is at the same time merciful, just, and compassionate. In the digital sphere, we are thus able to observe not only a further naturalization and normalization of militarism and violence or the sheer endless multiplication of the images produced by the Special Forces, but the growing number of videos produced about the Special Forces moreover seems to suggest that citizens are contributing quite actively to this war in cyberspace.

3.2 A double crisis of witnessing?

There seems to be widespread consensus that visual images occupy a central position in the representation of violence in modern societies (Boltanski, 1999; Chouliaraki, 2006; Möller, 2013; Anden-Papadopoulos, 2009; Apel, 2012). This much seems to be true notwithstanding the basic fact that images of violence and suffering can ever only be flattened representations of the human being in affect or pain (Dauphinee, 2007, p. 153) and that they would actually better be taken for their symbolic rather than representational value (Zelizer, 1998, p. 139). The ethics of spectatorship of

images of violent events like wars and atrocities has been a major topic of discussion among scholars (Kozol, 2014; Grønstad & Gustaffson, 2012; Reinhardt, Edwards & Duganne, 2007; Möller, 2013, Linfield, 2010). The complicity of the distant spectator (Grønstad & Gustaffson, 2012), the possibilities of political engagement (Kozol, 2014), or the 'secondary exploitation' of suffering (Bal, 2007, p. 95) are some of the important issues raised in this regard.

Wendy Kozol describes one major dilemma of visual culture in this respect, referring to the epistemological problem that images seem to constitute 'irrefutable evidence' on the one hand but on the other hand "mobilize racial, gender, and sexual constructs of identity, citizenship, and the nation that ambivalently mediate the conditions through which recognition takes place" (Kozol, 2014, p. 12). The active role of images in (re)producing identities and exclusions even leads to the more general claim that "the contest of images is the continuation of war by other means" (Apel, 2012, p. 1). Nevertheless, even Susan Sontag who had demanded an 'ecology of images' (Sontag, 1979) in the past, though not revoking her opinion on the 'image-glut' and her skepticism regarding the image's capacity to stir political action, would eventually make the case for an 'ethics of seeing' – accordingly, we were to permit images of violence to haunt us (Sontag, 2003). Discussion about the 'witnessing' of atrocities and the possible reactions images of war provoke among their audiences has produced results that vary across the board. There are findings indicating that images might sometimes actually provoke the public to use its political potential – the 'CNN effect' (see Robinson, 2002) -, contrasting accounts of a 'compassion fatigue' (Moeller, 1999), as well as the sobering conclusion that simply 'no one's looking' (Caruthers, 2008).

3.2.1 First crisis: Percepticide

In Turkey, it is first of all the historical experience of the 90s, which causes one to be skeptical of the possibilities of witnessing. As it is often said, during the period of the dirty there was ‘silence in the West, war in the East’. True, whereas in the latest counterinsurgency operations images such as those of Hacı Lokman Birlik and Refik Tekin were widely circulated via social media, many or perhaps even most of the images of the 90s did not gain such visibility during that time. Following Hochberg, one could argue that different modes of visibility coexisted during the 90s, with Turkey’s Kurdistan being subjected to a mode of spectacle and surveillance while the visibility in the rest of Turkey would be organized through a mode of relative concealment (see Hochberg, 2015, p. 7-8). Yet, as Başak Can shows, this is to be considered a partial truth at best. As Can points out, information about the war was relatively extensively recorded through parliament protocols, ECHR verdicts, human rights organizations and universities’ reports, dossiers in newspapers, interviews, the accounts of journalists and local people, medical reports etc. since the mid-1980s (Can, 2014). Göral too argues that quickly skimming through some of the major mainstream newspapers would have been enough to come across traces of the horror created by the war in the 90s (Göral, 2016, p. 135). Therefore, it seems hardly possible to maintain the assumption that the ‘silence in the West’ was due primarily to the immense difficulties of obtaining information regarding the state’s activities in the Kurdish provinces. With respect to the enforced disappearances and the operations of JITEM, it may be granted that state violence was to a certain extent shrouded in secrecy. In general, however, it seems that a reality that had not manifested itself in a similar way in the rest of Turkey essentially failed to be perceived from the other provinces.

The above-mentioned findings indicate that, overall, the problem in the 'Turkish West' rather lay with a 'public secret' and a 'law of silence' (see Taussig, 1999). The prevalent silence in the face of such widespread and systematic violence would thus appear to be linked to a coercive production of denial. Diana Taylor has used the term 'percepticide', originally coined by Argentinian psychoanalyst Juan Carlos Kusnetzoff, to describe what happens when a population is drawn into the spectacle of violence. Reflecting on the effects that constant fear, denial, and silent complicity have on the perceptual capacities of a population's individuals, Taylor writes: "seeing without the possibility of admitting that one is seeing further turns the violence on oneself. Percepticide blinds, maims, kills through the senses" (Taylor, 1997, p. 123-124).[29] With respect to the recent counterinsurgency operations in Turkey's Kurdistan, Chapter 2 has shown that, following the silence of the 90s, initiatives like the Academics for Peace have sought to redeem the idea of witnessing and resist to percepticide. Many of the signatories of the petition "We will not be a party to this crime!" stated that they could not have remained silent. We have also seen, however, that these acts of 'civil imagination' (Azoulay, 2012) ultimately failed, because civil space had largely disappeared as the entire society was turned into a front zone. In the manner of a typical counterinsurgency campaign, we watch the state attempt to drain all possible support for the Kurdish movement and insurgency by any means at its disposal. With multiplicity essentially collapsed into two sides, the position of the witness is now aligned with that of the 'terrorist'. In the face of the severe consequences connected to witnessing and seeing, people might in

[29] Sùarez-Orozco has moreover argued that percepticide results in constant attempts for rationalization, an establishing of the legitimacy and plausibility of acts of violence *ex post* (Sùarez-Orozco, 1992, p. 243). In Turkey, the paradigm of generalized self-defense against a ubiquitous 'terrorist' threat, itself cast as the absolute outside of humanity, peace, democracy etc., seems to operate as a strong 'analytical' grid that facilitates rationalization.

fact ‘choose’ fear, denial, and complicity, because “within the economy of the overarching gaze, they too felt vulnerable to detection, abduction, disappearance” (Taylor, 1997, p. 124). In the light of recent experiences in Turkey, we might extend this list by adding social death, imprisonment, loss of economic security etc.

On the other hand, we should not lose sight of the flipside of percepticide’s repressive dimension. In order to describe how it is possible that the majority of Turkey’s population is not seeing, not hearing, not perceiving, not sharing feelings, not speaking, not acting regarding injustices committed against the country’s minorities, Barış Ünlü has developed the idea of a ‘Turkishness Contract’. Here, denial and complicity do not only appear as negative elements, but also become central to the distribution of material and symbolic privileges and the emergence of a sense of belonging and community (Ünlü, 2018). The ‘Kurdish question’ is posed as a problem of the majority, i.e. of Turkishness and its construction upon the denial, exclusion, and exploitation of minorities. In a similar vein, Nazan Üstündağ suggests that it is time to ‘discuss the dominant identity’, i.e. not to create an archive of the suffering of the 90s, but to assemble an ‘archive of the Turks’ in order to document how they were able to avoid what was happening in the Kurdish provinces (Üstündağ, 2014). In posing the problem in terms of a failure to witness, we therefore have to account for the fact that percepticide and the exclusion of alterity are also a matter of the social organization of perception, attention, and consumption and its implications for subjectivity.

While Üstündağ’s hint to the archives is perhaps supposed to lead us to areas of pop culture and consumption that are completely removed from the topic of war, I have here tried to shed light on some of the visibilities and frames of counterinsurgent warfare that we encounter in mainstream media and in the field of

culture. What we encounter here is in part, I would suggest, an archive of images that avoids the reality of war despite showing it. Reality sinks into invisibility behind these images, while misrepresentations become all the more visible. This is quite significantly due to the permanent first-person shooter mode of representation, in which the 'Other', whether absent or present, is always already rendered a target, the gaze weaponized. Allen Feldman claimed that "relations of domination are spatially marked by the increase of perceptual (and thus social) distance from the body of the Other. In turn, this body is essentialized by material constraints that deny it recognizable sentience and historical possibility" (Feldman, 1994, p. 407). Essentialization and distance are the profound effects of the process of abstraction of the body through visual technologies and the mass media.

The latter function to produce something almost like what Du Bois calls the 'Veil', a broader "cultural screen on which the collective weight of white misconceptions is fortified and made manifest" (Smith, 2004, p. 40). We have to be careful to note that for Du Bois, it is exactly the misrepresentation (and material exploitation) of 'blackness' through which 'whiteness' can emerge as such at all. We find a visually inspired expression of this argument in Donna Haraway's contention that "[v]ision is *always* a question of the power to see – and perhaps of the violence implicit in our visualizing practices. With whose blood were my eyes crafted?" (Haraway, 1988, p. 585). Counterinsurgency warfare in Turkey has produced a twofold divide between those who are under permanent exposure and for whom there is no retreat to a safe private space on the one and those who are invited to watch from a position of relative safety on the other hand (see Azoulay, 2012). Consequently, we might wonder in how far this archive of images could be considered as an archive that engenders the dispositions "to consume and enjoy

productions of violence" (see Evans & Giroux, 2015, p. 32). This resonates with Üstündağ's claim that the mode of sovereignty of the Turkish state vis-a-vis Kurdish bodies could be understood as different historical stages of pornographic production (Üstündağ, 2013). With respect to online images of the curfews, she more recently suggested that the population of the country would increasingly be incited to enjoy the consumption of the pornographic subjection of Kurdish bodies to state violence (Şakar, Üstündağ & Kaya, 2018).

By means of new technologies such as smartphones with integrated cameras, social media, YouTube etc., the circulation of images seems to have accelerated and expanded to such a degree that dominant organizing principles of visibility of the 90s might have been disrupted by now. We should however not be seduced to jump to the easy conclusion that today, everyone using these media would see everything. It is quite possible that older modes of visibility are replaced with an even more diffuse system of 'idiomedia', in which algorithmic calculations of user's preferences generate aggregated clusters of personalized content suggestions, while blocking out much other online content (Barnet, 2009). The answer to the question who actually saw the Special Forces' images partially depends on the past preferences and browsing histories of as well as data shared by each user. Thus, we should not forget that online images of war too are ultimately competing for the attention of their audiences. On the other hand, it is to be noted that personalized opportunities for reception and expression come with individualized modes of repression as the many detentions for posts on social media indicate.

Another implication of the speed and quantity with which images ricochet around the internet could be an overloading of perceptual capacities that does not really enhance the capacities for witnessing but results in amnesia and anesthesia on

the individual and social level instead. The effect of the 'logistics of perception', as I have first tried to indicate in the introduction, is a continuum of perpetual shocks.[30] It needs to be asked whether this does not lead to a sense of indifference, coldness, or detachment that prevents genuine responses to the flood of images. But what is perhaps even more important is the question: what is real it all? As we have seen, the contours between the real and the virtual become increasingly blurred, which, together with a targeted system of framing, disinformation and lying, may result in the of erosion of the fabric of facts (see Arendt, 1972, 2006). Percepticide here takes the form not only of not being able to admit that one saw, but of a depredation of the senses that derives from uncertainty regarding the loss of a reality that disappears behind images.

3.2.2 Second crisis: The transparency of evil

Discussions about witnessing often tend to emphasize the importance of exposure and publicity. In part, the limits of this assumption were already demonstrated by above-mentioned acts of witnessing in Turkey. The mobilization of shame as an informal system to enforce a return to the rule of law did not result in the exposed side's compliance. Although the "dream of action, power, and enforcement" (Keenan, 2004a, p. 438) through public revelation that would cause shame and instigate reason and conscience still seems to be quite alive, particularly in the human rights discourse, recent experiences might indicate that the problem does not primarily rest with the public or the audience. In fact, the petition should rather be seen as a call to action deriving from a "civil concern for the truth" (Azoulay, 2012,

[30] This line of reasoning would certainly require further expanation, which would situate it in an analysis of the history of the senses that could account for the spatio-temporal conditions of experience. At this point, I can only refer readers to the works of Walter Benjamin, Jonathan Crary, and Paul Virilio for brilliant examples of this endeavor.

p. 117) rather than a moment of exposure, as there was hardly anything to expose anyway. Exposure has long since excelled into overexposure. In most cases today, "there is more than enough light, and yet its subjects exhibit themselves shamelessly, brazenly, and openly" (Keenan, 2004a, p. 438). No better way to summarize the general impression one gets from the numerous images of the Turkish Special Forces.

Today, we could produce an almost endless list of examples such as Sierra Leone's Revolutionary United Front, Saddam Hussein's Baathists, the Serbian paramilitary forces, the Somalian Hizbul Islam, the U.S. personnel at Abu Ghraib, ISIS and many others that indicate an inversion of the role of images of violence: "Rather than expose atrocities, photographs now advertise them" (Linfield, 2014). And really, as Lee Ann Fujii contends, a logic of advertising and display appears to be operating "when actors tape, film, or snap pictures of violence 'for fun', for why else record such activities if not to make others stop and look?" (Fujii, 2013, p. 421). Such images would suggest that violence is, among other things, cause for pride and amusement. The smiling faces of SS officers in photographs from the concentration camps or the joyful expressions captured in the Abu Ghraib images might still puzzle those who saw them. Klaus Theweleit (2017) has dedicated an entire book to the phenomenon that shows how ordinary the *Laughter of the Perpetrator* actually is. In the archive of the curfews we will not only encounter many images of graffiti that demonstrate an uncanny sense of 'humor' on the side of the Special Forces but even videos, in which we watch them laugh and cheer as buildings explode, bombs hit their target, and insurgents are killed.

The naturalness and banality with which all this takes place seriously raise the question what is wrong with these pictures (Hochberg, 2015, p. 15). Thomas Keenan

has approached the problem through the concept of the 'transparency of evil', which he uses to describe the shamelessness on the side of perpetrators of violence when it comes to acting in full knowledge of the presence of a camera (Keenan, 2004a). According to Keenan's argument, naturalness and banality are the only things that remain in a space beyond truth and falsity, where it is all about "opportunities, events, performances, things that are done and done for the camera" (Keenan, 2004a, p. 435). If perpetrators of violence pursue their actions for and with the camera as seen in so many cases during the counterinsurgency operations, then this signals the "effective erasure of [the] fundamental axiom. . . that the exposure of violence is feared by its perpetrators, and hence that the act of witness is not simply an ethical gesture but an active intervention" (Keenan, 2004a, p. 446). Rather, the staging and subsequent transmission of acts of violence is exactly what supplies the latter with a special communicative and performative force.

What can witnessing mean under these circumstances? What kind of response and responsibility can we imagine at the moment? While those most directly responsible for the continuation of violence do not permit intervention, who is the witness to address at all? We are, then, embroiled perhaps less in a war of images, which would require us to produce even more images and to generate greater exposure, than we are in a war of gazes (Nichanian, 2009, p. 98). What kind of intervention is able to challenge sovereign violence in such a war without mirroring it? Eventually, I don't really have an answer. What seems safe to say is that the ideas of ethical spectatorship and witnessing should not be taken as a problem of individual attitude. Instead, the present situation in Turkey shows that it is first of all necessary to forge a community that would be able to act in solidarity when entering

political dispute. On this terrain, there will however be no guarantees, no certainty, no safety, and no distance.

CHAPTER 4

IMAGES WITH A SPECIAL FORCE

Images with a special force refers to the Gendarmerie and Police Special Operations Teams (JÖH and PÖH by their Turkish abbreviation), who are more or less directly involved in the images that will be analyzed in this chapter. These images seem to have exerted a special force with respect to their performative and communicative power on the other hand. Building on previous discussions of counterinsurgent warfare's expansion into cyberspace and the 'transparency of evil' (Keenan, 2004a), I will now attempt to 'read' a selection of the Special Forces' images as 'digital postcards'. The argument I want to pursue is that images of staged acts of violence – acts of 'violent display' (Fujii, 2018) - may be said to attempt to most graphically (re)inscribe belonging, to (re)invoke a particular order, and/or to (re)institute power and sovereignty. In the postcards, I will contend, we encounter violence as a performative medium for the dissemination of (ex)communicative messages.

If constitutive violence is rightly considered to be a force beyond political shape, then it is through an analysis of the images that I will try to grab hold of sovereignty at the moment of its gaining shape. This moment of taking shape, I would contend, is the moment in which differences are (re)inscribed and the (*de facto*) sovereign emerges not only as a truth effect but also as and through an image.[31] Drawing on a concept favored by Nicholas Mirzoeff, then, we have to be attentive to the working of visuality as the operation through which a form of social organization that is based on the separation of previously classified groups is "made

[31] Here, I am partially following Hardt and Negri, who claim that imperial sovereignty operates on "a form of legitimation that rests on nothing outside itself and is reproposed ceaselessly by developing its own languages of self-validation" (Hardt & Negri, 2000, p. 33).

to seem right and thus aesthetic" (Mirzoeff, 2011, p. 3). Sovereignty, far from being the stable or completed project it is sometimes associated with, is in fact a more or less pervasive effect of acts of sovereign violence that constantly have to be repeated and reproduced in different ways. Sovereignty is thus engaged in a perpetual work of violently making bodies, borders, spaces, whole populations, images etc. In the strive for supremacy among competing authorities, which is likely to be related to a distinct territory, sovereignty is thus grounded in a violence without ground. Because sovereignty is self-authorizing it requires visuality as the "supplement to make it seem self-evident" (Mirzoeff, 2011, p. 7).

Broadly speaking, then, these postcards indicate that our understanding of violence is not exhausted by simple recourse to rationalist, instrumentalist and functionalist approaches. The communicative, performative and presentational character of these acts of violence suggest that meaning-making is a central dimension of violence too. Image-making is central to the staging of claims to meaning and truth. With respect to the images of the Special Forces, I would therefore submit that we are confronted with performative and communicative acts that have a force and reality in their own right. Like environment-deprivation, as brilliantly laid out by Jongerden (2007), perpetrator photographs are neither side effects nor accidental to counterinsurgent warfare, but need to be seen as "integral part of the machinery of destruction" (Hirsch, 2002, p. 102) that constitute "a sign of excess, connecting the perpetrator's gaze to the perpetrator's deed" (Hirsch, 2002, p. 106). Revisiting Jean-Luc Nancy's reflections on images and violence one could thus describe these images from the curfew zone as the demonstrative force that violence employs in 'making truth' (Nancy, 2005).[32]

[32] This refers to Nancy's reflections on the ways racism denies truth to the face of its victim. In this respect, he writes "[v]iolence [...] is or makes truth... [which] is true because it is violent, and it is true

From such a perspective, the focus on platforms like YouTube, Facebook and Twitter, which could rightly be seen as a shortcoming of a documentation of violations, seems all the more justified as these are some of the most used online communication platforms today. The images that are at the center of this thesis are among those that resonated most strongly with these platforms' audiences and the wider public (see Üstündağ, 2019; Protner, 2017). By foregrounding images that gravitate around the 'temporary sovereign', *JÖH* and *PÖH*, I certainly do not want to promote or reinforce a mythological understanding of warfare based on male heroes and sacrifice. However, as mentioned before, I would maintain the claim that these images reveal something about counterinsurgent warfare that remains absent from most other frames.

In this chapter, I will first try to clarify why I see the notion of the 'digital postcard' as a fitting conceptual tool to frame the images of *JÖH/PÖH*. Subsequently, I will read a selection of these postcards along two thematic threads. The first theme, *In the name of love*, focuses on the gendered and sexualized aspects of the counterinsurgency operations. Beginning with reflections on performances of 'sovereign masculinity' (Mann, 2014), I will move on to the different images of women that we encounter in the Special Forces' images, before I finally deal with forms of spatial and optical penetration. *In memoriam*, the second theme, focuses on the interlinking between violence and memory. On the one hand, I want to discuss violence as a medium for 'prescriptive memory' (Feldman, 2003) with its implications for notions of agency and responsibility. On the other hand, I will turn to the interconnected problems of martyrdom and sacrifice, which will lead us to

in its violence: it is a destructive truth in the sense in which destruction verifies and makes true" (Nancy, 2005, p. 17).

engage with the role of the dead in a war waged both in the name of and against the dead.

4.1 Digital postcards: (Ex)communication

This is the image, the visual projectile that I referred to in the introduction of the thesis (Figure 9). The obvious aesthetic concern underlying this photograph is stunning: the rifle, boots, the mirror, lipstick, the mask, the bed with a batch of clothes strewn across it, all assembled into a composition that is combined with strong textual elements. Meanwhile, the body of the Special Force is occupying nearly half of the frame being positioned off-center to the right. No doubts as to the efforts regarding the composition of this frame then. The involved actors even bothered to search through the private belongings of the homeowners in order to find a lipstick so as to be able to arrange this mise-en-scène. To be sure, there is no 'audience' around, neither in the case of the bedroom picture nor with respect to most of the other images. But whether we look at photographs of graffiti sprayed onto the walls of different cities, of police posing in front of these writings, in private homes or in front of ruined buildings, or of the celebratory huddles of the Special Operations Teams in central areas of the Kurdish cities after a 'mission is accomplished': All of these acts in a way only make sense if they are seen and it is the camera that literally 'prepares the stage'. Staring at the lens, the gaze is reaching out from the bedroom in search of its distant receiver.

In this image, we find epitomized what I conceive of as the 'digital postcards' of *JÖH* and *PÖH*. The idea to employ a digitalized notion of postcards begs further explanation, I presume. To begin with, a postcard might be defined as an interchangeable, consumable, and banal format that is primarily linked to the display



Figure 9. The 'bedroom image'

of touristic experiences. In this context, the postcard is sent from an exterior to its destined receiver at home, meanwhile indirectly leaving this exterior with inscriptions that evidence the sender's presence there at some point in time: 'I was here'. Arguably, postcards are moreover among the standardized media that implicitly enable the 'presentation of national self', contributing to the (re)production of imagined communities by creating a sense of national identity and identification

(Semmerling, 2004, p. 1). Today, one might assume, the postcard is increasingly dismissed from our communicative media as the integrated cameras of smart phones and social media together offer the opportunity to shoot personal memory photographs and instantaneously share them with others in the manner of postcards. Yet the images of the Special Forces show that the concatenation of selfie, hashtag, and story courtesy of Instagram does not necessarily culminate in completely individualized expressions. Quite the contrary, we see that it provides greater visibilities for the explicit communication of nationalist and militarist tropes through images. Thinking of digital postcards, I therefore prefer to focus on the moments of convergence between social media and postcards. As I will now explain, I see the most significant connection in the way in which they combine the communicative, mnemonic, and performative functions of the photograph.

Inspiration for the conceptual move towards postcards really came from looking at the many photographic images of lynching incidents that occurred between 1882 and 1950 in the United States (Allen, 2000). Sometimes, the photographs of the public spectacles that lynchings often used to be were printed as postcards. What would appear as evidence for the grave violation of human life, did in fact, as Shawn Michelle Smith has shown, turn into a visual souvenir that circulated via the public infrastructure. Lending the postcards a degree of officialdom through its stamp, the state and its institutions became implicated in the formation of white identity around the killing and commodification of black bodies (Smith, 2004, p. 121-124). The circulation of the photographs as postcards, Smith contends,

> maps an imagined community of senders and receivers who share feelings for one another and, perhaps, for the scenes the postcard represents. Individuals perform community by sending postcards, and they enlarge community in the same act, for these images symbolically expand a community's claim on time and space by connecting static individuals to distant places. Postcards function as fantasy sites of desire

> for distant viewers; the sender weaves family and friends at home into a larger spatial territory by sending images from afar. (Smith, 2004, p. 122)

Following Smith's observations, my contention is that in weaving together bodies, spaces, and images, the digital postcards of *JÖH/PÖH* address different levels of community at which they produce effects of communication and excommunication respectively.[33]

Previous research has discerned three communities which such photographs target: the 'military community', the public, and the enemy (see Anden-Papadopoulos, 2009). I cannot make any qualified arguments with respect to the circulation of images among the Turkish Special Forces themselves, other than saying that it does exist.[34] But quite clearly, these images also address 'us', meaning, 'the broader public'. The images of *JÖH/PÖH* remind us of the Abu Ghraib torture images and comparable incidents, for they too quite graphically stage scenes of domination, which the perpetrators seem to believe were "sanctioned by a larger community and served the interests of that community" (Apel, 2012, p. 80). The concepts of community and the public are tricky, however, particularly in the age of social media. We can hardly assume them as something static that would always already exist. Instead, the public on the receiving end today appears to be "something

[33] My use of these terms requires clarification. In deploying this pair of terms, I base myself on the Latin word *communicāre* from which both derive. The latter carries the different meanings of sharing, making common, and participating, which I think we should keep in mind when thinking about the productive relationship between the dissemination of images via social media on the one and the emergence of communities on the other hand. Conversely, excommunication refers to exclusion or expulsion from a (religious) community. By resonating with the idea of religious communities, it seems that 'excommunication' captures the myths of sacred territory and the sacred nation on which the community evoked here is based (see Adak, 2003; Keyman & Kancı, 2011). On the one hand, we find membership in the community to be contingent on sacrifice. On the other hand, deprivation of the right to membership in the community occurs in the form of a ban, i.e. a relation between sovereign power and bare life in which the latter is posed as the "negative referent of the new biopolitical sovereignty… in the sense of a life that may be killed but not sacrificed" (Agamben, 1998, p. 115).

[34] Photographs of the mutilated body of female guerilla Ekin Wan, for example, were found on the mobile phones of 24 police (Aslan, 2018). In these instances, the images might serve to forge a sense of group identity (Anden-Papadopoulos, 2009, p. 931) and at times function as trading cards rather than as postcards in a competitive game, which is based on a shared notion of war being fundamentally opposed to morals.

that comes after the image, a possibility of response to an open address. The public, we could say in shorthand, is what is hailed or addressed by messages that might not reach their destination." (Keenan, 2014, p. 25). Indeed, the images could have failed to find their public, but the many likes, the celebratory comments, and the wave of remediated content indicate relative success. We can even go a step further to suggest that these images in fact hail and institute a community.

With the counterinsurgent war launched by the Turkish state we however have to be aware that it is a conflict that in principle is beyond any notion of communal ties. It involves a radical process of depersonalization. In the image of the masked Special Forces police, we on the hand witness the crystallization of a long genealogy of the "anonymous collectivization of violence – the subordination of the self by acts of violence to historical generalities" (Feldman, 1991, p. 53). In this respect, the state's Special Operations Teams occupy generic positions from which they, as Feldman points out, only serve as tools that are tied into an eccentric relationship with violence (Feldman, 1991, p. 53). But on the other hand, these postcards – and that might well be the general interplay between abstraction and personalization that is at works in touristic postcards as well – could be seen as instances of a re-personalization and inscription of meaning and community into the site of violence. We should however lend an ear to Marc Redfield at this point, who has engaged with Benedict Anderson's work on imagined communities to show that if technical reproduction is on the one hand indispensable for the 'homogeneous, empty time' of the nation to be instated, it on the other hand always implies rupture. With respect to the digital postcards, which clearly are instances of technological reproduction, this raises the question in how far they partake in a form of transmission that serves "phantasms of immediacy and revelation" (Cadava, 1997, p.

xxiv). If, according to Redfield, "the nation imagines anonymity as identity, as an essentialized formal abstraction" (Redfield, 2003, p. 54), this makes it important to consider how notions of identity and community are disrupted by the very means and processes that enable their emergence in the first place.

The imagined and performed community we encounter in these postcards is that of the homogeneous Turkish nation, a project realized through violent (re-)incorporation at the hands of the proxy-sovereign, the Special Forces. The 'I was here' of the touristic postcard here occurs as community performed through material and symbolic appropriation that would rather read 'This is us and this is ours'. If according to Philip Gourevitch "genocide, after all, is an exercise in community-building" (Gourevitch, 1998, p. 95), then these images would suggest that counterinsurgency in Turkey's Kurdistan is too. However, this also points to the other side of the coin, not only to those who do not identify themselves with this kind of community, but, more significantly, the active expulsion and purification of the 'enemies' upon which community is built. Sovereignty and community are contingent on violence as a medium for excommunication. This means that the founding of community in these instances is inseparable from the fate of those who are included by exclusion through the sovereign ban (Agamben, 1998) and who remain, as the title of the volume on lynching edited by James Allen suggests, without sanctuary, condemned to interior exile (Allen, 2000). Counterinsurgency warfare as conducted by the Turkish Special Forces demonstrates that for the Kurdish population this quite literally includes all spaces from the bedroom to the graveyard.

Actually, the bedroom picture quite strikingly underlines that the previous paragraph needs a little revision since we are clearly not looking at purely

(re)presentational and discursive performances of 'imagined communities'. Fantasy, desire, fear, and intimacy equally partake in these practices. The images of the Special Forces, shared on social media, speak to the "place held by the nation-state in the collective political imaginary, the ways in which the state and the nation are not only imagined (Anderson, 1983) but fantasized, that is, held as objects of fear and desire" (Aretxaga, 2005a, p. 142). As Aretxaga clarifies elsewhere, the nation-state would not exist as such if it was not for its subjective 'actualization' in performative, discursive, and phantasmatic terms, which makes it possible for us to trace its effects through the "ways in which those identified as the state enact their fantasy vis-à-vis those others it considers enemies" (Aretxaga, 2005b, p. 263). The mirror in this frame could therefore be considered as evocative of Lacan's 'mirror stage', indicating that identity and identification regarding the sovereign community instated here are of imaginary and phantasmatic character. This is crystallized exactly in the production and seizure of images like these. Similar to pornographic images, the Special Forces' images seemingly reveal everything but in fact deprive their spectators of a narrative, so that the latter are "reduced to a paralyzed object-gaze" (Zizek, 1991, p. 110). These obscene images potentially work as the fetishes of state and nation (see Üstündağ, 2019).

So while we can maintain that the state's authority is enforced and enacted in a ghostly and phantasmatic way, this does certainly not mean "that the state is any the less real for that" (Rose, 1998, p. 9). As Diana Taylor suggests with reference to Lacan, historical or material 'reality' should not be understood as antithetical to spectacle, myth, drama, and scenario. Instead, it is by bringing fantasy and reality together that we should approach "individual and state formation in the visual sphere through complicated play of looks in 'the field of the Other'" (Taylor, 1997, p. 29-

30). It is within such an overall framework that I would like to proceed to 'reading' a selection of the digital postcards. The themes of 'love' and 'memory' have emerged as especially prevalent among the images in the archive of the curfews. In the following sections, I will use these two respective themes as points of entry to discuss how violence operates through the Special Forces' images in the curfew zone.

4.2 In the name of love

The image, which I used to develop the notion of the digital postcard spreads a message of 'love': '*Aşk Yüksekova'da başka yaşanıyor*' [Love is experienced differently in Yüksekova]. What kind of love, what kind of difference? One might assume this phrase to be original – it is not. While we can trace it back to the Turkish pop song '*Bodrum akşamları*' [Bodrum evenings], refering to the Turkish city of Bodrum, it is likely that the image from Yüksekova takes up a prior re-contextualization of the song during the curfews (Figure 10). Following a minor change in spelling from '*aşk Bodrum'da yaşanıyor güzelim*' [Love is lived in Bodrum, gorgeous] to '*aşk bodrumda yaşanıyor güzelim*' [Love is lived in the basement, gorgeous] the lyrics of the song would receive a quite different meaning when sprayed as graffiti onto a wall in the city of Cizre where dozens of people had just been burnt to death trapped in basements (*bodrum*). This is from where we have to start thinking about 'love' in the image from Yüksekova.

It is striking that a great majority of the Special Forces' graffiti in fact rely on citation of pop cultural elements. Connecting this observation to the argument about generic positions made before, we can take it as a reminder that we need to understand gender and nation as citational, performative, and reiterative practices

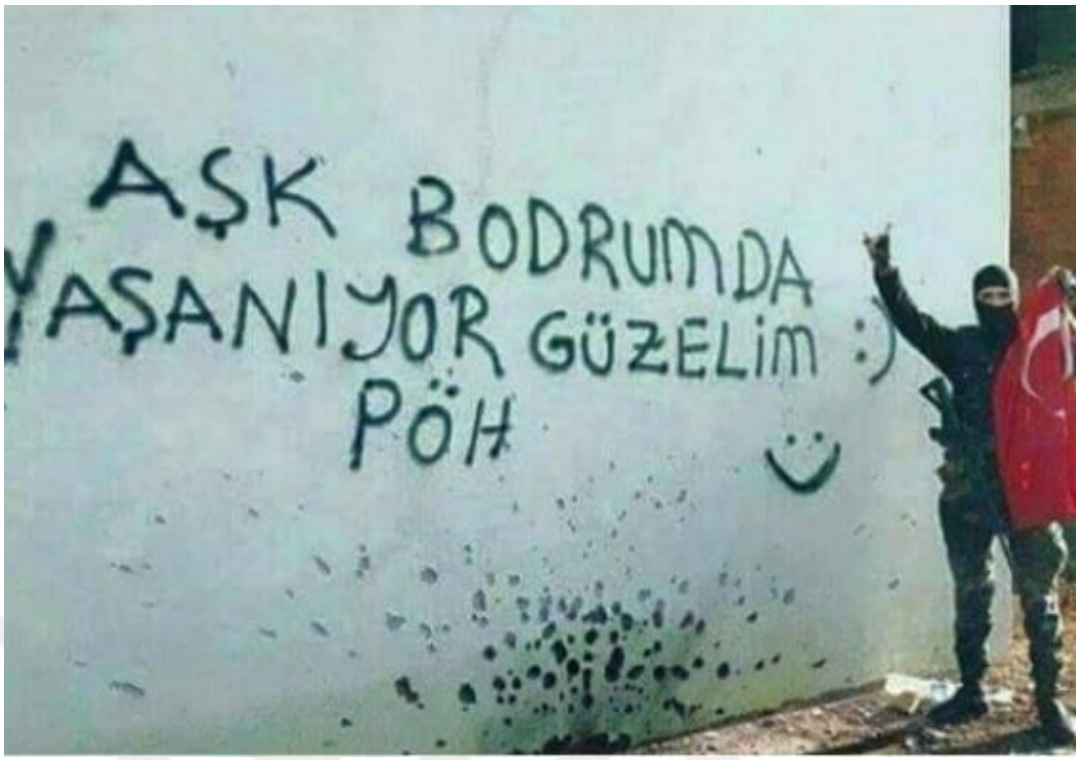


Figure 10. Special Force posing in front of 'basement' graffiti

(Butler, 1993; Taylor, 1997). Here, I want to take 'love' as a vantage point, from which to reflect on counterinsurgent war as a highly gendered mode of violence. The notion of 'sovereign masculinity', which I will discuss under the first heading will be the guiding line along which I will then turn to the Special Forces images of women in the second and finally to forms of spatial and optical penetration in the third section.

4.2.1 Sovereign masculinity

The photographs of *JÖH/PÖH* are male spectacles. In the previous two images, 'love' is staged by armed men in combat attire, one of them posing with a Turkish flag while his arm is raised to an ultranationalist salute, resembling a wolf. We learn that wolves are on the hunt in the curfew zone: 'The wolf's teeth have touched blood, be afraid' [*Kurdun dişine kan deydi korkun*]. Love is a one-directional force of predatory character. Built on fantasies of exaggerated agency and strength of the

Special Forces, these kinds of images evoke other cases of perpetrator photography – like the Nazi photographs – in which perpetrators tend to appear 'hyper-masculine' while the 'other' is feminized or infantilized (Hirsch, 2002). In the images of *JÖH/PÖH*, the subject is modeled upon imagined invincibility, which entails the denial and disavowal of vulnerability. The words 'We don't know what fear is' [*Korku nedir, bilmeyiz*] echo through the neighborhoods under curfew as the Special Forces group into a huddle to shout their oaths. It would certainly be necessary to account for the ways this subjectivity is produced at home and in the barracks, how the myth that 'every Turk is born a soldier' is culturally (re)produced to invigorate a 'nationalist structure of feeling' (Altınay, 2004, p. 70). But I am convinced that these 'hyperbolic displays of agency' (Mann, 2014) in the curfew areas allow for some reflections anyway.

While the enemies have allegedly 'run off holding their asses' [*götünüzü tuta tuta kaçtınız*] so that they 'were not there' [*yoktunuz*] when the Special Forces came to play[35] (read: kill), the latter present themselves as fearless enough to 'man up' and fight. Masculinity equals being hard, destructive, active, fearless and uncompromising. Building on Judith Butler's definition of sovereignty as a subject position that "not only denies its own constitutive injurability but tries to relocate injurability in the other" (Butler, 2009, p. 278), feminist scholar Bonnie Mann has developed the notion of 'sovereign masculinity' to describe the explicitly gendered character of sovereign subjectivities (Mann, 2014). Sovereign masculinity hinges upon a totalizing gendered framework, in which injurability, weakness, and fear are

[35] The Special Forces use a language of 'play' in many examples, which arguably serves to belittle war and killing and underline their own toughness: 'If you are gonna be offended, let's not play' [*Küseceksen oynamayalım*]; 'We were having fun playing, but you just immediately died' [*Ne güzel oynuyorduk hemen öldünüz*]. Here, one should further note that the notion of 'playing games' is another link to pornography, where conventional social roles are abandoned as individual pleasures take center stage.

identified with femininity. Its basic operation, according to Mann, is a conversion of fear and shame into power through spectacular acts of self-assertion. She suggests that "each hyperbolic display of agency will be at the same time an act designed to create vulnerability, humiliation and shame for someone else. The machine of conversion *needs* the other's powerlessness and shame, and will produce it prolifically" (Mann, 2014, p. 124).

The idea of conversion therefore indicates that the division between masculinity and femininity includes not only rejection of one's own femininity, but also violent feminization of the 'other'. In Turkey's Kurdistan, guerillas have apparently used the visual typologies of gender to their advantage by sometimes wearing women's dresses in order to escape from the eyes of the state. During the curfews, a mural of Mahsum Korkmaz was sprayed over with red color to add a bra, a skirt and a pair of shoes (Figure 11). The caption reads: a *hewal* (guerilla) in a



Figure 11. Special Force posing in front of defaced Mahsum Korkmaz mural

(Kurdish) women's dress [*Fistanlı Hewal*]. Since Korkmaz is the first commander of the guerilla forces of the PKK this defacement plays on the synecdoche between part and whole, symbolically targeting the Kurdish movement in its entirety. For the Special Forces, dresses and bras appear to be symbols of inferiority, signs of a lack of manhood. How else can we explain this promise made by a Special Force posing in front of a wall in full armor: 'I will make you wear a G-string in spring' [*Bahar'da tanga giydirecem size*] (Figure 12)? Playing with obscene imagery and mobilizing pornographic protocols, these degrading gesture images expel the 'other' as a feminized and inferior community.

Although femininity and feminization have played a key role in the images presented so far, it nevertheless seems as if women are strikingly absent from this war. Instead, we observe a largely self-referential male discourse, which depends on



Figure 12. Special Force posing in front of 'G-string graffiti'

"the feminine as mediating […] site of communication and exchange between men" (Taylor, 1997, p. 89). This argument has been specified by Cynthia Cockburn who contends that "male-dominant systems involve a hierarchy among men, producing different and unequal masculinities, always defined in relation not only to one another but to women" (Cockburn, 2001, p. 16). But at this point we need to be aware that these performances of masculinity also occur in relation to notions such as the state, nation and sovereignty. In declaring that 'You don't found a state in a (Kurdish) women's dress' [*Fistanla devlet kurulmaz*], the Special Forces explicate the strong connection between militarism, nationalism, and masculinity, which, as Cynthia Enloe (2000) observed, is central to most state-building. In the images of *JÖH/PÖH*, 'national manhood' and 'national sovereignty' amount to more or less the same thing (Mann, 2014, p. 3). In this imaginary, we find an intertwinement of the fates of both the nation and male individuals so that sovereignty and submission are perceived as the respective assertion or 'loss of male virility' (Hochberg, 2015, p. 86). Vice versa, male self esteem seems to be dependent on the status of the nation and the state (Theweleit, 1987, p. 33). It is 'the nation first' (*Önce Vatan*) and, as the Special Forces emphasize (Figure 13), they 'WERE NOT JOKING when at age 7, shaking under the rain, they pledged that [their] bodies shall be a gift to the Turkish existence' (*Biz 7 Yaşında Yağmurun Altında Titrerken varlığım Türk Varlığına Armağan olsun derken ŞAKA YAPMIYORDUK*).

Given this interimplication, it would be wrong to conceive of the Special Forces' acts of violent display as distinctly individual actions. Here, we rather need to understand the way perpetrators of political violence legitimize their acts with reference to 'higher institutions'. In some cases these may be state institutions, in others it could also be sectarian or underground organizations like Anders Breivik's

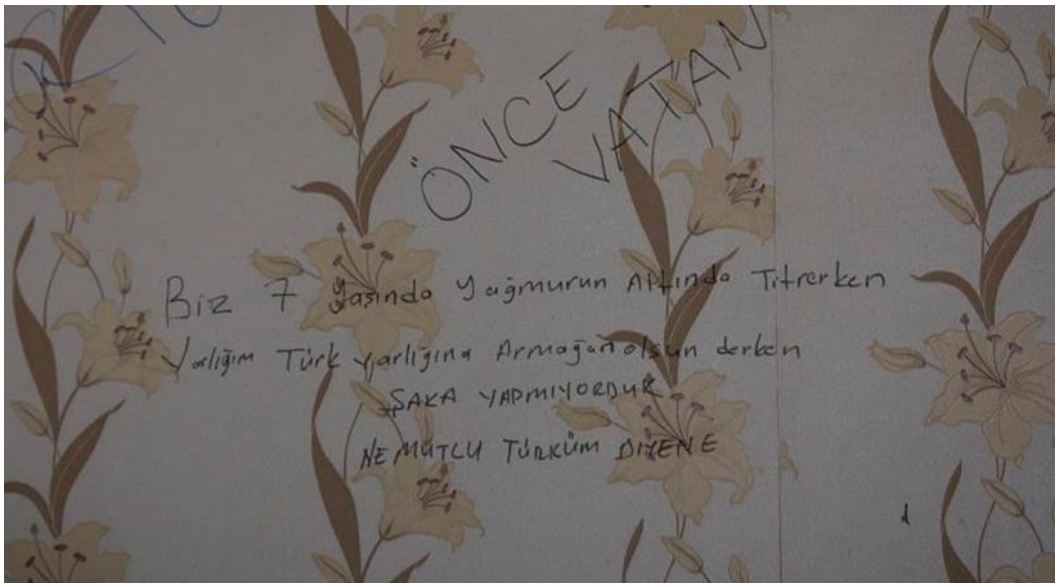


Figure 13. 'It's the nation first, we weren't joking'

'Knights of St. John'. The decisive aspect is that the perpetrators act on behalf of an institution in order to establish a world order they perceive as inevitable (Theweleit, 2017, p. 25). This accordingly endows them with the mission to cure the social body, a mission that even invests them with the 'right to kill' (Theweleit, 2017, p. 23). This warning is communicated through a graffiti in the curfew area, which proclaims that 'kidding with the State ends with death' [*Devletle şaka ölümle biter*]. Violent male self-assertion is therefore not strictly individual and independent, but usually takes recourse to some higher bearer of meaning. Put otherwise, 'sovereign masculinity' points to a self-referential subject, whose self is thoroughly militarized and nationalized. Theweleit has demonstrated how crucial huddles and 'reunions' with the 'community' are with respect to the execution of violence. He identifies a sequential logic, according to which staged acts of violence would generally be followed by a moment of relief and laughter. Finally, perpetrators of violence would in some way unite with the higher form of organization (the state for example), which legitimizes their action (Theweleit, 2017, p. 50). Along these lines should we understand this image from İdil (Figure 14) – actually a frame of a video sequence – in which we encounter one of the many huddles and collective oaths that appear in



Figure 14. Special Forces regrouping for celebratory oath after operation

different pictures from the curfew zones. *JÖH/PÖH* often make references to the Turkish nation, the state, and sometimes to Allah as sources of legitimacy. In this particular example, legitimization of violence is staged as a rightful duty in the name of love for the nation.

4.2.2 Images of women

Where are women in this hypermasculine spectacle? Despite the extremely gendered and sexualized images produced by the Special Forces, we can observe that real women, for the better part, are absent from these worlds. Instead, different images of the female are circulating in the curfew areas. To start with, I want to once again visit a scene of love. This scene takes place among the debris of a destroyed neighborhood in Cizre, were a heart pierced by an arrow decorates a building that has not yet collapsed. Next to the heart, the message 'I inscribed your name into Cizre, my love' (*Adını Cizreye yazdım yarim*) is sprayed onto the wall (Figure 15). Is this another way of saying 'I was thinking of you, while I did this'? Or does it even imply that 'I



Figure 15. I inscribed your name onto Cizre, my love'

did it for you, all of this? The woman addressed here[36] belongs to a category of women that really is absent from the curfew zone: those 'at home'. Her image is in stark contrast to that of the demonized women of the 'battlefront', the whores and monsters of Kurdistan. But in that, she is no less of a fiction than they are (see Theweleit, 1987). Counterinsurgency requires her image as the innocent and vulnerable female for the male to emerge as the protector of her, the family home and the heterosexual order. In turn, we cannot but wonder about the nature of the actual relationship, which this graffiti suggests. If sovereign masculinity is founded on the castigation of so and so many inappropriate images of the feminine, the messages of love to those at home indicate that the gendered and sexualized character of political violence has to be seen in relation to the routine violence of gender inequalities and patriarchal relations in Turkey.

[36] Although I do of course not want to jump to conclusions to quickly and impose a heterosexual reading of this graffiti, I do think that the images in general give us enough of a basis to assume the receiver of this message to be a woman.

In the curfew zone, images of women shift between the imagined and the real. This movement is accompanied by an oscillation between the exotic object of desire and the feared and despised enemy. One way or another, these mise-en-scènes demonstrate that the production sovereign masculinity is predicated on the destruction and submission of everything considered feminine. 'Girls, here we are' [*kızlar geldik*], the Special Forces declared in many of the private homes they intruded - here we are, 'but you weren't here, when we came' [*biz geldik, siz yoktunuz*]. This repeated reference to the absence of whoever was expected to be there, does in my eyes not only address a lack of courage as stated above. Most often written onto the walls of private homes and then shared on social media, these images further relate to sexual fantasies about Kurdish women as the ethnicized 'other' waiting to be conquered by 'real men': *JÖH/PÖH*.

After all, the home in the curfew zone is perceived as the 'hot chick's house' [*fıstığın* evi] (Figure 16), which attests to both the role of desire in these scenarios and the disabling of the cultural and moral codes usually regulating proper contact between woman and man, particularly in private space. To get an idea of how the contact is organized in the curfew zone, we can look into a report on the curfews in Yüksekova prepared by the Peoples' Democratic Party, where violence against women is specifically addressed. In Yüksekova, too, the Special Forces had intruded into many private homes, where they particularly cramped out women's underwear and left them scattered across the rooms. Especially women's clothes had been cut into pieces and used as toilet paper; those associated with Kurdish identity were burnt. One woman reports that the heads of women had been cut out of many photographs in her family's photo album. In another case, a bullet had been fired at a

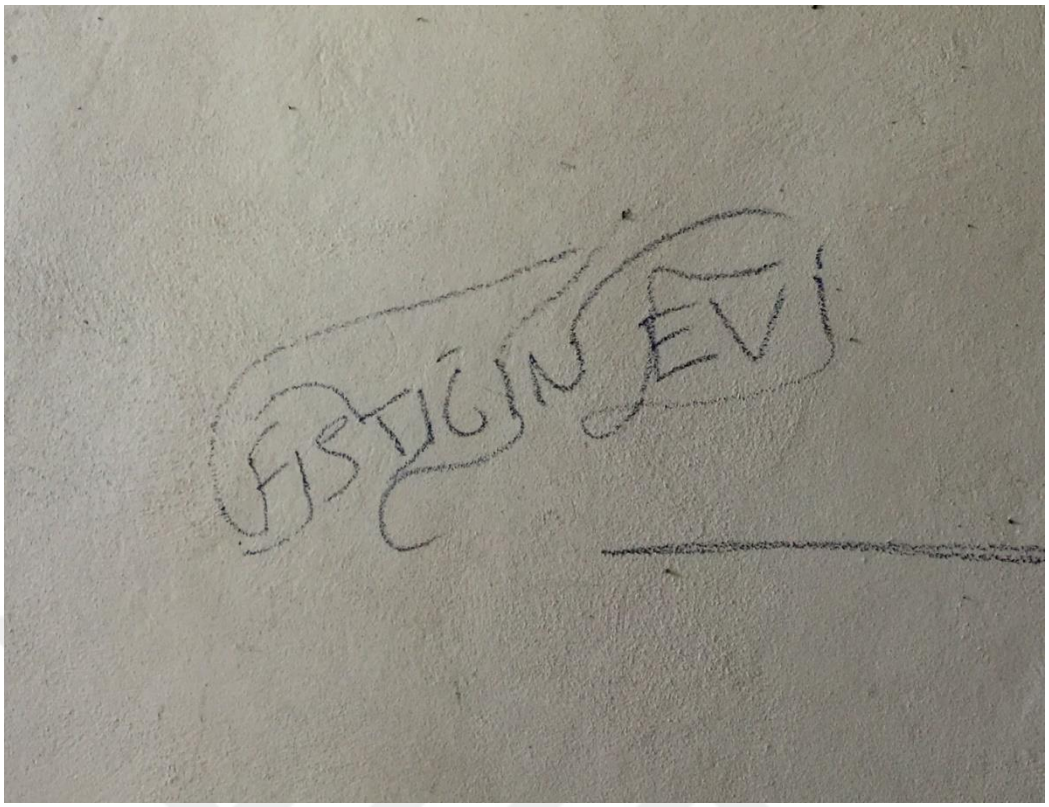


Figure 16. The 'hot chick's house'

woman's head on a photograph that was attached to the wall (HDP, 2016, p. 51). Similar observations have been made in Cizre, where it was again women's underwear and photographs of women that were exhibited in the private houses of the local population. Moreover, as Baysal (2016) writes, used preservatives were left across the houses' different rooms. Women from different cities talk about the highly sexist and sexualized view they encountered upon returning to their homes. In one case, a boy's large-size teddy bear had been dressed in women's underwear before he was raped. Apparently, it was often reported that children's soft carried traces of sperm on (Salık, Kadiroğlu, Kibar & Kılıçaslan, 2018, p. 25).

'Did we fuck (you)' [*Siktik mi*], one graffiti in Yüksekova was asking. In light of above findings this expression of active domination and penetration does not only refer to the emasculating victory the Special Forces claimed to have won over the guerilla fighters. The scenes of symbolic rape via literal sexual engagement with surrogate objects such as clothes, photographs and teddy bears moreover suggests

that sovereign masculinity, violence and pleasure are strongly linked (see Taylor, 1997, p. 5). Perhaps, we need to see these staged acts in line with what Diken and Bagge Lautsen take to be the festivalesque but reactionary character of the state of exception, which creates a temporary outlet for repressed energies while ultimately reproducing an order. In this respect, the transgressive 'male parties' in Kurdish homes "create a strong symbolic bond, a brotherhood in abjection or in guilt to use the more common term" (Diken & Bagge Lautsen, 2005, p. 124). Kimberley Theidon stresses that we have to be aware of how such acts correspond not only to guilt but also to a loss of the 'sense of shame', thus producing shameless men "with a recalibrated capacity for atrocity" (Theidon, 2013, p. 132).

If, on the one hand, Kurdish women stir a desire that seems closely related to fantasies of conquest and submission, then on the other hand, we have to realize that markers of Kurdish identity equally appear to stimulate hate and the desire to destroy. This can be seen with burnt folk clothes, Kurdish books, and flags, but nowhere does it become clearer than in the female guerilla fighter. Here it is perhaps necessary to open a small parenthesis in orde to grasp the female guerilla's position and role in the Kurdish movement. In general, the guerillas are perceived as masculinized revolutionary subjects fighting for a Kurdistan that is imagined as feminine and wild (Özsoy, 2010). The Kurdish movement in Turkey has sought to integrate national and women's liberation "by recruiting a large number of young (often unmarried) Kurdish women" (Sahin-Mencutek, 2016, p. 480) into the PKK and simultaneously increasing participation of women in all civil areas. A recent study estimates the 40 percent of the PKK guerillas to be female, including senior commanders (Scham, 2018, p. 56-57).

It has been argued that the women taking up arms to defend their community turn into "'more manly than man' icons of national resistance who receive respect and honor from the community and yet at the expense of their thoroughly de-sexualized bodies" (Özsoy, 2010, p. 39). This image of the Kurdish heroine may have transformed during the civil war in Syria, which saw the proliferation of media images that juxtapose a sexualized image of beautiful and explicitly feminine Kurdish guerillas to the 'barbarous' and 'misogynous' fighters of the Islamic State (Begikhani, Hamelink & Weiss, 2018, p. 17-18). We might therefore be witnessing a shift from a hyper-masculine image of the guerilla fighter to a stereotypically feminine one, which implies that war in general is perceived as increasingly female (Weiss, 2018).

One way or another, whether as masculinized women or as female fighters, Kurdish female guerillas seem to be perceived as threats to patriarchal relationships and control, which they seek to liberate themselves from. For the Special Forces, these women appear to be whores and monsters. They are the absolute enemies, a union of lethal danger and inappropriate sexuality. Eyewitnesses from Sur report that the capture of female fighters had priority for the state's forces (Salık et al., 2018, p. 112-113). Moreover, there were at least two instances of *JÖH/PÖH* circulating images of themselves posing around the mutilated bodies of female guerillas. The obvious threat contained in a graffiti announcing that 'The whore's revolution lasts until she sees a dick' (*Orospunun devrimi yarra.ı görene kadardır*) materializes in the spectacular display of stripped and dismembered female bodies. This, as Nagel puts it, "use of the masculine imagery of rape, penetration and sexual conquest to depict military weaponry and offensives" (Nagel, 1998, p. 258) is all the more crucial in this war that literally aims to force women under male domination.

Yet at the same time, it is important to differentiate between this gesture of symbolic rape and real rape. Diverging from the rather ambivalent attitude towards civilian Kurdish women in the curfew zone, in their encounter with female guerillas the men of the Special Forces responds with furious destruction. The aggressive mutilation and subsequent exposure of the dead bodies of Ekin Wan and other guerillas lead us to conclude that for the Special Forces, the death and killing of the (ethnicized) female or feminized body, which is perceived as the 'other' that the male community needs to be purified from in order to remain alive and potent, is a redemptive image (Taylor, 1997, p. 5). The disintegration of the female guerilla's body marks the restoration of safety and masculinity.

4.2.3 Penetration: Spatial and optical

Curfews are first of all a spatial strategy, they are imposed on geographic spaces in their entirety. In a sense, these areas are cordoned off and what remains within the boundaries of the curfews is equated with terrorism. Here, as Achille Mbembe wrote,

> Entire populations are the target of the sovereign. The besieged villages and towns are sealed off and cut off from the world. Daily life is militarized. Freedom is given to local military commanders to use their discretion as to when and whom to shoot. Movement between the territorial cells requires formal permits. Local civil institutions are systematically destroyed. The besieged population is deprived of their means of income. Invisible killing is added to outright executions. (Mbembe, 2003, p. 30)

This short quotation – originally intended as a description of contemporary colonial occupation - is strikingly fitting to summarize the situation under counterinsurgent warfare and curfew rule in Turkey's Kurdistan, where cities were kept under the spell of 'vertical sovereignty' and infrastructural warfare. The curfew areas have to be understood as 'zones of indistinction', in which the rule of law does not apply and "the fact that atrocities may or may not be committed does not depend on the law but

rather on the civility and ethical sense of the police that act temporarily as sovereign" (Agamben, 2000, p. 42). And indeed, during the curfew operations counterinsurgent war was essentially conducted as a police operation. According to Walter Benjamin, in the police's authority "the separation of lawmaking and law-preserving violence is suspended" (Benjamin, 1996, p. 243).[37] The police is the institution characteristic of the state of exception. Whenever the constituent violence of the sovereign needs to be refreshed or enforced, the police is invested with the authority to act as sovereign in order to achieve the ends that can no longer be attained through legal means.

One would perhaps further assume that a curfew, literally a ban on going out onto the streets in its Turkish rendering (*sokağa çıkma yasağı*), would primarily suspend public life and space. No doubt, the curfews of 2015-16 certainly did accomplish this to a great extent. However, this is not exactly the story the bedroom picture tells. In fact, a short time after the picture had started circulating through different media platforms, the homeowner was interviewed by a newspaper. Apparently, the house was located in an area that was not even affected by the clashes and had not seen any barricades erected (Evrensel, 2016). The story told by this image therefore is one of the intensified strive for 'Field Dominance' (*Alan Hakimiyeti*), one of the goals of the military doctrine adopted in 1993. Sovereignty is asserted through the penetration and symbolic appropriation of even the most

[37] I am adding the paragraph from which this short quotation is borrowed in order to clarify this point: "It is lawmaking, because its characteristic function is not the promulgation of laws but the assertion of legal claims for any decree, and law-preserving, because it is at the disposal of these ends. The assertion that the ends of police violence are always identical or even connected to those of general law is entirely untrue. Rather, the 'law' of the police really marks the point at which the state, whether from impotence or because of the immanent connections within any legal system, can no longer guarantee through the legal system the empirical ends that it desires at any price to attain" (Benjamin, 1996, p. 243). We find the police's ambiguous position between law-making and law-preservation that opens a wide discretionary margin strangely explicated in the official slogan of the General Directorate of Security according to which a police is to be a soldier, a lawyer, and a mother at the same time.

intimate and/or remote spaces within the curfew zone, which are rendered visible and transparent.

Many comparable images and testimonies in various reports show that the homes of the local population were turned into spaces that were easily penetrated by the Special Forces. In the ‘zone of indistinction’, the very division between public and private is completely erased. In fact, we need to mention here that the longstanding tradition of frequent and routine house searches in Kurdish cities has basically meant a long-term suspension of this divide, resulting in a sense that “there is no longer a safe place inaccessible by the state” (Darıcı, 2015, p. 246). As one graffiti declares: ‘The State is everywhere. Here we are, girls, we entered your dens’ (Figure 17). Wolves and dens, we are in a wildlife scenario. The curfew zone appears to be a space outside of civilization that must be brought under the control of the state by being ‘captured outside’, that is, included by exclusion (Agamben, 2000, p.



Figure 17. 'The state is everywhere, here we are, girls, we entered your dens'

40). Achille Mbembe's work is a great assistance in accounting for the colonial genealogy that the emergence of such a space presupposes. He argues that "the colony represents the site where sovereignty consists fundamentally in the exercise of a power outside the law (*ab legibus solutus)* and where 'peace' is more likely to take on the face of a 'war without end'" (Mbembe, 2003, p. 23). We should perhaps understand 'without end' here as pointing to the boundlessness of a state, which 'is everywhere'. It should be clear that such a condition does not apply for the country's other areas. And to be sure, we need to view this phenomenon in context with the prevalent notions of privacy and intimacy that surround the space of the home in Turkey. Transgressive penetration of the Special Forces violates the idea of the (family) home as a *mahrem* (forbidden) space, which is why the intrusion is considered an act that desacralizes the home and therefore calls upon associations with rape as Protner's ethnographic study reveals (Protner, 2019).

Penetration in the curfew zone is however not only spatial but also decidedly optical. Stored in the archive of the curfews are a few minutes of unbearable video footage of little children in Diyarbakır. A harsh male voice commands the kids to step in front of an armored vehicle. Here, they are told to take off some of their clothes, while a camera is recording the scene. Similar images exist of young males suspected to be insurgents. These men are forced to strip down completely. Different reports indicate that strip-search practices continued in the prisons. The 'dangerous' body is optically colonized to a maximum, everything is turned inside-out in order to clearly determine the threat emanating from the respective individual. The camera is of invaluable assistance, always present to seize the body of the 'other' as an image. This body is always exposed, always blinded by the light which illuminates it, while the state controls the distribution of visibilities from within the dark area behind the

viewfinder (I have already discussed how this constant making visible is achieved through a wide range of visual technologies such as night vision, drones, aerial vision, surveillance cameras etc.).

In the intimate relationship between exposed and exposer bodies are not gender neutral. As the body and the space of the 'other' are captured through spatial and optical penetration, they are simultaneously constituted as abject objects. Techniques and practices of visualization and surveillance are therefore not merely rational and technological. In these images, we are encountering visual registers of domination and submission, which are activated through attempts either to establish hypermasculine presence in front of the camera or to degrade and expose the 'other' from behind the camera. Spatial and optical colonization signal a "convergence of fantasy and technology in inscribing the body. . . with the meanings of sexual subjugation through a form of violence that phantasmatically replicates the scenario of rape" (Aretxaga, 2005a, p. 108). Counterinsurgent warfare is linked to a form of sovereignty that does not simply require "the management of bodies and populations, the power over life, but the intensification of bodies and intimacies that result from those technologies of management" (Aretxaga, 2005b, p. 264).

4.3 In memoriam

The curfew zone, as well as the more general landscape of the conflict between the Turkish state and the PKK, is saturated with a memory that is tightly linked to violence. This link emerges in numerous images in the archive of the curfews. The Special Forces seem to draw from mnemonic repertoires, which I think should be placed in the context of an analysis that gives credit to 'bodily social memory' as a performative and embodied category (Connerton, 1989, p. 71). I am inspired by

Allen Feldman's elaborations on the intertwinement between memory and violence, which build on narratological conceptualizations of history. Feldman proposes to approach the problem through "a performance analysis that focuses on the action of violence… as a materialized narrative act that successfully or unsuccessfully embodies and encapsulates social recall" (Feldman, 2003, p. 66). Consequently, I will discuss violence as a medium for memory, that is, a medium that instills remembering or forgetting in the first section. Here, I also want to pay attention to the implications this entails for modes of agency and forms of responsibility. Subsequently, I will attend to the role of the dead, which surfaces in the images as an interconnected problem of martyrdom and sacrifice. The chapter ends with a final section on dismembered bodies, where the notion of a war waged literally against the dead is discussed.

4.3.1 Don't forget: Violence as a medium for memory

After teachers and other public officials had been ordered to leave the curfew zones, many schools were turned into temporary barracks for the state's Special Forces. As the writing on the blackboard in the above image says, now it was their 'time to educate' (Figure 18). It is striking to see this passage from the more suspended violence of the disciplinary institution to the spectacular violence of counterinsurgency contained in one frame. It is also hard to miss the strong colonial undertone of this message. The construction of the Kurds as the 'Other', moreover defined as backward and often enough as criminal and violent, functions as *a priori* legitimation for the state's violence that is rendered alternately as civilizing mission or self-defense. In this relationship, those identified with the state seem to perceive reality through a "colonial mirror which reflects back onto the colonists the



Figure 18. JÖH posing in a classroom

barbarity of their own social relations, but as imputed to the savage or evil figures they wish to colonize" (Taussig, 2004, p. 51). Here, the national community underlying this fantasy of sovereignty is dependent on images of self and other that play a constitutive role in founding an order based on domination. State violence is essentially dematerialized and posed as rational and lawful. The Kurdish 'other' is turned into an empty vessel situated outside of civilization, which legitimizes police intervention into the "presocial, naturalized terrain from which the sanctioned enforcer extracts the disciplinary subject as so-much raw material to be reworked by the state" (Feldman, 1994, p. 409). The image has to be read against the backdrop of almost a century of exceptional rule and policies of assimilation towards the Kurds.

It registers failed education, meaning the supposed failure of the curfew zone's population to 'learn its lesson', which is explicitly communicated in a graffiti in Idil that says 'Idil, this should be a lesson to you' [*Idil, bu da size ders olsun*]. What the population fails to recall, is the memory previously inscribed into their worlds by the sovereign. Repetitive violence is thus required to re-instill memory, lest they forget. One can notice an interesting shift in agency here, as violence is rationalized as a response to the mnemonic deficits of its victim. Following Allen

Feldman, we can therefore understand violence in the emergency zone as an ‘in-situ historiographic apparatus’, a medium for the inscription of social memory onto bodies and into space (Feldman, 2003, p. 61). What is it that the population has forgotten?

Some photographs point to one possible answer: it reads ‘DO NOT FORGET these cruelties done to you by the PKK’ [*PKK’nın Size Yaptığı Bu Zulmü UNUTMAYIN*] (Figure 19). Here, we find that the state’s forces divest themselves from the roles of aggressor and victim. While these roles are completely contained within the curfew zone in the previously mentioned model of ‘good’ host population and ‘evil’ insurgent, the state’s intervention is concealed almost to the degree of invisibility. It is not clear whether the graffiti suggests that all of the cruelties were really executed by the PKK or if we are to understand that the PKK is something like a primary mover to which all responsibility ultimately has to be traced. In either way, however, this and similar statements constitute a disavowal of historical responsibility that belies the relational character of the conflict. But why is the population supposed to remember? Let us look at another graffiti from Yüksekova:



Figure 19. Graffiti reminding the local population to remember the cruelties of the PKK

'We cleaned your city, keep good care of it or we will come again' [*Şehrinizi temizledik ona iyi bakın yoksa bir daha geliriz*]. The notion of cleaning indicates that counterinsurgency is embedded in the narrative of sanitized biopolitical wars fought in the name of peace, democracy and humanity, where intervention appears as an almost reluctant, but eventually inevitable response aiming to cure the social body from a dangerous disease. But this graffiti furthermore holds an answer to the question what would happen if the people of Yüksekova would fail to 'keep good care' of their city – future violence is imminent, but already excused.

The patronizing attitude towards the local population of Turkey's Kurdistan has to be seen in the context of the racialized and inferiorizing colonial registers through which it proceeds. Mahmut Esat Bozkurt, the Republic's first Minister of Justice, once infamously declared that the Turks were the only masters and owners of the country and that "[t]hose who are not of the pure Turkish race have only one right in the Turkish country: the right to be servants, the right to be slaves".[38] It is this founding myth of the Turkish nation that the local population fails to recall despite decades of assimilationist policies and exceptional rule. There are many variations, in which the racist message of the sacred Turkish nation's superiority over the Kurds is communicated. One of them states that 'Founding a state is the Turk's job, not the lot of a dog' [*Devlet kurmak Türk'ün işi ite nasip olmaz*].[39] In essence, this is the lesson to be remembered: if you want to live in peace, "you have to obey the Turks" [*Türk'e biat etmek zorundasın*].

[38] "Öz Türk olmayanların Türk vatanında bir hakkı vardır, o da hizmetçi olmaktır, köle olmaktır" (cited in Ünlü, 2014, p. 419)

[39] Moreover, one graffiti consisted of what was almost a literal replication of Bozkurt's speech: 'Pride yourself if you are a Turk, obey if you are not' [*Türk'sen övün, değilsen itaat et*]. It should also be noted that challenges to this order are perceived as treason that will be punished, as another example demonstrates: 'There is no justification for treason (against the motherland), only a price to be paid sooner or later' [*Vatana ihanetin nedeni olmaz, er ya da geç bedeli olur*].

But such racist and mythological foundations for the Turkish nation also seem to facilitate a constant slippage of the state into the role of the victim. The state, whether attacked as an entity/community or *qua* individuals (its martyrs), is the victimized party. In terms of historical epistemology, it seems necessary to pay attention to the free play of the roles surrounding violence. Feldman makes a good point when he suggests that "[v]ictims and perpetrators are self-ascribed and shifting categories. One may dismiss this self-ascription as political rhetoric, but it generates material effects—new victims" (Feldman, 2003, p. 70). In the curfew zone, one decisive dimension of violence appeared to be linked to a logic of sovereignty that was largely determined by martyrdom and sacrifice.

4.3.2 Martyrdom and sacrifice

The 'zone of indistinction' is a space where the borders between fact and law, inside and outside blur, that much we have seen. However, the curfew zone is also a space where something takes place between life and death. In the previous chapter, we have already seen that the 'martyrs' among the Special Forces started to populate the neighborhoods of Kurdish cities as so and so many provisional street names. Their names are moreover regularly inscribed onto the different models of vehicles used by the state's executive forces. Although biologically dead, the martyr does not really find any rest but continues to serve the ideal s/he died for. The martyr therefore, to be precise, does not really die. While official discourse largely tried to conceal the fact that many of those fighting in the name of the Turkish state lost their lives during the curfew operations, communication with the dead was all the more visible in the images and graffiti of the Special Forces. Those alive salute the dead, like in this

image (Figure 20) that shows three *JÖH/PÖH* sending their greetings to 'martyr' Fırat Çakıroğlu: "There is no nationalism without some ghost" (Derrida, 1992, p. 15).

Different studies highlight the central position occupied by sacrificial death and martyrdom with respect to the (re)production of national communities (Anderson, 1983; Mosse, 1990; Khalili, 2007). The symbolic order of nationalism knows no act more generous than self-sacrifice (Zerubavel, 2006). In turn, martyrdom creates a remaining debt, an undying call that demands commitment to the nation as the ideal community the martyr died for. Life and death of the martyr are subjected to a process of abstraction through which the body is transformed into a sacred and nationalized symbol. The Turkish perception of martyrdom, as Özsoy finds, is based on a "symbiosis of the martyr's body and national territory" (Özsoy, 2010, p. 100).

From the photograph it becomes quite clear that the dead are not only commemorated but in fact immortalized (Neocleous, 2005, p. 107). The community performed in this image is a nationalist community of both the living and the dead that speaks to the "desire to communicate with and on behalf of, and in that sense to



Figure 20. Three Special Forces saluting Fırat Çakıroğlu

resurrect, the dead." (Neocleous, 2005, p. 109). In the image, we therefore witness a sort of communion by virtue of which the dead is summoned into presence. Çakıroğlu's appearance in the curfew zone is however particularly startling because he did not even die there, but in Izmir. As a martyr, Çakıroğlu has transformed into a symbolic token in which past and future collapse into the present, where the Special Forces strive to redeem his death by committing themselves to the ideal of a Turkish nationalist sovereign community. This image of three *JÖH/PÖH* standing amid a visibly destroyed environment somewhere in Sur, Diyarbakır, with their heavy arms indicates that redemption of the martyrs' deaths can in fact imply that the dead have to be avenged for.

The lines cited from the poem *Selâm [Salute]* written by nationalist poet, writer, and philosopher Nihal Atsız moreover leave us with a tension that will perhaps resist attempts to resolve it. 'Salute' is written in an ecstatic and emotive mood that belongs to a 'moment of victory' attained under great cost, which can obviously be related to the situation and self-representation of the Special Forces. In the poem, the '*yılları heba olan genç*' *[youth whose years are wasted]*, is consoled with the aspired arrival of the 'true future' of the Turkish community. Yesterday's heroes, tomorrow's martyrs, death and loss have to be endured, but will one day be redeemed. In many respects, 'Salute' therefore confirms what has so far been said about death and martyrdom. On the wall, we however only encounter this one particular line of the poem referring to the youth, whose years are wasted. Through such a re-contextualization it might become possible for us to also read these words as a reminder of the excess of war. The wasting of a singular life, its injury and killing, refer to soldiers' narratives that are usually inadmissible to the general discourse on war. The disparity between death as waste and death as martyrdom

marks the point of conversion from singular existences to the abstract life of the community. In consideration of this repressed excess it can be argued that "the nation itself as imagined community comes into existence thanks to a death it cannot mourn, a corpse it cannot bury – a corpse that must be foreclosed, expelled from the nation's abstracted, aestheticized anonymity" (Redfield, 2003, p. 57).

Resurrection of the martyrs then means that there cannot (yet) be an end to the violence or 'Do you think the hero's blood would be left on the ground' [*Yiğidin kanı yerde kalır mı sanırsınız*] (Figure 21)? Since death and violence are always the death and violence of a community, the martyr's death seems to be the safest guarantee for a continuation if not proliferation of violence: 'one of us dies, a thousand resurrect' [*bir ölür bin diriliriz*]. Therefore, I would submit that violence in the curfew zone is partially operating on a 'sacrificial logic'.[40] It is Allen Feldman's



Figure 21. 'Do you think the hero's blood would be left on the ground?'

[40] We turn to Feldman for a cogent definition of sacrifice: "Sacrifice constitutes an organized act of violence by which collective meanings and historical change are mobilized, visualized, and dramatized in the visible selection and violent elimination of the sacrificial object by a sacrificing agency. The victim is recruited from within the targeted social order, the victim may be a social intimate, and the victim is endowed with emissary capacities that are switched on with the application of violence. The victim in sacrificial actions bears messages and alters social reality in the very mutilation of the victim's embodiment. The movement of victims by violence from life to death is frequently envisioned as enabling the movement of society from one historical stage to the next. The

contribution to have related the production of memory through violent acts to an economy of violence subject to a sacrificial and actuarial logic. Accordingly, memory plays a central role in the compulsory repetition of violence and the emergence of an always already existing debt to be repaid in the future through further sacrificial acts of violence, resulting in 'narrative closure' and a 'frozen historical process' (Feldman, 2003).

At this point, it should be stressed that the notion of martyrdom has played a key role for the Kurdish movement as well. While there is only an imaginary Kurdistan that does not correspond to a realized nation-state, funeral ceremonies have for at least three decades been central events for the nationalization of dead Kurdish fighters (Özsoy, 2010). Özsoy's analysis finds that the centrality and moral weight of martyrdom in Kurdish politics has seen increasing contestation since the PKK announced its paradigm shift away from national independence. Nonetheless, martyrdom and self-sacrifice remain important dimensions at least for the armed wings of the Kurdish movement. If there are many references to the Turkish martyrs made by the Special Forces, we also have to make note of those graffiti that pledge revenge for killed Kurdish fighters. On both sides, it seems, the national and communal imaginaries embodied and symbolized in the martyrs have "little current experiential reality except in suffering and death" (Feldman, 2003, p. 67).

But if we are really dealing with a sacrificial logic, within which the deaths of single individuals are always inextricably linked to the fate of the community as a whole, then we also need to pay attention to how violence is executed against 'emissary' bodies in order to strike against entire communities. The execution and

sacrificial subject is inherently ambivalent—both contaminating and purifying, disordering and ordering, intrinsic to the social order and alien—because sacrifice for its agents represents the expulsion of contradiction from history in the vehicle of the emissary victim" (Feldman, 2003, p. 68).

subsequent mutilation of PKK guerillas has been a frequent and widespread practice during the 90s. In the context of the curfews, the previously mentioned deaths of Hacı Lokman Birlik and Ekin Wan – whose images I do not want to include here – can be seen not only as a reanimation of such practices but also as exemplary cases of this sacrificial logic. The atrocious violence unleashed at the bodies of the Kurdish guerillas is perhaps not primarily targeting to kill. Instead, as argued by Arjun Appadurai, such acts of violence should be considered in terms of their symbolic dimension, where the dehumanization and obliteration of the 'other's' body is supposed to purify society and create a less ambiguous sense of identity (Appadurai, 2006, p. 7). In the context of counterinsurgency, bodily violence functions as "forensic means... [and] vivisectionist tool to establish the reality behind the mask" (Appadurai, 2006, p. 89). Once the enemy has been identified from among the population, her/his body becomes the vehicle through which an expulsion of contradiction is to take place. In the images of the heavily armed Special Forces posing with the guerillas' stripped, mutilated and tortured bodies literally under their feet, we witness the anxious sovereign exhibiting himself in a moment of relief. The fear of territorial disintegration embodied in a typified other is temporarily diverted, the martyr comrades partially avenged for.

4.3.3 Dismembered bodies

The mutilated and dismembered bodies of the guerillas however reveal another perspective, from which we can look at the problem as a war literally waged against the dead. Complementing other uses of the concept, Banu Bargu has reflected on the notion of 'another necropolitics' (Bargu, 2016) in order to grasp a form of state violence that is explicitly directed against dead Kurdish bodies. This requires a

broadening of perspective. It was not only the dead bodies of guerilla fighters that were assaulted during the counterinsurgent war in Turkey's Kurdistan. As mentioned before, the bodies of civilians who had died during the curfews were left out on the streets, because the authorities did not grant permission for them to be picked up. Leaving the dead on the ground, which is the literal phrasing in local idioms, is a major disgrace in Kurdish society (Özsoy, 2010, p. 62). Elsewhere, corpses were kept in freezers to protect them from decomposition. The bodies of many who died in this episode were dismembered and defaced to such an extent that they could no longer be identified. After being withheld in morgues for weeks, they were often buried in unmarked mass graves. In the meantime, several of the 14 PKK graveyards that had been created after the initiation of the Peace Process were partially or completely destroyed following the collapse of the negotiations in 2015 (Polat, 2015; Gazete Duvar, 2017).

However, these phenomena are not exactly new. There is a history to the dismemberment of the bodies of Kurdish fighters as well as the more general "obstruction of proper burial. . . [as] unique phenomena in Kurdish-Turkish relations that have to do with the nationalization of sovereignty, territory, death and identity" (Özsoy, 2010, p. 114). In line with this concatenation it is unthinkable that 'terrorists' on the one and Turkish citizens and martyrs on the other hand would be buried in the same soil (Özsoy, 2010, p. 100). This is also exactly how the nationalists, who attacked the funeral of Hatun Tuğluk, mother of HDP deputy Ayşe Tuğluk, in 2017, legitimized their violent intervention in front of the court (Gazete Duvar, 2018). From this perspective, the Kurdish dead are perceived as not worthy of burial and as improper objects that harm the sacred values of the nation.

There may be yet another dimension to the war against the dead. As pointed out in the previous section, the notion of martyrdom is central for the Kurdish movement. The dead are not only buried but also resurrected. The conversion of victimhood into martyrdom ensures that the dead continue to have agency (Weiss, 2014). In the course of their resurrection, the martyrs are imbued with symbolic value. They are perceived to generate hope and forge community, which is why their deaths are held to create life (Özsoy, 2010, p. 52-53). According to Özsoy, it is thus exactly because the Kurdish dead are a site for the contestation of Turkish sovereignty that the Turkish state employs a variety of "repressive techniques such as refusing to deliver dead bodies for burial, secret interments, destroying graveyards, banning funeral or attacking funeral participants" (Özsoy, 2010, p. 24). In other words, Turkish sovereignty aims directly at interrupting the agency of the dead. Perhaps, this is one of the stakes with respect to the violence exerted against the bodies of Kurdish guerilla fighters. This violence does not stop at killing but "dedicates itself to destroying the living being as a singular body" (Cavarero, 2011, p. 12). Dis-membering thus literally stands in violent opposition to re-membering. It is an attempt of absolute defacement and dehumanization that wants to leave no life, no face, no name, no story, and no grave behind. It is a killing twice, as Özsoy finds, intending to erase the biologically dead Kurdish body from the symbolic order, too, so as to effectuate an eclipse of its affective and symbolic power as a martyr (Özsoy, 2010, p. 31).

And yet, the Special Forces simultaneously hold fast of this attempted erasure through images, which they moreover circulate through the web. This does not only show how attempts to complete destroy the memory of a human being can turn into memorabilia for the perpetrators. Most importantly, I think this circulation of the

dismembered bodies can be seen as an indication that when we think about 'establishing the reality behind the mask', we might have to understand this as the projection fantasies and fears onto reality via the surface of the 'other's' body. It is a molding of reality according to the Special Forces' image. This image, it seems, does not contain a near end to violence. Rather, what these images want is a general death for the racialized 'other', a death "for which there is no redemptive cycle, for which no birth follows" (Butler, 2000, p. 49)? No birth follows, or 'Abortion should be free for a whore, it is us who have to deal with her children' [*Orospuya kürtaj bedava olsun çocuklarıyla biz uğraşıyoz*] (Figure 22). In the logic of 'sovereign masculinity', the 'solution' of the Kurdish Question verges on the proposal of genocide.

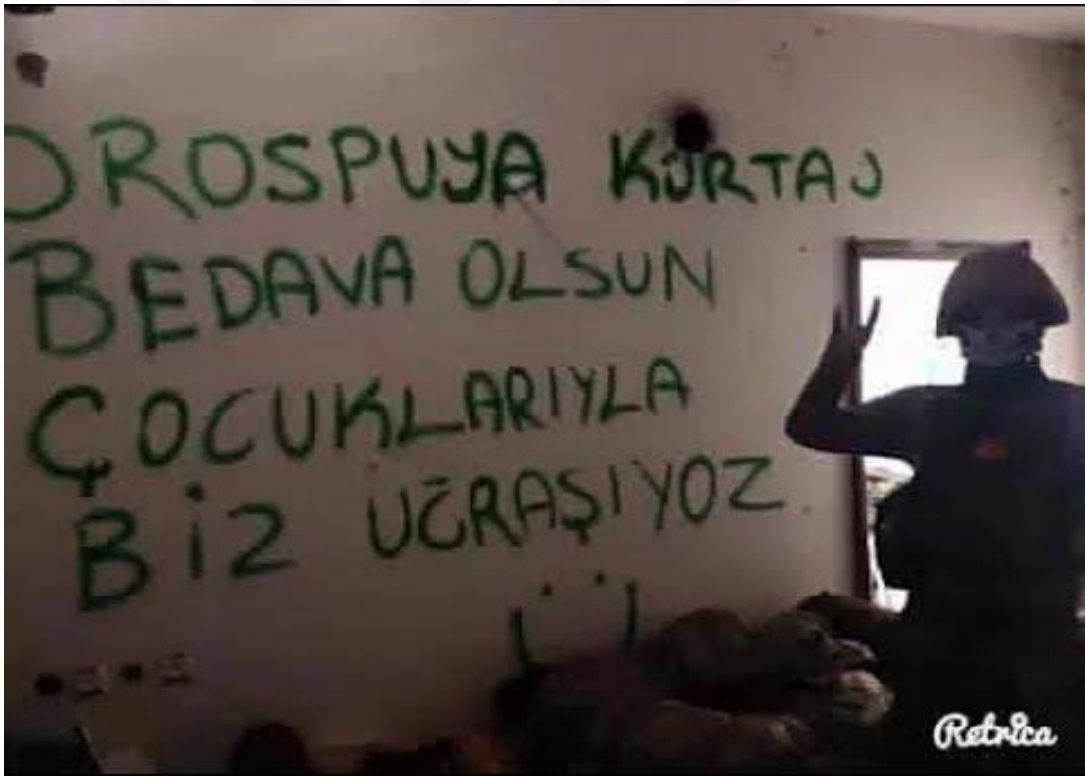


Figure 22. Special Force posing in front of interior graffiti

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

This thesis has set out from within archives of violence. It was discovered that the original frame of the archive of the curfews, the discourse of human rights, was rendered practically illegitimate in the course of an increasingly self-assertive militarization of the political landscape. Counterinsurgency in Turkey's Kurdistan is a mode of warfare that essentially transforms the entire society into a front zone, with the implication that we are able to observe a subjection of civil forms of truth-claiming to violent forms of truth-making. If human rights can theoretically pose a challenge to sovereignty in rendering the latter conditional on respect for the rule of law and compliance with human rights, then recent experiences demonstrate how sovereignty is in turn able to curtail the field of human rights and civil politics more generally. This experience has highlighted the arbitrary nature of evidence, factuality, and truth in the archive. In the discussion of the archive of the curfews, it has been established that even as representations and evidence, images are anything but unequivocal. Their interpretation always occurs from within intertextual and contextual webs, which are themselves embedded in relations of force and power. Deprived of the human rights framing, it becomes apparent that evidence is only one possible modality of the images contained in the archive. In this thesis, I therefore shifted the focus from violations to violence in order to investigate the latter's relationship to images.

This re-framing of the images is buttressed by genealogical accounts of exceptional regime practices and 'counterinsurgent governmentality' in Turkey's Kurdistan. Here, I have tried to follow Walter Benjamin in defining the breakdown

of the Peace Process, the return to the 'war on terror' paradigm, and the counterinsurgent war as the moment of danger that creates the legibility of this history as an archive of emergency and violence. If historically *de jure* and *de facto* emergency rule have appeared as central modalities of regime practices in Turkey's Kurdistan, then the recent counterinsurgent war has shown that the state of exception has been completely liberalized today, thus substantiating Benjamin's claim "that 'the state of emergency' in which we live is not the exception but the rule" (Benjamin, 2003, p. 291). The curfews represent a new mode of counterinsurgent warfare that essentially consists of containerized urban wars, in which the Gendarmerie and Police Special Operations Teams play a leading role. It was however stressed that we should approach the topic through the broader concept of 'counterinsurgent governmentality' (Feldman, 2015) to account for the scattered topographies of both biopolitical (self-)government and containerized (bio- or necropolitical) counterinsurgent warfare. This not only helps us to understand how sovereignty frequently ascertains itself within governmentality, but also to acknowledge that counterinsurgency is a totalizing framework targeting entire populations through the interrelated modes of surveillance, discipline and spectacle.

Against this backdrop, my interest was with counterinsurgency as a war waged in the visual field. To this end, I tried to approach the more general production of the visible in the context of counterinsurgent warfare, which I tried to trace through the different frames and visibilities of the curfew operations. One important finding in this regard is that counterinsurgency depends on techniques and technologies of visualization in order to enforce compulsory visibility. This is at the core of the doctrine of field dominance that requires spatial and optical penetration to a maximum extent, thus resulting in an obliteration of the division between public

and private. In invading and desacralizing bedrooms, but also in strip-searching suspicious bodies and in seizing images of the 'enemy' by means of visual technologies such as surveillance cameras and drones, sovereignty emerges as the capacity to control the field of vision in the shifting zones of violence and border-making.

We have moreover seen that counterinsurgency has pervasively entered the fields of media and culture, where visual aesthetics play an important role in battles over memory and meaning. In these frames, images of the 'other' as anything else but a 'terrorist' (and therefore outside of humanity) are excluded by default. The most persistent frame of counterinsurgent warfare seems to be one of sovereignty as a mode of violent self-assertion based on exclusion and domination of an 'other'. Moreover, it was found that violence is transformed into an enjoyable spectacle for consumption. The argument pursued here was that the militarization of media and culture contribute to a legitimization, naturalization, and dematerialization of violence. I have tried to illustrate this with respect to the implications of the analyzed frames and visibilities for the witnessing of the war. The notion of 'percepticide' (Taylor, 1997) helped me to discuss the repressive, productive and disruptive ways in which the possibility of witnessing is challenged. In brief, the first would refer to fear and compulsory silence, while the second relates to privilege, enjoyment and consumption. Disruptive moments were identified in a perceptual overload resulting from the contemporary communication infrastructure as well as in the increasing de-realization of warfare.

An important concern of this thesis was to trace the extension of war into cyberspace, where the state's Special Forces appear to continue fighting with other means. The images of *JÖH/PÖH* have particular significance for several reasons.

Firstly, it is the Special Forces who act as the temporary sovereign in the curfew zone. Secondly, these images reveal insights into the counterinsurgent war that remain outside of most other frames. Thirdly, these images most decidedly constitute a form of violence in their own right. I have made use of the concept of the 'transparency of evil' (Keenan, 2004a) to deal with the openness and shamelessness, which we encounter in the Special Forces' images and which basically leaves us without a privileged ground from which to witness at all. Therefore, I have argued, we should approach these images as communicative and performative acts of violence through which a distinct form of sovereignty is (re-)instated and notions of identity and community (re-)inscribed. The subject we encounter in these frames appeared as "a sovereign and extra-legal subject, a violent and self-centered subject" (Butler, 2004, p. 41). We have seen that the images and imaginations of sovereignty are clearly gendered and racialized. The violence of the temporary sovereign coincides with ideas of proper bodies in terms of gender, sex, and race.

The circulatory logic of sovereignty that operates through acts of violent self-assertion rests on a fantasy that will attain the status of reality always only to a certain degree. Since it ultimately conceals its own vulnerability and since even emergency rule might eventually be dependent on legitimacy, on implicit and silent or explicit and outspoken support of the 'people' or the 'humanity' in whose name it proceeds, sovereignty itself is trapped in a dilemma. But in this respect, the images of *JÖH/PÖH* as transparent acts of violence are more than worrying. In trying to dis- and relocate their own precariousness, how far are they willing to go in order to mold reality after their own image? Violent exchange was certainly mutual in the curfew areas, the armed wing of the Kurdish movement has by all means attempted to challenge the Turkish state as the sovereign. Nonetheless the many images from the

curfew zones lead me to assume that with respect to the Special Forces and the more general culture of counterinsurgency, we are dealing with problems that can only partially be illuminated by looking at 'real relations'. These frames and images rather seem to attest to a mode of self-referential projection of fears and desires onto the 'other' and a highly problematic notion of sovereignty that is an obstacle to an open and mutual society.

In this respect, the images should also be considered in their temporal quality. If they form part of the memory of this episode of violence, then it would be wrong to assume that they are 'past' in a strict sense. The images raise the question how a living together can be possible at all. During my analysis, I encountered that especially the images of the Special Forces appear as harbingers of future and perhaps even worse violence. The perpetrators of violence on the side of the Turkish state are still around anyway, but after having become the heroes of the nation they keep silence with respect to the curfew operations. If there was any chance to make perpetrators speak after the fact, such research would be tremendously important. This is particularly true for Turkey, where to my knowledge similar research has not been conducted yet. In this respect, it is also important to ask if masculinity can somehow be demilitarized after such a spectacular outburst of 'sovereign masculinity'?

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