Living in the Play State: Insurrectionary Youth Politics in the Kurdish Borderlands

By

Haydar Darici

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Doctoral Committee:

Professor Andrew J. Shryock, Chair
Professor Fatma Müge Göçek
Professor Alaina Lemon
Professor Rosalind C. Morris
Professor Ronald Suny

Haydar Darici

hdarici@umich.edu

ORCID iD: 0000-0003-0312-7050

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Abstract

Built on an ethnographic fieldwork carried out between 2013 and 2016, this dissertation examines Kurdish youth politics in Cizre, a small town at the crossroads of the borders of Turkey, Syria, and Iraq. It begins with examining the notion of growing up in a context where the term youth has shifted from indexing an age group to a political group involved in street-based politics. The dissertation explores how politically active youth experienced the passage of time amid routinized street protests and how their family members and the Kurdish movement sought to remove the youth from the realm of street politics to place them within either the normative life-cycle of kinship or redirect their revolutionary potential toward guerrilla war, respectively. This study argues that the notion of growing up indicated not a transition from youth to adulthood unfolding over time, but a rupture, that is an external event imposed on the youth, such as marriage and joining the guerrillas.

The dissertation explores how Kurdish youth reconfigured bodily and spatial practices to conduct street politics while avoiding arrest, incarceration, and lethal state violence. It particularly focuses on the elaborate theatrical performances that the protesters improvised to conceal their identities from surveillance cameras and possible government agents. It argues that the iterative performances in protest consisting of gestures, utterances, and dissimulations-generated a space of freedom: a fleeting play-world in which neither the strictures of everyday life nor the repression of the state remained insurmountable.

While the first half of this dissertation explores how the youth responded to the

technologies of surveillance produced and administered by state actors, the second half investigates the ways in which the young activists exercise security in the spaces they themselves have created. The dissertation examines the transformation of routinized street protests into an armed self-governance movement, a process in which the youth forged a quasi-state of their own by digging explosive-laced trenches along the entrances of their neighborhoods that permanently blocked off the entry of Turkish police and military. This study examines the political life inside the borders of these trenches from where the youth cultivated new spatial, material, and corporeal practices to maintain the security of their neighborhoods and fend off attempted undercover incursions. It argues that after digging trenches, the youth proclaimed themselves to be a kind of Kurdish police force, simultaneously fighting and mimicking their Turkish counterpart. The dissertation lastly chronicles and investigates the urban military operations that the Turkish state instigated to terminate the youth's safe haven in Cizre, resulted in the destruction of the town.

Introduction

In the spring of 2013, the Kurdistan Worker's Party (PKK) and the Turkish government embarked on a historic peace process to end three decades of armed conflict that claimed over 40,000 lives. Abdullah Öcalan, leader of the PKK, announced the commencement of the peace process via a public letter sent from the İmrali Island Prison, where he has been confined since 1999. The letter was read both in Turkish and Kurdish at Newroz (a Kurdish spring festival) in Diyarbakır, the unofficial capital of Northern Kurdistan, to an audience of over a million people. Öcalan's highly publicized letter contained certain directives for PKK commanders in the Qandil Mountains. "Today we open a door from armed resistance to democratic politics," the letter said, "principles of equality, democracy, and justice will thrive. Silence weapons; let ideas speak! Now is the time to withdraw our armed forces to the other side of the border."

Shortly after the announcement, guerrilla forces began to withdraw from Turkey as a gesture of the PKK's commitment to peace, while also making clear that a total withdrawal was reliant on the government's future steps in the process. This move nonetheless allowed for official peace talks to begin. On behalf of the Kurdish movement, Öcalan held regular meetings at the İmrali Island Prison with Turkish government officials, often in the presence of a delegation of deputies from the pro-Kurdish and left-leaning Peace and Democracy Party (BDP), which was succeeded by the People's Democratic Party (HDP) the following year. The BDP deputies facilitated communication between Öcalan and the PKK headquarters in the Qandil Mountains. At the crux of negotiations rested two items. The Turkish government demanded that

PKK guerrillas lay down their arms and withdraw from Turkey. The Kurdish movement demanded the enactment of a new constitution along with certain legislative reforms that would (1) empower local authorities in Kurdish regions vis-à-vis the central government; (2) give the right to use Kurdish (and other minority languages) in education and other realms of public life; and (3) revise the definition of citizenship from one that relies on Turkish ethnicity to an ethnically neutral and rights-based notion of citizenship (Hakyemez 2017).

The government supplemented formal peace talks with an outreach project to garner support for the peace process from Turkish citizens. Then-Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan personally invited esteemed academics, journalists, politicians, writers, movie stars and the like to form "the Commission of Wise Persons." This commission traveled across the country, holding public meetings to alleviate nationalist sensibilities and security concerns, and persuade the Turkish population about the dire need for peace in the country. Meanwhile, "Academics of Peace," an independent academic initiative, stepped in to contribute to the peace process, envisioning workshop series and conferences to offer a road map for a comprehensive transitional justice project.

I was in the United States when the peace process was announced. From afar, it was noticeable how Ocalan's declaration itself sufficed to alter the Turkish political landscape. Not only did the mainstream media abandon its anti-Kurdish rhetoric, but it also began to broadcast programs in which politicians and public intellectuals openly discussed the "dirty war" of the 1990s and the state violence committed against the Kurds. I returned to Turkey in April to see the reverberations of the declaration in daily life as well, most notably in the vast audibility and visibility of Kurdish music performances in the streets of İstanbul. I planned to stay in İstanbul

over the summer and then head off to Cizre, a Kurdish town at the crossroads of the borders of Turkey, Syria, and Iraq, to conduct ethnographic research on insurrectionary youth politics.

I was unaware at the time that my fieldwork would cover two drastic moments in the history of the Kurdish question; a utopic one becoming dystopic in the blink of an eye. Notwithstanding the unprecedented steps taken by both sides, the peace process collapsed within two years, leading to full-fledged urban warfare in the Kurdish region. The Turkish state's military operations mainly targeted Cizre, creating "apocalyptic scenes of destruction" in the town, as described in the report by the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (Report on the Human Rights Situation in South-East Turkey 2017). Within a year, my research, which was initially meant to be about contemporary phenomena, quickly became a study of historical events as Cizre was razed to the ground.

Many factors can account for the collapse of peace talks and the subsequent warfare in the region. A primary factor, for instance, concerned the government's perceived unwillingness to initiate the necessary reforms for a permanent peace agreement. Another reason for the collapse of peace talks had to do with the generative force of protracted wars (Thiranagama 2013). The war in Turkey has a life of its own, creating not only destruction but also subjects, social relations, values, resources, and loci of power. A permanent peace would undo the existing political structures and division of labor between the civilian government and the armed forces, and necessitate new discourses, political formations, and a new social contract within both communities. However, here I would like to discuss two critical events that overshadowed the peace process: the Gezi protests in 2013 and the Kobane protests in 2014.

The Gezi protests started in May 2013 as a reaction to the government's decision to carry out an urban redevelopment project in Taksim Gezi Park. The protests quickly evolved into a

massive uprising, (momentarily) unsettling existing political norms in western Turkey. This revolutionary moment led the Kurdish movement to imagine an alternative peace process in the streets at the expense of the formal peace process carried out with the government. A remarkable indication was the debut of the People's Democratic Party (HDP) in 2014 with a party logo with a tree, the symbol of Gezi protests. The HDP would be the first Kurdish party to focus on western Turkey, rather than the Kurdish region, also bringing the alliance with the Turkish left to the level of a coalition to initiate a collective struggle for radical democracy. Embracing the legacy of the Gezi movement, the HDP began fierce opposition to the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) and Prime Minister Erdoğan while carrying on peace negotiations with them. By this strategy, I would argue, the Kurdish movement sought to redefine its relationship with the Turkish population and perhaps to play an active role within the Turkish polity. What differentiated the HPD from other Kurdish parties was also its future-oriented outlook with a presumed coevality with the Turks while toning down the previous emphasis on state violence in the 1990s and the fact that Kurds and Turks have been subjected to different laws.

The Kurdish movement had initially hesitated to fully embrace the Gezi uprising, the timing of which coincided with the peace process. More to the point, the majority of protesters were secular and nationalist, many of whom criticized the government for negotiating with "terrorists." After all, it is no coincidence that one of the biggest uprisings in Turkish history transpired only two months after the declaration of peace talks. Since the beginning of guerrilla warfare in Turkey in the mid-1980s, the Turkish government used the discourse of "the enemy within" to contain their citizens and undercut possible opposition. Once the negotiations with the enemy within began, millions of Turks flocked to the streets to protest their government. The

Kurdish movement nonetheless found itself in a very challenging situation, for it was unable to ignore the uprising either.

On June 1 when the protesters took over Taksim square, a few BDP members came with party flags, which they passed around, and expressed solidarity with protesters at a press conference. They left shortly after the press conference, leaving the flags with protestors. As I was walking around with a BDP flag in my hand, I began to encounter hostile reactions from a group of nationalist protesters: "Why are these terrorists here?" Other protesters soothed them with the argument that their reactions would "give rise to provocations." A young man who appeared to be a Turkish leftist or anarchist approached me and asked, "Where are the others?" He was afraid that nationalist groups could take over the uprising if Kurds did not join en masse. A young Kurdish protester expressed exactly the same concern, and asked, "Where is the Party?" Another Kurdish protester warned me to not walk around with the flag, lest I be attacked by nationalists. After facing several aggressive reactions, a friend I ran into suggested we take the flag to the party building a few miles away. As we entered the party building, we saw party members were crammed in a tiny room, completely puzzled, watching a live broadcast from Taksim square. This revolution would be not televised, however. It would be "tweeted," according to graffiti in Taksim.

"Where are the Kurds?" Many people asked this question on Twitter, posting maps on which the cities where protests were taking place were marked, with all Kurdish cities unmarked. Another frequently posted news item suggested that water cannons in Diyarbakir were transferred to İstanbul to be used against the protesters. Ironically, Kurds have long been criticized for their "violent" resistance against the state. But now, the same Kurds were criticized for "collaborating" with the government—of course, the protesters emphasized that they were not against the state

but the government. As a matter of fact, there were numerous Kurdish protesters in Gezi park; they were just invisible to others. The only group recognized as Kurdish was a group of BDP members who came a few days later and created a space for themselves in the park with flags, placards, and a large picture of Abdullah Öcalan. They were able to do this because, by then, feminist, anarchist, and socialist groups dominated Gezi Park, while squares in other cities were mostly dominated by middle class-Turkish nationalists.

Nonetheless, there were many discussions about Kurds on social media, where some Kurdish and Turkish protesters responded to the popular question with another: "Where were the Turks in the 1990s when the state massacred the Kurds?" The individual stories of Kurds who were killed by the state appeared on social media, along with Kurdish accounts of the 1990s. The social media debates turned into rallies on July 28 when Medeni Yıldırım, an 18-year-old Kurdish man, was killed by police in the Kurdish town of Lice while protesting the construction of fortified military stations in the region. At these rallies, the Gezi protesters held Medeni's pictures and Turkish flags while chanting the slogans "We are all Kurdish" and "The killer state will be held accountable." This rhetorical gesture allowed for the imagination of an alternative model for peace as opposed to the official one from which the government began to derail by infiltrating into deserted guerrilla territories and building fortified military bases there, aiming to diminish the capacity for future guerrilla warfare.

In other words, whereas the peace process reinforced the governmental logic of securitization, the Gezi uprising seemed to have unsettled every single national symbol and political disposition--at least for the duration of the uprising. Despite its national scope, the uprising nearly died out after the police forcefully evacuated Gezi on June 20. Some protesters in major cities were nonetheless committed to sustain "the spirit of Gezi" by gathering in parks and

organizing forums. But only for a while. As the uprising quickly evaporated, national symbols and political dispositions slowly regained their original place. This was also when the HDP was established to substitute for the Gezi movement in the form of multi-cultural representational politics.

The second critical event was a Kurdish uprising built on a sustained youth movement, which is the focus of this dissertation. Gezi and other square mobilizations around the globe (such as those in Egypt, Greece, Hong Kong, Spain, the United States) unfolded in metropolitan centers to reclaim public space (Winegar 2016) or to ensure "being seen to speak" in public space (Morris 2013: 101). Kurdish youth politics was neighborhood-based, instead of square, and was much stronger in small towns than big cities. Besides, during exactly the time of Gezi protests, the youth politics was transforming into a self-defense force while also creating a new relationship with the larger Kurdish movement through the project of what was called democratic autonomy.

After the declaration of the peace process, the Kurdish movement embarked on constructing autonomy in the region, rather than waiting for the Turkish government to initiate legal reforms. The government's contradictory policies— starting the peace talks without the prospect of reaching a permanent peace agreement— are explained by a parallel development: the escalating political conflict with its former ally, preacher Fethullah Gülen, and the global Islamic movement he espouses. After the split was revealed to the public, the government accused Gülen's followers of creating a parallel state within a state, referring to their infiltration of state institutions, marked by their significant presence in the judiciary, military, police, and intelligence, among others. Anticipating a clash with "the parallel state," the government might have felt obliged to ally with the Kurdish movement and initiated the peace process. But in order

to sustain the peace process without making any real progress in terms of legislation, the government preferred to overlook as a compromise the Kurdish movement's activities in the region as long as those activities were hidden from the Turkish public (see Chapter 4). When interpreted through a retrospective lens, however, the lack of legislation made it easier for the government to step back from the peace process in the future with complete impunity, and criminalize and undermine forms of autonomy that had emerged outside the legal framework in the first place.

As for the Kurdish movement, it is likely that it believed the formation of autonomy on the ground would force the government to eventually provide a legal framework. The method of practice first, then legislation has thus far been a defining character of the relationship between the Kurdish movement and the Turkish government. One could also argue that the Kurdish movement instigated the process of establishing autonomy on the ground because it doubted the possibility of achieving the kind of autonomy it envisioned via formal negotiations. This is evident in the fact that in negotiating with the government, the movement could or would not directly voice their demand for autonomy but opted instead for vague terms like "empowering local governments." The gap between these two political registers—official and unofficial—is a testament to the incommensurability of the movement's political aspirations and its anticipation of what state concessions might be.

The Kurdish movement has developed the idea of democratic autonomy around the mid-2000s as a new political paradigm, leaving behind the initial goal of building a Kurdish nation-state (Üstündağ 2016). This model was heavily influenced by the work of American social theorist Murray Bookchin, whom Abdullah Öcalan read in prison. Öcalan reached out to Bookchin through intermediaries and discussed with him the model of democratic autonomy the

Kurdish movement sought to initiate. Democratic autonomy refers primarily to bottom-up governance in the region, enabling all social, political, and religious groups to "express themselves directly in all local decision-making processes" (Öcalan 2015: 26). This participatory system is based on the creation of neighborhood and city councils, which would collectively forge new institutions in the domains of law, education, economy, health, and self-defense.

This model was first launched on the ground in 2012 in Rojava, the Kurdish region of Syria. Its emergence was mostly catalyzed by the power vacuum which resulted from the eruption of the Syrian war and subsequent withdrawal of the Syrian regime's security forces from the region because it was unable to maintain multiple battlefronts. In a short period, Rojava residents under the leadership of YPG (*Yekîneyên Parastina Gel*, People's Defense Units) re-organized themselves in line with this new political paradigm and divided the region into the cantons of Afrin, Kobane, and Cizir. With its history of insurgency as well as its physical proximity to the canton of Cizir, Cizre looked as though it was part of Rojava. Note that the name Cizir is the Kurdish version of the Turkish word Cizre, and both originate in *Jazira*, the Arabic word for island. Located between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers, the city of Cizre and the canton of Cizir were part of the Jazira region of the Ottoman Empire for over six centuries (1299-1922), before they were separated by the border between Turkey and Syria. But in the current context, a constant flow and mutual exchange transpired between Cizir and Cizre, with people secretly crossing barbed wire fences in the dark of night for solidarity and to share experiences. As part of this flow, many of the youth who had joined the guerrillas during the period of my research ended up in Rojava fighting alongside the YPG.

The Kurdish movement than began experimenting with autonomy in Cizre and elsewhere in the Kurdish region, thanks to the peace process that eased the presence of the Turkish state in

the region. The formation of autonomy and the peace process went hand in hand (albeit uneasily) until the eruption of large-scale protests in October 2014 as a reaction to the Turkish government's refusal to let Kurdish forces in other cantons and Iraqi Kurdish peshmerga cross the Turkish border to join the resistance in Kobane. Anti-government protests turned into a massive, youth-led uprising across the Kurdish region and the Kurdish-populated districts of the western metropoles. Within only a few hours, they took over entire cities, including Cizre, and even highways in the region. The uprising caught the Kurdish movement and the Turkish government off guard. The latter was compelled to let Kurdish forces pass through the Turkish border. Unable even to comprehend the uprising, and responding to pressure from the government, the Kurdish movement urged the protesters to retreat.

While the uprising slowly died out in other places, Cizre youth took it to a new level, digging deep trenches at the entrances to their neighborhoods with the explicit goal of blocking the entry of the Turkish police and preventing arrest. Shortly afterward, the Kurdish movement adopted this improvised tactic into a strategy for the creation of stateless spaces in the region, urging youth in other Kurdish cities to follow suit by digging their own trenches. This move meant that the construction of autonomy in Cizre and elsewhere would now depend more on expanding stateless spaces through trenches than on negotiations with the state. What motivated the movement to take such a radical step was the latest uprising, which had revealed the power of streets and the mobilization capacity of the Kurdish population. As demonstrated in Chapter 5, the movement believed that a popular uprising across the region at the right time, and if appropriately guided, would compel Turkish forces to pull out of the region altogether. The Kurdish movement's strategy in the region was thus predicated on the resurrection of Kobane uprising, even though that uprising was mainly led by organized youth forces who were now

either behind the trenches defending their neighborhoods against the Turkish offensive or in Rojava fighting against the Islamic State.

Once the peace process collapsed, the government resorted to repressive policies and lethal violence to undercut political struggles of any kind both in the Kurdish region and western Turkey. It was thus nothing but the peace process itself that enabled the Kurdish movement to experiment with alternative solutions in the first place. Both the formation of autonomy and the struggle for radical democracy were predicated on a preexisting democratic landscape, which could only be sustained by the peace process.

I. Brief History of Kurdish Warscape

The conflict that the peace process was meant to resolve dates back to the fall of 1978, when a group of university students organized a secret meeting to design anti-colonial guerrilla warfare for an independent Kurdish state (Marcus 2009). Within 10 years, the PKK won widespread popular support, especially in rural areas of the Kurdish region where their guerrilla camps were located. The Turkish army failed to counter the rise of PKK because the army was formed in the first place to wage conventional wars—by then gendarmeries were entitled to sustain order in rural areas, mainly dealing with smugglers at the borders. To overcome this predicament, the Turkish state recruited local Kurds, usually from the tribal population, as village guards, or *korucu* in Turkish, thereby building an army at the battle site, without thoroughly changing the military structure (Jongerden 2007). State actors also formed a secret counterinsurgency unit within the Turkish gendarmerie, JITEM. A hybrid paramilitary organization comprised of gendarmerie commanders, specialized sergeants, village guards, and the repentant (former PKK guerrillas who turned into state witnesses), JITEM carried out

counterinsurgency tactics to eliminate PKK militants and civilian supporters (Goral at al. 2013; Can 2013). With the involvement of these paramilitary forces, the anti-colonial war against the Turkish state began to morph more and more into a Kurdish civil war, waged in tribal zones and the intimate space of kinship.

As yet another attempt to undercut Kurdish resistance, Turkish armed forces depopulated and destroyed rural areas, depriving guerrillas of their primary means of survival, including shelter, hiding places, intelligence, food, or new recruits. Between the late 1980s and the first half of the 1990s, they torched around three thousand villages, burnt forests, and imposed a ban on the use of meadows, consequently displacing more than two million Kurdish villagers and nomads to regional cities and the metropolitan centers of western Turkey where they became a source of cheap labor (Kurban and Yükseker 2007). This demographic change was informed by the historical strategy of "spacing people," dating back to the Ottoman Empire, as a means to control ethnic and religious minorities (Jongerden, 283). By forcing the Kurdish population into cities, the Turkish state aimed to assimilate Kurds, based on the modernist idea that Turkish national identity could flourish only in urban areas, as opposed to the predominantly Kurdish rural regions. However, the latest iteration of this strategy created unexpected consequences for the state.

For one thing, the demographic change was so dramatic that instead of being assimilated, displaced families Kurdified the city space itself not only within the regional cities where they quickly became the demographic majority but also along the peripheries of western cities. As these families faced economic exploitation, continuing state violence, and--especially in western cities--discrimination and racism, their attachment to the Kurdish struggle became solidified even further. Consequently, the forced migration allowed the PKK to gain a foothold in cities while

also forcing the state to change its strategy from "spacing people" to space-making; rather than settling and resettling insurgent populations, the state would now focus on regulating and dominating space itself. For instance, state actors remapped the spatial and administrative divisions in regional cities. In Turkey, the largest administrative unit is *il* (city), which consists of an urban center and several *ilçe* (towns) as well as villages. What differentiates a city from a town concerns a stronger presence of state officials, civil servants, and state institutions, including police, gendarmerie, and intelligence.

Until 1990, Cizre was a town in the city of Mardin and Şırnak in the city of Siirt. In tandem with the forced migration, state authorities turned Şırnak into a city and separated Cizre from Mardin, making it a town of Şırnak, even though the latter was (and still is) less populous than Cizre. According to its residents, Şırnak was chosen because it was a connecting point between guerrilla camps and urban areas, owing to its proximity to the mountains of Cudi and Gabar. Whereas cities like Şırnak morphed into "massive police stations," in the residents' words, towns like Cizre grew as bastions of the Kurdish struggle. There is undoubtedly a phenomenon of Kurdish *ilçe* on the Kurdish political landscape, seen as the lands of *serhildan* (uprising), and easily discernible from their uneventful Turkish counterparts.

Cizre was one of the regional cities that drew the largest number of displaced people. Located near Turkey' borders with Syria and Iraq, the town enabled newcomers to engage in smuggling. As mentioned earlier, some of the displaced families were villagers, known as *çiyayî* (off the mountain). Others were semi-nomadic tribal communities, namely *koçer* (nomads). *Koçer* families comprise the majority of a total of 120,000 people in Cizre, outnumbering 'the local' *bajarî* (of the city). This demographic composition made tribal culture predominant in the town to the extent that other residents, who were usually organized as large households, began

identifying themselves as tribes, self-applying, for instance, the terms *bajarî* and *çiyayî* as tribal names.

Cizre Map (https://www.worldatlas.com/eu/tr/73/where-is-cizre.html)

Until the late 1980s, *koçer* populations spent their winters in tents pitched nearby Cizre and moved up to the highlands in summer, where they socialized with guerillas. Some ended up joining them; the others returned to Cizre as usual, telling people about the guerrillas. By then, guerrillas were known as *yen derve* (outsiders) who would later be called *zaroken* (children), and finally *heval* (friend) (Çelik 2011). Many of my interlocutors who were young or adult in the 1980s affirmed that they heard about the PKK for the first time from *koçers*. From the late 1980s, PKK militants would settle into Cizre, primarily in the neighborhoods of Sur, Cudi, Yafes, and

Nur, which came into existence when *Koçer* and *çiyayî* populations built shanty houses on empty land on the hillsides surrounding the city.

With its city guerrillas, militia, and sympathizers, the PKK shortly became a hegemonic force in these neighborhoods, establishing its own courts, conducting trials and executions. As was the case in the mountains, the residents provided shelter, food, intelligence, and new recruits for the party. Back in rural areas, *Koçer* populations had been monopolizing their share of smuggling. Now they were dominating smuggling in the town, though the roads and tactics that they employed to smuggle goods had slightly changed. Despite these continuities in daily economic life, the urban space afforded the residents new ways of being political and new modes of relationship with the party.

After forging liberated zones in rural areas, the party began exercising the same scheme in urban areas, as a stepping stone for an independent Kurdistan. The strategy was to introduce an uprising culture to the city and thereby force Turkish security forces to withdraw—though the emerging riots were planned beforehand, organized on relevant dates to convey a specific message, and rigidly regulated by PKK militants. Accordingly, the party redressed religious and mythological characters, that is, transferring the figure of the martyr and that of Kawa (Newroz's protagonist) into the political scene, to set the stage for public gatherings in funerals and festivals, respectively (Aydın 2013). Residents were urged, for instance, to claim the corpses of guerillas killed by Turkish armed forces and attend their funerals en masse as a gesture of respect for their martyrs (Marcus, 141). Typically, thousands of unarmed people, usually women and children, began protesting on their way back from the funerals despite risking their lives to do so. The emergence of popular uprisings challenged existing gender- and age-based political hierarchies as women and youth became the prominent political actors while adult men were increasingly

marginalized. Furthermore, the funeral uprisings generated a necropolitical struggle between the PKK and the Turkish state in that the latter often refused to deliver the bodies of guerrillas to their families, escalating deadly protests even further (Ozsoy 2010). Newroz, observed on March 21 of the Kurdish calendar, was another precursor of upheavals, which were often met with lethal police violence, notably in 1992, when security forces fired at the rally, killing at least 22 (Marcus, 145).

In response to the urbanization of Kurdish resistance, the state began to instate the village guard system in urban centers as well, recruiting mostly the newly settled nomadic tribes. Thus, the settlement of nomadic tribes occurred in tandem with their integration into the village guard system.[1] As in rural areas, each tribe had its own village guard army, consisting of certain families or clans and under the command of a head-village guard, who was usually the leader of the respective tribe, while other tribesmen continued supporting the PKK. State authorities also formed new JITEM units to operate exclusively in urban centers, each of which was led by a gendarmerie commander and a tribal leader, and typically comprised of a group of village guards, special sergeants, and the repentant. By 1993, the state renewed its war machine with advanced military technology and intelligence, more numerous and better-equipped troops, as well as newly formed elite combat units and paramilitary organizations (Jongerden, 70). This renewal occurred within the framework of a new counterinsurgency doctrine, known as the "field domination doctrine," with the goal of establishing a territorial hegemony in Kurdish lands, both in urban and rural areas, via armed forces and military bases. Prior to this strategy, for instance,

[1] By virtue of their nomadic life, this population was previously not eligible for this occupation that required the protection of a given territory. Expect for a small number of non-tribal villagers, the village guards in rural areas had comprised mostly of sedentary tribes.

guerrillas maintained control over rural areas except when mobile Turkish forces entered a given territory to eliminate targets and withdraw afterward. This is why guerrillas could quickly reclaim even those areas in which the Turkish military conducted large-scale and relatively long-lasting incursions, for instance, the areas evacuated and burned during the forced migration.

The new war machine placed Cizre under a complete siege in 1993, forcing the militants either to go underground or retreat to rural areas. A small number of militants in town, recruited from local population, began to engage in armed propaganda, often to motivate local youth to join the guerrillas and consolidate its base. Now that the territorial hegemony of the Kurdish movement was undone, a JITEM unit, under the leadership of gendarmerie commander Cemal Temizöz and leader of the Tayan tribe Kamil Atak, began to exercise surgical operations against undercover militants and their supporters. Although the existence of JITEM had long been denied by state authorities, a plethora of leaked official documents, veteran confessions, victim testimonies, and court cases nonetheless revealed detailed information about the structure and activities of this unit. In his confessions to Turkish prosecutors, for instance, Atak's brother Mehmet Binzet stated that he was recruited in 1993 as a village guard, when he was 12 years old, like all men in Atak's extended family. He describes in detail how since then he stood guard with his weapon in their houses' basements, which they called "Sanctuaries," where torture and execution took place, and how dead bodies were made to disappear afterward (Temizoz ve Digerleri, 7). More information was revealed when his confessions led to a court case filed against JITEM members in 2009. It was revealed, for instance, that a classified protocol was issued to allow JITEM teams to operate in targeted areas without the intervention of police or other state forces. The protocol ordered the division of Cizre into two administrative units, albeit unofficially, each to be controlled by a different security apparatus. Accordingly, gendarmeries

would be entitled to maintain security in Yafes, Sur, Nur, and Cudi, neighborhoods inhabited exclusively by displaced populations and hence controlled by PKK militants. The rest of the city—home to Turkish civil servants, government officials, and local bajari—would fall under the jurisdiction of regular police officers.

The political landscape in Cizre underwent another dramatic transformation toward the end of the decade. Following Abdullah Ocalan's arrest in 1999, the PKK declared a unilateral ceasefire and changed its discourse from national emancipation to cultural recognition, from guerrilla resistance to liberal politics (Ozsoy 2010). A similar transformation occurred around the same period for Turkish political Islam as well. After the Islamist Virtue Party was closed down for violating secular norms in 2001, a liberal group within the party founded the Justice and Development Party (AKP), which became the new ruling party in Turkish politics in 2002. AKP chose a different path from the Virtue Party not only because it proposed a moderate form of political Islam, but also because it represented political Islam within a multicultural framework (Tuğal 2009). In that vein, the Kurdish and Islamist movements, which the Turkish Kemalist establishment viewed as major threats to the foundations of the republic, namely to national integrity and secularism, began to re-present themselves through a multiculturalist idiom.

The AKP's coming to power along with the acceptance of Turkey's candidacy to be a full member of the European Union at the Helsinki Summit in 1999, paved the way for a broader transformation in Turkey's political regime that terminated the reign of paramilitaries in Cizre and elsewhere along with enforced disappearances and systematic torture (Gunes 2015). The new political conjuncture brought about the emergence of multiple actors and political forms within the Kurdish movement, and inevitably new spatial practices. In the case of post-1990 Diyarbakir, for instance, Zeynep Gambetti suggests that this major Kurdish city transformed from a war zone

into “a paradise for civil society activists,” with the formation of a Kurdified public space. For her, the Kurdified public space came into existence owing to the institutionalization of the Kurdish movement (exemplified by the Kurdish metropolitan municipality), events like Newroz celebrations, and NGO and civic activities (Gambetti 2005: 42).

I would suggest that the transformation of cityscapes more broadly had also to do with the Kurdish youth’s street politics, which is the main focus of this dissertation. This political movement was generated by Kurdish youth (second generation members of displaced families) partly as a reaction to the dominance of civic and representational politics within the Kurdish movement (Darıcı 2016). This dominance stemmed from a profound crisis within the PKK in that the renunciation of national liberation brought the party almost to the point of fragmentation. In the absence of Ocalan, the party was unable to lay out a new political strategy other than an ambiguous discourse of democratization. More to the point, the Turkish government had disavowed the unilateral ceasefire and continued attacking the PKK, which ultimately called off the ceasefire. Amid this crisis, street politics appealed to the alienated working-class Kurdish youth who were known by then as “stone-throwing children” (Darıcı 2013). In Cizre, the youth’s routinized street protests, along with the arrival of guerrillas after the ceasefire ended, made the neighborhoods increasingly inaccessible to state actors. The youth permanently blocked their entry when they dug trenches at the entrances to their neighborhoods in a process of constructing autonomy.

II. Analytic Frame

This dissertation works through the category of youth to examine insurrectionary politics in Cizre. *Ciwan* in Kurdish and *gençlik* in Turkish, the category of youth first came to associate

street politics and then with militarized self-defense practices, both from the point of view of political actors themselves and the Kurdish community more broadly. I deploy this category not only to understand the formation of youth through a symbiotic relationship to these forms of political struggles. I use the category of youth to also examine the question of intricate relationships between politics, temporality, and kinship.

The study of youth became central to anthropological inquiry after the 1990s (Durham 2004). Until then anthropologists employed "youth" (often used interchangeably with the term "childhood") to explore the psychological notion of cognitive development (Mead 1928; Herdt and Leavitt 1998; Schlegel and Barry 1998), the structure of family, rites of passage, and kinship (Evans-Pritchard 1940; Richards 1956; Fortes 1984). Informed by the cultural turn and postcolonial critiques, as well as the subsequent marginalization of kinship studies within the discipline of anthropology, anthropologists now approached "youth" (like gender) as a distinct category to be studied often beyond the boundaries of the family (Clarke 2009), and usually around the framework of individual agency. Today, it is now almost commonsensical within anthropology (and other social sciences) to view youth as a historically and culturally constructed—and thus relational—category, and as a political subjectivity (Diouf 2003; Honwana 2011; Bolten 2012; Singerman 2013).

While agreeing with the view of "youth" as a distinct social category and a historical construct, I suggest that rites of passage remain central to the formation of the category of youth in Cizre, even when these life-cycle rituals are not necessarily confined to the realm of kinship. My discussion of youth in what follows is grounded mainly on two marked events: namely, joining the guerrillas and getting married. These two events often unfold in opposition to one another, signifying a competitive relationship between family structure and domestic

reproduction, on one hand, and political structures and political reproduction, on the other. As a socially recognized rite of passage, the Kurdish movement encourages joining the guerrillas primarily to contain and channel young people's revolutionary potential, whereas the family encourages youths to marry in order to place them within the normative life-cycle and drag them away from potentially lethal political actions. This is one reason why for Kurdish youths being political was predicated on the refusal of adulthood and of mandatory reproductivity associated with adulthood. I propose an evental and non-continuous conception of maturation and an idea of youth based on particular inversions of temporality.

The inversion of temporality is an indication of the transgressive and world-creating quality of play, a notion that was deeply embedded in Kurdish youth politics. The notion of play is traceable in the game-like structure of street protests in that they unfolded spatially and temporally separated from ordinary life and contained non-utilitarian pleasure (Huizinga 1955). I suggest that the cultivation of a set of internal laws and logic akin to gaming had to do, in part, with the occurrence of street protests on almost a daily basis. This reiterative mode not only allowed the youth to come up with a script to design protest. It also made possible for the protesters to develop, multiply, and sophisticate tactics to conceal their identities from state surveillance and hence avoid incarceration. I document how the simulating and dissimulating practices in protest, in fact, evolved into elaborate theatrical performances.

I view "play" as that which subverts the relationship between signifier and signified in social action, thereby creating new forms and norms of communication. Therefore, play is not a mere action, but a frame within which words, actions, and objects come to stand for something that they normally do not outside of that frame. "This is play" means "these actions in which we now engage do not denote what those actions for which they stand would denote" (Bateson 1972:

317). I suggest that this play-mode generated a life-world for Kurdish protesters beyond the confines of daily life, one that forged its own forged a political spectacle and a particular audience.

Another intersection that informs the dissertation is thus one between spatiality and publicness. I describe routinized street protests that spread throughout the entire town while other residents watched them from street corners, half-open shop store doors, and the windows of houses. Protesters occasionally videotaped these protests and posted them on social media to be emulated by other protesters across the Kurdish region. Indeed, the police too videotaped the demonstrations from armored vehicles and CCTV cameras in order to identify protesters, a tactic to which the protesters responded with the aforementioned sophisticated practices of concealment.

The dissertation explores how Kurdish youth transcended these structured interactions with the police by "playing" with the entire town when they began digging trenches with the dream of autonomy.[2] I suggest that the digging of trenches confined the youth (quite literally) to their neighborhoods where they forged a mimetic quasi-state. Instead of covering their bodies, the youth began to camouflage entire neighborhoods using spatial tactics such as erecting massive barricades and draping enormous curtains across the streets. Inside this entrenched and entirely concealed autonomous zone quasi-state, the youth acted as a kind of Kurdish police force, making the audience of disappearing street protests the subjects of disciplinary and regulatory

[2] If "play" is a form of sign interpretation, "game" is a type of structured interaction or social organization in which participants reorganize their lives in a different manner from what they consider their everyday lives. This means that the difference between play and game is one of scale: while play is an open-ended phoneme with a world-making quality, the latter is temporally and spatially finite and bounded by rules.

practices initiated in the name of self-governance. I demonstrate that the transgression of game as such faced a similarly unbounded, totalizing—but completely lethal—urban warfare that the Turkish state initiated to obliterate the town and any vestige of its insurgent youth.

This warscape cultivated its own audience. Both Turks and Kurds across the country watched mainstream TV channels broadcasting war images taken by drones. They followed the war via the personal social media accounts of Turkish security forces who posted graphic images of destruction and pictures of racist graffiti they painted on the walls of residential houses in the now occupied quasi-state. Turkish soldiers habitually posted their own pictures taken in the bedrooms of deserted houses, evidencing a total occupation. Meanwhile, non-combatant residents resorted to the same uses of social media, draining their cell phone batteries in order to reveal the brutality of the state and to prove their own civilian status. Yet state actors designated all residents who "refused" to leave their neighborhoods as combatants. In the aftermath of the war, they revised this categorization by presenting the dead as combatants and the survivors as civilians.

III. On Methodology

I conducted field research at a time when the Kurdish movement embarked on experimenting with self-governance in several towns across the region, albeit in varied degrees and forms. A bastion of Kurdish struggle, Cizre was one of the three pilot sites in which autonomy was being constructed in a systematic way. Doing research in this peculiar context allowed me to observe on the ground the emergence of autonomous institutions replacing those of the state and the evolvement of youth movement into self-defense forces of the unfolding

autonomy. But it was also equally challenging to do research in this period because the project of autonomy brought Cizre under the spotlight of both the Turkish state and the Kurdish movement.

Despite carefully scrutinizing the town, as mentioned earlier, state authorities did not in fact interfere much the construction of autonomy insofar it was done secretly. On the basis of this unspoken agreement with the government, the Kurdish movement seemed to have refrained to some degree from publicizing this political project. However, as is the case for other criminalized and legally prohibited struggles around the world, Kurdish politics is saturated with public secrecy, and that secrecy is supplemented with and reinforced by public revelation. On the one hand, the movement resorted to secrecy to maintain the peace process and forge international support. Secrecy was also a means for the movement to protect itself from state forces, given that the project of autonomy transpired beyond the legal framework and under the gaze of the state through surveillance technology as well as government spies who were believed to have infiltrated the emerging self-governance institutions. On the other hand, the movement had to reveal in part what was happening in Cizre in order to mobilize Kurdish youths and disseminate the dream of autonomy across the region. A telling example of this was the highly publicized ceremony marking the inauguration of armed self-defense units (YDG-H) in Cizre (see Chapter 5).

The intentional opacity built around the project of autonomy has inevitably manifested itself in the form and content of my field research. I was obliged to know how to know what was askable, writable, and recordable about a political project that was already scandalously visible in media and whose fundamental objective was to transgress the distinction between legality and illegality. My solution to do research while protecting my interlocutors was to act as though this ambiguity did not exist. I refrained, for instance, from voice-recording and even note-taking

about certain issues regardless of whether they were already publicly disclosed or not. Secrecy was not only a matter of research ethics or political strategy but something that made and unmade social relations. One's revelation of a secret to a friend was a gesture of trust. But trust was a slippery notion; it was never devoid of suspicion, of the risk of future betrayal, given that many youths had been arrested based on statements that their friends gave under torture. The revelation of a secret was thus more about self-induced vulnerability as condition of friendship and of my relationship to interlocutors.

My interlocutors were male and female youth, usually between 10 and 25 years of age, who engaged in youth politics. In order to observe how youth inhabited different spaces, I frequently visited them at their homes and spent leisure time with them in the streets and tea houses where they most often socialized with their friends. However, these spaces did not allow me to reach youths below 15 years of age. I could interact with them in the streets, but that was not enough for me to get to know them. During my home visits, they were either very quiet or simply forced to wait in other rooms, as their parents wanted to make sure that they did not bother the guests. As for older youths, they were also quiet and often busy with serving the guests. I could only talk to their parents and other older members of their extended families, which enabled me to learn a great deal about the 1990s. In order to spend more time with younger youths, those who were very active in street politics, I decided to teach in a middle school as a volunteer English instructor.

I began teaching in a middle school that was famous for its politicized students. The school seemed more like a prison than a place of learning, with its high walls and barbed wire. When I entered the schoolyard, the first thing that attracted my attention were two flagstaffs without flags, and between them, a headless Ataturk statue, obviously destroyed by students. Inside, the building

was no different: there were no Turkish flags, Ataturk posters, or any of the signs of Turkish nationalism common in schools in other parts of the country. The school looked like an abandoned place, with broken windows and doors, and garbage strewn everywhere. All the walls and desks were full of writing and slogans about, for example, the murder of guerillas, guerillas' counter-attacks on the Turkish military, the war in Rojava, and other similar events. I was struck most when I saw some students coming to school in guerrilla uniforms, containing even the emblem of HPG (Hêzên Parastina Gel or Peoples' Defense Forces, PKK's military wing).[3] Every morning, my students would come and tell me about incidents that happened in their neighborhoods, complete with their commentary on them.

While in my first year, I navigated between different spaces to interact with different groups of youths. But these spatial configurations altered in the second year of my research, after trench-digging became the basis of new form of resistance. In this new framework, youths from all age began to spend most of their time in the streets and around the trenches. In the evening, they used to make a fire in their streets, sitting around it for hours to hang out with friends, listen to music, talk about most recent political incidents in Cizre or elsewhere, and more importantly, stand guard in case of incursion attempts by the Turkish armed forces. After midnight, they continued this ritual around the tents pitched in certain locations within the entrenched zone, with the explicit purpose of standing guard against incursion attempts. These arrangements made my research much easier as I could find and talk to all those who involved in youth politics as well as guerrillas and other political figures in the town. But for the digging of trenches increasingly militarized youth politics and obstructed the space for street politics, my students and other

[3] A local tailor made these uniforms. Cizre residents, especially youth, would wear them in Newroz or weddings.

younger youths were no longer active in politics, although they still gathered around the tents every single night as though they still were.

IV. The Structure of the Dissertation

This dissertation consists of four main chapters. Chapter 2, "Growing up in Cizre," provides a glimpse of everyday life in Cizre and how it informs radical youth politics. It focuses on the notion of growing up and examines how the youth's coming of age constituted a prominent site of intervention in the realms of kinship, politics, and law, intending to contain, redirect, or terminate youth politics. I suggest that in this context maturation is not a transition but a rupture, not a process but an event that requires an intervention, namely joining the guerrillas or marriage. This chapter, therefore, addresses the tensions between the reproduction of lineage and the making of a political collectivity. It also investigates how the Turkish state appears as yet another social actor with the capacity to alter normative life stages by placing underage Kurdish youth in legal limbo.

Chapter 3, "Politics as Play: Concealment, the Street, and the Self," focuses on what actually happens at protests--observing how Kurdish youth prepared for protests by covering their bodies and turning everyday objects into weapons, how they gathered and positioned themselves in the streets, moved their bodies, interacted with fellow protesters, and clashed with the police, who were always protected inside their armored vehicles. I ask how the youth, through street protest, incorporated improvised theatrical performances into their repertoire of political action as a practice of concealment. I argue that iterative performances in protest generated a space of freedom: a fleeting play-world in which neither the strictures of everyday life nor the repression of the state remained insurmountable.

Chapter 4, "Down in the Trenches," investigates the transformation of youth politics from deploying street protests to self-defense practices, following the digging of trenches that gave the youth a quasi-state of their own with demarcated borders. It suggests that the trenches, by virtue of their material properties, isolated and cut off certain flows of power and people while also forcing the youth to cultivate a new spatial, material, and corporeal habitus in order to engage in less familiar methods of self-defense. I show, for instance, how they had to learn to handle a gun, dig a trench, and use their bodies around the trenches while blocking the endless incursion attempts of the Turkish police. I also document the security system the youth developed within their (en)trenched territory by setting up checkpoints, performing ID checks, establishing a mechanism of punishment, and even creating their own make-shift prisons. I argue that after the digging of trenches, many youths cut off all relationships to family, school, and work, and proclaimed themselves to be a kind of Kurdish police force, simultaneously fighting and mimicking their Turkish counterpart.

Chapter 5, "Urban Warfare: The Reoccupation of Cizre," chronicles the process of urban warfare that the Turkish state instigated in the fall of 2015 in order to reinstate its demographic and territorial sovereignty over Cizre. This chapter suggests that the Turkish state waged full-fledged warfare rather than conducting surgical operations because it was unable to draw a line between civilians and combatants. As such, this chapter demonstrates the mechanisms by which the categories of civilian and combatant became slippery and transitive, both for Cizre residents and the Turkish armed forces. I suggest that state actors created the categories of civilian and combatant after the inception of warfare and based each term on whether residents accepted or refused to leave their neighborhoods. In this vein, they viewed the explosive-laden trenches as weapons and all those who inhabited the spaces behind them as combatants. This chapter

demonstrates that these categories remained ambiguous and unstable throughout the war and that the state stabilized them once the war ended. I suggest that the final line was between the dead and the living because the state designated those who were killed as combatants and those who survived as civilians.

Chapter 1: Growing up in Cizre

In September 2014, the Kurdish Democratic Regions Party (DBP) organized a three-day festival on Mount Gabar dubbed "Return to the Village." A three-hour drive from Cizre, this mountain has been a critical base for the PKK since the 1980s, harboring one of its largest guerilla camps. Mount Gabar was once home to many families who now live in Cizre and nearby cities; Turkish security forces displaced them from the mountain in order to curtail the mass support for the PKK and its anti-colonial guerrilla resistance in the rural areas. This festival came as an opportunity for displaced families to visit their villages for the first time after decades away as well as to spend time with guerrillas and friends in a space inaccessible to the Turkish state.

I drove up to Mount Gabar for this festival in the back of a truck, along with my interlocutor Ahmet and his extended family. We drove through a part of the mountain that the Turkish military had declared off-limits for civilians. Meanwhile, Ahmet was telling me what he would do if we were stopped and interrogated: "I will say I am visiting my village. I will not even show them my ID." Every few minutes, a military vehicle would drive by us; and each time Ahmet's seven-year-old nephew, Baran, forgetting that he was in the truck, would hastily stand up and look around for a stone to pick up, before realizing where he was and sitting down again. "He is conditioned to throw stones at military vehicles whenever he sees them," Ahmet proudly commented, "he began joining street protests." As we passed the last army post, the asphalt road on which we were driving turned first into muddy dirt and then into stony fields. This infrastructural deterioration indicated that we were entering guerilla territory, for while state

authorities had attempted to build roads in order to penetrate into guerrilla territory, guerrillas restricted this incursion by attacking the construction sites. Yet the contemporaneous peace process seemed to have alleviated this tension regarding the infrastructure, as a dirt road had been dug a few weeks before the festival by the Kurdish-led municipality of Cizre itself. As I surveyed the changing landscape, I chatted with Şilan, Baran's twelve-year-old sister, who was a seventh grader in the middle school where I would soon begin teaching. She first appeared to be shy and perhaps a bit sad, but her expression noticeably changed after we encountered a group of guerrillas who were waiting to welcome the festival participants. Şilan cheerfully stood up, took off her red, green and yellow scarf (colors of the Kurdish flag), and waved it to salute them.

The festival's location was significant. It was a vast plain near the ruins of Basret, a village that had been burnt during the years of forced migration. I recalled an interlocutor who had described this village to me, though he himself was not sure whether what he recounted was based on his childhood memories or stories told by his parents. Across from the village stood a guerrilla cemetery that was still under construction. The remains of guerrillas who had been buried in various locations since the 1980s were now being exhumed for reburial in this cemetery. There was a guerrilla camp nearby, but the festival participants were not allowed to enter that area for security reasons. The daily life of the guerillas was nonetheless etched on the entire landscape, which gave festival participants a glimpse of the more mundane aspects of their world. I noticed, for instance, firepits, pans, teapots, and tobacco all around as well as bags of bread hung on trees and vegetables stored in a river to be kept fresh and safe from animals.

Large tents had been built around the festival area to be used by the thousands of expected participants. A stage had been erected in the middle of the festival area where the participants gathered at sunset to listen to stirring political speeches alternating with live Kurdish music.

Every night a group of guerrillas would burst into sight on the horizon and march in a line, as in official military ceremonies, to the crowds' enthusiastic applause. The spectators would cheer even more when another guerrilla group fired red tracer bullets into the air from within the adjacent forests, lighting up the dark sky like fireworks. Meanwhile, small groups of people were standing in certain spots in the festival area, waiting to be reunited with their family members who had joined the guerrillas. These reunions were always bittersweet because all knew they would inevitably end in separation again.

On the second day, I came across several parents who were desperately looking for their children who had just disappeared. As this news circulated, we realized that Şilan was also missing. Ahmet recalled seeing her a few times talking to guerrillas. "She must have joined the guerrillas," he concluded. For her family, Şilan's disappearance was both shocking yet expected. Lokman, her father, went to speak with the guerrillas to determine his daughter's whereabouts and confirmed that she had joined them that morning. As he recounted to us afterward, Lokman requested that the guerrillas send Şilan back on the grounds that she was too immature to be a guerrilla. The guerrillas rejected this request, stating that she had joined them of her own free will. They could not ask her to leave, the guerrillas asserted unless she wanted to do so. Unable to challenge this argument, he demanded a private conversation with Şilan, hoping that he could convince her to come back with him. Şilan appeared in a guerrilla uniform shortly thereafter. She listened to her father silently without making eye contact and then said that she wanted to stay with the guerrillas. We returned to Cizre without Şilan. For her and the many other youths whom we left behind, joining the guerrillas indicated a political coming of age and a sharp departure from ordinary life.

This chapter attempts to explore Kurdish youth politics through the notion of maturation. I argue that growing up in Cizre does not unfold exclusively through the passage of time or maturation of the body. It is experienced not as a transition but a rupture, not as a process but an event that requires an intervention. As a socially recognized rite of passage, the Kurdish movement mediates joining the guerrillas primarily to contain and redirect the youth's revolutionary potential. Yet this path to maturation is often derailed by the path of marriage, as the family typically employs the latter to place the youth within the normative life-cycle and thereby extract them from potentially lethal politics, be it street politics or guerrilla struggle.

Despite the escalating conflict with the PKK, however, many of the families themselves support the Kurdish movement, which paves the way for the politicization of the youth in the first place. More precisely, this is not a story of the abduction of underage children by an armed organization. Recognizing the impossibility of bringing their children back from the guerilla camp, parents often find no option other than becoming engaged even more actively with Kurdish politics. Another reason for this tendency is the economic and political benefits that families obtain for having members in the guerrilla camp, owing to the institutionalization of the Kurdish movement, particularly since the 2000s. I thus argue that once the youth join the guerrillas, they constitute an alliance as well as a conflict between the family and the Kurdish movement, consequently blurring the line between the reproduction of lineage and that of political collectivity.

In this chapter, I also investigate how the Turkish state appears as yet another social actor that alters normative life stages, albeit in the legal realm, intending to terminate youth politics, which it views as a breeding ground for guerillas and a significant source of urban disorder. I demonstrate this intervention by examining a counter-terrorism law that modified the legal

definition of childhood in ways that exclude underage Kurdish protesters and thus allowed Turkish courts to prosecute them as adults and impose sentences up to 35 years. Rather than mediating the youth's coming of age, I argue that the state has strategically placed them in a legal limbo where they were considered neither children nor adults.

I. Becoming Youth

The word *gençlik* had an affective resonance in Cizre; its simple utterance generated anxiety in the listener. *Gençlik* stood for "youth" in Turkish, a word that locals used exclusively even in conversations in Kurdish, displacing its Kurdish version *ciwan*. It was a challenge for me, especially in the first days of my fieldwork, to tell curious locals what my research was about. Initially, I had a generic answer: "It is about youth." Hearing the word "youth," some interlocutors responded with a meaningful smile followed by an expression of sympathy and pity: "May God help you." In their point of view, youth in Cizre were ignorant, irrational, and violent to the point of unintelligibility; how could I think that I could research the youth when it was impossible to even have an intelligible conversation with them? Others warned me not to use this word again if I did not want to be misunderstood. They even came up with alternative formulations that I could employ while avoiding that word: "I am researching Cizre's culture and traditions," or "I am researching individuals between 10 and 30 years of age." The displacement of youth by "individuals" in the latter reveals by concealing what it actually indexes in public imaginaries. Before approaching youth as an ethnographic category, I shall look at its historical formation vis-à-vis the metamorphosis of the Kurdish movement at large.

The scholarly literature on Kurdish politics has not taken youth as a category to be theorized (Watts 2010; Romano 2006; Marcus 2009), despite youth's pioneering role within the

Kurdish movement since its debut. As mentioned earlier, the PKK itself was established in 1978 by a group of university students who had separated themselves from the (Turkish) student movements and relocated to rural Kurdistan to initiate an anti-colonial resistance against the Turkish state. Even though the PKK morphed into a mass movement after the inception of guerrilla war in 1984 (Gunes 2015), it was still predominantly the youth who shouldered the armed struggle. Since the early 1990s, Kurdish youth also figured in the emergent *serhildan* or popular uprising through which the PKK envisioned forging liberated zones in urban areas, as a stepping stone for an independent Kurdistan. Such revolts were thus planned beforehand, organized on relevant dates to transmit a specific message, and strictly regulated by PKK militants.

Around the same time, the PKK encouraged the formation of a youth movement that would facilitate the recruitment of urban young people. At that time, this movement was associated predominantly with students as it operated on behalf of the PKK in middle schools, high schools, and universities. In a place like Cizre, where it was rare for girls to go to school, the youth movement predominately targeted boys.[4] Derya, one of the very few girls within the first generation of the youth movement, recounted that a PKK member was always present in their meetings to direct them. She also reflected on how being linked with the PKK made her life easier as a young woman within a conservative community: "People respected me, you know. I

[4] Similarly, it was mostly boys who joined the guerrillas. This is due in part to the Compulsory Guerrilla System that the PKK initiated in 1989 according to which a young male member of each Kurdish family in the region, regardless of whether he was married or unmarried, was obliged, if not forced, to join the guerrillas. This system aimed at both increasing the number of guerrillas, and preventing Kurdish youth from carrying out compulsory military service in the Turkish army (Romano 2006).

could go anywhere alone, day and night. Even when I walked in the streets with boys, they never gossiped about me. They thought I would never get married."

Derya was exceptional in terms of her background as well. She had been born and raised in Cizre, while the majority of politically active youths had moved to the city from rural areas as a result of forced migration. Thus, in addition to continuing state violence, the mobilization of Kurdish youth was also driven by the process of forced migration that turned them into a source of cheap labor in the informal economy at a young age.[5]

In the early 2000s, a new generation of youth, who were born into urban spaces and thus inhabited that space in a different manner, began to organize a novel form of street protest on a daily basis, thereby transforming the streets into a political space. Unlike the previous protests that were heavily structured by PKK militants, the new protests would typically start with a few young people who would then be joined by others, both boys and girls, students and non-students. Through these protests, I argue, Kurdish youth generated a political space of their own, one that would increasingly dominate urban Kurdish politics as a whole while also sustaining a semi-autonomous structure, despite the PKK's perpetual interventions to regulate it. This

[5] It was nonetheless easier for the youth to integrate economically and politically into a relatively small, politically radical, and homogeneously Kurdish populated city like Cizre, not to mention that the displaced constituted more than half of the total population in the city. The displaced, including the youth, increasingly became involved in smuggling between Turkish and Iraqi border areas. A common practice for smugglers, among others, is to cross the official borders on a daily basis via minibuses that have secret compartments concealing goods such as tea, sugar, cigarette, alcohol, and gas, yet only appearing to carry passengers. As it is not always easy to find real passengers, smugglers typically hire four to five employees whose job is simply to sit in the minibus and occupy a passenger seat as they cross the border in exchange for a modest daily salary. Interestingly enough, the fake passenger refers to himself and is referred to by others, as an "ant" (*karınca*). In response to my question about why they use this appellation, one such fake passenger replied: "You know ants, they go back and forth all the time and actually do nothing. We are like them, we go back and forth between Turkey and Iraq but do nothing." The term "ant" is so common in Cizre that one can hear somebody saying "I want to be an ant" or "I am looking for a job as an ant."

political mode was partly informed by the organization of space: As the protests took place in the streets where the youth already spent much of their time, anyone who happened to be on the street when a protest began automatically found themselves to be part of the protest without having decided in advance whether or not to participate. This ambiguity that stemmed from the lack of a formal structure and membership system not only allowed for the dramatic rise of Kurdish youth politics but also made it difficult both for the PKK to regulate the process and for the state to identify the protesters.

Until around 2013—when I began my fieldwork— the street protesters were dubbed *çocuk*, the Turkish word for child. Often used in the plural, *çocuklar* (children), this term had become the signifier for street protesters, with various social actors employing it for different political ends. Human rights activists used it to represent the protesters as innocent non-agents in order to protect them from police brutality. Kurdish politicians used this term to pathologize the protesters and banish them from the realm of the political. In their point of view, the politicization of children through violent street protests was a potent sign of trauma originating in the state violence of the 1990s. This formulation represented Kurdish children as both the embodiment of a violent past and the precursor of an equally violent future. Kurdish politicians employed this discourse of "traumatized children" as a tool to launch negotiations with the state for the resolution of the so-called Kurdish question. The message was clear: the state needed to negotiate with rational adults if they wanted to avoid a dark future characterized by violent children.

Turkish mainstream media similarly employed the term *çocuklar*, and always with the prefix *taş atan* (stone-throwing), portraying the protesters as non-agents and yet violent. This representation allowed mainstream media to simultaneously accuse Kurdish adults of using and

abusing children for their political agenda and to legitimize state violence unleashed on underage protesters (Darıcı 2013). A massive revolt that broke out in the city of Diyarbakir in 2006 provided a telling example of this hypocritical stance. In the wake of this revolt during which the police killed ten protesters (Ozsoy 2010), the newspaper *Radikal,* then the most liberal mainstream newspaper in the country, published the headline "Spare the Children, Gentlemen." Note that "Gentlemen" here did not reference the Turkish police but Kurdish adults (Radikal March 7, 2006).

This stance aligned with that of the government. One year after this revolt, the government passed an Anti-Terror Law that allowed legal authorities not only to punish the parents who supposedly sent their children to protests but also to prosecute these same children as adults. That is, the parents were being penalized because the protestors were children, yet the demonstrators were not being prosecuted as children. Ironically, following the United Nations conventions, the government passed the Child Protection Law in 2005 to initiate special judicial processes to protect children from crime and the detrimental effects of adult institutional punishment (Babül 2017). The law defined children as human beings below the age of eighteen. They were further placed in two categories, namely children in need of protection and children pushed to crime by adults (ibid). The anti-terror law, however, created a third category of children for those allegedly involved in terrorism by defining the act of stone throwing in protests as armed resistance to security forces. This law sought to render protesters between twelve and eighteen years of age ineligible to benefit from the Child Protection Law, allowing the Turkish courts to impose sentences of up to 35 years and incarcerate them in adult prisons. While the state altered normative life stages by creating a new legal category that placed protesters in a legal limbo in which they are neither children nor adults, the protesters themselves, including those in

their twenties, re-appropriated the term “children”— again not its Kurdish version *zarok* but the Turkish version *çocuk*— as a signifier of radical politics (Darici 2013).

An incident I observed in 2010 in the Kurdish city of Diyarbakir demonstrates this phenomenon well. A young European woman named Julie came to the city to make observations about the stone throwing children on behalf of an international NGO focusing on children's rights. After she met several local NGOs, she decided to organize a meeting with the politically active children in order to hear what they had to say about themselves. Julie asked me to join the meeting to translate for them. In the meeting room, Julie was waiting for little children to come, but those who entered to the room were mostly in their early twenties. Her disappointment was replaced by a sense of shock when those older youths referred to themselves as children as they spoke in the meeting. "Why do they call themselves children, some of them are even older than me," she whispered to me. I imagine that those who helped organize the meeting intentionally had invited older protesters to participate because they thought that they would have more to say, even though the majority of protesters could be legally defined as children.

Notwithstanding the gradual displacement of the term *çocuk* by *gençlik*, this terminological move did not denote a process of maturation but a shift in political affiliation— *gençlik* was similarly conceived as a category in opposition to adulthood. The shift to *gençlik* had to do with the formation of a youth organization in 2013, named initially in Turkish *Yurtsever Devrimci Gençlik Hareketi* (YDG-H), or the Revolutionary Patriotic Youth Movement. The inception of YDG-H occurred in tandem with the Kurdish movement’s new strategy of democratic self-governance. Encouraging youth to organize under YDG-H, the Kurdish movement sought to transform street protesters into self-defense units on the path to establishing self-governance in Cizre and several other Kurdish cities. Thus, the preference of the term

“youth” over “child” signaled the beginning of a new relationship between street protesters and the Kurdish movement at the expense of the protesters autonomous position. Yet this convergence occurred when the Kurdish movement changed its strategy once again from recognition to autonomy, which resonated well with the youth's political engagement. And with this alliance, the Kurdish movement began to represent the youth as heroic revolutionaries fighting to construct Kurdish self-governance, as opposed to their previous representation of "the traumatized children" as the precursor of a dark future.

It was literally the G (*Gençlik* or Youth) of YDG-H that became the master identifier for street protesters, including those as young as ten. The residents of Cizre used this word in conversations in Kurdish and Turkish in the exact grammatical form as in the title of YDG-H, that is the plural noun *gençlik* even when the sentence structure needed the singular form *genç*, as in the frequently used phrase *gençlik olmak* (becoming youth) that stands for joining the street politics. A 9-year-old boy, for instance, used the following expression (in Kurdish) to remark that his 12-year-old brother had joined the YDG-H: *Birayê min gençlik bû* (My brother became youth). Another exemplary expression (in Turkish) belongs to a middle-aged woman after her YDG-H affiliated son was killed by the police: *Oğlum ya gençlik olacaktı ya da gerillaya katılacaktı* (My son was either going to become a youth or join the guerrillas). By this, she meant that she knew that her son, like the majority of Cizre youth, would either join the YDG-H or the PKK.

Recalling that the previous term *çocuklar* was always employed in the plural form to indicate collectivity, the insistence on the noun form for *gençlik* seems to shift the stress from a group of individual actors to the youth as a cohesive group. It is this affiliation that determines who is youth and who is not. Zehra (21) explains why she did not consider herself “youth”: “I

feel close to the women's movement. I don't like youth politics. You know, the youth never read books. They don't know about the PKK's ideology. They do fight the police every day, but they don't really know what they are fighting for."

In Zehra's imaginary, the association between youth and the YDG-H becomes pronounced when she reflects on the former vis-à-vis the women's movement. She, like many others (both male and female), did not consider herself "youth" precisely because she was not involved in the street politics associated with the YDG-H, even though the youth organization involved many women of her age. This is precisely why my friends warned me not to use the word "youth" in the first place, claiming that my project would sound too political and thus suspicious in the eyes of the locals and the state.

If the notion of youth is constituted by political affiliation, then, how do the youth experience their maturation? For youth socialized through street politics, growing up was not something observable and recognizable, at least not as self-knowledge on the level of consciousness (see Chapter 3). What shapes the temporality of youth here is the immediacy of the present moment in street protests wherein the youth are aware that their death could be imminent, since police routinely use firearms with live ammunition to "disperse" protesters. In one protester's terms, "there is no tomorrow" for them, quite literally. "There is no tomorrow" also signifies their claim on the notion of youth, and hence on radical politics, a phenomenon they often expressed with the motto "we started young, we will finish young."

The youth often expressed that they noticed their growing age when they attended others' weddings. Metin (16), for instance, told me how he felt during the wedding of his friend a few days before: "Then I said to myself, I could also marry if I wanted." It is thus through the analogy drawn with a second person of the same age in the context of a rite of passage set around the

kinship system that the youth perceive their own maturation. And it is this intimate connection between marriage and growing up that makes marriage the primary strategy for families to pull the youth out of street politics as well as prevent them from joining the guerrillas. Yet joining the guerrillas itself is a socially recognized rite of passage, a political coming of age with the promise of departure from ordinary life altogether.

II. Making an Exit

One night Ahmet, a 17-year-old informant comes home with his friend from a nearby village to stay over for a few days. The guest gets along well with the family members and begins to trust them in a very short time. He decides to reveal to them the real reason for his trip to Cizre. "I will make an exit tomorrow," he told them using the idiom coined to define joining the guerillas. The curious family begins bombarding the guest with questions: "Are you in debt?" "Do you owe someone money?" "Did you lose money gambling?" "Do you have a problem with your job?" "You don't get along with your father, do you?" "Is he forcing you to find a job?" "Is he beating you up? "Are you in love with a girl who does not want you?" "Are your parents forcing you to marry a girl you don't love?" "Did the girl you loved marry somebody else?" "Is your trial close to a final judgment?" The young guest briefly answers "no" to all of these questions. The next day he informs the family that he will go downtown to buy a T-shirt and will be back soon. He never returns.

His exact motivation is still a mystery, but the immediate questions that come to mind in such a situation reveal what kind of 'ordinary life' the youth wished to exit from altogether. Ironically, this story was recounted to me by Ahmet's older sister who herself was planning to

join the guerrillas at that time for one of the reasons suggested by the questions that the family asked the young guest. Consider, for instance, that the family did not even bother to ask the guest if he had an ongoing trial, but instead assumed that he had one. Indeed, nearly all youths that I met in Cizre had ongoing trials for predominantly political alleged acts, with many of them already having been arrested at an age as young as twelve and spending a few years in prison, if not more. Many youths are married at the same age and begin working even earlier. Joining the guerillas, as the pertinent phrase "making an exit" suggests, appears to the youth as a way out from a life restricted by state violence, poverty, and oppressive kinship norms, even if the alternative trajectory contains the threat of death. Joining the guerrillas with such motivations was so common that it even has a specific name within the Kurdish political vocabulary: *duygusal katılım* or emotional joining. “Those who are unhappy, those who want to run away from their own lives usually do the emotional joining,” a member of the Kurdish movement recounted to me. He also mentioned another type of joining the guerrillas, though much less common than the former: *bilinçli katılım* or conscious joining, referring to those situations where one joins the guerrillas with entirely “political” motivations.

I observed the flow of youth to the guerrilla camps most clearly in the middle school where I taught. Every few days we would learn that a student who had been absent from school had, in fact, joined the guerrillas. This is why one of my students, ten-year-old İbrahim, imagined that the most likely possibility for him to be rid of students he did not like was if they were to join the guerillas. He had seen many such instances, whereas, alternately, he had not seen many friends leave the school because their families had moved to a different city. "I wish Mevlüt would join the guerrillas," said İbrahim, after telling me how Mevlüt was being a bully towards his classmates. It turned into a routine duty for the school's principle to make phone calls to

parents to let them know that their children had joined the guerrillas. Once, for instance, three thirteen-year-old female students came to the school in the morning, said farewell to their friends, and then left. These three students were best friends, and nobody in the school was surprised that they had made an exit together. After calling the fathers of the three girls to let them know what had happened, the principal recounted to me: "They just said "OK," nothing else, as if I had given them some trivial news." I told her that they might just be cautious in case the police were listening to the phone call. Already aware of this possibility, she said she had tried to meet parents in person to give them the news, but to no avail. The contact numbers given to the school usually belonged to the fathers, most of whom were truck drivers and thus often away from Cizre. It was difficult for her to communicate with the mothers as she did not speak Kurdish and mothers usually did not speak Turkish. On this occasion, the principal recalled an incident regarding one of the students in question.

> I remember having an argument with one of these girls about a ring she wore. I told her she was not allowed to wear a ring in the school. She said it was her mother's. Then I did not say anything. Her mother had passed away last year. Soon after, her father married again. She did not get along with him and his new wife. I wish I had not argued with her about the ring.

Apart from this first girl, the principal was somewhat surprised by the exit of the other two girls. She claimed that these girls had neither family problems nor political aspirations that would lead them to make such a radical move—the principal tried to substantiate this claim by telling me in detail how these girls had always worn make-up despite being repeatedly warned not to.

In addition to everyday troubles, the youth were also motivated to go to the mountain by their face-to-face interactions with the guerrillas—though such interactions were inevitably

mediated by the idealized image of the guerilla, nourished by mythical stories and the media, most notably the Kurdish TV channels that broadcasted daily life at guerrilla camps. Besides festivals, as described above, the youth were able to visit the guerrillas for various other occasions, such as picnics in the mountains, the most popular leisure activity, particularly for the youth, given that they did not have many other leisure activity options in a small place like Cizre. They would often drive to the mountains to have a picnic, sometimes not returning.[6] Yet the most typical method for youth to join the guerillas was to interact with those militants in the city who were responsible for recruiting the youth and taking them safely to the guerrilla camp. In one of the neighborhoods known to be the Kurdish movement's safe haven and hence mostly inaccessible to state authorities, there was a small building where these militants were frequently present, meeting those who wanted to join the guerrillas. While walking around in that neighborhood, an interlocutor pointed to that building and, perhaps to mock the rising NGO culture in the city, said: "This is the association of joining" (*katilim derneği*), as if it were an official institution.

Also significant was the presence of guerrillas in the political and everyday life of the city. My interlocutors recounted that they were impressed to see how the guerrillas were affectionate with one another and how they desired to be part of that relationship. I observed such affection among the youth involved in street politics as well, but this affection was always colored by a sense of possible betrayal and of suspicion of government spies posing as fellow

[6] In 2014 the Kurdish-led municipality in the city of Diyarbakir organized a picnic on a nearby mountain, after which several participants did not return, as might have been expected. Afterward, some parents began sit-in protests in front of the municipality, holding the photographs of their children who had just joined the guerrillas. They claimed that the PKK took their children to a picnic and then kidnapped them.

protesters. This was the case for city politics at large. My point here is not the existence or absence of betrayal in any particular political space but that this discourse was created vis-à-vis an idealized image of the guerrilla. At issue is the imagined ontological difference between the city and the mountain that produces different relations and subjects. This difference figures clearly in the Kurdish term *hevaltî* (friendship/comradery). *Hevaltî,* referencing both intimacy and equality, is a concept that describes relationships within the Kurdish political landscape. Even though everybody involved in Kurdish politics at some level typically refers to their fellows as *heval* (friend/comrade), it is only the guerrillas who are eligible to use this term as a self-identifier. For instance, *Ez hevalim* (I am a friend/comrade) means "I am a guerrilla." This is why a common phrase for joining the guerrillas is *tevli hevalan bûn* or "joining the friends/comrades." This term is used vis-à-vis the guerrillas to denote not the norms of a particular political relationship but a difference between different actors within that politics.

This nuanced difference implies that *hevaltî* is believed to exist truly only among guerrillas, and indeed it is the only legitimate form of relatedness available to guerrillas, given that they are not allowed to be involved in romantic affairs—though in practice this rule may likely be broken— or to marry, and that their "exit" means cutting their kinship ties with their families. It is the exit from the family and from the society that leads youth to imagine joining the guerrillas as a rite of passage to freedom. This is the case in particular for young women who are particularly affected by strict social norms. The youth view joining the guerrillas as an escape not only from society but also from themselves in that it could allow them to alter the way they think, see, and desire. As a rite of passage to adulthood, making an exit was thus viewed as a rupture rather than a transition.

The idea of self-transformation through making an exit is manifest in failed romantic relationships. As some young couples could not continue their relationship due to familial pressure or political norms, many found a solution in going to the mountain. For instance, Raperin had a romantic relationship with a guerrilla who was assigned to the city. They were forced to break up when their romance was revealed to their friends. After all, a guerrilla was not supposed to be involved in such relationships. Upon their breakup, however, they decided to leave together for the mountain. To do so, Raperin would have to join the guerrillas while her boyfriend would request that the movement reassign him to the mountain. I asked her how that would change their situation, given that the same rules were applied even more strictly amongst those guerillas in the mountain. Her answer indicated that it was not their situation that she wanted to change, but their desires.

> Blind love is dangerous. If you fall in love, you move away from politics. However, in the mountains, you can no longer love a person. You love the struggle, the mountains, and the comrades. We would end up in different camps, anyway. Probably we would be able to see each other once a year or so.

In a way, they had to choose between betrayal and sacrifice. They could continue their romance by moving to another city and leaving everything behind, which would be a betrayal of their political ideals. Going to the mountain appeared to be the only possible solution to their plight as it could teach them how to not love romantically.

Street politics provided the youth with a similar venue to become someone else and to generate a different form of life. Yet for some women, participating in street politics was not an option because it was viewed as a political space reserved exclusively for young men. Perhaps for

this reason, in Cizre it was commonly assumed that the number of women who joined the guerrillas was higher than that of men, as they had fewer spaces to express themselves politically within civilian life in the city. As one interlocutor put it: "Here, boys talk, girls join the guerillas." There are no formal statistics available, but according to my estimates, young women constituted approximately half of the total guerrilla recruits. Given that the recruits consisted mostly of those who had been socialized in street politics, including both male and female youths, joining the guerrillas may have indicated the youths' desire to extend the fleeting moment of freedom experienced in street protest to their entire life.

III. Marriage

Merwan was arrested at the age of seventeen in a street protest in 2008 and spent five years in prison. Throughout his time in prison, he was planning to join the guerrillas immediately after his release. Suspecting this plan—as it was a typical pattern for those in this situation—his family decided to marry him to an acquaintance's daughter to obstruct it. The family launched the wedding preparations while he was still in prison. After his release, he argued with his family to cancel the wedding. Instead of withdrawing, they hastened the preparations because Merwan's unwillingness itself confirmed their suspicions. One night, he came home with his hair shaved—youth typically shave their heads before either leaving for their compulsory military service or joining the guerrillas. By coming back with his head shaved, he, in a way, declared his decision to join the guerrillas. His mother received the message but said nothing to him. She sat silently by his bed on the floor until the sunrise. Merwan, while pretending to sleep, recalled the protest where he had been arrested, the police officers who had broken his arms while forcing him into

the armored vehicle, his mother's face when she had seen his broken arms, and her deteriorating health condition.

> My mother had high blood pressure. It was actually sorrow that made her ill. Every day I argued with her about this marriage issue; she fainted several times during these arguments and was hospitalized. And it was because of me, you know. That night I thought that she could become paralyzed if I left. So, I decided not to do it. I told her to do whatever she wanted. How could I have known that they would marry me so quickly? I was married in the blink of an eye.

When I met Merwan, he had been married for about a year and had a newborn son whom he had given the codename of a martyred guerrilla. He had already distanced himself from street politics and now was spending much of his time crossing the Iraqi border every day to smuggle goods to make a living for his family. He used to say that his prison years were the most peaceful time of his life because he was away from all the troubles of society and had a community with other political prisoners. I ran into him in the festival at Mount Gabar, and as we walked around together, his mother followed us at a distance, keeping a careful eye on her son. Even though Merwan was married now, his mother was still worried that he could join the guerrillas, especially during the festival as it would be easier for him to do so there.

Family pressure to marry as a strategic response to youth politics seems to have shifted the acceptable age of marriage to align with the age at which youth joined the guerrillas. Since some youth join the guerrillas at ages as young as thirteen, the marriage age has also decreased to

thirteen.[7] Traditionally, parents married their children off at an early age so as to control their sexuality, which is viewed as a threat to the morality of the community. Marriage at a young age was thus already a norm in Cizre, as was illustrated to me by a scene that I observed during a school seminar. The seminar had been organized by a teacher from Istanbul, on the topic of facilitating communication between parents and their children. At some point in this seminar, the teacher advised the parents to remember how they had acted when they were their children's age, before judging their children for their immature behavior. After a moment, it became clear that all of the parents in the seminar had already been married at their children's ages.

The appropriate age of marriage seems to have increased gradually since the 1990s as the youth became more powerful within the family, owing to their involvement in educational institutions as well as the labor market. However, the age of marriage began to decrease again as the same processes helped lower the age of politicization, and of joining the guerrillas. Thus, in the current situation, it is the politicization of youth rather their sexuality that parents consider the most significant threat and that becomes the central dynamic underlying the decrease in the age of marriage.

This was demonstrated in a story told me by Levent, a 19 years old interlocutor from a large family who had 10 siblings. Levent's maternal aunt, Fatma, has 9 children, and after her eldest son joined the guerrillas, she became worried that her younger son would follow his older brother's path. In order to prevent her younger son from leaving, she decided to marry him off to

[7] The legal age of marriage is 17 in Turkey, while it can be reduced to 16 in "exceptional circumstances" with the consent of the court. Parents usually get around this legal obstacle by marrying off their children through unofficial religious marriages. Official marriage follows the religious one when married couples need to obtain an ID for their children who reach the school age. The state typically overlooks this practice.

Levent's thirteen-year-old sister. The young couple was married, and shortly afterward, due to a similar concern, Levent's maternal uncle, Bekir, became determined to marry off his sixteen-year-old son to another of Levent's sisters. She was a fourteen-year-old middle school student at the time. To convince the family of the marriage, Bekir told them: "My son is still a child. What if someone persuades him, tells him something. He can easily be fooled and taken to the mountain." Levent objected to this plan on the grounds that his sister had not yet reached the age of marriage and needed to continue her school. Yet he was unable to convince his parents. Though the young boy and girl became engaged soon thereafter, Levent nonetheless sustained his objection and finally convinced his parents to break off the engagement. Shortly after, Levent's paternal uncle, Osman, came to ask for the hand of the same girl for his son, with a similar motivation, thus leading to another family crisis. Levent's parents declined this proposal, suggesting that it would not be able to explain this to Bekir.

Believing that youth have to get married in order to grow up, and not the other way around, parents stress the youth's immaturity in order to convince their potential in-laws of marriage. They slightly modify this discourse when they negotiate with the guerrillas to retrieve their children. It is known that the guerrillas respond to the argument about a youth's immaturity by reminding the parents that many of the guerrillas who are much respected now made their exit at a very young age. This demonstrates that the guerrillas use a similar discourse as the one used by the parents for marriage: As far as the guerrillas are concerned, youth grow up when they join the guerrillas, not the other way around. Parents also know that expressing sorrow at losing their children would not work either as the guerrillas would quickly remind them that all guerillas leave behind grieving parents. It is indeed difficult for parents to challenge such politically and morally loaded arguments precisely because many of them have supported the PKK and suffered

the cost of forced migration to the city and the continuing state violence after that. Many may still attempt to prevent the youth from becoming involved in radical politics partly because they believe that their families have sacrificed enough already, a point that I will return to in the next section. Another contributing factor may be the common perception among adults that youth politics is devoid of ideology and rationality and hence cannot be considered politics.

Having dealt with parents frequently, the guerrillas became “experts in public relations,” as one guerrilla who I met on Mount Cudi recounted jokingly. He told me about a pattern in which interactions with parents unfold, which corresponds to my observations. The parents often begin by expressing how they are willing to sacrifice their children for the Kurdish cause. They then claim that what they want to do is, in fact, to protect the guerrillas from their children. As such, they (mis)represent their children as childish, weak, useless, spoiled, perverted, psychopathic and the like, to argue that they would do more harm than good to the guerrilla struggle.

One parent, for instance, told the guerrillas that their son was such a coward that he was afraid to even stay at home alone at night, let alone fight in a guerrilla war. One parent claimed that their daughter was still wetting her bed during the time that she joined the guerrillas. Another parent argued that his son was a sexual deviant and claimed that he used to sexually harass women in his own family. He then warned the guerrillas: "What if he does something bad to the female guerrillas as well?" Another one brought a report from a psychiatrist to prove that their son had severe mental issues that could lead to massive problems for the guerrilla struggle. Regardless of whether or not these claims were sincere or not, these stories demonstrate the way in which parents pathologize their children to dissuade the guerrillas from recruiting them—in a way analogous to the way that Kurdish politicians represented the protesters in their attempt to

bargain with the state. The guerrillas' typical response to parents is to emphasize the youth's agency, claiming that neither the parents nor the guerrillas are entitled to decide on the youth's behalf.

Thus, the parents are left with no option other than trying to persuade their children to come back with them, which also often proves to be unsuccessful. The emphasis on the will of the youth is more of a discursive tactic that the guerrillas use against the family; the guerrillas, due to security reasons, are prohibited from quitting and returning home even if they want to do so. In some cases, the guerrillas do not even let the new recruits, especially the younger ones, meet with their parents in case the parents are cooperating with Turkish police. It is possible that some parents may meet their children to inform them about a possible amnesty or a reduction in prison sentence that has been offered by the police if the child returns from the guerrilla camp.[8] A member of the Kurdish movement claimed that many recruits who were possibly disappointed by guerrilla life deserted and returned to their families after meeting with their parents.

That being said, the youth do not need to meet with their parents to know that they could receive amnesty or a reduction in a prison sentence if they escape from the camp. Consider the case of Yasemin. She made an exit at the age of thirteen and fled from the camp a year later, after arguing with her commanders. She explained that her commanders did not allow her to visit her older brother, who was stationed in another camp. She expressed her resentment, saying that "The guerrillas in higher ranks could easily visit their relatives though." After she returned to the

[8] Known as "Reinstatement into Society Law," this law affords "members of terrorist organizations" amnesty or a significant reduction in sentence in exchange for becoming state witnesses (see Özlem Biner 2006). If applicants are under the age of 18 and if they claim to have not involved in armed conflict, they are shortly detained and released without facing prison sentence.

city, she was detained by the police for a few days and then released. As a fourteen-year-old former guerilla, Yasemin could not easily adjust to the family life again, however, at least for a while. Her older brother recounted to me:

> [She behaved] as if she was still in the guerrilla camp, you know. She would wake up very early in the mornings, as guerillas do. She was furious. She would argue with everybody, with our relatives and guests. She would beat up my younger siblings all the time. "I would never marry," she said. She would refuse to do housework. "I won't serve men anymore," she said. She told my mom to not do housework either. She slowly got used to it again though. She is now doing housework.

In contrast to the situations that we have seen above, in which parents represent children as immature and guerillas represent them as independent agents, sometimes the opposite is true as well. In other cases, the guerrillas sometimes employed an entirely different tactic, describing their new recruits as immature children in need of protection from family or state violence, and thus the guerillas themselves assumed a parental role. For instance, one thirteen-year-old female student in my school joined the guerrillas in order to escape from violence in her home life. Both of her parents had passed away some years earlier. The father had been killed by an unidentified assailant, and a few years later the mother passed away from an illness. According to her friends, since the death of their parents, her older brothers would beat her up. In fact, the brothers themselves were underage yet took on parental roles following their parents' deaths.

Upon her exit, her relatives went to talk to the guerrillas to get her back. The guerrillas rejected this request, arguing that she would be safer with them than with her brothers. In this and similar instances, the PKK itself comes to stand in as a substitute for the family. This approach is

informed by the PKK's notion of "party children,"[9] encapsulates the idea that the PKK is obliged to take on the responsibility of taking care of children whose parents are not present due to their political engagement. The notion of "party children" also explains why the age of joining the guerrillas is as low as twelve. Those recruits, the PKK claims, are not involved in armed resistance immediately but instead are placed in safe places where they receive years-long ideological and military training. Thus, they become the children of the party, which is responsible for raising, educating, and taking care of them.

This tension between the PKK and the family points to a contradiction between the reproduction of a political collectivity and the reproduction of familial lineage. The PKK has criticized the institution of the family for reproducing capitalist modernity, which is fundamentally based on the exploitation of women and youth. In accordance with the ideology of the PKK, in order to overcome this capitalist modernity, the urgent task is to unmake such gender- and age-based divisions of labor that are reproduced in the realm of the family. The PKK's discourse thus stresses the historical oppression of women and youth and names them as the prominent political actors who can bring about a structural transformation. In that vein, the PKK has privileged the notions of gender and youth while denouncing the family.[10]

Partly due to this discourse, for many youths, "marriage means nothing but suicide," as one interlocutor expressed. Within youth sociality, marriage and politics were considered mutually exclusive phenomena to the extent that expressing a desire for marriage itself was interpreted as an implicit way of expressing the desire to abandon the political struggle or vice

[9] PKK is often referred to as "the party" for short.
[10] This strategy strangely resembles how the discipline of anthropology in the wake of 1970 displaced the idea of kinship with gender and youth and examined them beyond the boundaries of the family.

versa. The excerpt below from Zehra about a conversation with her friends shows how unspeakable the issue of marriage is within youth politics.

> Once I told them that I might get married in the future and they gave me a sour look. You know, they came out against me. I said I did not mean right now but maybe in the future. They said: "How could you even consider this. You die when you get married. It means death for women."

Oddly enough, the fact that marriage was the main tactic that parents deployed in order to prevent youth from making an exit was one of the main reasons for the youth to make an exit in the first place. As far as the school teachers were concerned, clear evidence of this was a book called *Özgür Eş Yaşam* or Free and Equal Partnership. Many youths carried this book, one teacher recalled, and often mentioned it prior to making an exit. Critiquing the notion of marriage from a feminist perspective, this book was highly popular at the time in Cizre, particularly among young women. Marriage, in fact, was an unceasing subject of conversation between the students and teachers. Some students, especially the young women, would often tell the teachers that if they had poor grades at the end of the semester, their parents would remove them from school and then force them to get married. They would have no option other than making an exit, they claimed, unless the teachers raised their grades.

One teacher said that he was suspicious of this narrative when he first came to teach in Cizre, assuming that his students were using making an exit as a threat to raise their grades. Many parents I talked to made a similar point— without mentioning the issue of marriage— explaining that children were allegedly using the same threat to manipulate their parents. "I am scared to even argue with my son," one father complained, "whenever we argue, even when it is

about a simple thing, he says he will make an exit to get rid of me." It is possible, I would suggest, that some young people might have used making an exit as a tactic to negotiate with the school and the family, which they considered two oppressive institutions. That said, this does not mean that it remains only a threat; the teacher admitted that over the three years he spent in Cizre many students did indeed make an exit, while many others as young as thirteen were removed from school and then married off, though not necessarily due to their grades.

Even though marriage proved to be a practical arrangement to control the youth, it was by no means devoid of challenges and contradictions. Of those who married during my time there, some immediately began to plan a divorce, though unsuccessfully. Rare though it might be, some others prioritized their commitment to youth politics over familial responsibilities at the expense of exclusion from kinship ties entirely. Mehmet was one such case. After his marriage, he faced never-ending arguments with his wife and his parents, due to his desire to continue taking part in youth politics. He had three children within a few years, which did not deter him from youth politics but increased familial pressure to a great extent. Though some of his cousins and siblings were also part of the youth movement, they did not experience as much pressure due to their being unmarried.

Mehmet was able to maintain his political engagement, against all the odds, partly because he belonged to an extended family —the dominant kinship form in the city—and thus he was not responsible alone for taking care of his family economically and emotionally. It was instead the oldest family member, who happened to be his paternal grandmother, who was responsible for the management of the household, which was supported economically by her adult sons who, apart from Mehmet, were together involved in smuggling. In this sense, Mehmet's children had multiple people around them who performed parenthood. Even though it

was less prevalent, I have observed that in some families, children called both their fathers and their parental uncles by the same Kurdish term: *bavê min* or my father, when referring to them in the third person. Also significant is that Mehmet's wife was his first cousin; thus she was already part of the extended family regardless of her marital status. That said, Mehmet's parents and wife still constantly berated him for not fulfilling his responsibilities and for harming the entire family. They forced him to give up youth politics, find a job, and return to the family, yet this served only to alienate him further. Mehmet gradually stopped going home even to see his children. His family, except for some younger members who were part of the youth movement, had to accept the situation and continued to live their lives as if he did not exist.

IV. Paying the Price

The relationship between the youth, the family, and the Kurdish movement is by no means stable, as each party transforms the others. Consider parental relationships, for instance. Parents could hardly perform parenthood after their children began to participate in youth politics. For security reasons, the youth usually needed to stay away from home after starting to engage in such activity. They kept a distance from their families also to avoid quarreling and believed that the political struggle should be prioritized over their families and even over their own lives. "If you are close to your family, if you think of yourself, you cannot be active in politics," said one interlocutor as he explained why he cut off all of his familial ties. Also, the fact that death was imminent for the youth who were involved in street politics or who might potentially join the guerrillas at any time has inevitably transformed existing familial relationships. In this predicament, some parents came to admit that they had little power over

their children and hence tried to prepare themselves in advance for the loss of their children. For instance, sixteen-year-old Zeki recounted the following to me: “Every morning as I leave home for school, my mom says to me: “Why do you even go to school? You go to school in vain. Soon they [the police] will kill you, anyway.”

Another mother, who had suffered the killing of her son and daughter by the police, explicitly stated that her son had already been dead for her ever since he had joined the youth politics. However, she could not accept the death of her daughter, who had not been active in youth politics but was killed while she was trying to aid a youth injured during a clash with the police. "She was not meant to die," the mother said.

For the parents, their children’s involvement in radical politics, which they often initially do not support, sometimes further politicizes them as well. Parents, mothers, in particular, are likely to become more politically active after their children join the guerrillas or are killed or jailed—even though such incidents can push some parents even further away from politics (Caglayan 2007). Some parents have made political claims through their kin relations with the guerrillas, the martyrs, or the prisoners. They even formed their own political movements, such as the Peace Mothers (*Dayîkên Aşîtîye or Barış Anneleri* in Kurdish and Turkish respectively), which grew into a notable civil rights movement in the country. This tendency partly explains the scale of support the PKK has received from the Kurdish population. Consider that in a survey conducted in 1995, in response to the question “Do you have a relative in the organization (PKK),” 34.8 percent of Kurdish respondents replied “yes” while 34.9 percent refused to reply (Romano 2006: 90).

If we take into account that some of those who refused to respond might also have had relatives in the PKK, the average was significantly higher. This average perhaps is even higher today given that the youth have increasingly been joining the guerillas at a younger age.

Once the youth join the guerrillas, they begin to constitute an alliance (as well as a source of conflict) between the Kurdish movement and the family. This alliance can be understood best through the notion of *bedel*. Literally meaning "price" both in Kurdish and Turkish, *bedel* defines a sense of indebtedness to the martyrs who have sacrificed their lives for the Kurdish cause (Yoltar 2017). It has often been the youth who have taken this sense of debt to heart, and thus felt obliged to repay it through engagement in Kurdish politics. *Bedel* has come to take a new form in tandem with the institutionalization of the Kurdish movement, particularly since the 2000s. Since then the movement has increasingly become a significant (and at times hegemonic) political and economic actor in Kurdistan, consequently transforming Kurdish politics into one of representation.

In the absence of a Kurdish state formation and thus a contract of citizenship, the new politics of representation required the redefinition of the relationship between the Kurdish movement and Kurdish civilians. The crisis of representation was to be negotiated in the realm of the dead, as the Kurdish movement began to position itself as an arbiter mediating between the dead and the living and thereby turning the moral economy of *bedel* into a social contract. As such, the living were now indebted not to the dead but to the movement that acts in the name of the dead. However, this is not a one-directional indebtedness and becomes a never-ending cycle of giving and taking (Neyzi and Darıcı 2015). For when a guerilla is martyred, the Kurdish movement becomes the indebted party that is obliged to reciprocate through, for instance, employing a family member of the dead in its institutions.

Also significant is that one is indebted not individually but as part of a kinship group; a person is no longer indebted if they belong to a family that has already paid their debt. As such, the notion of *bedel* sets a limit on the price to be paid. Consider the case of Rıdvan, a 24-year-old man whom I met shortly after he was released from prison. He had first been arrested during a protest when he was fifteen years old and consequently spent two years in jail. Upon his release, he decided to join the guerrillas, along with several friends. The night before he planned to leave, he slept on the flat roof of the family house, as many in Cizre do during the summer months to escape the heat. At sunrise, he woke up to find a rifle pointed at his head, the roof packed with masked police officers and his house surrounded by armored vehicles. Apparently, the police had found out their plan and conducted operations to arrest them. This time Rıdvan spent five years in prison and continued to be determined to join the guerrillas once he was freed. Meanwhile, while he was in jail, Rıdvan's younger brother joined the guerrillas. Rıdvan then changed his plans on the grounds that his family's debt to the movement was now paid off, and that it would be too much for his parents to lose a second son.

Having a family member among the guerrillas, Rıdvan's family was now a *değer ailesi* or "a family of value," a title that the Kurdish movement used to refer to those families that had paid their debt (*bedel*) by having a family member die in the war with the Turkish state. The "family of value" can be viewed as a new form of family that the Kurdish movement generated in opposition to the traditional family, and that reproduces the revolutionary struggle. *Bedel* thus defines a point at which politics reenters the realm of the family: At the same time as the Kurdish movement seeks to delegitimize the reproduction of the family, it still relies on kinship ties for the reproduction of a political collectivity. That said, it is a highly contested question regarding

how the debt should be paid, who is considered indebted, and what kinship form has the right to represent the dead—whether it is the nuclear family, the extended family, or the entire clan.

As the Kurdish movement became more and more institutionalized in the region, being a "family of value" became a key to economic and political resources. Ahmet recounts:

> When a family member makes an exit, that family comes to have a say in political affairs. For instance, when the Kurdish municipality hires somebody, or when they nominate a person as a candidate in the mayoral elections, they often choose a member of such families. You know, people say, for instance, "their daughter made an exit, for her sake, we should support them." What I mean is that having a martyr in the family or a family member in the guerrilla camp brings advantages to the family.

Such possible benefits could push parental pressure in the opposite direction for the youth. Reportedly, many tribal leaders who had been allied with the state began to turn to the Kurdish movement after the 1990s when the movement became increasingly institutionalized. One of the most remarkable stories that I heard concerned a notorious village guard who was responsible for the killing and disappearance of many Kurds through his involvement in the state's paramilitary activities in the 1990s. This man "gave" his two sons to the guerrillas in order to come to terms with the Kurdish movement and to obtain economic advantages from the municipality.

Yet families still attempted to drag children out of street politics, which were not believed to bring them economic and political benefits. This was because the youth were not part of Kurdish institutional power for a long time. Nor did they have as much symbolic value as the

guerillas within the Kurdish political landscape, despite their pioneering political role in the region. During a specific time when the Kurdish movement became the uncontested hegemonic power in Cizre, I witnessed several cases where parents encouraged their children to join the guerrillas. One young woman, Turkan, recounts:

> My parents want me to devote myself to the party [PKK]. They want this a lot. My father always tells me to become a guerilla. He says: "You should become more active in politics. You should become a guerrilla." I really wonder why he asks me this. Is it because of his commitment to the party or just his self-interest?

As far as Turkan was concerned, it was the latter. Her father had various chronic illnesses caused by the months-long torture he had suffered in the 1990s, and he needed to have health insurance to be able to go to the hospital. He had lost his health insurance after he was fired from his job at the municipality. Turkan continues:

> He tells me: "If you make an exit, you can make them hire me in the municipality again. Then I will have health insurance. Or ask your friends at the party to hire me. You have been active in politics, but they haven't given you any money." I said: "Even if I became a guerrilla, I would not let them hire you. I would not let you use it for your own interest." I resent it a lot. You know, he wants to use politics only for his own interest.

There was another motivation as well behind the preference of some parents for their children to make an exit. One parent I knew, for instance, was concerned that his son might go to the mountain to join the guerrillas. He purchased a motorcycle for his son, hoping that it would keep him busy and prevent him from making an exit. Soon after that, however, his son was arrested for theft and faced prison for two years. In the face of such a predicament, some parents may come to

think that making an exit is an honorable choice for their children and for the family. Osman, an interlocutor who had failed in his attempt to join the guerrillas, recounts:

> I mean, families, of course, feel sad when they lose their members. But after they join the guerrillas, they are honored too. When my niece joined the guerrillas, my sister said "my daughter did not do anything bad; she did not steal anything, I know where she is and what she is doing. I am proud of her." You hear that if they do not join the guerrillas, they become thieves, they use drugs, they become prostitutes. And it is the state that pushes the youth to these things. Then families say that their children did not do these bad things but became militants for a good cause.

It is noteworthy that after Osman's niece joined the guerrillas, her parents, like many other parents, tried all avenues to retrieve her, before accepting the situation. About two years after her exit, however, she escaped the guerrilla camp, was caught by the peshmerga of Iraqi Kurdistan and was then handed over to the Turkish police. While waiting for trial in Turkish prison, this former guerrilla, still at the young age of fourteen, told her parents about her decision to benefit from the amnesty law in return for serving as a state witness. Her parents tried to convince her not to do so, suggesting that such an action would bring dishonor to the family. Osman was the only one within the family who supported his nieces' decision. "I asked my sister," he recounted to me, "why are you unhappy that your daughter is alive? Would you be happier if her dead body came instead?" Once elevated to a "family of value" because of their daughter being a guerilla, this family was now facing the risk of being labeled as a traitor to the cause. This is a story of coming of age that illustrates the thin line between martyrdom and betrayal as well as the uneasy relationship between politics and kinship.

V. Conclusion

This chapter suggested that growing up in Cizre is not marked through the passage of time or maturation of the body, but instead, it unfolds with an intervention in the form of marriage or joining the guerrillas. I demonstrated how the family uses marriage as a means to pull the youth out of street politics and to prevent them from joining the guerrillas, and how Kurdish guerrillas seek to recruit the youth before they get married, while also channeling the youth's revolutionary potential. Simultaneously, the Turkish state resorts to the law as a way of placing the youth in limbo to repress their uprising. I argued that even though these interventions are reinforced by competing social actors and directed towards different ends, they converge in constituting the youth as an excess that needs to be contained (if not consumed).

This chapter further examined how the relationships between the family, the Kurdish movement, and the Turkish state take different forms in different conjunctures. In some cases, the family collaborates with state actors to retrieve their children from the guerrilla camps, amplifying their antagonism with the Kurdish movement. In other cases, the family admits the impossibility of retrieving their children and possibly becomes engaged even more with the Kurdish struggle, at the expense of being targeted by the state. Although the Kurdish movement sought to delegitimize the reproduction of family, they still relied on kin ties for the reproduction of their form of politics and their vision of collectivity. As the movement became a significant institutional power in the region, it began to offer economic and political benefits to the families of value, which reproduced the revolutionary struggle. In other words, the family of value is the epitome of an emerging relationship between the movement and civilian Kurds based on debt, akin to a relation of representation.

In the next chapter, I focus on moments of street protest, which include bodily material practices, such as turning everyday objects into weapons, participating in various theatrical performances to evade the police, as well as strategically inhabiting the heavily surveilled physical landscape during street protests. I demonstrate how street politics generates alternative modes of being and different possibilities of relatedness (albeit momentarily), allowing the youth to detach themselves from themselves, from their usual social identities based on names, class, and gender.

Chapter 2: Politics as Play: Concealment, the Street, and the Self

Drinking alcohol is taboo in Cizre. It is difficult for the residents of this borderland to go to a liquor store to buy beer, let alone gather in public to drink. Faced with this situation, would-be imbibers ask the liquor store owner, whose phone numbers many people have, to deliver beers to their place. Those who are able to drink at their house constitute a lucky minority, however. Many people live with their extended families, from whom they hide the fact of their drinking, and have no option other than driving to the hill surrounding the town to drink in their cars. Cars are used for other secret purposes as well, such as smuggling goods from Iraq to Turkey or having illicit sexual liaisons. The latter is probably why locals named this hill *Aşk Tepesi*, or the Hill of Love. These cars would often have tinted windows, preventing voyeurs from gazing inside. Besides, the interiors of the vehicles are full of secret compartments where cigarettes, sugar, tea and other smuggled goods from Iraq are hidden.

After people drink, they deposit beer bottles in bags and leave them near a trash bin on the street to be used for another forbidden purpose: Masked revolutionary youth collect the bottles to make Molotov cocktails for their street protests. Although there is often a tacit agreement between the youth and the drinkers, the latter might occasionally leave discarded bottles dispersed on the hill. Familiar with such inconsiderate drinkers, the youth would borrow a car from an acquaintance to drive to the hill early in the morning to collect the bottles. The youth agree that beer bottles are the most suitable containers for Molotov cocktails in terms of their size and thickness, strong enough but breaking immediately when thrown. This is why the police

usually patrol on the hill, asking the drinkers to break the discarded bottles, to no avail. Faced with locals' accusation that he taints the city with decadence, the liquor store owner shrugs his shoulders and gallantly tells anyone who will listen to him, about the higher purpose served by these bottles. "If I did not sell beer," he told me once, "how would the youth make Molotov cocktails?" The circulation of beer bottles reflects the two dominant characteristics of life in Cizre: Islamic piety and revolutionary politics. This chapter is about the latter.

In this chapter, I examine how Kurdish youth shaped and reconfigured their bodily and spatial practices to conduct street politics while avoiding on the one hand lethal police force and on the other potentially lethal state violence via arrest and incarceration. I pay special attention to the kind of street protest in which the youth incorporated improvised theatrical performances into their repertoire of political action as a practice of concealment. More specifically, the protesters not only cross-dressed to obscure their gender and evade detection by surveillance cameras; they also altered their speech and bodily postures, used pseudonyms, and created and role-played imaginary characters to conceal their identities from government spies posing as fellow protesters. In this manner, the youth momentarily detached themselves from their usual social identities based on names, class, and gender – shedding markers that identified them in ordinary life (Goffman 1990; Lemon 2000; Mol 2003). By reiterating their performed roles on a daily basis, however, they not only acted like someone else but *became* someone else. I argue that these iterative performances in protest -- consisting of gestures, utterances, and dissimulations -- generated a space of freedom: a fleeting play-world in which neither the strictures of everyday life nor the repression of the state remained insurmountable.

I. The House

In Cizre, habitual places are regularly invaded by the Turkish state through house raids. Over the two years I spent in the town, I did not meet a single person whose house was not raided at least once. The excerpt below is one of many similar stories I heard during my fieldwork. The narrator is Raperin, a 23-year-old woman, who tells about the night her older sister Eylem was arrested for her participation in youth politics.

> That night Eylem was sick. I remember. I gave her her medication. I told her: "You should sleep, I will sleep soon, too." I had to go to school early in the morning. It was Sunday night. I went to bed. It was about 2 o'clock. I closed my eyes. I was about to fall asleep. I heard some loud noises. What a noise! The front door was made of steel. They kept banging on the door. My mother went to open the door, saying: "We are here. We will open the door. Don't bang." They entered the house with their muddy shoes. As I opened the door to my room, one of them pointed his gun at my head. They threw my father on the floor. They stepped on his hands. They pointed a gun at his head. My little sister wetted herself. She was so scared. They dragged my sick sister Eylem outside. We followed them. They put her in their armored vehicle and left. I quit school that day.

When I met Eylem, she had just been released after spending five years in prison. She was an amateur singer, performing traditional Kurdish music with a local band in Cizre. She showed me the music videos they had uploaded on YouTube. Because she resumed joining street protests upon her release, she slept at home uneasily. She would wake up many times at night, worrying that the police would violently knock on the door or even break in again. About a year after I met her, Eylem was brutally killed by the police during a massive operation in her neighborhood. For

the youth, thus, the house is far from being a space of intimacy and relief. It is rather a space where they are registered, located, arrested, and killed. While their widespread regularity and highly charged political meaning are recent, house raids are not an entirely new phenomenon in this region. In fact, the youth grew up with such experiences due to the armed conflict between Kurdish militants and Turkish security forces since the 1990s.

Metin, an interlocutor who was a young child at the time, recounted to me how he and his extended family would immediately climb down to the basement after they heard the first gunshots of the night.

> At that time, basements were very common. A house without a basement then, was like a house without a balcony now. It didn't have any value, you know. We had a goat with a crippled leg. It became so well-conditioned that when a gunshot was heard, it used to go to the basement even before we did.

As they left the basement with sunrise, Metin continued, they would see nothing but more bullet holes in the walls of their house. Another informant, Dilek, recounted to me how she was surprised to see that the bullets, which were fired in the dark night, in fact, pierced the walls in a certain pattern. She recalls, for instance, seeing a figure on the wall that resembled a dog's ear until it turned into a human face with new bullet holes. She also remembers how she and her siblings turned the bullet holes into a game in which they put their hands on the wall, moved them around, trying to find a space without bullet holes large enough to fit both of their hands. Some bullet holes still remain in the walls, continuing to shape the residents' relationship to their homes.

I came across a telling example of such a relationship during a visit to my interlocutor Murat. The front door of his house, full of bullet holes from the early 1990s, opens to a small and dark hallway. This hallway is where people take off their shoes, and it connects to the living room through a second door. Murat said that early in the morning when the sunlight hits the front door, the light enters the hallway through these holes. As he puts his shoes on every day to go to work, he sees the holes made up of sunlight on his body. Each time, he said he felt like he was being shot.

While the basements shielded them from bullets, Cizre residents were still vulnerable to frequent house raids. At the time, house raids were carried out by the paramilitary organization JİTEM, which, as mentioned previously, carried out extrajudicial murders and enforced disappearances against Kurdish militants as well as their civilian supporters. While conducting counter-insurgency tactics, JİTEM teams exclusively used Toros cars, a model of Renault produced in Turkey, often a white color. My interlocutor Zehra recounts:

> You know, there were these white cars. They were generally moving around on our street. Our neighbors would let us know if they were in the vicinity or approached our house. My dad many times jumped from the wall and crossed to other houses. My uncles did that too actually.

With its physical features and color, the car itself spread fear among the residents, becoming the signature of JİTEM. As Merwan shows in the excerpt below, the White Toros terrified everyone as if they had seen a white specter of death wherever it materialized. After all, many of those who had been taken away with this car for 'interrogation' never returned: "When people saw these cars, they would tremble with fear. They would think "what if they stop while passing by and take me away." We would see them mostly at noon. We would try not to go out often."

Due to this fear, many families stayed not at their own house but at the houses of their acquaintances and changed their location frequently to prevent the state from figuring out their address. During that time, the residents came up with a brilliant solution to prevent house raids. Following the circulation of a rumor that the state was preparing for a mass operation to arrest those who supported the PKK, residents living in the targeted neighborhoods removed all the sign boards such as street names and house numbers from their neighborhoods. This tactic reportedly prevented the state from locating and identifying their targets, and possible subsequent violence. This tactic was unsustainable, though; house raids resumed when the state agents replaced the sign boards shortly thereafter.

As such, for Cizre residents their homes have thus never been an unassailable space of intimacy or protection but instead are spaces of uneasiness, anxiety, and worry (see Navaro 2012). In the following section, I demonstrate how the youth transformed the streets into a space of intimacy and protection through political action.

II. The Street

Almost every day after sunset, small groups of youth protesters gather in Nusaybin Avenue. They do not rally on the avenue to make a political statement, though. Nor do they have placards in their hands. They often block the avenue with barricades and chant the slogan *Biji Serok Apo* (meaning, "Long Live the Leader Apo"— an endearment and abbreviated nickname for Abdullah Öcalan) to trigger police intervention. Street clashes typically flare up when the police, seated in their armored vehicles, use tear gas, blast bombs, rubber bullets, and real bullets to disperse the protesters and dismantle the barricades. The youth fight back with the ammunition

that they produce by manipulating mundane objects such as stones, cans, pieces of wood, and beer bottles. They also enjoy using fireworks, which allow them to hit police vehicles without getting too close. “The police are terrified by fireworks,” an interlocutor said, “especially when they explode on the front windows of the armored vehicles.”

Equally important, fireworks have the aesthetic effect of making protests visually and audibly beautiful. As the youth sometimes videotape spectacular scenes of clashes and upload them on YouTube, they inspire those youth in other Kurdish cities to employ similar tactics. The protesters need to measure their radius of action carefully. To hit the constantly moving police vehicles with stones or Molotov cocktails, for instance, they must know the distance they have to keep away from them. Surely, the distance one should keep also changes depending on one’s bodily strength and flexibility as not all protesters can throw an object equally far. Whether advancing toward the police or retreating to their fortified positions, the youth have to be fast and flexible, run in a zigzag, looking back every few seconds, or sometimes running backward, to avoid being hit. In turn, by observing the ways in which the youth’s bodies navigate the street, one can predict the locations and the movements of the police vehicles and tear gas capsules, indicating an indexical connection between the movement of the body and that of objects (Silverstein 2013).

Synchrony and coordination among bodies of the protesters that are positioned in different spots on the streets and rooftops in the vicinity are important, and they must often anticipate each other's movements without talking to each other. For instance, those on the rooftops should take into account those in the streets and make sure that they do not obstruct the latter’s movements. When the protesters occupying the rooftops attack the police from either side of the street, they might accidentally injure protesters on the ground if there is a lack of

coordination between them. So, the youth protesters need to cultivate an intuition that lets them know when to act in sequence and when to act all at once in order to protect each other and effectively clash with the police. They have cultivated this bodily hexis over years. Inhabitation of the urban environment exposes them to protest as a practice from childhood years before they adapt protest as an ethos. Accordingly, they know the rules before they choose to play the game.

They typically begin participating in the protests when they were as young as ten years old and even younger when they started observing and helping the protesters. At the age of six or seven, for instance, many of them began to stand in the entrances to the streets and walk around to inform the older youth about the location of the police. Also, they carry a specific bag during protests to collect the tear gas canisters that the police throw at them and sell them afterwards. They all run towards the location where the canisters are expected to land, compete with one another to pick them up before others do, often burning their hands if they touch the canisters with their bare hands. Sometimes they share the canisters even before the police fire them so that they hope to avoid any possible fight among themselves. "This is mine," one of the kids would announce as the police fire a canister, while another kid might claim the next one and wait his or her turn for the police to fire the next one.

Nusaybin Avenue, the main street that runs through most of Cizre where protests often start, constitutes a symbolic and material borderline between two different landscapes in the city. On the west side of the avenue are the neighborhoods of Sur, Cudi, Nur while on the east side one finds the neighborhoods of Kale, Dağkapı, Şah, Dicle, Yafes, and Alibey. Many of the politically active youths usually live in the former while Turkish civil servants and the Kurdish

bajari[11] live in the latter, with the exception of Yafes. Nusaybin is a wide and long avenue, making it easier for the police to follow and catch the youth. The youth, therefore, hide in their own neighborhoods, consequently bringing the protests into the inner parts of the west side of Nusaybin Avenue. However, it is difficult for the police to successfully subdue the youth. The layout of the neighborhoods is rather chaotic, as the houses arose in a haphazard way not based on any urban planning but rather as a result of the efforts of the displaced, who tried to create living spaces through their own means. Buildings are generally one, two, or three stories, and are adjacent to each other along the streets. The streets are usually very short and narrow, connected to each other like a maze where armored vehicles cannot pass or enter.

Moreover, the protesters regularly break the street lights, rendering themselves invisible and the neighborhoods illegible to the police and any other uninvited outsiders.

In contrast to the house, which is separated from the outside world by walls, the streets generate a feeling of safety and function as a shelter through their openness as well as their connections to buildings. While running from the police, the youth can retreat to their neighborhoods and disappear in the labyrinth of dark, narrow, and short back streets. The residents even leave their doors open during protests to let the youth step inside any time as they escape the claws of the police. The youth can enter any house along the streets even if they do not know its inhabitants, either to stay there for a while or to climb to the roof and jump to other roofs, fleeing the scene of the protest. In other words, rather than being entrapped by the walls of their own houses, the youth are able to find safety in the streets and strangers' houses.

[11] Bajari, meaning "of the city," is a term used to differentiate city-dwellers from the gundi (of the village), that is, former villagers and nomads.

As these protests unfold within a specific time-space, in accordance with a set of internal laws and logic, they adhere to certain operating principles of play. This is not only my interpretation, however; my interlocutors also use soccer as an analogy to explain to how they organize protests. When they reach a point of exhaustion, one protester said, we negotiate with the police to take a break, "just like at the end of the first half of a soccer game." Both parties agree to not attack one another during the break and resume their violent game afterward. Because the police remain in their vehicles during the protests, the protester have come to perceive the vehicles as "the police's home," if not their bodily extension. Protesters claim that they can envision the police's emotions and state of mind by the way the vehicles move around. "When the vehicles slow down," Rohat (16) said, "we know that the police are either tired or hungry."

In this framework, police officers emerge not as enemies but as members of the opponent team without whom the youth cannot play. This explains the incident where the youth took to the streets but the police did not show up, and a protester called the police pretending to be an adult. He informed the police that there were young people protesting in the street, and requested that they come and intervene. Another time they called the police to report a fake incident. They told the police that the members of two rival tribes had started a serious fight in the Cudi neighborhood and again asked them to come and intervene. The police responded that those neighborhoods were not safe for the police and they should ask Kurdish youth to intervene instead.

The police did not believe them probably because they knew that Cizre residents would never appeal to the police to resolve intra-community problems. It is also possible that the police found it risky to enter the neighborhoods where anything could happen. I observed this after an

incident in the middle school where I taught. One morning we realized that someone had broken into the school and stolen valuable equipment. The principal called the police and asked them to come to the school to conduct investigations and find the stolen equipment. Yet the police told him that the school was in Cudi and it was not safe for them to enter the neighborhood. The police were also familiar enough with the youth to figure out that the youth were trying to drag them to Nusaybin Avenue to clash with them. Diyar (16), an interlocutor who was involved in this incident of fake reporting, indeed views street protests as a "fun activity" that needs the participation of the police:

> If there are more protesters, there is more fun. You do not want to go home then. Yesterday, for instance, it was so much fun. My friend wanted to go home early. I convinced him to stay with me a bit longer. After the protest, you feel so tired, your whole body hurts, especially your feet. When you go home, you fall asleep immediately.

For Refik (17), the purpose of protests is not about attacking the police, as the weapons used in protests cannot not even damage the armored vehicles let alone the police officers inside them:

> It does not matter whether the armored vehicle gets damaged. Nothing happens to it with stones, Molotov cocktails or blast bombs. I know it. But I do not think about it when I throw stones at them. When I do that, I feel like the stones will blow up the vehicles. It does not matter whether they get damaged.

Over the two years I spent in Cizre, not a single police officer was either wounded or killed during protests. The same thing cannot be said for the youth. They play a dangerous game that is lethal only for them. During protests, the police often fire pepper gas canisters and blast bombs

not into open areas as a means to scatter the protesters, but target the youth's bodies, consequently wounding and killing many. They also use various kinds of weapons, such as shotguns whose shells scatter and explode when fired. If the youth are lucky enough not to be shot directly, hundreds of bits of shrapnel pierce their bodies. The youth can also be wounded during the protests by breaking or spraining their limbs while jumping off roofs, by accidentally burning their hands if they are not fast enough to throw the Molotov cocktails they set on fire, and by being severely beaten up by the police in the streets or police station.

The youth often have trouble accessing medical assistance when they have injuries because those who help them have to risk arrest. Only a few doctors and nurses who have links with Kurdish politics are willing to treat the youth, normally outside the hospitals and with limited means. The volunteer doctors and nurses spend a lot of time removing shrapnel if it does not penetrate deep into the body. Otherwise it has to be taken out surgically in hospitals, which is hardly an option for the youth because their wounds can be interpreted as proof of their participation in the protests and consequently lead to arrest. This is why many youths continue to live with bits of shrapnel stuck in their bodies.

I have witnessed an incident where the youth could not reach out to the volunteer doctors and nurses. Instead, they asked their friend who worked in a hospital as a cleaner to treat an injured protester, hoping that their friend might have at least observed the doctors while treating their patients. When the injuries are serious, they might also use their smart phone cameras to Skype the volunteer doctors in and outside the city, show them the wound and follow the doctors' instructions for treatment. Many protesters thus learned in the process how to deal with various kinds of injuries. When injuries are deadly, however, none of these methods work, as in the following story told to me by Dr. Ahmet.

One night Ahmet received an emergency call about a seriously injured person in the neighboring town of Silopi. Ahmet immediately drove to Silopi to see a young man named Osman, who was half-naked sitting on a couch along with many fellow protesters who could do nothing but wait desperately. After examination, Ahmet figured out that the bullet was in Osman's stomach, which could only be taken out surgically. He told Osman's friends that the patient did not have much time left and that he needed to be taken to a well-equipped hospital as soon as possible. Unable to do anything else, Ahmet returned home. A few days later, he received another urgent call, this time for a patient in Cizre.

Ahmet went to the address only to find another seriously wounded young man. While examining the wound, he thought he had seen it before and then realized that it was the same patient that he had seen in Silopi a few days earlier. Ahmet recounted to me how embarrassed he was when he realized that he actually never looked at the patient's face but only his wound. Ahmet was not the only one who identified people through their wounds; the police typically view the wound inscribed on the body of the youth as evidence of their involvement in armed clashes. And this is why Ahmet had refused going to hospital in the first place; the bullet wound would mark him as a combatant, leading him to spend the rest of his life in prison.

In this respect, the wound that is inflicted by pepper gas canisters, blast bombs, shrapnel, and bullets becomes evidence of participation in protests as well as an archive of political violence and collective struggle.[12] The body of the protester is also invaded by state surveillance and thereby becomes a site of secrecy (Mahmud 2012) to be concealed from unwanted gazes.

[12] The fathers of these youth who were young adults in the 1990s also carry the traces of war on their bodies in the form of disabilities, chronic illnesses, and more. Many of the interlocutors said that their fathers were unable to work due to illnesses stemming from imprisonment and torture.

Despite the suffering and surveillance of their bodies that they confront in their lethal game with the Turkish police, the young Kurdish protesters continue to invent ways to use objects and theatrical performances to conceal their identities from surveillance. However, these practices go beyond serving the goal of avoiding surveillance. In the next section, I show how they have generated a life-world where the relationship between people and materialities has been re-inscribed, while the boundaries between theatre and reality have become increasingly blurred.

III. Concealing the Body

The youth take to the street for protest while facing up to 35 years in prison. They are usually charged with being members of the PKK, which is designated as a terrorist organization by the Turkish state (and many other states have followed suit). This is in spite of the fact that the majority of these protesters are below the age of 18. These charges a brought to bear by the Turkish state through its surveillance apparatus, which targets politicized youth. As is the case for the house, the state registers the youth's face, gender, and name and then observes them through this surveillance system. Moreover, it is rumored that the state has spies within the youth movement. I witnessed many people being accused of spying in Cizre. Every young person that I interviewed had a striking story about spies to share with me. For example, one story was about a local young woman who fell in love with a police officer whose main motivation was to use her as an informant. The young woman, intentionally or not, provided the officer with information about her own brother, which resulted in her brother's arrest. Another story was about a young man who impressed everybody with his deep knowledge about PKK's ideology, along with his courage, sacrifices, and friendship, who then turned out to be a spy.

A variant of this story was told to me by more than one interlocutor. I think the youth have reasons to believe that the state placed spies within their movement. But the point here is not the facticity of this issue, but how its discourse transforms youth politics. Therefore, the youth believe that the state can identify them not only by their name, face, and gender, but also by their body size, posture, gestures, voice, dialect, clothing, and the like, especially by means of spies who are close to their bodies, such as family, tribesmen, friends, and even fellow protesters. I would thus argue that not only the house but the body of the youth is a site of anxiety and uneasiness. That is why the concealment of the body becomes the most important condition for their political engagement.

At protests, youth reconfigure and shape their bodily practices to conceal their identities. Doing so necessitates not only a new "appearance" but a "manner," which constitutes two "items of expressive equipment" in play (Goffman 1959: 14). Reşit (16 years old) said that he used to steal his father's keffiyeh (or poşu in Kurdish), wrapping it up around his stomach under his sweater before he went out. Outside near the streets where the protest was occurring, he would find a spot where he could secretly unroll the keffiyeh and cover his entire head. Then he would join the crowd of the protesters who either cover their head with keffiyeh or cloth or masks to become unidentifiable. Those attending the protest with naked faces are warned by other protesters to cover them.

Unable to identify the protesters through their faces, the police began to focus on their clothing. When they conduct house searches, they match youths' clothing with the camera footage. This is not unique to the police in Cizre. In the city of Adana, for instance, the police similarly tried to identify Kurdish protesters through their clothing. This tactic proved ineffective as all the protesters began wearing identical black T-shirts. The protesters in Cizre, however,

developed a more sophisticated method that allowed them not only to cover their everyday clothes but also to obscure their body size and gender to viewers: male protesters wear loose frocks or skirts and female sweaters, which are usually very colorful, with floral patterns. And female protesters dress in loose male pants and sweaters—some wear skirts, as male protesters do, and focus on covering their breasts through loose sweaters.

Although the police soon figured this tactic out, my interlocutors believe they still get confused when they try to identify the protesters' gender. In addition, the protesters wear gloves to not leave finger prints on the objects they touch such as Molotov cocktails, stones, and fireworks. Some protesters pay more attention to details than others while trying to render themselves un-identifiable. Some of my informants, for instance, would cover even their eyes with transparent cloth. Also, to cover their shoes, they would either wear socks over their shoes or cover them with nylon bags. They explained to me the rationale behind this tactic through a past incident where several protesters had been arrested when the police identified their shoes.

Another method youth utilized for concealment is switching dialects. In Cizre there are many tribal groups, and each speak a different Kurdish dialect; through dialects, people can figure out one another's tribe of origin. Knowing how to speak multiple existing dialects in the town, the youth switch from one dialect to another during protests to hide which tribe they belong to. It is noteworthy that the endurance of multiple dialects in a small town like Cizre and elsewhere has to do with the state's ban on the institutionalization and standardization of the Kurdish language. Ironically enough, the PKK's preference for using Turkish (over Kurdish) as the language of politics — for instance, in the publication of political books and journals, due to the very fact that Kurdish was not standardized — has also further prevented the standardization of Kurdish. As the youth speak through cloth or masks covering their mouths, it is also hard for

others to identify them through their voices. Besides, the youth change their body posture, as well as the way they walk and talk. Through all these changes, the youth protect their identities even from their close friends and family members.

One young man, Rojhat, proudly told me about the time he went to his own house with his face covered to sell a political journal. His mother opened the door. They talked for a while, but his mother did not recognize him. However, not everybody is as successful in hiding their identity, even if they might use the same tactics. For instance, Rojhat mentioned Ayse, who was also part of the youth movement. Ayse could never manage to hide her identity, no matter how much she tried. When Rojhat and Ayse were once visiting neighborhoods to sell journals, many people recognized Ayse, even though her face was covered and she changed her dialect, posture and so on. Rojhat said that people who saw Ayse came up to them, calling her by her real name, hugging her and asking her how she was doing. Rojhat added that they needed to threaten these people not to say anything about Ayse's activities to anybody, otherwise they would punish them.

Derya, a young woman, said that she used to wear a black burka to hide her identity outside the protests as well as in order to be inconspicuous when she had to make many visits around town for political purposes. The burka not only covered her body, making her unidentifiable, but also signified that she belonged to a certain community. It is the bajari women who usually wear the burka in Cizre. These women are known to be less politicized than those from other communities, hence wearing the burka can be a safe option to attract less attention from the police. However, Derya said, sometimes she would walk alongside a female friend who also wore a burka as a disguise. Yet her friend was so tall that the police apparently assumed she was a man, perhaps a guerrilla disguised as a woman, as they knew that it was an old tactic used

in Cizre. Thus, they followed Derya and her friend several times. Derya jokingly said that if her friend did not try to hide her identity, she would attract less attention.

In addition to these tactics, some youth create imaginary characters and role-played during the protests in order to avoid identification. For instance, one protester was known as Marcos. When I first heard of him, I assumed that his codename referred to Subcomandante Marcos of the Mexican Zapatista movement. Yet he had imagined this character as an Armenian atheist.[13] Another protester assumed the name "the Doctor." This young man picked this code name because he liked the doctor's white uniform. He also always wanted to be a doctor. He adopted the doctor's uniform during the protests and found a doctor's bag and stocked it with first-aid supplies, along with Molotov cocktails, fireworks, and blast bombs. In time, he had acquired basic medical knowledge. When someone was wounded during the clashes, it was the Doctor who was responsible for treating them. Even the police referred to this protester by his assumed identity.

After the protests end, usually at three or four in the morning, the youth's "costumes" and "props" were carefully hidden outside their homes to be used again the next day. What happens in these moments is that the protesters with baggy clothes and masks all of a sudden disappear from the streets. Shortly afterwards, a large number of youths in "normal" clothes appear out of the blue in the same streets and walk to the neighborhoods where the majority of the politically active youth live. Overly familiar with the protesters' tactics, the police assume that at least some of the youth who are out in the street at such a later hour must be those who only minutes before had held Molotov cocktails. They randomly stop the youth who are on their way back home,

[13] He used the word fila, meaning Christian in Kurdish but generally referring to Armenians.

check their IDs and interrogate them in order to find evidence for arrest. Hence, the youth have to be careful in obscuring every trace of protests on their bodies, for instance, fixing their hair, which takes a specific shape when they cover their head tightly for hours while protesting.[14]

IV. Naming

I met Rodar (18 years old) at the place where he was working as a janitor. One could see him holding a huge tea tray, serving tea to guests and his co-workers, who chain-smoked and constantly talked about politics. Had I met Rodar in another setting, such as in school (he actually quit after graduating middle school), I would have known him by his Turkish name, Faruk. Rodar and many others typically have both a Turkish name — an official name written on their ID, due to the ban on the use of Kurdish names and language in official settings like schools, government offices, and paperwork — and a Kurdish name used in most other contexts.[15]

Once Rodar told me about his two older brothers who had joined the guerrillas several years ago but were recently killed by the Turkish army. He showed me a picture of his brothers on his smartphone, taken at a guerrilla camp. The picture looked familiar to me, but I could not remember where I had seen it before. When I told him this, Rodar said it was his profile picture

[14] In 2009 in the Kurdish city of Diyarbakir, the police used a different method to figure out who had joined the protests. Unable to find any noticeable signs, the police examined the hands of the passerby youth to see whether there were traces of stones (as the protesters throw stones at the police) and arrested 16 youth whose hands allegedly showed such traces.

[15] I should note that to protect their identity, I gave yet another name to each interlocutor, as a pseudonym to use in taking notes and writing about them both in the field and afterwards. I met the youth in different settings, some in schools and some in other contexts. Thus, I happened to know the former by their Turkish name, the latter by their Kurdish name. I picked pseudonyms according to the setting within which I met them.

on Facebook. Apparently, without my knowledge, we had long been friends on Facebook where he had a profile with a fake name.[16] After I completed my fieldwork and left Cizre, I found out from a mutual friend that Rodar closed his Facebook account after many of his friends were arrested for posting comments on political issues. For a while I did not hear from him. Later on, I came across an account on my friends list on Facebook whose profile picture looked like Rodar. I messaged him to find out that it was indeed Rodar. I asked him about his profile picture. He said that it was a picture of his younger brother who had been killed one year before by the Turkish police.

The youth usually use the pictures of martyrs (either family members, as in Rodar's case, or well-known guerilla commanders) and politically meaningful names or words in Kurdish on their Facebook profiles, instead of their own pictures and names. These social media accounts sometimes pass from one person to another. People share their passwords with friends to use their accounts, who afterwards might return them to their original owner or pass them on to other friends. In a way, what passes from one to another through Facebook accounts are not just names but also characters, like a cyberspace version of the Doctor. The youth protesters also have codenames reserved exclusively for street protests, again as a tactic of concealment. Some codenames are Kurdish names or words, which have connotations involving the Kurdish struggle, while others refer to other oppressed ethnic or religious communities, such as the Armenians.

For instance, one protester's codename was Aram, a common Armenian name. He said he picked this codename as a gesture of respect for Armenians who had inhabited this land before the Genocide. Some take codenames of deceased guerillas (or martyrs) that they admire.

[16] I usually accept friend requests even if I don't recognize the person per se if there are mutual friends, especially in the context of my fieldwork.

Codenames, in a way, pass from one generation to another through martyrdom. Later, if they join the guerillas, they take a new codename different from the one they use in street fights. Typically, codenames consist of two words, sounding like a name and a surname. The first word has a semantic content, delineating their political practice, while the second word refers to their hometown, such as Şoreş Ciziri (şoreş: revolution; Ciziri: of Cizre). Thus, the graveyards in the guerilla-controlled areas look like a map of Kurdistan. As material objects inscribed on bodies, bodies inscribe onto space. Youth make a claim on space through their political struggle. Yet this space becomes legible only when they are dead.

All names the youth employ in different settings index different social histories (Lele 2009; Rymes 2000) and oscillate between the personal and the collective and between the singular and the multiple (Das 2015), consequently gaining a citational character. Besides, one's identity, as Webb Keane notes, is publicly recognized through the utterance of his or her name by others — after all names are uttered more by others than those who possess them (Keane 1997: 132) . Despite being a tactic of concealment in the first place, the practice of naming thus goes beyond its initial goal and in effect operates in line with the formation of new personas for protesters.

V. Persona

"Seeing," Erik Mueggler claims, "is an encounter in which one's own body becomes visible to oneself as though from the position of things seen, things that are outside the body" (Mueggler 2011: 176). If one can envision and define oneself and others only through face-to-face interactions (Keane 1997: 13), then, the fact that the youth interact with the outside world by

disguising everything that makes them publicly identifiable subjects shapes the way they see themselves and the outside world. As Demhat (17 years old) remarks: “At the protest, you put your real life aside and you forget about yourself.” Murat’s (16 years old) experience is no different: “You just focus on your target, you forget about your troubles. It does not matter whether you love somebody. It does not matter whether your dad pressures you to work and bring money. You don’t think about those things.”

It is a kind of experience that Sedat (18 years old) could not find the right words to describe:

> Like, it is different from emotions. You know, for example, there is something we call weeping, laughing. But what is in the protest is not something like this. It is different; it is like something hot. When you are there [in the protests], you are totally absorbed in it. You don’t think of other things much. Maybe you only think not to get caught [by the police]. There is always a thrill there. As if there is something that is going to happen at any time and you are waiting for that. You don’t think about tomorrow because you don’t know what will happen tomorrow.

Ironically, it seems that play is transformative precisely because it is deadly. In other words, the prerequisite to cultivating these new, transcendent selves is the very fact that collectively, the youth have the knowledge that they can lose their lives at any moment. In such a situation, what matters is the here and now, as Sedat says, there is no tomorrow for them. “Time goes by so fast” Refik (17 years old) says, when

> You realize that it had been fifteen hours since you started the protests. You are not aware that you had not eaten anything since then. You lose yourself. What you pay attention to

> is not food or water. What you pay attention to is the corner, whether the police vehicles will appear there or not. Whether I will be able to hit it or not. You also think about cigarettes. I would lie, if I say I don't think about cigarettes. If you have them, it is great.

This material re-inscription of the life-world is informed by a history of state violence that renders normal life uninhabitable; also significant is the immediacy of the present situation where protesters at any time anticipate their death due to police violence. I suggest that the altered sense of temporality due to the immediacy of the present is what separates the world of play from daily life. Thus, the deadly politics of play becomes more real than an uninhabitable "normal" reality insofar as, in protesters' terms, "there is no tomorrow."

VI. Conclusion

Life in Cizre is covered by layers of secrecy for religious, traditional, or political reasons. Many people drink secretly. Many eat secretly during Ramadan, while pretending that they are fasting. Since pre-marital romantic relationships are not approved of, many have secret girlfriends and boyfriends. There are multiple tactics of concealment that different groups employ in different settings. Black chadors allow adult women to navigate public spaces without being identified. A woman once laughingly told me that even her husband could not recognize her, even though she came across him in public many times a day. For many young women, using the Turkish language is a means of concealment. At home, they use Turkish to talk on the phone with their boyfriends, as their mothers usually only know Kurdish. In this framework, what is at stake is not one's intention in engaging in an action marked as improper. Nor is it the improper action itself. Of significance is rather the display of such an action, which is viewed as an indication of

disrespect to the family and the community. This is perhaps because display is necessarily interactional. A religious man, for instance, proudly told me about his son who has never drunk alcohol in the presence of his father, as a gesture of respect.

Secrecy is also an essential element of play the youth perform in protests. As Huizinga (12) remarks, play "loves to surround itself with an air of secrecy." In this chapter, I suggested that materiality is yet another constitutive element of play in that the quality of play became manifest in the material expressions of protests. Kurdish street protests built around layers of secrecy, diverse spatial and bodily practices, and lethal game illuminates the generative force of political action and its world-creating quality.

The life-world emerging in moments of protest penetrated daily life through the utterance of the following slogan in bizarre contexts: "Biji Serok Apo" or "Long Live the Leader Apo." They whispered this slogan in a rhythmic way during their mundane everyday activities—when they work, walk, eat, and so on. "Biji Serok Apo" was a leitmotif of daily life city as it was probably the most uttered sentence among the youth. Once a young repairman came to my apartment to fix my refrigerator. He was constantly whispering this slogan to the extent that his utterance organized the rhythm of his work. As he finished whispering six syllables of the slogan once, he turned the screwdriver six times. Knowing that he was not supposed to utter this slogan in strangers' homes, he apologetically looked at me and said that he could not stop himself uttering it.

In the middle school where I taught English as a volunteer, when the school bell rang, my students would recite this slogan in unison as they ran out the of the classroom. They used to write this slogan on the board, books, and walls, and to carve it on their desks. In order to attract their attention, I was translating this and their other favorite slogans into English. They were

surprised that the slogans could be translated into another language. I used to hear this slogan when I passed by the amusement park in town. Youth would utter this slogan loudly, especially when riding the pirate ship called *Gondol*, perhaps the scariest ride in the park.

I think the utterance of this slogan indicates more than a gesture of respect the youth paid for the leader of Kurdish movement. As Rosalind Morris notes, "the slogan is speech at the point where the boundary between language and thing threatens to dissolve" (Morris 2016: 128). Vocalization of this slogan outside the protests and carving it on objects and walls are invocations of the play state. It is through the utterance of this slogan that the play state permeates daily life. Besides, this slogan is a reminder of the political discourse that mobilizes the youth in the first place.

Chapter 3: Down in the Trenches

In October 2014, Cizre youth led a massive uprising during which they took the entire city under their control for over two weeks. Although they eventually ended the uprising and withdrew from the city center, their presence and influence was resurrected within their neighborhoods but this time in a slightly different fashion. Digging deep trenches along the entrances to the neighborhoods of Sur, Cudi, Yafes, and Nur—the bastions of the Kurdish movement— the youth aimed at rendering these places inaccessible to the police and other state actors. This form of defiance proved to be easily imitable in addition to being an effective form of resistance: youths in Yüksekova, Nusaybin, Silopi, Şırnak, and Sur followed in the footsteps of those in Cizre shortly thereafter and started digging their own trenches. As trenches spread across the region, they became the dominant register not only of youth politics but Kurdish politics more broadly— one that posed an immediate challenge to the Turkish state's territorial sovereignty.

This chapter investigates the relationship between the digging of trenches and youth politics, arguing that the former enforced a new form of spatial, corporeal, and temporal habitus onto the latter. By this, I mean that the youth began to focus more on the protection of neighborhoods, which were separated by trenches from the rest of the city, rather than turning the entire city into a space of conflict, as in the case of street protests. The digging of trenches also led many youths to cut off all relationships to the state, family, school, and work, leaving no room for returning to the quotidian life after protest. And in so doing, it unsettled the distinction between the mountain and the city and between the guerrillas and the youth. The political was no

longer predicated on the creation of a life-world outside of everyday life but became everyday life itself. As such, the term play state, which I previously used in a metaphorical sense to name this fleeting life-world, gained a literal meaning with the emergent political register, as it allowed the youth to establish their own unofficial quasi-state, whose borders were demarcated by trenches. I demonstrate how the youth mimicked the Turkish police—the only corporeal and spatial model of 'security' they encountered—while carrying out self-defense practices in their play state. I thus argue that the play quality of self-defense practices lay in mimesis.

The shift from street protests to self-defense did not occur overnight with the digging of trenches; these two forms coexisted side by side for a while, albeit uneasily. I argue that street protests persisted in the context of trenches, because it was predicated on a certain bodily hexis that the youth had acquired over the years by observing and partaking in protests. It was not easy for the youth to translate these experiences into the defense of their liberated zone, which often involved armed clashes with the police. After all, self-defense practices demanded new embodied practices that were yet alien to the youth; they had to learn how to handle a gun, dig trenches, and how to use their bodies around the trenches while fighting the police. I suggest that as the armed struggle escalated over time in relation to larger political processes in the Middle East, the trenches gradually annihilated the space for street politics.

I. The Rise of Autonomy

After the declaration of the peace process, the Kurdish movement began experimenting with democratic autonomy across the region, rather than waiting for the Turkish government to initiate legal reforms. Democratic autonomy refers primarily to a bottom-up governance in the

region, based on the creation of neighborhood and city councils, which would collectively forge new institutions in various domains of social life. When I began my fieldwork in the fall of 2013, the neighborhood and city councils had already been set up, along with other vital institutions of emergent autonomy, which included a court, elementary school, and health center, in addition to self-defense units and cooperatives.

The Turkish government preferred to overlook the Kurdish movement's activities in the region as a compromise to sustain the peace process without making any real progress, especially in terms of legislation. In so doing, the government gained the leverage to step back from the peace process in the future with complete unaccountability. Consider the following incident about a Kurdish elementary school, set up in the context of autonomy in Cizre, as a striking example of how the official peace process on the macro level allowed for unofficial negotiations in local settings, and vice versa.

The elementary school in question, *Dibistana Seretayî ya Berîvan* in Kurdish, began providing education in Kurdish in September 2014, with two first grade classes filled with around a hundred students in total. However, only a few days after opening its doors, the school made headlines in the Turkish mainstream media. The headlines triggered the paranoia of Kurdish separatism in the Turkish nationalist imaginaries, thereby generating an uproar among the Turkish public. To mollify the public, the police raided the school and shut it down, an event that received as much coverage as the opening. But only hours after the police raid, a group of local politicians visited the city's governor to request permission to reopen the school. As they recounted to me later, the governor was unwilling to release an official order to open the school but instead encouraged them to do it on their own initiative. In so doing, the governor made it clear that the school did not have official permission, let alone official status, and that he would

turn a blind eye toward such initiatives insofar as they were kept secret from the Turkish public. The next morning, these local politicians removed the seal on the gate and silently re-opened the school without facing any intervention by the police. As the re-opening of this elementary school was not reported in the mainstream Turkish media, the school (whether due to simple lack of awareness or purposeful ignorance) ceased to exist for those outside the city of Cizre.

While the larger context of the Kurdish-Turkish peace process produced ambiguities at the local level, which allowed autonomous Kurdish institutions to flourish while simultaneously rendering them invisible in the Turkish public imaginary, what I found fascinating was the Cizre residents' lukewarm reception of these emergent institutions of autonomy. For instance, although the right to receive education in the mother tongue, i.e., Kurdish, was a prominent mobilizing frame for the Kurdish movement since its inception, there was little enthusiasm within the community when the school for which they had struggled for years was finally opened. It would suffice to remark that only those parents who were actively involved in Kurdish politics were willing to send their children to this school.

I think one reason for the indifference toward the alternative Kurdish school is a general disinterest in education at large, which is evident in how Cizre was often featured as one of the main cities where students had the lowest grades in the national high school and university entrance exams.[17] For many within the community, the youth's prospects lay not in education but in smuggling, perhaps because the latter was a more realistic and profitable option. This partly

[17] Once, I happened to be in a store while a TV channel was broadcasting the news that Cizre was ranked the least successful city in the entire country in terms of high school entrance exam scores. The news caught the attention of two boys in the store, who had probably just taken the exam; they laughed out loud and sarcastically congratulated each other.

explains why a friend of mine — who happened to be the first college graduate in his extended family and second in his entire clan — considered resigning from his job as a civil servant. As he put it, his much younger siblings and cousins earned more money through smuggling than he did despite his higher level of education. As for some relatively educated parents who were more enthusiastic about their children's education, the teachers in the school were not sufficiently qualified to teach in Kurdish—the teachers had received education in Turkish and learned Kurdish at home. A friend of mine who sent his son to the school worried about the uncertain prospects of the school given that the school had only first grade classes and the possibility of opening a second grade depended on the continuation of the fragile peace process.

I observed similar apathy for other autonomous institutions as well. For instance, the city and neighborhood councils formed in about 2013, but many residents had no desire to actively attend the council meetings. Although there was emphasis on creating an alternative economy, the only cooperative established to that end was a bakery, which went bankrupt after only a few months. Similar to the school, the court was criticized for lacking a qualified staff. Several interlocutors claimed that those performing the roles of judge and prosecutor in the court had in fact little knowledge of the law and how it should operate, as they had no formal legal education. They were often criticized for making uninformed, unfair decisions. For instance, a friend of mine brought a dispute surrounding the distribution of an inheritance within his extended family to the court, claiming that his uncle had taken over a piece of land that belonged to the entire family and requesting his share. In its decision-making process, the court relied solely on personal testimonies since it had no access to any official deeds or any other official archival material that could reveal the property's past ownership. When the court decided in favor of his uncle, my outraged friend remarked, "The state's court is more just than our court."

A prevalent criticism of the court and other Kurdish autonomous institutions is that they mimic existing Turkish institutions. This criticism was prevalent despite the fact that these institutions were not supposed to provide merely a Kurdish version of existing state institutions but to challenge the capitalist and patriarchal system, more broadly. Besides, for many, the problem was not simply that these new autonomous institutions were mimicking state institutions, but rather that they were failing even to mimic them effectively. This was particularly the case for the youth's self-defense practices—given that the youth were in fact informed by the model of guerrillas, it cannot be claimed that they are exempt from claims of mimicry.

This criticism reveals the tension between the desire to act like a state and an inevitable failure to fulfill that desire. I would suggest that this failure does not stem from the actors' misunderstanding of what Kurdish autonomy entails but their inability to create new institutions without taking up the state institutions that they had encountered throughout their lives. When they began building autonomous institutions, they had to work with what was available to them, which mostly consisted of their perception of the state and how it functions, given that the state was never fully legible to them in the first place. Here perhaps the key question is, in what ways did the youth and other actors adapt and modify state practices and institutions while simultaneously inventing new ones?

It was institutions of self-defense that excited people most while also challenging the negotiations with state actors on both local and national levels. The Kurdish movement had sent several guerrillas from the mountains to the cities to train local youth—namely the street protesters—and recruit them into the self-defense units. The guerrillas also took the prerogative to help form the YDG-H, which served as an umbrella organization to coordinate these units.

Young women within the YDG-H would later create their own organization, YDG-K, Patriotic Revolutionary Young Women's movement.

YDG-H opened its Cizre branch in the summer of 2013 with an inauguration ceremony. A few hours before the inauguration ceremony, around a hundred youths, who had received military and ideological training from guerilla fighters, took to the city's main avenues. Their faces were covered in masks, and they were wearing black T-shirts with a photo image of Abdullah Öcalan on the front and back, along with the words "YDG-H" and *asayiş.* These youth chanted slogans as they waved the PKK's flag and marched in a straight line on the main avenues before eventually reaching a large clearing at the edge of the Nur neighborhood where the ceremony would be held. Thousands of residents from Nur and other neighborhoods who had gathered in the clearing to watch the ceremony cheered as the youth entered, singing political songs and chanting slogans. Across from the youth, who took their position for the ceremony and formed a neat, clustered formation, was a desk covered by PKK's flags and Öcalan's pictures, and behind the desk stood three face-covered guerrillas.

The ceremony started with a moment of silence, which was a gesture of respect for the Kurdish martyrs, followed by passionate speeches propounding the history of the Kurdish movement, the current political strategy of autonomy, and finally the YDG-H's role in realizing that strategy. The guerrillas then summoned the youth one by one with their codenames to step forward, shook their hands, and gave them a rolled diploma, affirming their membership in the YDG-H. After receiving their diplomas, the youth took their oaths, expressing their life-long commitment to the YDG-H.

One of my interlocutors who had participated in the ceremony recounted to me that each diploma was marked with a red star and the YDG-H acronym using a carved potato stamp dipped

in water-based paint, as they used to do in elementary school—the making of the diploma with fleeting paint is yet another example of the tension between mimicry and its failure. Resembling guerrilla initiation rites on the mountains, this ceremony marked the first step in the armament and institutionalization of youth politics. The formation of the YDG-H also set the stage for the October uprising, which took place that same year (2013) as well as for the subsequent formation of trenches.

II. The Digging of Trenches

On the evening of October 6, 2013, I was sitting in an open-air teahouse in the city of Diyarbakır. A friend was telling me about his younger brother who had gone missing a few days earlier. He thought that his brother might have gone to join the YPG in order to protect the canton of Kobane against an ISIS offensive, though he also believed his brother was not sufficiently politicized to take such a radical step. Meanwhile, in the teahouse, a pro-Kurdish TV channel was reporting that the Turkish government was refusing to allow Kurdish forces in other cantons to cross its border to join the resistance in Kobane, and that the demise of Kobane was imminent—at the time, international media often pointed to the Turkish government's alleged logistical support for ISIS in the latter's attacks on Kobane.

Only half an hour later, the smell of tear gas started to fill the teahouse, the certain sign of a protest happening nearby. It soon became apparent that the news broadcast we had just watched had sparked a massive youth-led uprising which spread like wildfire across the Kurdish regions, as well as Kurdish-populated neighborhoods of Turkish cities. For the most part, the uprising was in the form of street protests where the protesters often threw stones and Molotov cocktails at the

police, while the police fired tear gas and water cannons to disperse them. But in some places (for instance Diyarbakır, where I had witnessed the beginnings of the October uprising), street protests evolved into armed clashes with the police and the Huda Par—the political wing of the state-backed Islamist movement Hizbullah—leaving over fifty dead.

Early in the morning on the following day of October 7, I went to the Diyarbakır bus terminal only to find out most trips to Cizre had been canceled, as parts of the highway in that direction fell under the control of protesters the previous night. I was lucky enough to find a bus driven by a local from Cizre, who knew how to negotiate with the youth to pass through their barricades and checkpoints. After we arrived near the entrance to Cizre around 4:00 pm after around 7 hours on the bus, the driver announced that he was unable to move any further because the youth had blocked all entrance and exit points in the city, and that the passengers had to continue the trip on foot. As I got off the bus along with other passengers and walked towards the city, I received a phone call from my friend and interlocutor İrfan, letting me know that he was in Rojava at the moment, chatting with the YPG guerrillas.

That same morning, according to İrfan, he and hundreds of other youths walked from Cizre to the Syrian border, aiming to cross to Rojava's Cizir canton. When they approached the border, the Turkish soldiers fired at them and wounding one individual, in an attempt to stop them from advancing. The youth moved forward despite the gunfire, broke the barbwires at the border, and made it into Rojava. Unable to stop this flow, the Turkish soldiers apparently left their watch-towers and retreated to their bases. The border was at some distance from where I got off the bus, but I was close enough to see people still crossing to Rojava through the ripped barbwires. İrfan and some others returned to Cizre later in the evening while over three hundred youths reportedly stayed in Rojava to join the YPG there.

I finally entered Cizre early that evening by foot, passing through numerous check points and barricades. On the way, I came across an acquaintance, Resul, who told me that his fifteen-year-old son Emin had been missing since the morning. I knew Emin and had interviewed him only a few weeks before, and I joined Resul to look for him. However, all the youths that we encountered had their faces covered; some of them were standing by the barricades with their rifles on the main avenues, while some were trying to break the CCTV cameras placed atop the long concrete pillars on those avenues, and yet others sat on the sidewalks, relishing the sight of the destruction of CCTVs with great curiosity. Anticipating that Emin might have covered his face, too, we approached anybody whose clothing, hairdo, or body size resembled that of Emin. Even after admitting the impracticality of this method, Resul nonetheless insisted that we keep walking around, this time not to find Emin, but to make Emin find us. Resul believed that if Emin saw us he would approach and reveal his identity, which I was not so sure about. I remembered my interlocutors telling me laughingly how during protests, they acted like strangers when they spotted their parents, who were looking for them to take them home. A few hours later, we found out that Emin was among the youths who had crossed to Rojava and that he was not returning home in the near future.

Despite the ongoing uprising, Cizre was unusually quiet, even quieter than previous times when the clashes with the police had become part of daily life in the city. Even the familiar smell of tear gas was noticeably absent. At first, I had trouble understanding why this was the case given that in other cities the clashes had escalated to a more dangerous level than usual that day. Based on my informants' accounts, I tried to reconstruct the events that occurred the previous night: thousands of youths, some armed, had stormed the streets and started protests, while many others, including adults, fired their guns in the air from rooftops, which my interlocutors

interpreted as a threat to the government. The scale and velocity of the protests caught the police off guard in Cizre to the extent that they had to withdraw from the streets and remain on their bases, except for a small number of police officers who positioned themselves in the governorate building's yard to protect the governor. Meanwhile, the youth had encircled the city and erected barricades on main roads, blocking vehicles from entering. They had also asked, if not flat-out ordered, the city's shopkeepers to keep their stores closed during the uprising. As such, they had taken the entire city under their control only within a few hours.

In other cities, the uprising slowly died out after the second day, when the number of protesters began to decrease. The police used this opportunity to regain its presence in the streets and disperse the protesters. This was the case especially for metropolitan cities like Diyarbakir, over which the protesters could not gain or maintain control. More protesters left the streets after Kurdish politicians, who had failed to contain and redirect the uprising, finally called for calm on the grounds that the protests could derail the peace process. Another contributing factor to the swift dissolution of the uprising in most cities seems to be the lack of vision or plan for the aftermath of the uprising, which protesters considered as something ephemeral rather than sustainable.

Although the uprising in Cizre continued over two weeks until the youth eventually brought an end to it and retreated to their neighborhoods, it left deep imprints on the youth. It revealed the potentiality of the streets, allowing the youth to reimagine the realm of the possible, remarkably not at the moment of happening but in its immediate aftermath. Many youths I talked to at the time had come to believe that they could go beyond momentary uprisings and render their neighborhoods inaccessible to the police in a permanent way. They were determined to prolong the uprising in their neighborhoods.

As the municipality workers lifted the barricades to let the police back into the city center, the youth concurrently built new, makeshift barricades along the entrances to their neighborhoods, using sandbags and "anything big" they could find, such as trashcans, rocks, pieces of wood and metal, and the like. The police responded by positioning themselves on the main avenues to initiate attacks to take over the neighborhoods (in which they had been increasingly losing their foothold during the last few years), and arrest the youth (thereby deterring another uprising from happening again). They would pass through the barricades, advance in the neighborhoods to some extent, and conduct arrests, before the youth eventually fought back, engaging in long hours of clashes at the risk of serious injuries and more arrests on their part. Later, the youth improvised an unprecedented form of defiance.

One night, the youth appeared in the streets that connected their neighborhoods to the rest of the city. Some stood guard on the corners of the streets with pistols in their hands while others began breaking all the street lights one by one with stones in order to avoid being noticed by the police. As the streets slowly disappeared into the dark, the youth hastily began digging trenches along the entrances to the streets. Around two meters deep and wide, the trenches aimed at permanently blocking the entry of the police and other state actors to these neighborhoods. The method of digging a trench varied depending on the size and location of the streets. For the narrow streets, they used shovels and pickaxes, which slowed down the digging but allowed the process to be less noticeable.

It was impossible to dig trenches in the same way on wider streets, especially the ones that hit the main avenues, fast enough and without being noticed. The youth used excavator machines instead, which they had taken from the city's Kurdish-led municipality. Yet there were still a few streets that were not wide enough for an excavator machine and not narrow enough to

dig a trench with shovels and pickaxes quickly. On such streets, the youth agreed not to dig trenches but instead to build strong and permanent barricades, often using sandbags. Despite the police sporadically firing at them to hinder their efforts, the youth managed to finish digging the trenches over a single night, separating the neighborhoods from the rest of the city. The borders of these newly forged liberated zones were demarcated by the trenches that cross cut the urban landscape overnight.

III. A Spatial War

The digging of trenches would soon become a common practice that would mark the beginning of a perpetual spatial war between the youth and the police. The youth began spending their time and energy largely standing guard every day from night to dawn around the trenches in order to repel any police attacks. Besides, they needed to continuously maintain and modify the trenches in order to effectively fend off incursions. For one thing, the trenches were uneven in terms of their width and depth; the ones that were dug with shovels and pickaxes were narrower and shallower than others. So the youth dug them deeper and wider in the following nights while the police fired at them from the other side. They also kept on unmaking and remaking the trenches to deal with practical challenges.

For instance, the youth realized they must leave at least one street in each neighborhood open for use by ambulances and fire engines in the case of emergencies. Concerned that the police could also use them to enter the neighborhoods, they came up with the idea of moveable trenches. They dug a kind of trench that did not block the street entrance entirely but left some space undug on one edge. In case of emergency, they used large timbers to cover the trench so

that vehicles could pass through with one tire on the edge and another on the timbers. After the vehicles passed through, they would lift the timbers and turn it into a trench once again. In this way, they could make and unmake the trenches in minutes.

Meanwhile the police were quickly adapting to these new spatial technologies. They introduced armored excavators, for instance, in their incursion attempts to the neighborhoods. The excavators were meant to fill the trenches and make way for other police vehicles. Behind the attacked trenches, the youth would begin erecting barricades with sandbags and rocks, using them as shields against the police who shot at the youth once they crossed the trenches. Facing fierce armed resistance, the police usually pulled back from the neighborhoods only to initiate another attack shortly thereafter. Later on, to make it more difficult for the police to unblock the streets, the youth planted myriad kinds of mostly homemade roadside bombs in the trenches. The police soon came up with a new tactic to deal with explosive-laden trenches: They would first detonate the explosives from afar, fill the trenches via excavators, and tried to advance into the neighborhoods, often with little to no success.

Another spatial technique the youth developed was changing the location of certain trenches from the entrance to the middle of the streets, aimed at intervening incursion attempts more effectively. Also, the police found it riskier to fill the trenches in the middle of the street, suspecting that there would be traps. “They were right to be cautious,” one of my interlocutors said laughingly, “because there are traps there indeed.” As the trenches were perpetually being unmade and remade, the borders of the liberated zones changed every day. For instance, my interlocutor Zeki lived in a house that was behind the trenches that were previously built near the entrance of the neighborhood of Nur.

Thus, their house had initially been inside the liberated zone. But when the location of the trenches was switched from the beginning to the middle of the street, the house was suddenly outside that zone. While his family continued to live in their house, Zeki often found it safer to stay at his friends' places inside the liberated zone. The plethora of trenches and barricades and their perpetual unmaking and remaking inevitably altered the way residents inhabited their neighborhoods. It was difficult for them to move around, particularly at night when the streets were dark except for the light seeping through houses; one had to memorize the map of the trenches everyday anew in order to not fall into a trench. That is why, if I happened to visit my friends when it was dark, I would call them on my way to find out if any new trenches were dug around their streets since my last visit.

With the trenches, the focus of youth politics became the protection of the neighborhoods from the police. This responsibility inevitably transformed youth politics to a great extent into an armed resistance. But the armed resistance would also spread beyond the trenches in the form of street protests when the youth occasionally crossed to the main avenues to clash with the police, using stones and Molotov cocktails and the like. In so doing, the youth momentarily changed the rules of the game as they led the police to respond often by firing tear gas and water cannons—though it became more common to see the police firing at the protesters with live ammunition. I should note that it was not only the armed youth —YDG-H's formal members — who attended the protests; all youths in the neighborhoods were potential street protesters. Often abbreviated as *gençlik* or the youth, pointing to "G" in the acronym, YDG-H was more of an epithet with which all the street protesters identified themselves. This is why street protesters began to refer to themselves and be referred to by the wider public as the youth instead of children, as was the case before the YDG-H era (see Chapter 2).

The old-fashioned street protests that continued to occur from time to time suggested that there was still space for political participation among youth who were unable or unwilling to get involved in armed resistance while still claiming membership within the YDG-H, formally or not. The street politics persisted because it was something the youth had learned to do over many years. Many of them were only small children when they began observing protests taking place in the streets where they played. They often began joining the protests when they were as young as nine years old. By so doing, they learned how to use and conceal their bodies, how to turn mundane objects into weapons and use them to fight the police, and how to deal with the police if they were attacked. So, it was not easy for them to suddenly change their mode of political engagement despite the new context. They needed to develop new bodily techniques; they needed to learn how to use the trenches and their bodies while protecting their territory against a police force equipped with advanced weaponry and stronger armored vehicles as well as high-tech thermal image and night vision cameras.

In fact, the youth even had trouble cultivating corporeal techniques to keep up with their own evolving resistance technologies. Most of them only received a short period of training prior to their engagement with the armed resistance, and some youths still did not know how to properly handle a gun. An interlocutor told me of an incident in which a youth pulled the trigger while tampering with his pistol, killing a fellow fighter by accident. I suspect this was not a single occurrence. The youth had even less knowledge and experience when it came to the use of explosives, which I realized when I learned that one of my interlocutors had accidentally killed himself by exploding a roadside bomb that he was trying to plant in one of the trenches. My interlocutor Zeki compared the armed resistance with street protests: “Before [the trenches], I would throw stones at the police and then go home. It is not like that right now. Now, I need to

devote my whole life to the resistance. It is what the guerrillas do. I had to cut off all connections to my family. I had to quit my job."

Indeed, the difference between the guerrillas and the youth was increasingly fading away. This is evident in how the meaning of joining the guerrillas changed. In the past, the main allure of joining the guerrillas for the youth was the prospect of leading a completely different life in the mountains, fully emancipated from work, school, family, community, and the state. But after the digging of trenches, the youth went to the guerilla camps to get military and ideological training only for a few weeks, after which they swiftly returned to the city. The act of joining the guerrillas became reduced to preparing the youth for armed struggle in the city, close to home.

Nonetheless, since the digging of trenches had begun, it was still necessary for the youth to cut off their relations with the familiar institutions that grounded them in the city in order to ensure anonymity and safety—their own and that of their family. Additionally, it was no longer possible to keep their ties with these institutions while also maintaining their political engagement. This unique hybrid of the Kurdish youth's armed guerrilla resistance in a city setting, coupled with their self-isolation from every day institutions, reflects on the consequences, as well as evolution of the youth's grassroots improvisation and resistance technologies. Moreover, it shows the close relationship between politics and the body, while revealing the infinite possibilities of political engagement, whether successful or not.

Lastly, the existence of trenches in a sense facilitated the street protests because the youth, armed with the knowledge of the exact location of the trenches, were now able to easily move back and forth across trenched areas, making it difficult for the police to arrest them. In fact, the youth's mobility between the areas inside and outside the trenches enabled them to turn the entire city into a space of insecurity for the police. That is because the police expected the youth or the

guerrillas to organize armed attacks against them anywhere in the city and then cross the trenches to return to their liberated zones. I was able to clearly observe this anxiety one time when I was passing by a local grocery store in an area outside the trenches. I noticed two officers from the special police force standing guard outside the store with their finger on the trigger. Inside the store, two more officers were by the counters, standing in the same manner. Then, I saw two others approaching the counters with their carts full of grocery items. Only then did I realize that all six men were there just to shop for groceries, with four of them standing in position, ready to fire in case of an attack.

After the two officers with the full carts paid for their groceries, they brought their carts outside and put their bags in the armored vehicle parked right in front of the store. After that, they switched places with the officers standing by the counters, who then proceeded to get their carts to shop for their own groceries. Before the trenches, I had never seen this level of apprehension and uncertainty among the police about their own control over the city. Moreover, it demonstrates the bodily techniques that the police had to develop or adopt in response to the everyday spatial war with the youth and their inexperienced–yet potentially lethal–resistance technologies.

By virtue of their transient quality, I would thus argue that the trenches generated a sense of spatial indeterminacy, limiting the police's capacity to conduct even the simple ID check within the city. Perhaps paradoxically, the digging of the trenches as a physical border-making practice was effectively undoing the invisible borders that had previously separated the youth's neighborhoods from the rest of the city where usually Turkish or Kurdish civil servants and the bajari (of the city) community resided. This is why the trenches enabled the neighborhoods' residents to move around more easily than before within and outside the city to carry out their

quotidian activities. Adult men continued their business, passing through two borders on a daily basis, first the trenches and then the Iraqi border to smuggle goods. Some families went to cities in the Aegean and Black Sea regions as seasonal farm workers. Others crossed the trenches on a daily basis to go to school, work, shop, or hang out with their friends in teahouses. In spite of the increased safety for Kurdish residents crossing borders largely due to the presence of trenches, every resident made sure they returned to the liberated zones inside the trenches before sunset.

IV. Youth's Quasi-State

Behind the trenches, people went on living their lives. They continued to work, marry, prepare food, keep house, and get entangled in family politics within the unstable yet safe space inside the trenched borders. But the space created by the trenches was a space of the youth, a space for the youth. In this space, the youth set the rules, isolating and cutting off certain flows of people and power. Carrying their pistols and walkie-talkies in hand, they would set up checkpoints in the streets to perform random ID checks on the streets. They would also patrol the neighborhoods with regularity to catch and punish the government spies, as well as those who were involved in so-called immoral and criminal activities. Beating was a typical form of punishment, though in some cases they imposed fines. Over time, they improvised new methods for punishment. For instance, they turned several basements or regular houses in certain locations in each neighborhood into what they called shelters (*sığınak*). A shelter functioned as something between a prison and a detention center where suspects were often kept for ten to twenty days as a form of punishment. But in case of more serious crimes, the youth would take the suspects to the nearest guerrilla camp to be tried in the guerrilla-run courts.

That is to say, the youth were not only fighting against the police but at the same time, mimicking (or failing to mimic) them, particularly within the boundaries of their play state. For one thing, the youth lacked the necessary surveillance equipment to compete with the repressive force and effectiveness of the state. They would conduct ID checks, for instance, without having a database to run a background check on peoples' names. In the absence of such databases, the ID could hardly reveal anything about its holder except for inaccurate biographical information. Due to the ban on Kurdish, many residents had both a Turkish and a Kurdish name, using the former exclusively in official settings and the latter in all other realms of social life. Most people had the wrong date of birth on their IDs, but strangely, they often had the same wrong date: January 1. Perhaps this is the easiest date to make up—parents would usually obtain their children's IDs so late that they often forgot the exact date of birth for their child. As the widespread joke goes, "January 1 is the Kurds' national birthday," which shows how an error on the Turkish ID becomes a marker of Kurdishness. Conducting ID checks, nevertheless, allowed the youth to figure out to an extent whether an ID holder was among the local community. A person's place of birth and family registration information on their ID could usually reveal if they were from the region and hence Kurdish, though this depended on how the youth drew the region's border, not to mention that not all places in the region were as homogenously Kurdish-populated as Cizre. Regardless of effectiveness (or lack thereof), the ID check was more of a performance that marked the Kurdish movement's power in the neighborhoods—though this is true even for the official police conducting ID checks via advanced surveillance technology. Besides, in determining if a person was to be trusted, the reference point was never the individual's personal information per se but his or her family: was the family known as a supporter of the Kurdish

movement? Was it one of the families of value?[18] To which tribe and clan did the family belong? Similarly, when the youth accused someone of being a spy, other residents would judge the accusation based not on the accused's personal history but familial history.

It was not easy for the youth to take on the role of police without creating much confusion and resentment on the part of the community. Many denied any legitimacy to the self-defense force operated by the youth and refused to show their IDs. In contrast, the guerrillas never faced this kind of negative reaction when they played a similar role in the same neighborhoods in the early 1990s. This recognition partly derived from the idealized image of the guerrillas in public imaginaries as heroes who were willing to sacrifice and die for the sake of the Kurdish people. And while it was the guerrillas themselves who had trained, led, and monitored the youth in the present context, the locals would bestow on the youth neither legitimacy nor the responsibility of self-defense.

When I noted the common criticisms against the youth-led self-defense force, Mahmut, a member, replied with a question. "Everybody shows their IDs when the state asks, but why do they get annoyed when the youth do the same thing?" He expressed a sense of resentment for this lack of recognition while telling me how the youth were in fact sensitive to people's feelings while doing their job: "If a man is going somewhere with his family, I don't ask for his ID, because he would feel humiliated." Other than some exceptional cases like this, he tried to look at everyone's ID.

[18] The family of value is an epithet the Kurdish movement came up with to refer to those families whose member(s) died in the war with the Turkish state (see Chapter 2).

> I stop even those who belong to the self-defense units. This is because there are many [government] spies in the neighborhoods. If they see that I do not look at someone's ID, they would figure out that that person is a member of the youth.

What is at stake here is that both the subjects and objects of self-defense practices are the youth. It was commonly believed that the government recruited spies often among the youth, who had more access to the information needed and who were supposedly easier to convert. Similarly, the youth were seen as the main actors involved in drugs, prostitution, and theft – ones the youth self-defense units were obliged to fight against. For the Kurdish movement, it was the police that lured them into these criminal practices in order to "degenerate and de-politicize Kurdish youth." A common slogan graffitied on numerous street walls, along with the acronym YDG-H, reflects the movement's campaign to fight such involvement among the youth: "No to Drugs, Prostitution, and Theft." Note that these activities were not clearly defined. For instance, drugs usually refer to marijuana and variants of ecstasy (the most common drugs in the city), while prostitution here can refer to any extramarital sexual relations. Yet no matter how prevalent they were and whether or not the police played a role in initiating them, the Kurdish movement had singled out these controversial practices to provide evidence for the necessity of self-defense and autonomy for the community's security and morality.

In simultaneously portraying the youth as in danger and a threat, this discourse claims that politicization is the only viable solution to save the youth, as well as to prevent them from harming the community. As an interlocutor remarked, "the movement prevents youth from going down the wrong path." But from the beginning, self-defense units accepted many members who were engaged in "drugs, prostitution, and theft" which they were supposed to prevent and fight against. "All the junkies and thieves began joining the self-defense units," an interlocutor

claimed, “because the movement thought it would make them leave the wrong path.” While for the movement politics was a means of rehabilitation, for many youths, crime and politics were not mutually exclusive in the first place. It appeared to many interlocutors that thieves and junkies joined the self-defense units also because they thought their membership in the organization would render them untouchable. This tactic seemed to succeed to some extent, as the following examples show, but the majority of those punished were still the members of self-defense units.

One night, while taking a walk in the Sur neighborhood, my friends and I noticed an incident where a young man was threatening another young man at knifepoint. As we approached them to intervene, along with some other passersby, the attacker told us that he was part of the youth self-defense unit (YDG-H), and that he was fining a drug dealer as part of his duty to keep public order. But the man who was attacked rejected the accusation of being a drug dealer and claimed that he knew the attacker from before and was sure that he was not a member of YDG-H. Given also that the attacker had not covered his face — which was the youth’s signature—my friends and other passersby concluded that he could only be a thief, as he “did not look like the youth at all.” After an aggressive quarrel with the attacker, some of the passersby surrounded him and forced him to drop the knife, then turned him over to the youth in charge of that specific street. A few days later, my friends found out that the attacker was in fact part of the youth self-defense unit and thus had been released immediately after he was apprehended.

Here is another incident that confuses and complicates the story even more. Once a store was robbed, leaving many eyewitnesses behind. The eyewitnesses failed to notice it was a robbery however, perceiving it as an incident where public order was being sustained, precisely because the thieves had covered their faces, looking like the youth. The next day, the news of the

robbery circulated in the city, and residents started to openly complain about the youth. But the youth denied their involvement in the robbery and pointed to a recent phenomenon where the thieves masqueraded as "the youth" to rob the store, similar to other incidents where robbers dress like police officers. This means that the act of covering your face, which the youth employed primarily as a means to prevent identification, seems to have evolved into a collective identifier for the youth.

But what if the thieves were really part of the youth as in the previous case? They might have done it for either their own individual or collective benefit— they would confiscate or "expropriate" goods or money to spend for the community and the political struggle. Concepts including what constitutes theft or proscribed drug use remained vague and ill-defined. For instance, an interlocutor who belonged to a self-defense unit recounted to me how he put a lot of effort into stopping drug trafficking in the city. Allegedly, he even began using common drugs in order to infiltrate and figure out the drug networks. He said he eventually managed to stop drug trafficking to some extent, but he ended up becoming a drug addict himself in the process. However, in his point of view, using drugs was not harmful, unless it was encouraged by the state to degenerate the youth and undermine Kurdish resistance.

A similar ambiguity exists regarding the concept of prostitution. I observed the youth occasionally using the term "prostitution" to refer to unpaid extramarital sexual relations, as well as actual paid sex work. When I asked one of my interlocutors if he viewed extramarital relations as prostitution, he said they knew the difference and continued: "But if girls lose their virginity nobody would marry them. Then they start getting involved in prostitution." Ironically, as the youth tried to catch those who were involved in prostitution, they faced the risk of their own arrest by the Turkish police. This is because prostitution and extramarital sexual relations alike

typically occurred inside cars parked on top of the hills surrounding the city. The youth drove up to the hill and looked inside vehicles through tinted windows in order to expose and punish those who were having sex there. As the roads to the hills were often controlled by the Turkish police, several youths were arrested on the way to interrupt alleged acts of prostitution. There were also incidents where the police used their spies to release fake news about locations supposedly used for prostitution, to drag the youth out of the neighborhoods and arrest them.

In some cases, self-defense units would take naked pictures of those caught having sex in vehicles and show them to their parents. This form of punishment expectedly outraged the parents; they often accused the youth of defaming and punishing their children for their personal satisfaction or grudge. My informants, who were members of the self-defense units, defended themselves against these accusations by pointing out how effective the youth have been in obstructing criminal activities: "The police cannot not catch a thief even after a year, but the youth can do it just in a day." For my interlocutor Murat, the reasons beneath the accusations stemmed from a simple fact: "People do not love the youth." For him, people whose houses were robbed loved the youth, but others whose children were involved in criminal and immoral activities did not, as it hits them too close to home. "They know that their children are thieves. They know their children are drug addicts. These people do not like the youth" he said and added:

> Once we caught a girl while she was having sex with somebody inside a car. We took her naked pictures, not of her face but her body. There was a birth mark on her shoulder. We went to her house and showed the pictures to the girl's mother. But the mother denied that

they were her daughter's pictures. She said her daughter did not have any birth mark on her shoulder. She was lying.

Here is another incident my interlocutor Rojhat recounted to me as an example of how parents reacted when their children were accused of harassment.

> There was a woman in the street where I was patrolling. She was married. She told me that a young man had been harassing her. I went to his house. His father opened the door. I told him about his son. I will tell you how he responded to me. He just said: "Would you like to come in and have some tea?" Can you believe this? He did not care his son was harassing a married woman.

The discourse concerning theft, drug use, and prostitution, I would suggest, was aimed largely at convincing and mobilizing the locals in the struggle for autonomy. But the youth took the responsibility given to them so literally and seriously that they revealed the practices and relationships that the community already knew about but had long preferred to overlook. This tension would only increase over time until many locals framed the self-defense unit as nothing but a criminal organization that had to be abolished immediately. After numerous complaints reached the guerrilla headquarters in Qandil, the leaders requested detailed reports on the youth. They even mentioned the urgent need for academic research, which would provide insights to understand and resolve the "youth problem."

V. "The Youth Have Left the City"

Cizre youth also became a target of the Turkish government because of their frequent mentions in mainstream media. In January 2015, the government sought out Abdullah Öcalan's help to deal with this issue. For Öcalan, the youth and their trenches could have detrimental effects not only on the peace process but also on the upcoming general elections in June 2015, in which the People's Democratic Party (HDP) was expected to be the first Kurdish party to pass the ten percent threshold and win more seats in the parliament than in the previous elections. The elections presented a technical issue as much as a political one, since state actors would not even be able to enter the trenched areas to place ballot boxes. Öcalan thus wrote a letter from Imrali Island prison, which exclusively addressed Cizre youth. Hatip Dicle, a renowned Kurdish politician, brought the letter in person to Cizre to read it aloud to a large crowd of local residents.

The letter's message was clear. Öcalan was asking the youth to cover the trenches and uncover their faces. There was total silence on the part of the audience, most of whom had at least a few family members and friends within the self-defense units. Even those who had wanted to close down the self-defense units now worried that if Öcalan's demands were fulfilled, the police would easily arrest the youth and occupy the neighborhoods once again. Locals speculated that if they carried through with Öcalan's demands, the youth would be left only with the option of joining the guerrillas if they were to avoid imprisonment. That evening, several of my interlocutors came over to my place, so I had a chance to ask them how they interpreted the letter. For them, the dilemma was less about choosing between arrest and joining the guerrillas; it was more about whether they would obey or disobey their spiritual leader.

Other political actors in the city focused their energy on pressuring the youth to let the trenches be filled, while the youth tried to find a midway solution so that they could delay

making a final decision. They started the negotiations by saying that they were against the idea of filling the trenches because doing so would enable the police to make arrests and re-occupy the liberated zones. However, they declared that they would agree to do so on condition that the police would not enter the neighborhoods. Since it was unlikely that the youth would directly communicate and negotiate with the police, they proposed that rather than filling the trenches all at once, they would start by filling two trenches the next day, as a gesture of reconciliation. And if the police did not attempt to make incursions, they agreed to continue filling two additional trenches per day. My interlocutors further explained that the reason behind this decision was to spread the process over a longer period of time. They recounted that it was extremely risky and labor-intensive to dig the trenches, and that they had spent months modifying and deepening the trenches. In turn, they might not be able to afford to re-dig the trenches if the police attacked them afterwards.

The next day, the municipality sent an excavator to close two of the trenches. Cizre's Kurdish mayor Leyla Imret, along with many other political figures, were present at this critical event, during which she took pictures of herself near the excavator filling the trenches, to be posted on social media. Only one day later, however, the police passed through one of the unblocked streets to kill a twelve-year-old boy named Nihat Kazanhan. Viewing this provocative event as a sign of upcoming attacks, the youth declared that they were not filling any more trenches. Thereafter, the locals began circulating the rumor that the youth had left the city. Various speculations were put forward to explain the whereabouts of the youth: "They crossed to Rojava." "They joined the guerrillas." "They went to visit their relatives in [western] metropoles." In fact, the youth had not gone anywhere; this was merely a discourse to generate an impression that those who could likely undermine the peace process and the elections were gone

for now. What followed this rumor was a short period of indecision vis-à-vis trench politics in the city.

The youth were still in their neighborhoods but no longer visible around the trenches and city center. They were more focused on avoiding armed clashes with the police while at the same time preparing for a possible police attack. Besides, most people outside Cizre, both Kurdish and Turkish, assumed that all the trenches had been filled, due largely to the pictures Mayor Imret had posted on social media. All the trenches were in fact still physically intact, except for two. But they seemed to have lost much of their symbolic power with the absence of the face-covered and armed youth who once guarded them. The trenches of the liberated zones were relegated to looking more like construction sites. Likewise, when they were no longer around the trenches with their faces covered and rifles in hand, the youth lost much of their previous image. Metaphorically, if not literally, the youth had really gone; the trenches had really vanished.

There was another remarkable scene that can be viewed as a metaphor for the political landscape in the city after the youth and the trenches were made invisible. It occurred on March 21. Thousands of people gathered on empty land on the skirt of a hill to celebrate Newroz. Many of them wore traditional Kurdish clothes. On the stage were well-known Kurdish politicians, giving long speeches on peace and fraternity. Some families were watching the celebration from the top of the hill where they were also picnicking. On my way back home, on Nusaybin Avenue where protests had often happened before, I saw a boy around seven or eight years old with a mask, holding an HDP flag. The boy also attracted the attention of another passerby, an elderly man who said to him laughingly, “If you were going to cover your face anyway, you should be holding another flag.” What the man pointed to was the mismatch between the masked boy and the flag, for it belonged to an official Kurdish political party that had gained mainstream visibility

at the time. So, unless he was holding "another flag"—code for the PKK flag— there was no need for him to cover his face. Meanwhile, I noticed several other children of similar age who also covered their faces and held HDP flags.

It was probably more difficult for the children to obtain the PKK flag than the HDP flag, as the latter was abundant in the streets because of the ongoing election campaigns. Perhaps they were simply unaware that each flag had a different political connotation and generated a different affective resonance for the community and the police. Indeed, the police who were patrolling nearby in their armored vehicle seemed to be indifferent to these children. All of a sudden, however, one of the children began throwing stones at armored vehicles, which launched a mini-street protest. Other children joined him thereafter, throwing stones while the police inside the vehicles responded by firing tear gas at them. Besides showing the persistent corporeality of the street protests, what makes this scene intriguing is the fact that these children were not used to seeing festival-like Newroz celebrations. Indeed, Cizre was renowned as a city of insurgency owing to the deadly protests that occurred on the same avenue on Newroz days since the early 1990s. In the previous year (2014), for instance, the governor had banned the Newroz celebration a few days prior to the Newroz day, only to see youth immediately take to the streets and clash with the police, without waiting for the actual Newroz day. Also, the killing of a protester by the police the night before the Newroz celebration triggered more protests. Now that the youth were not around, these children seemed to have taken their place to maintain the Newroz tradition, albeit in their own unique, spontaneous way.

VI. Conclusion

Cizre was unusually uneventful during the spring of 2015. A sense of waiting dominated political life in the city, traceable to the profound dilemma between the unfolding autonomy and the prospect of a fragile peace process. I completed my field research and moved to Istanbul in June. On July 20, an ISIS suicide bomber killed 33 young activists while they were making a press statement in the border city of Urfa, announcing their trip to Kobane to help reconstruct the city after it was razed to the ground by ISIS. Two days later, again in Urfa, two Turkish police officers were killed in their beds. The PKK initially claimed the killings as a retaliation against the killing of young activists, suggesting that the government had facilitated the ISIS attack. Shortly afterward, it released another statement to announce that it had nothing to do with the killing of police officers. Though it was too late, the government used this event to call off the peace process.

Meanwhile, Cizre youth re-appeared on the public stage to set up checkpoints in the trenched areas more frequently than ever to protect Kurdish autonomy, though this time without the shield of the peace process that had so far limited the scale violence directed at Cizre. They also resumed their fighting against the police via armed resistance around the trenches, as well as street protests. Yet the police began to undermine the possibility of street protests by using firearms exclusively to disperse the protesters. Regarding this shift, an interlocutor stated: “I liked the old times better than the trenches because back then, we could do street protests whenever we wanted. But they are firing at us now.”

As the struggle raced toward urban warfare, the age range within youth politics shifted. For instance, many of those who were between ten to fifteen years old and had previously been involved in street politics could not engage in armed resistance, consequently finding themselves

outside youth politics altogether. It was now generally those older than fifteen who carried out resistance behind the trenches. Moreover, the Kurdish movement began to transfer more guerillas and heavy weaponry to Cizre and other entrenched cities to prepare for the upcoming urban warfare. Indeed, the sporadic armed clashes culminated in urban war in the fall. The next chapter chronicles the urban war in Cizre, one that marked a turning point in the dialectic struggle between the Turkish state and the Kurdish movement.

Chapter 4: Urban Warfare and the Reoccupation of Cizre

In the fall of 2015, the Turkish state instigated an urban warfare campaign to reinstate its demographic and territorial sovereignty over Cizre, ultimately killing hundreds of residents and razing neighborhoods to the ground. The scale of violence that the state unleashed in this process came as a shock to the Kurdish population as well as the PKK leadership. "We did not expect an attack of that level; we were wrong," said Murat Karayilan, a senior PKK commander. Note that only a few years before the eruption of urban warfare, Karayilan had published a book on the extensive history of Kurdish resistance against the Turkish state, *Bir Savaşın Anatomisi* (Anatomy of a War) (Karayilan 2015). In this book, he examined how in the 1990s, the state designated Cizre as a laboratory of counterinsurgency to experiment with tactics of enforced disappearance, extrajudicial murder, and torture. Given this precedent, how could nobody foresee what was in store for Cizre? Alternatively, why did the state opt for catastrophic warfare instead of surgical operations as in the 1990s? This chapter suggests that notions of legibility and illegibility might explain this radical shift in the tactics of counterinsurgency, as well as the sense of shock it inflicted on the Kurdish polity.

Concealment has been a fundamental tenet of the Kurdish struggle in Cizre (and elsewhere) since the 1990s. Cizre residents have improvised various tactics of concealment to maintain this struggle while evading lethal state violence and incarceration: removing signboards such as street names and house numbers; breaking street lights; dismantling surveillance cameras; regularly changing locations; using codenames; and cross-dressing, to name a few. The digging

of trenches, however, brought the tactics of concealment to a new level in that it rendered entire neighborhoods illegible to the state. More to the point, the evolution of new political forms and actors in the Kurdish movement during the 2000s blurred previous divisions between militants and sympathizers. Back in the 1990s, via the tactics mentioned above, the state had recruited Kurdish tribal leaders and former PKK militants in the village guard and paramilitary JITEM to identify militants and isolate them from sympathizers.

With the debut of street politics and the self-governance movement a decade later, however, the state had difficulty framing its target; it thus began to impose mass incarceration for collective punishment. The paradigm of self-governance materialized Kurdish politics in every aspect of daily life; virtually all residents, whether politicized or not, inevitably became implicated in the Kurdish movement by merely engaging with autonomous institutions. This process also set the stage for the digging of trenches to further unravel other divisions within the Kurdish political landscape: namely, the youth and guerillas, the city and the mountain.

In the 20th century, across the globe, enemy-centric approaches were the dominant principle of counterinsurgencies. Contemporary liberal counterinsurgencies, however, unfolded on a spectrum of enemy-centric and population-centric tactics, integrating micro-practices of governance with coercion (Howard 2008; Gregory 2011; Sitaraman 2012; Jaffer 2016). Of significance is that these transformations, along with the global war on terrorism, have given rise to the legalization of counterinsurgencies in the liberal age (Khalili 2012; Harcourt 2018). I argue that the Turkish state's latest campaign maintained an enemy-centric approach while at the same time adhering to the liberal trend in legalizing this counterinsurgency. This amalgamation appeared as a response to the process in which an illegible population and inaccessible geography obstructed the possibility of drawing a line between civilians and combatants, and therefore of

conducting more surgical operations. Resorting instead to full-fledged warfare, the state viewed the districts with explosive-laced trenches as weapons (literally and metaphorically), and all those who inhabited them as combatants. Once it penetrated the entrenched neighborhoods, I suggest, the state embarked on a mapping exercise to make legible the urban space, and then to create the conditions of confinement whereby residents could not escape that space. Finally, through these tactics of confinement, the state could then categorize residents as "civilians" or "combatants," based on the residents' supposed willingness or refusal to leave their homes.

I. A Legalized Counterinsurgency

After bringing an end to the peace process, the government began developing a legal framework for full-fledged urban warfare on the fortified cities of Cizre, Sur, Nusaybin, Silopi, Şırnak, İdil, Yüksekova, and Derik. The envisioned war would entail the deployment of military combat and the use of heavy weaponry in urban areas, which was, however, against Law 542 of Provincial Governance (Gürcan 2016). According to this law, Turkish Armed Forces were authorized to sustain border security and wage conventional wars, and conduct operations exclusively in rural areas, while police and gendarmerie were entitled to maintain security in urban areas. One option for the government to overcome legal barriers on urban warfare was to suspend habeas corpus via the imposition of martial law. Instead, the government ruled to amend Law 542 of Provincial Governance to extend the armed forces' scope of operation to urban areas. Accordingly, if the police and gendarmerie forces were unable to undermine urban insurgencies, the armed forces would then be compelled to intervene and maintain order. The military units involved in such operations would remain under the jurisdiction of the Chief of General Staff. As

such, this legal arrangement was instrumental in curtailing the authority of city governors in favor of military power.

Hulusi Akar, the Chief of General Staff, initially responded with caution, pointing to potentially detrimental outcomes of urban warfare:

> A soldier should not be involved in operations in urban centers. A soldier is very much different from others. His upbringing and training provide him with a distinct perspective on operations. A soldier has different training, understanding, and reflexes. More importantly, a soldier's description of a target is different, so is his perception of a target. By his very nature, a soldier does not act as civilians do. He has objectives. On top of that, he might have problems with civilian citizens. The participation of soldiers in operations in urban centers is therefore wrong. Police and gendarmerie should do the operations in urban centers. Soldiers should be involved only in operations outside urban centers (Diken 2015).

Akar's words indicated how the engagement of the military in urban warfare would likely have catastrophic consequences. However, a second law that the government passed toward the end of the war revealed the real source of this hesitation: the military feared being held accountable for the possible causalities of such a war, which would most likely have a high civilian death toll. The law in question granted the military legal impunity, blocking all investigations against the military by subjecting them to approval by the Prime Minister and the Defense Minister (Evrensel 2016). Plausibly in anticipation of such a law, the armed forces agreed to engage in war against Cizre and other towns, and proceeded to form squads consisting of police and gendarmerie special operation units, commando teams, and armored army units (Gürcan 2016).

The war in Cizre started on September 4, along with the imposition of an indefinite curfew. However, state actors never acknowledged the war as it was, instead adopting the terms "curfew" and "operations." The Governor of Cizre claimed that the curfew sought to "eliminate members of the separatist terrorist organization, remove the trenches and barricades, and secure the lives and properties of our people" (Türkiye İnsan Hakları Vakfı 2016). Once the curfew was in force, military units, located on hilltops surrounding the city, began to attack the entrenched areas with tank fire and artillery. Simultaneously, from the rooftops, Turkish snipers forced residents to remain indoors, targeting those who stepped outside. The curfew continued for eight days, during which 22 residents were killed, mostly by snipers. Kurdish politicians and human rights activists noted that these 22 people were all civilians. Despite official reports, the death toll in Cizre remained unclear for several reasons.

For one, the Kurdish movement depicted resistance to the Turkish offensive not as an armed struggle but as civil disobedience. Such a portrayal of the opposition made it impossible for the Kurdish movement to admit to the killing of "combatants" on both sides. What complicated this picture is that Kurdish self-defense units consisted of both YDG-H members and the guerrillas (though much less numerous than the former), which often enabled the Kurdish movement to depict armed local youths as civilians. As for the Turkish state, it claimed that its security forces killed over 42 terrorists without revealing exactly who they were. Prime Minister Davutoglu alleged that there was not even a single civilian death in Cizre, without ever declaring the killing of three-month-old Miray, to name only one of countless victims.

The Turkish military combined lethal force with micro-practices of coercion and confinement. They cut off electricity, water, and telephone networks, and fired at rooftop water tanks and outdoor air conditioning units, while continuously shelling residential buildings. These

measures, coupled with Cizre's notorious heat and humidity, made it difficult for the residents even to breathe.[19] During nine days of curfew, human rights organizations reported that the Turkish military heavily damaged more than 1600 buildings, along with 300 water tanks and 280 air conditioners (İnsan Hakları Derneği 2016). The Emergency Architects Foundation released a report that concluded the following: "The fact that the impacts are most often perpendicular to walls and doors revealed that the fire was deliberately turned towards residential houses from the street" (Emergency Architects Foundation 2016).

A few days after the lifting of this curfew, I went to Cizre for three weeks to visit my interlocutors. Since I had completed my field research in June, the contrast between the areas with and without trenches had become even more pronounced. I first went to see Baran at his home, one of the interlocutors whom I had not heard from during the curfew. He and his extended family lived in a one-story traditional house in Nur Neighborhood, now marked with the scars of war. The wall to the front yard was entirely demolished; the yard was packed with piles of rubble and traces of blood. Two rooms on one side were similarly damaged with broken windows and bullets holes in the walls, while the neighboring house shielded two bedrooms in the back that thus remained relatively undamaged. Baran said that over 35 people were crushed in these two rooms, with the arrival of many relatives and neighbors whose houses were even more vulnerable to artillery and tank fire. There was not enough space for everyone even to sit, he commented, especially given the severe temperature and humidity.

[19] In the absence of a robust Cizre water infrastructure, residents have water running in their homes only two days a week. Residents often depend on rooftop water tanks, which they fill when the water to be used the rest of the week. Air conditioners are another basic need in Cizre; even the poorest households have one installed in every single room, running them 24 hours a day to overcome extreme weather conditions. Targeting of water tanks and air conditioners thus meant a severe punishment for the residents.

Baran recounted that after the security forces fired at their rooftop water tank on the second day of the curfew, a drastic water shortage further threatened their survival. The water shortage was a matter of life and death, especially for Baran's mother who had recently chemotherapy treatment for her cancer. To reduce the risk of infection for the mother, other housemates decided to avoid using the bathroom as much as possible and instead to urinate in bottles. They quickly ran out of drinkable water; left with no alternative, they drew water from the well in the front yard, despite the risk of being hit by artillery and snipers. Since assaults typically occurred at night, Baran explained, they minimized this risk by only going outside to the yard during the day. Because the well had not been used for over 20 years, the water was muddy, and everyone who drank it became ill with diarrhea, including the children and the babies. At this point, people began to step outside more frequently to get some air, since up until this point, the snipers had not targeted them during the daytime. This notion would soon be proven wrong. On the morning of the fourth day, snipers fired at the yard, killing a young relative of Baran. As the others retreated in a panic, they left his body in the yard. According to Baran, since that day, the snipers fired at whoever stepped outside, day or night. To retrieve the dead body, they attempted to halt the attack by walking outside with white flags in their hands, signifying their civilian status. Snipers nonetheless continued firing, forcing them to retreat back into the house. Out of desperation, they asked the police patrolling in the vicinity to let them bring in the dead body; but the police responded from a megaphone, "You can eat him when you run out of food." Against all odds, they relentlessly persisted in their efforts, finally managing to carry back the body three days later.

This was not an isolated event. A ten-year-old girl in Cudi, Cemile Cagirga, was severely wounded in front of her house and was not allowed to be taken to the hospital; she died shortly

afterward. Unable to transfer Cemile's body to the morgue due to the curfew, her mother placed her body in a freezer to prevent its decay. She covered the fridge with a green cloth that contained Qur'anic scripts. Even such an option was not available for many residents who lived in places where electricity was entirely cut off. One father, for instance, regularly put cologne on his daughter's body to cover the stench of decomposition. Another took his son's body to a grocery store at the end of the street where they lived, to place the body in a freezer that had a generator.

My interlocutor Murat showed me the new spatial tactics that the self-defense forces had devised after my departure from Cizre in June. To avoid detection by drones with thermal and night vision cameras, for instance, they built "internal roads" at strategic locations by tearing down walls and forming passageways connecting houses from the inside. Other residents employed this tactic to procure food, to transfer dead bodies, and to re-engage in life activities without stepping outside. Murat asked me to take one of those internal roads to meet a guerrilla who recently joined them. After walking for a few minutes, we entered a house and crossed through broken walls, moving from one house to another. Those houses were mostly deserted, except for a few in which the residents covered the passageways with curtains for privacy. We finally arrived at our destination to meet a female guerrilla in her early 20s. A local from Cizre herself, she expressed a sense of victory, suggesting that although the Turkish military managed to remove some trenches, they soon had to withdraw due to the defense forces' invisible resistance.

This sense of victory was quickly spreading among Cizre residents, including those who had seen nothing but a disastrous defeat in the aftermath of the curfew. For instance, Baran was initially very pessimistic, aggressively disputing anyone who uttered the term "victory." He then began to appropriate the word, going even further to claim that the victory belonged exclusively

to his neighborhood in which both the offensive and the resistance were much stronger than anywhere else. This optimism continued over the next two months, despite the imposition of three more curfews, each of which lasted less than a day with no further military operations. At the time, local political actors even tried to establish an academy for social sciences with the framework of self-governance. I was back in Istanbul by then and planned to go to Cizre in December to join this initiative. Suddenly, however, this political climate dissipated in early December with imminent threats of an indefinite curfew, fueled by a rumor about a classified government document ordering the local hospital to expand the capacity of its morgue. Many residents began to view all the curfews imposed thus far as nothing but an exercise for a prolonged and far more destructive curfew, and rushed to grocery stores and pharmacies to stock up on essential goods.

A second indication of an expanded curfew involved a text message that the Directorate of National Education sent to Cizre school teachers. This mass text made an unusual request that teachers attend a compulsory training seminar the following day, and that they could do so in their hometowns. Such workshops were typically held during the summers in two parts, once before and once at the end of the school year; and teachers have been obliged to complete this training in the schools where they taught. With such short notice, and as a significant departure from the usual procedure, teachers interpreted this message as a warning for an impending curfew and immediately fled the city in a panic, some by hitchhiking, as if they were escaping a natural disaster. A teacher who happened to be in a neighboring town when the message was sent out recounted to me that by the time she went home just a few hours later, her roommates had already left the city.

Many residents suggested that the government evacuated the teachers in order to avoid leaving any witnesses of its future crimes. This widespread assumption reflected the residents' conviction that the outside world does not count them as witnesses, and that state violence will escalate in the absence of Turkish officers who have the social legitimacy to witness. The teachers' departure was a significant turn of events, as it complicated the categories of civilian and combatant: the separation made by the state was not between civilians and combatants, but between Turkish officers and the local population.

II. Mapping the Resistance

One day later, on December 14, the governor declared a fifth curfew, again to protect "our people" from terrorists, after "real citizens" were safely evacuated. In contrast to this euphemism, then Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu framed the goal as "cleansing the city house by house." "There is not a single house," he declared, "not a single neighborhood in which [weapons] are not stored up. This will be cleansed." Using the house and the neighborhood as metaphors, Davutoğlu criminalized this physical space in its entirety, along with those who inhabit it. President Erdoğan aligned with him to say that they would regard those who went outside during the curfew as "terrorists" (Evrensel 2015). This discourse indicated that the physical landscape itself had become a prominent target, an objective that became further evident when security forces continued bombing the entrenched districts for days after the resistance had been entirely suppressed.

Given that the peace process was not moving forward, self-defense forces expected further incursions by the Turkish military. Since the lifting of the curfew in September, every day

from sunset to sunrise, they had dug the ditches deeper, fortified the barricades, expanded the internal roads, planted explosive devices at strategic locations, and hung large curtains in the streets to block the view of drones and snipers, all of which aimed to adapt the physical landscape for self-defense. These architectural and infrastructural reconfigurations further indicated a practice of mapping, one that countered the state's mapping practice, by encircling Cizre against surrounding hostile geography, arming the town with explosive-laced ditches.

Besides the extensive spatial adjustments, the YDG-H members were now wearing guerrilla uniforms, a symbolic move that the Kurdish movement initiated to discipline the youth and create a sense of unity among the self-defense forces. Guerrilla uniforms indeed seemed to have altered the youth's posture as well as appearance to the extent that I could not recognize some of my interlocutors when I first encountered them during my return visit. This strategy was followed by an organizational one: the Kurdish movement urged the self-defense forces to replace the YDG-H with the YPS (Yekîneyên Parastina Sivîl or Civil Protection Units). In addition to bringing the youth and the guerrillas under the same organization, the formation of YPS, I suggest, had a second, albeit implicit goal: to undo the association that the YDG-H had generated between the notions of youth and self-defense, thereby making the latter available to all residents. This attempt resonated with the statements that the PKK leadership released in July, suggesting the time for a revolutionary war of independence had come. It also delineated a point of departure from Öcalan’s earlier formulation of self-defense as a popular form of civil disobedience.

III. Confinement

Upon the teachers' departure, the governor declared an indefinite curfew, euphemistically entitled "The Peace and Freedom Operation" (*Huzur ve Özgürlük Operasyonu*), to be enforced from the subsequent day onward. The youth immediately flocked to the major streets to erect barricades using massive rocks, sandbags, and the like. Meanwhile, a group of university students who had come from other Kurdish cities a few days before decided to stay in Cizre during the curfew. Many of them did so to express solidarity with Cizre residents while others actively engaged in the resistance.

On the evening of the following day, security forces launched extensive operations in the entrenched neighborhoods. From the start, this curfew proved to be unprecedented in its duration and destructiveness. This was evidenced by the involvement of the highest levels of the Turkish military; the Chief of General Staff and the Commanders-in-Chief of land, air, and naval forces came to lead the operations in Cizre from the neighboring city of Şırnak. The curfew continued for 79 days. Mainstream media broadcasted this urban warfare with the footage provided by security forces, representing all residents who were killed as PKK guerrillas. Alternative narratives also transpired through social media, most commonly by HDP deputies and human rights activists. Throughout the curfew, I stayed in contact with my interlocutors, most of whom were involved in the resistance and were increasingly targeted by the security forces.

Of all that transpired, one incident was exceptional for me. On one of those nights when bombardments of the neighborhoods reached an extreme scale, I received a phone call from an interlocutor named Rohat. He spoke in a whisper on the phone, strangely talking about some random mundane topics. From the sounds of explosions and gunfire in the background, I thought he was probably at a location that was under attack at the moment. Why would he call me to

make small talk while he and his friends were in grave danger? Perhaps he was just being cautious, in case the police recorded our conversation, and trying to give me a message that I was unable to decipher. After talking for about half an hour, he abruptly hung up the phone.

Rohat clarified this awkward incident when I went to Cizre after the curfew was partially lifted. As he recounted, that night, military units launched a ground invasion in Nur Neighborhood, which compelled the self-defense units to fortify the trenches at the entrances to the neighborhoods. Although this incursion attempt was ultimately pushed back, military units managed to advance into the area by removing several trenches, including the one Rohat was fortifying. When armored vehicles fired into the streets as they moved forward, fellow youths retreated to the adjacent lane, but Rohat was too late. Having no other option, he jumped over a wall to the front yard of a deserted house, broke the door and entered the house. Terrified that he was seen while climbing over the fence and that the military units would come and kill him, he tried to reach out to his friends in the neighborhood to ask for help, to no avail. He became even more frightened when he figured out from the sounds outside that armored vehicles had stopped near his hideout. This was when he called me on the phone as an attempt to overcome his own fear, speaking in a whisper to evade being heard by those outside the house. Rohat said that the military units somehow did not follow him; they might have found it too risky to leave their armored vehicles, or they might not have noticed him at all.

Rohat and other interlocutors chronicled the process of this war. As was the case in the previous curfew, the security forces began attacking the neighborhoods from hilltops and rooftops. They concurrently carried out incursion attempts with small units on the ground, only to be repelled by self-defense forces, leading to loss of lives on both sides. This was the first phase of the war, in progress until the 41st day. Despite the curfew imposed on the entire city, it

disproportionately affected the entrenched neighborhoods of Nur, Cudi, Sur, and Yafes, whose residents were forced to remain indoors with no electricity, water, and telephone networks. Notwithstanding the risk of being shot, they made bread in traditional earth ovens in the yards or on rooftops, sharing it with neighbors and fighters. As shop closures have been a typical form of resistance in Cizre since the 1990s, people have adopted the habit of storing abundant quantities of flour in their basements, often smuggled from Iraq. Basements also contained barrels of cheese. In many households, people went to the nearby mountains in the summers to gather a specific kind of herb to make enough cheese for a year.

Besides cheese and bread, for the most part, the fighters lived on junk food. Right before the curfew was in effect, they confiscated several heavy goods vehicles passing through Nusaybin Avenue en route to Iraq. An interlocutor told me about a funny scene where an elderly woman brought a pack of muffins for him and fellow youths while they were trying to repel an incursion attempt. "The enemy was a few meters away from us," he said, "but the woman insisted that we eat the muffins right away; otherwise she would not leave." It was usually elderly women who stood with the fighters to the end. After the first curfew, I met one of those women and her son, who was involved in the self-defense forces. She jokingly introduced herself to me as “the terrorists’ cook.”

During the first phase of the war, Turkish ground forces did not have a tangible presence in the city, except for snipers positioned on rooftops in the districts without trenches. Having a wide field of vision, snipers could restrict the movement of residents between the entrenched zones. With a view of Nusaybin Avenue, they were also able to obstruct flows of activity between the districts with and without trenches. In case of an emergency, some residents had no choice but to risk moving around; some managed to reach their destinations, while others were

hit along the way by sniper fire or pieces of shrapnel. Some were forced to diverge from their original plans and go to a new location.

Consider the case of Murat. A member of the self-defense units, Murat wanted to go from Nur to Cudi to see his younger brother. His brother had joined the guerrillas some years ago and recently returned to Cizre to join the resistance. By that time, however, the Turkish ground forces had taken control of the road between these neighborhoods, positioning multiple snipers in that area. Murat was nonetheless willing to attempt this journey. His initial plan was just to run in a zig-zag pattern, until he came across a group of people with white flags who were about to take the same passage. Mostly women and children, this group was trying to cross to a safer part of the city. To minimize risk, Murat decided to walk with this group to the middle of the passage, then swiftly leave the group and run toward Cudi. He entered the road with the group only to be blocked by Turkish forces, given no option but to leave the city altogether.

Murat faced a grave dilemma at that moment. He could carry out his original plan and run toward Cudi, but such an action would provoke the security forces to fire at the entire group. However, leaving the city would also mean leaving his friends and the resistance, not to mention that he would also be arrested at a checkpoint and probably face a life sentence. Murat nevertheless chose to follow the group to the exit. He carried a toddler on his shoulder and pretended at the checkpoint to be a father who was trying to save his child's life. He said he forgot his ID at home and pretended to be one of his relatives, giving the security forces his relative's ID number, instead of his own—Murat had memorized many ID numbers to use in such situations. At the second checkpoint, the security forces asked him to take off his clothes to see if there were any traces of pistol markings on his shoulders. They employed this method to identify combatants, assuming that carrying a gun for extended periods of time would necessarily leave

some marks on one's shoulders. To his surprise, Murat had no visible marks on his shoulders and was let go.

Murat was forced to leave the city in the middle of the war and witness the subsequent killing of his friends via social media. Meanwhile, many university students who had remained in Cizre as a political gesture were now desperately trying to find a way out. According to my interlocutors, the students did not expect the curfew to last more than a week, and their anxiety worsened with every passing day to the point of total panic. They discovered that the security forces allowed a limited number of trucks once a week to transfer goods to the stores outside of entrenched territories, and that many people fled the city on the backs of these trucks. As these stores opened for a few hours a day on a random basis, the students often took strolls around the grocery stores so as not to miss the chance to find the store owners and secure their escape. Nevertheless, some of the students who had joined the resistance after staying in Cizre were killed by the security forces. In short, the security forces were totally unpredictable, responding differently in similar cases. I suggest that the lack of consistent tactics was related to the ambiguities regarding the categories of civilian and combatant, leading security forces to frame all residents as the enemy.

IV. Categorizing the Combatant

In an interview conducted by journalist Ahmet Gün, a police officer in the special forces stated that the self-defense units had placed remote-control explosives on the walls and then applied plaster to cover them. They also fortified some buildings from the inside, he added, by constructing a second wall made of hard bullet-proof stones, layered over existing walls, and

drilled with tiny holes for shooting. “You see a [normal] building when you look at it,” the officer warned the reader. “You think it is a normal house when you enter it,” he continued, but then it “explodes” and “tumbles down on you” (Bold Medya 2018). 2018).

Ahmet Gün responded to a question about the killing of a 57-year-old woman, Taybet İnan, whose body was left in the street for a week.[20] “What we heard about Taybet İnan was quite different," he said. "We heard that she was a woman who refused to leave the [entrenched] area." He went on to suggest that there was a radical difference between how Taybet İnan appeared and who she really was: “She was a woman who provided logistical support for the YDG-H members. This might sound strange to you. ‘She was a woman of my mother’s age,’ you might say. But many women of her age were providing support [for the YDG-H members].”

The state’s operational mapping linked physical space with all those who inhabited it. Buildings that looked normal on the surface were in fact disguised weapons; and residents who looked like civilians were in fact disguised combatants. People’s refusal to leave their homes was what revealed this linkage in the state’s mapping: “If the state asks you to leave, you will leave. Otherwise, you will pay the price.” Ahmet Gün noted that the security forces tagged the residents who declined to flee their homes as black, but “those who promptly obeyed and took their leave when the state asked them to do so were white. To stay in that geography during the trench operations was nothing but betrayal.” He also discussed a nuanced point, regarding children who were not yet fully terrorists but only potential terrorists. However, he narrated an incident that showed these terrorists-to-be were not necessarily treated with more restraint.

[20]Taybet İnan was shot in her legs in the neighbor town of Silopi. Her brother-in-law was killed as he tried to rescue her. Unable to approach his wife, her husband threw a rope to her to drag her, but he was also shot by snipers. She died the next day.

> We were in the armored vehicle. No intense clashes were happening at the time. My partner needed to urinate; we had been in the vehicle probably for 10 hours. We drew the vehicle's door near the mosque's entrance. One or two minutes after he got out, a gunshot sound came from the mosque. He came running and got into the vehicle. "There were two or three kids inside," he said. There was a curfew in force; you had to go into combat sometimes. My partner heard a noise and fired on them. "Then I saw them running away," he said. God knows what happened to them afterward (ibid.)

Note that the state's mapping of people had a temporal dimension, because whether the residents left the entrenched districts "promptly" was also significant. At the same time, state actors did not give the residents much time to leave the city. They announced the curfew only one day before its implementation, likely as a tactic to catch the self-defense forces off guard. With such short notice, some residents joined the school-teachers to leave the city, despite the youth's desperate efforts to prevent them from doing so. The majority of the local population was nonetheless determined to not leave the youth alone. After the war reached an extreme level of violence, some could not go even if they wanted to. For one thing, there was a high risk of being shot along the way, even with white flags; after all, the security forces had complete power to decide whether to let them leave or not. Ahmet Gün remarked:

> Nobody commands you to kill civilians. I have served 9 years in the South East, this is more dangerous than giving commands. If commands were given, at least limits would have been known. They make us wait in the vehicle for 20 hours; days pass like this.

> There are 120 people inside [the cars], and there is no command given. When there is no command, there is no limit either. If we received orders, less would have happened (ibid).

After the 41st day of the curfew, the second phase of the war, the security forces remapped the territory by splitting the entrenched districts into sections as small as 15 square meters (Gürcan 2015). They began to "cleanse" these areas one by one with explosives, targeting the so-called terrorists while evacuating qualified civilians en masse. The residents who were qualified to leave migrated to western and regional cities; some just moved to other neighborhoods to stay with their relatives. Meanwhile, others moved to nearby villages; this particular wave of migration contrasted with the one in the 1990s, when villagers were forced to move from rural to urban areas.

As part of the mission of cleansing, the security forces searched every single house that was not destroyed and carried out another practice of mapping. While searching the buildings, the security forces appeared to have profiled the inhabitants by interpreting objects that had been left behind. In one case, they erroneously assumed from books they discovered in a Kurdish teacher's apartment that this resident was a Turkish teacher who supported the Kurdish movement. This interlocutor further recounted that she had returned home after the war to find that the security forces had broken all of her domestic items into pieces. They wrote various notes on the walls, calling her a traitor and threatening that they would catch and rape her. Another female interlocutor said she found her underwear dispersed all around her apartment, with comments about her body size written on the wall. There were also some incidents where members of the security forces took selfies in the residents' bedrooms and posted them on social media. Another interlocutor who lived in a district without trenches said he found a large hole in his living room,

and a mattress under the hole. He believed that a sniper had stayed in his apartment, as the hole provided views of Nusaybin Avenue.

It seemed that as the security forces moved goods from one apartment to another, they often ended up leaving the items there. An interlocutor, for instance, told me how he found his camera that had gone missing during the war. He said a local man whom he had not met before approached him at a tea-house and asked if he lost a camera. It turned out that this local man found the camera in his apartment, and from the saved pictures, he was able to identify the owner. My interlocutor was relieved to see his camera, as he was concerned that the security forces could have used the images taken at the barricades against him. Indeed, the Kurdish teacher previously mentioned had lost her laptop and went to the police department to ask if they had it. She said there were many boxes of confiscated items, and that the police told her it would take months to inspect them.

V. 23 Bostanci Street

The Turkish military employed tactics during the ground invasion that caught the self-defense forces by surprise; when the military descended from the heights of the hills, alongside incursions from main roads, the self-defense units were totally unprepared. Because there existed no proper roads from the hills downward, the self-defense forces assumed that the Turkish military would attempt to enter the neighborhoods via main roads, which they had already blocked with trenches, explosives, and various kinds of barricades. However, the military had embarked on building roads from the hilltops with armored bulldozers, and were able to enter the neighborhoods simultaneously from both directions. They moved particularly quickly from the hills, in the absence of trenches and traps on their way. An interlocutor who lived on the upper

side of Cudi recounted that self-defense units made desperate attempts to set up explosives, to slow the military down. He pointed to the ruins of a nearby building and said that from their balconies, some other youths countered the armored vehicles with rifles, to their own demise. As for the concurrent ground invasion from the main roads, the military exercised a slightly different tactic. Unable to cross the blocked streets, they razed buildings and formed new paths on the remains of buildings toward the center of the neighborhoods.

Even after crossing into central areas on regular roads, they continued to demolish the buildings along the way to eliminate the presumed explosive devices set up indoors. They narrowed the blockade around the entrenched districts, and from then on, did not let anyone leave. Those who had not left these districts at this point began to take shelter in basements to protect themselves from tank fire and artillery, and they ended up being stuck there. There were many basements where people were stuck in hiding, but the one in Cudi's Bostanci Street received the most attention in the mainstream as well as social media.

On January 23, Faysal Sariyildiz, an HDP deputy and a Kurdish local, announced on social media that 31 people were stuck in that basement, many injured, three of them already dead. He said that after he notified the government of the basement's location, the security forces surrounded and shelled the building. A similar incident transpired a few weeks earlier in Silopi in which three injured Kurdish activists were killed after their location was reported to local state actors. After the killing of these activists, a Kurdish politician in Diyarbakir told me about some injured people who were confined in the district of Sur. She was facing a dilemma, in that exposing the location of the wounded to state actors was also the best chance available to rescue them; however, such efforts thus far had resulted in the killing of the injured. Sariyildiz publicized the basement incident on social media as an attempt to press the government, to

prevent further fatalities. He continued to use social media in the following days, updating the public day and night about the conditions of the basements. In the below pictures he posted, for instance, he released the list of people who were wounded and those who were exhausted due to the lack of water and food, respectively.

This social media campaign went hand in hand with the use of legal strategies. Volunteer Kurdish lawyers appealed to the Constitutional Court to request interim measures for the injured people in the basement. The Court rejected these applications on the grounds that the continuing "terrorist activities" in that neighborhood made it impossible for medical assistance to reach the basement safely. This argument was indeed specious, because by then, the neighborhood was for the most part under the control of the security forces. There were still groups of militants who engaged in small-scale clashes with the security forces in different parts of the neighborhood; however, the basement in question was only a few hundred meters away from Nusaybin Avenue over which the security forces had total control. In addition, the court suggested that the information presented by the lawyers regarding the identities, locations, and medical conditions of those in the basement was either inaccurate or insufficient. As shown by the quote below, the Court characterized the information provided as ambiguous and sufficient to cast doubt on the civilian status of the applicants, evident in the frequent use of the adjective "alleged."

> The alleged applicants have been reluctant to communicate directly with the public authorities. They have forwarded the civil authorities to third persons. They provided different addresses at different times concerning their whereabouts. Grave doubts emerge concerning the fact that they regularly change their location and that they refrain from getting in contact with public authorities for access to health services. The Constitutional Court has reached the conclusion that an interim measure cannot be ordered at this stage

> on the grounds that there is still uncertainty as to whether the persons in question are injured, if so, whether their injuries are serious, in what circumstances they are wounded, whether all of them are injured, whether they are armed and at which address they are present (Halkların Demokrasi Partisi 2016).

In making these assumptions, the Court failed to consider the direness of the situation at hand. For one thing, the applicants might have failed to accurately read the building number when they took shelter, due to the circumstances of having severe injuries and fleeing from bombardment. When the first address turned out to be wrong, the owner of the building reached out to the legal and political representatives of the applicants and provided the correct address. That some of the injured were unconscious made it difficult for their legal and political representatives to obtain even proper names. One of the wounded had both a Kurdish name and an official Turkish name, with the latter unknown by others in the basement. As was the case with the text messages sent from the basement, Turkish names were adjusted to Kurdish in such a way that they did not match their official written versions. However difficult it was to obtain the exact proper names in such a dire situation, the Court still found the provided information insufficient to identify the applicants, and requested each applicant's official family record. It was impossible to fulfill this request, as only the injured were authorized to obtain their family records by applying to the Cizre Population Directorate, which was shut down with the inception of the curfew. As such, the Court relied on the inaccurate information provided to generate an anonymous figure who had neither a proper name nor an actual address: a character who was unwilling to interact with state institutions, and hence not a citizen deserving medical assistance.

Unrecognized in the legal realm, the injured sought recognition on social media, using cellphones with ever draining batteries. Due to poor cellular reception in the basements, the

wounded often climbed up to the second floor to introduce themselves to the outside world with their proper names, families, and occupations. On the phone calls posted on social media, the public heard their screams and sounds of explosions. They often mentioned how thirsty and hungry they were in their text messages to Faysal Sariyildiz.

Mehmet Tunç, the co-chair of people's assemblies in Cizre, was in the first basement and sent Sariyildiz the following text message:

> A mortar shell hit the chimney. We were scared to death. Thankfully it exploded on the third floor. All the dust in the stoves came to the basement. They (security forces) are now firing at the building. Very badly. There is an injured girl named Soltan [here]. She is always telling me: "Father, do not leave me here." This makes me grieved. There is another kid who keeps asking for water. He/she has internal bleeding. We cannot give him/her water (ibid, 91).

Despite these efforts, they were still unable to prove their injuries. As President Erdogan stated that "maybe they are not injured," the injured sent pictures as evidence of injury and death in the basement. These pictures exposed dead bodies covered by blankets and the wounded lying down on the ground, looking exhausted, though one of them was making the peace sign with his fingers. These graphic images sought to challenge the mainstream media narrative depicting the basement as full of weapons, explosives, and healthy terrorists.

In addition to sending pictures and text messages, cell phones enabled survivors to connect to the Kurdish conference at the European Parliament. Speaking at this meeting, Mehmet Tunç described what was happening in the basements and throughout the city, connecting the present situation with the forced migration in the early 1990s. Then he called on the Parliament: "Please stop this atrocity" (ibid, 93). Mehmet Tunç and others in the basement

also joined live broadcasts on the pro-Kurdish TV channel Med Nuçe, with the sounds of moaning and shotguns on the background, calling on to the Kurdish people in Turkey and diaspora to mobilize for Cizre (ibid, 92). While addressing the Kurdish community, they still felt obliged to highlight the civilian status of those in the basements. In one of their broadcasts, for instance, Mehmet Yavuzel, a member of the Kurdish Democratic People's Party (DBP), spoke of the civilian-ness even of the dead: "There are six civilians dead beside me" (ibid, 98).

Meanwhile, on January 27, three HDP deputies started a sit-in protest and a hunger strike at the office of the Ministry of Interior (T24 2016). They demanded that the dead bodies be transferred to a morgue, the injured be transferred to a hospital, and their right to health and life be respected (İhlas Haber Ajansi 2016). This protest succeeded in compelling government officers to allow ambulances to enter Cudi neighborhood. As the ambulance moved toward the basement, two HDP deputies in the ministry were talking on the phone, one of them was talking with a health personnel in the ambulance, another one with Mehmet Yavuzel, in the presence of the minister, to arrange the evacuation of the trapped. As the ambulance moved forward, heavy explosions and gun fire occurred on Bostanci Street. The security forces then blocked the ambulance and detained the health personnel.

The phone call with Mehmet Yavuzel, which was posted on social media the same day, recorded the sounds of blasts and gun fire, followed by screams from the basements. While the HDP deputies believed that it was the security forces that were targeting these ambulances, state officers placed the blame on 'terrorists.' In the midst of dissonance between Cizre and Ankara as well as HDP deputies and state officers, both the President and the Prime Minister refused to acknowledge that people were dying in the basements and they speculated that nobody was even injured (T24 2016). I should note that the health personnel in the ambulance too blamed the

security forces. In interviews I conducted with them, they claimed the security forces acted against the order from the ministry and even escalated their attacks on the basement as the ambulance approached. After this failed attempt, relatives of the trapped, all women, walked towards the basement to rescue their family members, but they were also blocked by the security forces.

On February 4, amid these failed attempts, a second basement incident took place. It turned out that 62 people took refuge in a basement on Narin Street, about 150 meters away from the Bostanci Street basement. The building where the second basement was located was similarly encircled and shelled by security forces. Accordingly, public focus switched to the second basement. For a while, there was no news from the first basement, which, at the time, made me consider that they had escaped through an internal road. However, about a week later, HPD deputies resumed posting on social media the latest news regarding the first basement. On top of that, they revealed a third basement in Akdeniz Street in the adjacent neighborhood of Sur, where 50 more people were stuck. One of the people in the basement, Derya Koç, joined live broadcasts on the pro-Kurdish TV channel IMC to explain their situation:

> Let me start from the beginning. About 20 to 25 friends were wounded by shrapnel pieces. We took them here and sat with them. We went upstairs to bring them some stuff they needed. There were about 20 people down in the basement. But they [the security forces] came and poured fuel on them, burning them alive. We could not respond to our friends' call. We just listened to the sounds of moaning but we could not move. When we were upstairs, they [the security forces] hit the building with tank fire and artillery. We are 25 people here; half of us are injured. We are now waiting. The attacks to the building are ongoing. They [the security forces] have been attacking for a week now but the

> attacks have escalated in the last three days. We are still waiting. We had about 20 friends there. They were injured; we were staying with them. We were waiting; we were thinking one day these sounds would die away and we would get out from here. But they [the security forces] came and burnt our friends alive. Our injured friends might draw their last breath at any moment if nobody comes for help. We are unable to go down in the basement; it is still burning anyway. It started at 8:00; our friends have been burning for one [day, hour?] now. The fire dimmed down a bit but there is no sound from friends anymore. They burned them alive. What I want now is that they stop firing, that they cut these sounds (Halkaların Demokrasi Partisi, 50).

One day after Derya Koç joined this broadcast, the security forces stormed the basements, killing all those who were trapped.

VI. Cemetery of the Nameless

Hacer Aslan was a 19-year-old nursing student at the local health clinic. During the curfew, she assisted the injured in Nur Neighborhood but nobody heard from her until her name appeared among the trapped in the first basement, under the list of people who were exhausted due to the lack of water and food. After the operations in the basements, her mother, Hezni, gave her DNA sample to identify her daughter. However, her DNA sample matched with the body of a male who turned out to be her 22-year-old son Mehmed Said. Hezne had not heard from him since the war started, hoping that he had managed to flee the city. My interlocutors remarked that many youths had gone missing during the curfew but families refused to reveal the cases in order

to not put their children on the state's radar. Reportedly, they entertain the possibility that their children had fled to Rojava and will be back when the dust settles.

It is still not clear how Hacer ended up in the basement but her family believes that she found out her brother was among the injured in the basement and that she crossed to Cudi Neighborhood to assist him, only to be stuck there with him. Hacer's body was burned to the extent that it could not be identified even through DNA tests. This was the case for 17 more bodies that were buried in the cemetery of the nameless. It was not only unidentified bodies were buried in this cemetery, however. As the curfew was still in process, the government amended the law on burial in a way that allowed local government authorities to bury the dead in the cemetery of the nameless, if the bodies were not claimed within three days after the death (Agos 2016). Given the context of the curfew, many of bodies could not be claimed by their families within the time given, and hence were buried in this cemetery. Consider the case of İbrahim Akhan (16-year-old). When İbrahim was killed by security forces, his family had already left the city for a village nearby. They received a phone call from the police, asking them to go to the city morgue and take their son's body. But the family said they were unable to enter the city due to the ongoing curfew. His father, Abdullah, narrates:

> After the curfew was lifted, in Yafes Neighborhood, we saw a grave on which our son's name and surname was written. Our funeral was taken away from us. None of us could attend the funeral ceremony. We could not bury him with our traditions. We are even not sure the one buried there is our son (ibid).

In another law passed during the curfew, local authorities banned proper funeral ceremonies with mass participation. With further arbitrary treatments, families of the victims were given no option but to bury the dead at night with a few participants, often with only the light of their vehicles (BBC 2016).

Going back to Hacer, the state designated her as a terrorist, as were all others killed during the war. For the YPS, she belonged to the self-defense forces and hence was a martyr. On its website, she was listed as a YPS martyr, with her picture and the following information:

Code Name:
Name and Surname: Hacer Aslan
Mother's Name: Hezni
Father's Name: Abdulaziz
Birth Place and Date: 1996/Cizre
Date of Joining the Struggle:
Date and Place of Shahada: 2016/Cizre (yps-onlione.com 2016).

That the sections of code name and date of joining the struggle were left blank show how arbitrary the calculations were. As with the first curfew, the exact number of people who were killed during this curfew is unknown. Human rights organizations and Kurdish institutions claim that the security forces killed 280 civilians throughout the curfew, again without mentioning the killing of guerrillas. According to a report by the United Nations, security forces killed over 200 residents in Cizre and 1200 in total in the Kurdish region, and internally displaced around 500,000 people (UNHCHR 2017). President Erdogan claimed "5400 terrorists have been eliminated" in total in Cizre and other entrenched cities in the region, with no mention of civilians. It is likely that the majority of those "terrorists" were those youths who had been affiliated with the YDG-H and its successor YPS. As the following reports indicate, the bodies of the unnamed and the uncounted for were mutilated and then scattered all around the city.

According to the UN report, the security forces continued demolishing buildings after the operations came to an end, leading to the mutilation of dead bodies inside the buildings and on the streets:

> The subsequent demolition of the buildings destroyed evidence and has therefore largely prevented the basic identification and tracing of mortal remains. Moreover, instead of opening an investigation into the circumstances surrounding the reported excessive use of force, recourse to heavy weapons and the resulting deaths, the local authorities accused the people killed of participating in terrorist organizations and took repressive measures affecting members of their families (ibid, 8).

After the destruction was completed, according to a report by HDP, local authorities removed the ruins and transferred them to the banks of River Tigris, where the residents later found burned body parts all around. As for the basements, local authorities have removed the bodies inside and not protected the basements for investigation. After the curfew was partially lifted, the relatives of those killed in the basements appealed to the prosecutor's office and requested an investigation in the basements. Although the prosecutor went there along with a number of security forces and lawyers, he refused to enter the basements for security reasons. Thereafter the lawyers volunteered to enter the basements to collect evidence, albeit without necessary equipment and in the dark:

> the crime scene investigation lasted forty minutes, with the prosecutor contenting himself with looking at the place where the incident took place from a distance. As for demands for an examination of the Tigris riverbank area, these were firmly rejected (Halkaların Demokrasi Partisi 2016, 132).

The report mentions a second investigation by forensic experts, including Sebnem Korur Financi, a renowned forensic physician and the president of the Human Rights Foundation of Turkey (HRFT).

> The buildings and the streets that housed the basements have become completely ruined and burnt due to shootings involving tanks, mortars and other heavy weaponry. Amid the rubble of the basements, we have observed and photographed a large number of tank and mortar bullets and cartridges. While heavy corpse smells were still discernable in the streets outside of basements of horror, we also observed blood stains in the interior and exterior walls of the houses. We have seen human bones and the spoils of military products. Forensic medicine experts have found pieces of bones that admittedly belong to children (ibid, 58).

The DNA tests that followed further complicated the picture. Although Mehmet Tunç was stuck in the first basement, there was no trace of him in that basement. Instead, his DNA sample matched with the body parts that were uncovered from the second basement. Another victim had body parts scattered in two different basements. With bodily remains all around and unmarked graves, Cizre was more like a necropolis now.

VI. The Reconstruction of Civilians and Combatants

Meanwhile, relatives of the dead filed a lawsuit with the ECtHR against the government on the following grounds: violation of the right to life, violation of the right to liberty and security, and inhuman and degrading treatment (Yavuzel and Others v. Turkey). In order to counter these allegations, the government had recourse to forensic files, satellite images, maps,

pictures, drone footage, intelligence reports, and repentant accounts claiming that those who were killed during the curfew were not civilians but combatants. Recall that when the people in the basements were still alive, the government had referenced the lack of information on the "alleged" applicants' proper names, locations, and family records to designate them (albeit implicitly) as terrorists. Upon their death, these ambiguous figures were now being granted proper names, home addresses, and family records. Similarly, until the end of the war, the state branded all residents who were unable (or refused) to leave their homes as combatants. But after the war, it began to portray them as vulnerable civilians whom the combatants forced to stay in their homes in order to use them as human shields against the Turkish offensive.

In the satellite images that the government submitted to the ECtHR, all buildings in the entrenched districts are given code numbers, each of which is linked to certain trenches, barricades, and explosives. Besides these images, state actors also utilized pictures and camera footage taken by drones and hand-held cameras, and images of weapons in the basements, to reinforce the idea that all the dead were combatants. Or to use the officials' own words: "Some photographs showing the houses where the bodies were found, the ammunition in the houses and the members of the terrorist organization are annexed to this document [*sic*] (ibid.). As for forensic evidence, state officials employed fingerprints and DNA results on human remains to demonstrate the traces the dead left on rifles and on elements of the physical landscape that were viewed as weapons, such as barricades, trenches, basements, and the like. As such, state officials continued indicating the links between a hostile space and a hostile people.

Using forensic files, state officials also indicated the residues of gunpowder and explosives (TNT, HMX) found on two of the dead bodies in the first basement. Referencing also

the public defender's claim that these bodies must have belonged to combatants, the state officials suggest:

> The Government would like to underline that in the examination carried out on the body of İslam Balıkesir, TNT and HMX were found, and that gunpowder residues were found on the swabs taken from Muharrem Erbek. Besides, the Government considers that the fact that swabs could not be taken from other deceased persons on the ground because the physical condition of their bodies was unsuitable does not mean that they had not used weapons (İbid).

Finally, the files submitted to the ECtHR resort to intelligence information, court files, and repentant testimonies from criminal investigations, which were still ongoing before the war, and alleged that the victims had been the members of the YDG-H or the PKK when they were alive. With this plethora of so-called evidence, state actors have made contradictory claims. On the one hand, they have implied that the combatants killed the civilians while also arguing that not even a single civilian was killed during the curfew. On the one hand, they used all methods available to convince the ECtHR that the dead bodies belonged to combatants, and that Turkish security forces operated within the framework of international law. On the other hand, they claimed: "in the absence of any camera recording of the incident scene, and in the absence of any witnesses who could identify perpetrator(s) of the incident, the perpetrator(s) could not be identified, and that the work to identify and arrest perpetrator(s) is ongoing" (ibid.). So the perpetrators were not revealed even if the killing of combatants was legal by standards of domestic and international law, not to mention that the security forces themselves recorded the moments of fire, and posted them on YouTube afterward.

Nevertheless, though these killings were without perpetrators, state officials could finally create the categories of civilian and combatant. They managed to separate civilians from combatants after all combatants "were eliminated," all trenches were removed, all normal-looking buildings were destroyed, and finally, after the traces of the killings without perpetrators were erased.

VII. Conclusion

Since the legalization of counterinsurgencies in the name of the global war on terrorism, and since the rise of asymmetric wars in urban areas, the ability to separate and pacify civilians has become a critical asset more than ever. This is the case particularly in the contemporary Middle East where states mimic none-state actors, and none-state actors mimic states. A notable example is the formation of an Islamic State by ISIS and its demise at the hands of another non-state actor, the YPG. After allied forces moved forward to root out jihadist militants, international media repeatedly asked this burning question: how to separate militants from civilians? Many claimed that the civilians in the lands controlled by ISIS were families and relatives of militants. So they might be as civilian as we imagine.

In this chapter, I tried to demonstrate the mechanisms by which the categories of civilian and combatant became slippery and transitive, both from the side of the inhabitants of Cizre and from the perspective of the state. I further suggested that the existence of categories does not necessarily precede warfare. As was the case in Cizre, they were created once the war erupted so that one's refusal to leave his/her own home could be viewed as evidence of his/her combatant status. I argued that this spatial reconfiguration went hand in hand with a temporal one, as security forces designated Cizre residents as civilians or combatants based on the time-span

within which the residents left or refused to leave their homes. These categories were nonetheless ambiguous and unstable throughout the war until the state stabilized them in the aftermath of the war by utilizing technology and forensic science and by erasing the traces of its crimes, including bodily remains. For the state, all those who were killed were combatants (as the state claimed that not even a single civilian was killed during the war); and all those who survived were civilians (as the state claimed all combatants were eliminated). So the final line was between the dead and the living. The state's inability to read, categorize, and shape the local Kurdish population resulted in catastrophic warfare, which rendered many residents literally unidentifiable.

Conclusion

My fieldwork overlapped with a period of transitions, marked with beginnings and endings. It was a time when Kurdish youth politics switched from street politics to militarized self-defense with the dream of autonomy that turned into a nightmare. Kurdish youth had initiated street politics in another period of transition in the wake of the 1990s when the Kurdish movement changed its strategy from national emancipation in favor of cultural recognition. Curiously, in reaction to the failed dream of a Kurdish nation-state, the youth forged a miniature, ephemeral, and lethal play state through which they remade themselves. By protesting on a daily basis and by perpetually clashing with the Turkish police, they elevated the so-called Kurdish question into an everyday phenomenon of urban life, expressed materially through tear gas clouds, exploding fireworks, and burning barricades in the streets of poor neighborhoods.

Political adults both admired and despised street politics. They appreciated the youth's invincible courage to take to the street almost every day in the face of lethal police violence. They viewed radical street protests as necessary, if not inevitable, given that there was little space for liberal politics in the town. I witnessed a telling example of such appreciation for the youth politics during a rally organize by Kurdish institutions to express their solidarity for Kobane when the canton was under the siege of ISIS. Early in the morning, thousands of Cizre residents gathered in front of the BDP office only to be teargassed by the police who had already surrounded the office.

In order to negotiate with the police, the Kurdish co-mayor walked towards the closest armored vehicle, navigating to evade the tear gas capsules that were still being fired by that vehicle. Although this negotiation attempt failed, the crowd began the rally, but the police blocked the roads and dispersed them using water cannons and tear gas. Many youths who were present in the rally had been warned repeatedly by political adults not to cover their face and not to attack the police. In the face of police violence, however, everybody expected youths to take the stage and do what they were good at. "The youth will take our revenge" a middle-aged man shouted as he was retreating. Indeed, hundreds of masked youth with fake clothes soon appeared in the street and clashed with the police until late at night.

But adults also despised the youth for unnecessarily protesting every day, for long hours, and without reason. If those adults were parents with children within street politics, they would concern more about the lethality of protests. That the idea of street politics and that of youth were interwoven brought about an evental and non-continuous category of youth and a strange story of maturation (or lack thereof). During my field research, some of the youth protesters got married at a very young age, left street politics, and became the breadwinners of their extended families. After one of them began to make a good amount of money from smuggling, his father, who also used to be smuggler, decided to retire at the age of 40. Some youths joined the guerrillas before they were forced to get married while others sustained their engagement with youth politics.

But these frameworks began to change as trench-digging became the basis of self-defense practices that marked a radical change in the rules of the game the youth played with the state, and that set the stage for the displacement of play state by a mimetic quasi-state and the subsequent urban warfare. In that framework, the category of youth became narrowed down even further in that it began to index those who engaged in armed resistance while excluding those

youths who were unable or unwilling to participate this form of resistance. Conversely, in this process, the category of youth encompassed the guerrillas who came from the mountains to fight beside youths. This move indicated a reversal in the process of political coming of age and hence maturation because many of them were those local youths who had recently joined the guerillas. Partly because the Kurdish movement denied the presence of guerrillas in the town, the returnee guerrillas felt obliged to dress and act as youth and in a way reclaiming the category of youth— recall that the difference between a youth and a guerrilla in the previous context was reliant not on chronological age but on the form and the space of politics in which they were involved. Interestingly enough, when sporadic armed clashes with the police evolved into urban warfare, it was now the youth who emulated the guerrillas— by wearing guerrilla uniforms, for instance— not the other way around.

During the urban warfare, many of these youths/guerrillas were killed while some committed suicide before they were captured by Turkish armed forces. Some were arrested during the war, others managed to flee the town to live as fugitives in western cities or cross to Rojava or the mountains. Yet others continued living in Cizre among the ruins and under complete military occupation. In their neighborhoods (Sur, Nur, Cudi, and Yafes), nearly half of the buildings were destroyed. Armored vehicles patrolled in these neighborhoods twenty-four hours while also playing Turkish nationalist anthems. Every night, they raided half-destroyed homes, beating, humiliating, and then arresting the residents. Within two weeks after the curfew was partially lifted, around 10 youths committed suicide due to the fear of arrest. I addition to the pervasive house raids, the police had built permanent checkpoints at the entrances to Cizre, albeit interrogating only those who were entering the town, not the ones who were leaving, of which probably the youths who committed suicide were unaware. Because of the overwhelming

surveillance, it was now impossible for the youth to avoid mandatory military service, an old rite of passage to adulthood that men performed at the age of 18. Either because of the Kurdish movement's hegemony in the town or because other rites of passage (joining the guerrillas and marriage) occurred at a younger age, military service had lost its transitionary meaning. I should also note that over the two years of my field research, I do not remember hearing about anybody leaving for military service. But during my visits to Cizre after the war, however, I learned that many youths went to do a year of military service, including those who fought the Turkish army only a few years ago.

Perhaps at issue is the return of tradition in the aftermath urban warfare not only because of the reentry of military service in young men's lives, but also the re-establishment of parental and familial authority over particularly female youths, an authority that they had long challenged through their involvement in radical politics. Young women were now forced by their parents to be at home before sunset because they would not be safe at night in the streets on which, until recently, the same women used to stand guard with pistols in their hands. Besides, these women and many young men were forced by their families to get married. In the absence of a political structure that could otherwise protect them, many young women are subjected to domestic violence, either by their parents or husbands or in-laws. Each time I went to Cizre after the war, my interlocutors mentioned young women committing suicide. Some (female) interlocutors believed these women were killed by their families but made it look like a suicide. They also said about their friends who wanted to join the guerrillas specifically to end domestic violence they have been exposed to after they got married.

Joining the guerrillas is still viewed as a way out by young men and women despite their criticism against the Kurdish movement for playing a role in the creation of conditions for the

war that killed their friends and destroyed their homes. But joining the guerrillas was more difficult after the war because there seems to be no network available that would facilitate their exit. More to the point, some youths could access to a trustable channel, they still hesitated to make such a move due to the high risk of arrest, if not death, on the roads to guerrilla camps that were mainly under the control of Turkish military. For youths, at least for now, joining the guerrillas is no longer a possibility for a departure from ordinary life or a political coming of age. Although the family does not compete anymore with the Kurdish movement in arranging the youth's passage to maturation, the pressure for marriage persisted and even escalated, so did domestic violence. It seems to me that the rise of familial pressure and domestic violence had to do, among other things, with the limits of the return of tradition itself. That is, the family is unable to control and discipline the youth who had been empowered by political institutions, even if these institutions have fallen apart now. In other words, pressure for marriage, domestic violence, suicides, and the like might indicate the limit of the return of tradition itself.

Meanwhile, state authorities, after removing the ruins, initiated large-scale urban redevelopment projects rebuild the town in ways that undermine the possibility of political rebellion and sustain its colonial occupation. For instance, they built towering residential apartment blocks in some areas, including the basement area. They turned some public schools and parks into fortified police stations and built new schools outside of the town. The streets were widened and illuminated. Shop owners were forced to install high-resolution security cameras. A five-star hotel and a large GYM were opened, along with several fancy coffee shops and chain grocery stores. Besides, the government appointed a trustee to the municipality of Cizre, discharging the Kurdish mayor and firing the employees, closing all affiliated institutions, including a clinic established to provide Cizre residents with health service in the Kurdish

language. The trustee also made it mandatory for traditional coffee houses where mostly local elderly men frequented to set up a library comprising only of Turkish nationalist books.

The state nonetheless has fragile visibility for the same reason that it destroyed the town. That is, the locals are still illegible to the state despite all its efforts. By destroying the physical landscape, covering the ruins with Turkish flags, rebuilding the town in a way that is familiar and knowable, the state revealed itself not the residents. This is most noticeable in the tunnel-like structures used as checkpoints at the entrances to the town. As vehicles enter these tunnels, the police speak with passengers via megaphone, asking several questions to figure out who the passengers are and where they come from. The police then go out and check car trunks and finally ask the passengers to show their IDs. Each time when passengers do the expected move and put their hands into their pockets to take out their IDs, the police wince by reflex.

The police are apparently expecting something to happen, but they do not know where and when. Consider the following incident recounted to me by an interlocutor. An eight-year-old boy who used to play around the barricades that youth protesters set up, builds, perhaps out of boredom, a mini barricade in front of his house. Shortly afterward, the police arrived and took the boy into the custody, interrogated him for two days to find out who made the boy build the barricade. My interlocutor told me this story to indicate the paranoia that Cizre inflicted on state authorities. He told me this story also to express the sense of hope that the little boy and his mini barricade flared up for future struggles. After all, it was stone-throwing children who revolutionized urban politics after Öcalan was arrested with a humiliating spectacle after the Kurdish movement gave up the idea of national emancipation without any political prospect other than the vague discourse of democracy and recognition, and finally at a time when the movement nearly fell apart. It is impossible to know what kind of politics will emerge after all that happened

in the last few years. But it would surely be the creation of a youthful spirit. “We started young, we will finish young,” stated Nesim, a year before he was killed by the stat

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