FOUCAULT COMES TO BAKUR: SOVEREIGN POWER AND COLLECTIVE PUNISHMENT

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Abstract: The Solution Process in Turkey has come to an abrupt end and along with it came an unprecedented violence in Bakur (Northern Kurdistan). This paper argues that the violence ravaging the region – especially in those areas where curfews have been declared – can be considered as a practice of punishment that is being employed indiscriminately. In line with this thought, the paper adopts a Foucauldian approach for comprehending the motivations behind the practice of collective punishment. In doing so, the paper revolves around the concepts of sovereign power and punishment introduced and argued by Michel Foucault. The paper argues that success of a pro-Kurdish party (HDP) in June 7 elections and following declarations of self-rule in the region constituted an obstacle in Erdoğan's desire for presidency but more importantly he took it as an act of dissent to his sovereign will. As can be seen in the functioning of sovereign power, he therefore punishes those people who are HDP's main constituent while making an example out of them for potential challengers to his sovereign will.

Keywords: Northern Kurdistan, sovereign power, collective punishment, Turkey, Foucault.

INTRODUCTION

Not long ago, most of the people in Turkey were hopefully following a process called "the Solution Process"; a process which was aimed towards ending the decades long war between the Turkish state and the PKK (Partiya Karkerên Kurdistanê/ Kurdistan Workers' Party) that has severely impacted the lives of hundreds of thousands people directly or indirectly. However, such light of hope abruptly disappeared from the horizon and was replaced by unprecedented atrocities committed by the Turkish state led by Erdoğan and his party Justice and Development Party (AKP). The violent clashes between the state and self-defense units of the PKK has been escalating mutually. However this paper focuses on the atrocities committed by the state because at least in theory, the state is the institution that should guarantee the lives of its citizens regardless of their ethnicity, religion, gen-

der and political affiliation. But it hasn't been the case in Bakur (Northern Kurdistan) since June 2015 which is incidentally right after the general elections in Turkey in which AKP suffered its first loss. In this escalating violence, the public has witnessed bodies being dragged behind police cars, women executed publicly and left on the streets naked and even dozens of people burned to death in basements. All these acts of atrocities share the same perpetrator: the security forces of the state. In facing this reality, the government has had two approaches; either denying any responsibility by claiming that these are false reports streaming from the area for inciting uprising in Turkey or these atrocities are nothing but exceptional cases perpetrated by some "bad apples" inside the security forces and will be punished accordingly. Along with these arguments and through the mainstream media, it is argued that the excessive use of force, forced evacuations and even curfews that last months on do not in any way target civilians but rather necessary measures for combating the terrorists whom in most cases are supported by "outside forces".

This paper argues the opposite. It argues that the atrocities committed by the state after direct challenges to sovereign's rule constitute a practice of punishment exerted collectively in order to accomplish submission and consequently provokes corresponding ways of resistance. In line with this argument, the paper adopts a Foucauldian approach for establishing a relationship between the concept of power and the concept of punishment whether it is individual or collective. Although not ignoring alternative theoretical approaches, the paper limits itself to reading of Foucault's own works for establishing a relation between concepts like sovereignty, criminal and punishment. As the practice of punishment concerns itself with the criminal, the paper traces back the developments that made the Kurdish people criminals therefore to be subjected to punishment in the eyes of the Turkish state as well as the most of the people in Turkey. Through tracing back this process, a relationship between the power and the collective punishment in practice will be made clear.

PUNISHMENT AS A SPECTACLE OF POWER

In the holy books of all three religions, the God is depicted as an omnipotent being. Aside from being able to create things out of thin air, the most preferred way of showing his omnipotence is punishment. Remembering the examples of Adam and Eve, Sodom and Gomorrah and the Great Flood, one can easily conclude that the God punishes collectively to exact his wrath and to make an example. Such tendency of the God can be seen back on earth. Monarchs, princes and sultans who all claim to have a relation with the God himself in one way or another practice the same way of displaying their power through punishment. This is where Foucault comes into the play. For Foucault, power is not equated with force and/or violence. Foucault defines power as a set of relations (Foucault 1998: 63) therefore he distinguishes himself from those who define power as a concept that can be monopolized by the state or other actors. For Foucault, power is positive:

> We must cease once and for all to describe the effects of power in negative terms: it 'excludes', it 'represses', it 'censors', it 'abstracts', it 'masks', it 'conceals'. In fact power produces; it produces reality; it produces domains of objects and rituals of truth. The individual and the knowledge that may be gained of him belong to this production (Foucault 1991: 194).

Through this production, power evolves and therefore Foucault talks about different types of power evolving throughout time. One can see this evolution more clearly in terms of its reflection on the practice of punishment. By looking at the way that those who deemed fit for punishment are punished, one can see what kind of power is being exercised in the society at given time. Although, it is important to mention that Foucault doesn't argue that there are clear cut distinctions between the types of power exercised. He argues that the types of power rather form a triangle in which each type of power supplement each other:

> We need to see things not in terms of the replacement of a society of sovereignty by a disciplinary society and the subsequent replacement of a disciplinary society by a society of government; in reality one has a triangle, sovereignty-discipline-government (Foucault 2006: 142).

Foucault argues that there are three types of power: sovereign power, bio-power and disciplinary power. Bearing in mind that Foucault's argument on co-functioning of these types of power, this paper argues that the policies adopted by the Turkish state and following developments exhibits features of sovereign power. What does Foucault mean by this concept?

Sovereign power stops and limits certain behavior. Often this form of power involves a dramatic show of force, the use of examples, violent punishment and even extreme pain. It is the kind of power that does not accept any public dissent, or any show of loyalty to any other commanding center. It is the form of power that, if people accept it, will make sovereignty possible by claiming a monopoly of rule. Power transforms one into someone that does what the rulers say out of fear of being caught and punished. It creates subordinate subjects (Lilja & Vinthagen 2014: 112).

Foucault argues that the sovereign power dates as back as to medieval times (Foucault 1991: 3-73). In line with Foucault's arguments, sovereign power also evolved however the core of it remained unchanged: "to display the might of the sovereign" (Foucault 1991: 47-49). The functioning of sovereign power can be best examined in the rituals of punishment. Those who are thought to be directly challenging the sovereign are punished in a way that the punishment displayed the might of the sovereign while making an example of the challenger for others to take notice. Foucault calls this ritual of punishment "spectacle of punishment" that presents itself barest while punishing a would-be regicide. To paint the best picture possible, Foucault depicts the ritual of punishing Damiens the would-be regicide in 1757. Damiens was sentenced to make amende honourable; a process that inhibits all the tools, features and motivations of the sovereign power. Like all types of power, Foucault argues that sovereign power also demands obedience from the subjects but unlike other types of power, it employs tools of violence, terror and humiliation (Foucault 1991: 55-57). In the process of performing amende honourable, the regicide was forced into apologizing from the God, the king and the country:

[…] of a power that presented rules and obligations as personal bonds, a breach of which constituted an offence and called for vengeance; of a power for which disobedience was an act of hostility, the first sign of rebellion, which is not in principle different from civil war; of a power that had to demonstrate not why

it enforced its laws, but who were its enemies, and what unleashing of force threatened them; of a power which, in the absence of continual supervision, sought a renewal of its effect in the spectacle of its individual manifestations; of a power that was recharged in the ritual display of its reality as 'super-power' (Foucault 1991: 57).

As the time passed, the spectacle of punishment evolved in terms of employing different tools however the objects of the punishment remained the same; submission of the subject and the display of power. The long ceremony of torture was replaced with public execution. Removal of torture from the public eye was replaced with symbols that remind the public the might of the sovereign. While in the spectacle of punishment, the might of the sovereign was painted on the body of the condemned, now it is replaced by display of military might. The ceremony of public execution is militarized as it transformed the criminal from an enemy of the sovereign to an enemy of the crown. In doing so, the sovereign punishes the criminal in a way that he punishes his enemies; with his military might. Consequently, the ritual of public execution is accompanied with the over-presence of the military. While it symbolizes the status of the criminal as the enemy of the crown, it also reminds the audience the might of the sovereign (Foucault 1991: 50-55). Despite of this evolution, one of the thing that remained the same was the need for the audience. Whether it was in the rituals of amende honourable or in the ceremony of public execution, the audience has been the most vital participant. The ritual and the ceremony are brought before them for a purpose; to remind them of their obedience to the sovereign (Foucault 1991: 57-65).

In the final leg of its evolution in modern times, the sovereign power has endowed itself with the functions of making criminals. As the rituals of public execution became more and more symbolic, a new concept entered into the realm of the spectacle of punishment: social pact. The one who has been regarded as accepting the rules and laws laid out in the social pact is considered a rebel, a traitor, a terrorist because by violating these rules and laws he is regarded as attacking the whole society as a body. Therefore, as Foucault argues the right of punishment of the perpetrator has shifted from the vengeance of the sovereign to defending of the society (Foucault 1991: 90). Through this transformation although the act of punishment started to become more subtle and more

"humane", Foucault argues that it is still a thing to be feared. Not only because it still retains its motivation of making examples out of the criminal (Foucault 1991: 108-109), but also it is now able to make criminals mainly because of power's relationship with knowledge and truth. While strongly rejecting the motto that has been attributed to him "Knowledge is power" and/or vice versa, he clearly states that "his problem has been the effects of power and the production of truth" (Foucault 1990: 118).

Truth is a thing of this world: it is produced only by virtue of multiple forms of constraint. And it induces regular effects of power. Each society has its regime of truth, its "general politics" of truth: that is, the types of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true; the mechanisms and instances which enable one to distinguish true and false statements, the means by which each is sanctioned; the techniques and procedures accorded value in the acquisition of truth; the status of those who are charged with saying what counts as true (Rabinow 1984: 72-73).

In line with Foucault's rejection of the availability of universal truth, he often reminds his readers that he is occupied with Western society however his insights proves useful for societies like Turkey that has been going under an intense Westernization process for almost a century. Therefore Foucault's attempts to illuminate the relationship between power and truth may very well be applied in Turkey. It becomes clearer when Foucault talks about "political economy of truth" because it revolves around institutions and apparatuses that have a role in the relationship between power and truth:

In societies like ours, the "political economy" of truth is characterized by five important traits. Truth is centered on the form of scientific discourse and the institutions which produce it; it is subject to constant economic and political incitement (the demand for truth, as much for economic production as for political power); it is the object, under diverse forms, of immense diffusion and consumption (circulating through apparatuses of education and information whose extent is relatively broad in the social body, notwithstanding certain strict limitations); it is produced and transmitted under the control, dominant if not exclusive, of a few great political and economic apparatuses (university, army, writing, media); lastly, it is the issue of a whole political debate and social confrontation ('ideological' struggles) (Rabinow 1984: 73).

Through the functioning of "political economy of truth", power produces truth but also it is important to acknowledge the

reversal of that relationship. Truth also produces power but what does it mean? It means that truth may very well be in place for legitimization of functioning of power in the society. Turning back to sovereign power and punishment, the question becomes; who is to be punished and who to punish? Taken together with the concept of "political economy of truth", these questions bear a great importance in the case of functioning of sovereign power in Northern Kurdistan.

MAKING OF A CRIMINAL: ELECTIONS AND SELF-RULE DECLARATIONS

After unprecedented assimilation policies (van Bruinessen, 1991), a period of relative peaceful way of addressing Kurdish Question through several organizations (Jongerden & Akkaya, 2011) and war of independence led by the PKK (Marcus, 2007), a hope of peaceful solution appeared on the horizon for a vicious circle of violence that have been ravaging mostly Kurdish towns and cities. It took the combination of Öcalan reinventing himself theoretically and a pragmatist one party government to initiate a process called the Solution Process.

It all started in 2005 when Erdoğan addressed the public in Amed (Diyarbakır). For the first time in the history of the Republic, a prime minister acknowledged publicly the existence of a problem regarding Kurds in Turkey. In his speech, Erdoğan not only acknowledged that there is a Kurdish Problem but also Turkey must face its past. He talked about practices of ethnic and regional – referring to Kurdistan – discrimination in the past and stated that his government would eradicate these discriminatory practices. Although it was criticized by the nationalists, it was an important step to be taken in the road to building peace. As Aslan and Çapan (2013: 40-41) argues, acknowledging the mistakes made in the past by the parties that are considered responsible for these mistakes is the first and most important step of building a lasting peace. After this symbolic speech, first concrete step was taken in 2007 after the elections. In 2007 elections, Democratic Society Party (DTP) succeeded getting into the National Assembly. It was important for several reasons. First of all, the election system in Turkey has 10% threshold for any party to overcome in

order to be able to take seats in the Assembly. It was the product of 1980 coup d'état designed for preventing entrance of political parties that are considered radical including leftist and pro-Kurdish political parties (Sayarı, 2002: 15, 27-28). Second of all, for a pro-Kurdish party, the threshold was not the only obstacle for being represented in the Assembly. Even if a party managed to by-pass the threshold system, it could still be shut down for various reasons (Akyazan, 2006). As a result, DTP was the successor of several disbanded pro-Kurdish parties that managed to get into the Assembly. However, in line with the hope brought by 2005 Amed Speech, Erdoğan held a meeting with the representatives of DTP after the elections as the head of Justice and Development Party (AKP). Remembering the instances when members of parliament were dragged out of the Assembly by the police, the meeting was a promising start. Two years after the meeting, the government initiated a process called "Kurdish Opening". It was a promising beginning that started with radical initiatives like introduction of Kurdish channel – *Trt Şeş* – by state network TRT and removal of several obstacles for the use of Kurdish in daily life. As little as it was known at that time other initiatives were being taken by the government. It was leaked in 2011 that in 2009, the state and the PKK started talks in Oslo, Norway. They were carried out secretly – and in fact carried out by the secret service of Turkey; MİT (National Intelligence Agency) – because the government believed that the public wasn't ready for it at that time (Bahar 2013: 93). Although the government managed to keep these talks secret at that time, it was an incident known as Habur Incident that brought the progress to halt. After Öcalan's call, thirty four PKK members who haven't been involved in armed actions against the state entered the country for their trial. The way these people were welcomed caused a strong uproar from the nationalist front. It even came to a point that even a long time Kurdish activist Ümit Fırat admitted that the welcoming ceremony was bit too much (Fırat 2014: 8). From Habur Incident onward, neither the government nor the PKK took steps towards a solution. However relatively less violent era was at hand in this period.

It was in 2012 when Erdoğan stated on TRT that the talks between the state and Öcalan has been going on for some time. This statement also marked the era of negotiations which were more

transparent and more concrete than previous negotiation talks. First of all and most importantly, the negotiations were not a state secret anymore. Although it was still the secret service negotiating on behalf of the Turkish side mostly, it still was considered a good starting point for further transparency. A more concrete example of promise of such transparency was the inclusion of People's Democratic Party (HDP) into the talks. Successor to previous banned and closed down pro-Kurdish political parties, HDP was founded in 2012. Unlike previous pro-Kurdish parties, HDP proved to be more inclusive and therefore more powerful in Turkish politics (Şimşek & Jongerden, 2015). The inclusion of HDP into the negotiations between the state and Öcalan promised further transparency. In these negotiations HDP served as a messenger between Öcalan, public and the PKK cadres in the field. Secondly, in terms of its comparison with the previous negotiation talks, this round of talks seemed to be inclined towards enabling the participation of the public. The initiative of "Wise Men Commission (Akil Adamlar Heyeti)" can be considered as a sign for this inclination. The commission was aimed towards explaining the solution process to the people in seven different regions in Turkey. They were also to be getting feedback from the people they contacted with regarding their views on the process. Sixty three people chosen to the commission were to be active in the field for a month and would provide reports to the government (BİA Haber Merkezi, 2013). Despite of all these developments from 2009 to 2015, the process failed in the end and led to the situation which gave birth to a period of atrocities that this paper argues to be a practice of collective punishment. To be fair, all the developments up to this point are radical in nature considering the history of Kurdish Question in Turkey. However, the process was doomed to fail since its inception. First of all, the political environment in Turkey is a very dynamic one therefore exposed the process to major pressures. Secondly, the method, the actors and the unclear character of the process even furthered these pressures. To start with the nature of the process, the actors constitute the most problematic facet. By fixating the fate of such a complex issue to several actors and to their will and benevolence, the process was shaped up to be very fragile. It might be understandable while the negotiations were conducted covertly that parties should be limited. However, in 2012 the negotiations were seemed to be

opened up to the public and the public reaction hasn't been as negative as the government thought it would be. In fact, a research shows that the general public support for the process is as high as 57% while it is 83% among Kurds (Yılmaz, 2014). Despite the fact that the support was high among the people, the parties chose not to include even more sides to the process. It resulted in that the process was highly vulnerable to the priorities of negotiating parties (Yeğen, 2014: 8).

The fragility of negotiations manifested itself the best in the instances of the siege of Kobané by ISIL and lastly the June 7 elections in 2015. Although it is not possible to dwell on the details of each situation, Kobané and June elections were the breaking points of the process. On the path to these incidents, "the Gezi Park Resistance" and "the December 17/25 Corruption Scandal" highly damaged the credibility of AKP and Erdoğan. Erdoğan and AKP responded both the Gezi Park Resistance and the Corruption Scandal with increasing authoritarian policies. While the Gezi Park Resistance was marked by extreme police brutality, the Corruption Scandal was followed by unprecedented censoring of the media and the internet. Both of these incidents undermined the legitimacy of AKP government and Erdoğan but more importantly it made issues like drafting a new constitution and introduction of presidential system more vital and more urgent for them. However, for the sake of the solution process, the Kurdish side of the negotiations weren't much involved in these incidents. In fact, HDP distanced itself from the Gezi Park Resistance by claiming that at some point it was attempted to be evolved into a coup d'état. Although these incidents strained the relations of negotiating parties in the process, it was the siege of Kobané and the June 7 elections that broke off these relations.

The first blow came with the siege of Kobané laid by ISIL. On January 2014, Kurds declared their autonomy in Rojava and Kobané is one of three cantons that constitutes the autonomous region (Duman, 2014). Rojava is an important place for Kurds in which they have been experimenting self-government for some time. While Kurds were experimenting self-government in Kobané, ISIL forces laid siege on the city in late September. Unlike most of the cities that were on the path of aggressive ISIL expansion, Kobané resisted effectively. With the each day of resistance, Kobané gained a symbolic importance. It even came to a point

that Kobané was began to be referred as "Kurdish Stalingrad" ("The Economist", 2014). It also had an impact on the relations between Kurds and the Turkish state in general but more specifically it affected the Solution Process. During Kobané resistance, Turkey adopted a rather passive stance. Although having accepted refugees from Kobané, Turkey never responded to calls for help to Kobané inside and outside of Turkey. Along with strong suspicions on the relationship between ISIL and Turkey, Erdoğan's statements on Kobané made the situation even worse. In a speech he was giving to Syrian refugees, Erdoğan claimed that Kobané was about to fall[1]. Given Ankara's stance towards Kurdish administration in the region and aforementioned suspicions coupled with Erdoğan's tone of hope in the statement, Kurds in Turkey interpreted it as a sign of Erdoğan and AKP government's genuine feelings for Kurds and their fate (Zeydanlıoğlu 2014: 14). Although later on, Turkey was forced into providing a corridor for an aid convoy to Kobané, its general stance gravely damaged the Solution Process. In an interview, one of PKK's top commanders Murat Karayılan stated that Turkey is responsible for ISIL attacks on Kobané and that the Solution Process is now over for them[2]. For the Kurdish side of the negotiations, Kobané can be considered as existentially important which the AKP government and Erdoğan failed to acknowledge.

For AKP and Erdoğan reasons of breaking off the Solution Process seem more personal. During the process, negotiating parties had some demands to be met by their counterpart. While the Kurdish side had demands more in collective nature like more power to local governments, lowering the 10% threshold in the election system and removal of Turkishness from the definition of citizenship; AKP and Erdoğan had two specific demands among others: a new constitution and shift to presidential system (Bahar 2013: 78-79). In these demands, AKP side actually demanded the support of Kurdish side in the parliament in an effort to accomplish them. Here, the question is; what makes them more personal than the demands of Kurdish side? It was the Gezi Park Resistance and December 17/25 Corruption Scandal that made these issues more personal for them. Being Turkey's first social uprising, the Gezi Park Resistance was the first blow to AKP's legitimacy. Started as a small scale protest against the destruction of Gezi

Park which is the last remaining decent green area inside the city turned out to be a general protest against increasing authoritarianism in Turkey. Whatever may be the outcome, the Gezi Park Resistance strongly damaged AKP and Erdoğan's legitimacy. By resorting to extreme police violence, censoring and false propaganda, AKP and Erdoğan alienated more people than ever in Turkey (Toktamış 2015: 29-45; Bozkurt 2015: 77-89; Özden&Bekmen 2015: 89-105; Civelekoğlu 2015: 105-121; Jenkins 2013). Soon after the serious blow of "Gezi Park Resistance" to AKP's legitimacy, December 17/25 Corruption Scandal came. Referred as "the biggest corruption scandal in the history of the Republic of Turkey" (Yüncüler & Karakoyun 2015), it went as high as Erdoğan's son Bilal Erdoğan including three ministers from the cabinet at that time. Even though they were some claims in the beginning, the government's response to the claims and to following investigation proved it to be more than claims. After all is said and done, the government responded to the claims by heavily censoring social media and meddling with the investigation by replacing and even punishing the prosecutors (Bedirhanoğlu 2015). Even though the government managed to save the day, it was an irreparable damage to its legitimacy. A survey (MetroPoll 2014) conducted after the scandal shows clearly how it affected the government's legitimacy. According to the survey, "59.7% believe that the government tried to cover up the scandal while 60.5% think that investigations on corruption claims were just and right". This survey can be interpreted as that even some of the supporters of the AKP government believe that there is corruption in the government and the investigations shouldn't have been meddled with. Suffering a great loss of legitimacy, drafting a new constitution and therefore introducing presidential system became vitally important for AKP and Erdoğan. In doing so, they aim to strengthen their position in the government. These incidents strained the relations between negotiating parties however following incidents not only ended the Solution Process but also turned most of Kurds into criminals that should be and will be punished accordingly in the eyes of AKP, Erdoğan and most importantly in the eyes of fair amount of the public.

At probably one of the shortest group meetings in the history of the parliament, HDP co-chair Demirtaş declared their ultimate

goal for June 7 elections: "As long as there is HDP, as long as
there are HDP supporters breathing on these lands, you will not
become the president. We will not let you become the presi-
dent"[3]. Denying any give and take with AKP and the government,
Demirtaş declared that they will be an obstacle to Erdoğan's long
desired presidency. Thanks to the threshold obstacle in the elec-
tion system, AKP has enjoyed a rather free-ride in Kurdish towns
since its inception. For example, in 2011 elections pro-Kurdish
politicians had to register as independent candidates. Even
though they were officially supported by the pro-Kurdish political
party Freedom and Democracy Party (BDP) at that time[4], the
election system in Turkey forced them to run independently for
the parliament. Apart from showing the absurdity of election sys-
tem in Turkey, it also meant an opportunity for AKP. In the ab-
sence of a party block, AKP gained more seats in these regions
even though they had to share it with independent candidates. To
provide a better picture, one only needs to compare the results of
2011 general elections in which AKP enjoyed the absence of party
block competition with June 7 and November 1 elections in which
HDP as a party dominated the region in terms of election results.
In 2011, AKP managed to win 6 seats in Diyarbakir while the in-
dependents managed to win 5 seats. (Election Results for the City
of Diyarbakır, 2011) The ratio of obtained seats have changed
radically both in June 7 and November 1 elections In these elec-
tions, HDP decided to run for these elections as a party instead of
separate independent candidates. This decision meant trouble for
AKP as even co-chair of HDP admitted that AKP would very
much like them to run as independents in the elections[5]. In Di-
yarbakır, AKP only managed to get 1 seat in June 7 elections
(June 7 Election Results for the City of Diyarbakır, 2015) and de-
spite re-scheduling another election under very uneven circum-
stances, AKP only managed to get 2 seats in Diyarbakır. (Novem-
ber 1 Election Results for the City of Diyarbakır, 2015) By taking
the cities where AKP would achieve majority in the assembly from
the hands of AKP, HDP became the fourth biggest political party
in the assembly. In order to be able to draft a new constitution
AKP needed 330 seats in the assembly however the success of
HDP on June 7 elections prevented it. On June 7 elections, AKP
managed to get only 258 seats in the parliament while HDP man-
aged to get 80 seats doubling its numbers in the assembly. (Gen-

eral Results of June 7 Elections, 2015). After June 7 elections de-
feat, Erdoğan and his AKP did what any electoral authoritarian
(Schedler 2006) ruling cadre would do: they didn't recognize the
elections results and rescheduled elections on November 1. It was
in this period when the government declared that the Solution
Process has come to an end. According to the confession-like
statements made by both Prime Minister Davutoglu and his aide,
it was Demirtaş's campaign that ended the process. Prime Minis-
ter's aide Akdoğan stated that HDP's campaign on June 7 elec-
tions provoked Erdoğan and therefore he ended the process[6].
And Prime Minister Davutoğlu goes one step further by claiming
that HDP sacrificed the process in the hopes of increasing their
votes in the elections. From this point onward everything started
to go downhill. While peoples of Turkey have been enjoying a rel-
ative peace in the last six years, after June 7 elections violence ap-
peared again. On July 20, Turkey was rocked with a blast in
Suruç, Şanlıurfa. Consisting of mostly young people who were try-
ing to reach Kobané to take part in its reconstruction after ISIL
siege and for delivering the things donated by people in Turkey.
They were targeted by a suicide bomber affiliated with ISIL. 34 of
them died there along with the conscience of most people in Tur-
key (Keyman 2015). The massacre at Suruç was followed by an
even more dangerous act. Two days after the massacre, two police
officers were found executed in their homes in Ceylanpınar,
Şanlıurfa. While HPG claimed responsibility for the incident, it
also stated that it was a retaliation for the massacre at Suruç[7]. This
event also marked the starting of military operations in Kurdistan.

In an environment of increasing violence, political purges
started as well. After June 7 elections, Erdoğan and his party
started arresting numerous Kurdish local politicians. The purging
of people who are effective in local politics can be considered as
another aspect of collective punishment inflicted upon Kurdish
people by the state. Facts provided by several reports from non-
governmental organizations and press releases by HDP strengthen
this claim. A report that depicts the developments between June 7
and November 1 elections by IHD provide horrifying numbers of
arrests and detentions: "During this time, most of them being pro-
Kurdish political activists, 5.173 people were detained while 188
of these people are children and 1004 people were arrested while

36 of them are children" (İHD, 2015). On a press release made by HDP on January 6, 2016, the political purges are defined "as the last step of the coup d'état towards democratic politics". In this press release, one can clearly see targeting of HDP representatives especially at local level. As of January 6, eighteen HDP representatives at municipal level have been arrested and twenty nine elected officials have been removed from their office by the Ministry of Internal Affairs (Danış Beştaş, 2016). The political purges by Erdoğan and his party provide one of the main motivations for declarations of self-rule in several Kurdish cities. The first declaration of self-rule came in the period following June 7 elections that has been characterized by these political purges and increasing violence. First self-rule declaration came on August 10, 2015 from Şırnak by Democratic Regions Party (Demokratik Bölgeler Partisi). The content of the first declaration has been shared by many that followed it. In a way that directly challenges the sovereign, the declarations emphasized heavily on the issue of legitimacy: "The state institutions in our city have lost their legitimacy. Therefore from now on, we, as people, will rule ourselves democratically" (Demokratik Bölgeler Partisi, 2015). A later statement made by Congress of Democratic Society (DTK) further details the motivation behind self-rule declarations. In this statement, DTK relates declarations with the policies followed by AKP and Erdoğan after June 7 elections. They claim that AKP government declared war on Kurdish people while placing Öcalan under heavy isolation. Along with this, the representatives elected by Kurdish people are being arrested in a way that disrespect people's right to choose their own representatives. Under these circumstances they argued, there is no other alternative but people governing themselves (Demokratik Toplum Kongresi, 2015). The statement also establishes a relationship between self-rule and existence of trenches and barricades in Bakur.

Since the first day of military operations, the government has stated that the reason for curfews accompanied by military operations is that the PKK has taken advantage of the era of the Solution Process. They claimed that during this era thanks to the benevolence of the government, the PKK "filled the cities with weapons" and digged trenches so that they can control these areas. However, reports from the area that contains interviews with

the residents of curfew imposed neighbourhoods prove that trenches and barricades weren't in fact that common and even in some cases there weren't so long conflict between the guerrillas and the security forces (Cizre Gözlem Raporu 2016: 27). The military operations that are ravaging the region are called as "trench operations" by the pro-government media as well as the government itself[8]. The claimed existence of trenches provide a legitimization for these military operations. But why would trenches being digged in and barricades being put up would disturb the sovereign this much? Lilja & Vinthagen (2014: 112) provides us a Foucauldian answer. Defining sovereign power as "the forbidding power of law, violence and sovereignty", they propose a corresponding way of resistance. The reason for proposing a corresponding way of resistance to sovereign power lies in its ultimate motivation: "creating subordinate subjects." For this type of power, any act of dissent is hostility. In the context of Turkey, declaring that you are aiming to prevent somebody from becoming the president is a clear act of dissent. An act that is to be punished. Therefore following the Lilja and Vinthagen's line of thought a power that aims to inflict violence and establish sovereignty, one meets it with the corresponding resistance:

> Since sovereign power is about claiming the monopoly of violently or forcefully repress certain behavior and/or command other behavior, resistance becomes a matter of breaking such commands or repressions; that is, doing what is illegal or doing things for deviant interests and circumventing, undermining the sovereignty of power centers. […] Sovereign power is a form of power that demands absolute obedience and therefore the resistance that develops is undermining these values, institutions and representatives. Resistance is, in a corresponding way, typically openly defiant and challenges through rebellions, strikes, boycotts, disobedience and political revolutions, by overthrowing kings, governments and regimes, with the attempt of ever more clever applications of violence, counter-power and strategies of power play (Lilja&Vinthagen, 2014: 113).

In other word, one digs trenches, puts up barricades, sets up checkpoints on roads[9] or even declares self-rule[10].

The results of June 7 elections and self-rule declarations made in the following period constituted a direct challenge to sovereign's will. These results and declarations turned most of Kurds into criminals. They are began to be considered as criminals in the eyes of the sovereign for two distinct reasons. First of all, the ethnic group that happens to be HDP's main constituency and resi-

dents of self-rule declared areas are Kurdish people. Secondly, sovereign power doesn't tolerate any kind of loyalty to another "commanding center" (Lilja & Vinthagen, 2014: 112) other than itself. Therefore in line with the nature of sovereign power, disobedience ought to be punished indiscriminately and in a way that exhibits the might of the sovereign so that it might deter any futures challengers from challenging the sovereign again.

SOVEREIGN POWER IN KURDISTAN: CURFEWS, OPERATIONS AND COLLECTIVE PUNISHMENT

There is a saying in Turkish that can be roughly translated as whatever the dervish thinks, it comes out of his mouth (*dervişin fikri neyse zikri de odur*). Rather than implying honesty, the saying implies slip of a tongue. Something that Davutoğlu said at his election campaign brings one's mind this saying. During a campaign in Van, Davutoğlu said that: "if AKP loses the power/majority after the upcoming elections, Beyaz Toroslar (white Renault R12 Toros vehicles) will be back here, roaming the streets"[11]. This statement was in fact a reference to the times when Kurdish people were subjected to heavy state violence and "Beyaz Toroslar" is the symbol of those times (White 1999: 83-88). But what is so specific about these white colored vehicles? It is in fact the very history of these vehicles that led some people to assume that Davutoğlu didn't simply make a statement but rather threatened people before the elections. These vehicles are commonly used by Turkish covert counter-guerrilla units known as JİTEM. They represent the atrocities targeting the left in Turkey but even more specifically Kurds. The streets of Cizre, Sur, Bismil, Silopi and many more Kurdish cities are still haunted by the ghost of these vehicles. Anyone who has been forced into these vehicles were never seen again. And even if they did return, they were subjected to tremendous amount of torture during the time they went missing. For years they served as the punishing hand of the state, symbolizing the sovereign's might in being able to make people disappear forever (Karakaş, 2015; Kayar, 2015; Söylemez, 2015). Therefore one can easily assume that what Davutoğlu said in Van was simply a threat for manipulating people into voting for his

party. In those elections, AKP lost its rather overwhelming majority in the parliament. They re-scheduled the elections for November 1 and "Beyaz Toroslar" didn't return. They were replaced by AKREP's (armoured police vehicle), TOMA's (symbolic police dispersal vehicle) and even tanks. Hacı Lokman Birlik is one of the proofs of this replacement in terms of the state's choice of vehicle for punishing people while also making an example of someone. According to the reports, on October 2, an armed confrontation between PKK guerrillas and security forces broke out. According to the media, Hacı Lokman Birlik was among the guerrillas fighting the police and he was executed by the police. What followed shocked anyone with a minimum level of conscience. Although he was executed by 28 bullets[12], he was also dragged behind a police vehicle known as AKREP. The footage of this horrible act was serviced via Twitter. The incident was reported as an isolated and a spontaneous act however later it turned out be a planned act of punishment. The dragging of the body was in fact done with the knowledge and the approval of superiors of the officers in the vehicle. Only two police officers were dismissed and no real progress is made in the investigation until this day (HDP, 2015). Although Davutoğlu later stated that this kind of act represents an isolated instance, the following atrocities committed by the security forces constitute a pattern. Even before Hacı Lokman Birlik incident, another act of punishment and making an example was committed in Muş on August 10. According to the reports, on the night of August 10, an armed confrontation broke out between PKK guerrillas and the security forces. A woman named Kevser Ertürk was killed in this confrontation. The following day her body was exposed on the street; stripped off naked[13]. Again an investigation was launched with no actual results until this day. What might be the motivation behind these atrocities? Foucault answers:

Perhaps the notion of 'atrocity' is one of those that best designates the economy of the public execution in the old practice. […] In so far as it must bring the crime before everyone's eyes in all its severity, the punishment must take responsibility for this atrocity […] it must reproduce it in ceremonies that apply it to the body of the guilty person in the form of humiliation and pain. […] Furthermore, the atrocity of a crime was also the violence of the challenge flung at the sovereign (Foucault 1991: 55-56).

Few months after these incidents, the punishment by the sovereign turned into be collective rather than individual. The punishment is now inflicted upon whole towns in a way that manifests the might of the sovereign. Through declaration of curfews in several Kurdish towns, the military operations began to be conducted. Despite its name suggests a conflict between two fighting parties, these operations targeted civilians in more than one occasions.

Article 2 of European Convention of Human Rights (1950) states that:

> Everyone's right to life shall be protected by law. No one shall be deprived of his life intentionally save in the execution of a sentence of a court following his conviction of a crime for which this penalty is provided by law (European Convention on Human Rights, 1950: 6).

As a signatory of this convention and the maker of the laws, it means that the state is responsible for upholding everyone's right to life without any exception. Not only the state must actively protect the lives of those who are under its jurisdiction, but it also must avoid any action that might infringe people's right to life. As a signatory of European Convention of Human Rights and several other international and law-binding documents, the Republic of Turkey even guarantees these rights in its very own constitution. In the Article 17 of the constitution, the Republic of Turkey guarantees protection of the right to life of its citizens actively and passively (Constitution of Republic of Turkey, 1982). Article 33 of Geneva Convention (1949) states that:

> No protected person may be punished for an offence he or she has not personally committed. Collective penalties and likewise all measures of intimidation or of terrorism are prohibited. Pillage is prohibited. Reprisals against protected persons and their property are prohibited" (Convention [IV] relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War, 1949).

The reasons for stating the above articles from the Geneva Convention, European Convention on Human Rights and the Constitution of Turkey stem from the current reality in Bakur. First of all, the towns and cities that were and are subjected to curfews and operations can be considered war zones as heavy weaponry have been deployed and the regions considered for this

definition have been witnessing extreme levels of violence. Secondly, stating the above articles provides the reader a stark contrast for following atrocities committed by the security forces of the state in the region. The author hypothesizes that the security forces of Turkish state has been engaged in violent acts that can be considered as collective punishment. In fact, several reports from the area as well as statements made by HDP reveal that the residents of curfew-declared areas consider these practices of atrocity as collective punishment. It was Demirtaş who for the first time publicly described the atrocities committed in Northern Kurdistan as collective punishment. In a statement he made prior to his visit to Russia, he claimed that places where there are strong HDP constituency are being targeted by military operations. He argued that after June 7 elections, AKP and Erdoğan realized that Kurds are the only organized opposition left in Turkey that can challenge their authority. So, in an attempt to run freely, AKP and Erdoğan is now targeting these places[14]. Most importantly, the residents of these areas consider these atrocities committed as a punishment inflicted upon them collectively. In several reports from the region, one can find statements by residents on this line. Human rights activists in the region are highly and rightly critical of the status of curfews declared. While arguing the lack of legal basis of curfews compared to OHAL (state of emergency), they also say that "the curfews are nothing but collective punishment for all living in the district (Sur)" (International Crisis Group, 2016: 6-7). A committee that was comprised of representatives from several NGO's visited Cizre after curfew are in agreement with those in Diyarbakır. Referring to the common practices discussed below like demolition, looting, indiscriminate and intentional targeting, the committee explicitly describes the situation as follows: "All these methods that are common all around Cizre must be considered together with the intentions of punishment, making it unusable and inhabitable" (Cizre Gözlem Raporu, 2016: 20). Lastly and more importantly, even a conservative human rights association like Mazlum-Der reports that the practices of the security forces can be considered as collective punishment. The association includes a quote in their report from the co-chair

Fig. 1. *South East of Turkey*.

Source: International Crisis Group Report, 2016: 17).

of Nusaybin municipality who makes a clear link between June 7 elections and the curfews: "What has changed before and after June 7? These neighbourhoods were still being sieged by security forces even before there were trenches and barricades, even before there were curfews. 2 of 22 killed in this neighbourhood were killed way before there were trenches here" (Mazlum-Der, 2015: 8). Then the question becomes; what happened in curfew-declared areas? What makes many people think that the practices of security forces are collective punishment?

The map above (fig. 1) shows the towns that have been subjected to curfew until mid-March. The first curfew was declared on August 16, 2015 in Varto, Muş. Starting with this date and until mid-March, there have been fifty nine curfews imposed in twenty two towns in Bakur (International Crisis Group, 2016: 3).

The curfews accompanied by military operations have resulted in a tremendous human cost. In curfew areas, 310 civilians were killed (TIHV, 2016) and even the government reports that 355.000 people were displaced during this time (International Crisis Group 2016: 3). Looking at some of these areas closer provide even a more horrifying picture. On December 2, 2015 curfew was declared in Sur. Despite several breaks, the curfew was extended to a period that covers more than a hundred days. During this time both the PKK and Turkish security forces suffered casualties. The deployment of heavy weaponry in Sur led to the destruction of the most of the neighbourhood (International Crisis Group 2016: 6). The destruction forced 23.000 people to leave their homes where the overall population is 25.000 (International Crisis Group 2016: 7). People left their homes without being able to take most of their belongings with them because the curfew imposed in a round-the-clock manner. Even though those who left their home hoped to return to their homes one day might not even have that chance as the decision to immediately nationalize Sur has been taken by the government (Ekinci 2016). For some, the decision is regarded as "a cultural and social genocide" (Karakaş 2016).

During the conflict in Sur the violation of human rights included systematic actions perpetrated by the security forces. As they will be also seen in Cizre, Silvan and Nusaybin, the residents of the curfew area were humiliated and punished indiscriminately. The graffitis serve as a commonly preferred way of delivering messages to the residents by security forces in Sur. In order to induce terror in the minds of the residents, racist and sexist slogans were sprayed on the walls of homes in Sur. Slogans like "you'll see the might of the Turk", "The State is here", "Girls – referring to the guerrillas –, we are here", "There is no God but the State", can be observed more commonly[15]. These graffitis are also serviced via social media[16]. The inviting of an audience via social media brings Foucault in mind once again. Apart from the terror of graffitis, the body has been once again resorted as a way of humiliating people. On March 7 while the conflict is going on, the images of seven men stripped naked and were crouched next to a wall began to be circulating the Internet. Contrary to usual reflex of the authorities, the governor's office in Diyarbakir confirmed the incident and stated that stripping off men have been a routine in

order to detect suicide bombers in the area[17]. Along with this statement, co-chair of another pro-Kurdish party; Democratic Regions Party (DBP) argued that people who want to be evacuated from the area are demanded to be get completely naked and then surrender to the security forces[18]. Considering the images shared of executed guerrillas that have been exposed naked on the streets, this "routine" might very well be considered as a way of humiliation.

Another systematic way of punishing and humiliating collectively is the breaking into the homes of the residents who have evacuated the area. As it can be seen in the cases of Cizre and Silopi (Cizre Gözlem Raporu, 2016), these claimed searches inside the houses are unwarranted. However it doesn't stop there. A joint report by several non-governmental organizations on Cizre depicts a horrifying scene inside several houses. It reports that the electronic devices like washing machines, televisions and refrigerators were destroyed with hammers and sledgehammers. Those devices that can be carried are reported to be stolen. Apart from these material damages, psychological damages were also inflicted. The target of these psychological damages that are inflicted through humiliation are reported to be mostly women. In houses that have been ravaged by security forces, undergarments of women were spread around the house. In some houses, undergarments were even pinned on the walls with the pictures of women that used to live in those houses. Apparently not satisfied with the humiliation already inflicted upon residents, in some houses feces were left on beds (Cizre Gözlem Raporu 2016: 6, 11, 14, 15). Lastly, intentional targeting of the utilities in the curfew areas can also be considered as another way of collective punishment. The practice of cutting of water and electricity services without prior warnings and without any discrimination can be considered as a way of collective punishment towards residents of curfew declared areas. Examples from Silvan and Cizre further illuminates the scope of these practices. A report from Silvan describes indiscriminate cutting off these services: "During the operations in curfew declared neighbourhoods of Tekel, Mescit and Konak, electricity and water services were entirely cut while also affecting those neighbourhoods where there haven't been a declared curfew" (IHD; TIHV; DTO, 2015: 2). The situation gets even worse as the report states that there have been no prior pre-

cautions taken in the event of cutting of these services. As a result, 14.000 people in curfew-declared neighbourhoods were deprived of water and electricity during the operations (IHD; TIHV; DTO, 2015: 9). The situation seems to be the same in Cizre. A report from the area states that transformers and electric transformers have been "either destroyed or uprooted and transported" (Cizre Gözlem Raporu, 2016: 9). And in some neighbourhoods, the infrastructure has been completely destroyed (Cizre Gözlem Raporu, 2016: 5). The situation also takes its toll on remaining residents. Statements from the remaining residents in different neighbourhoods in Cizre makes the vehemence of the situation clearer. The residents state that the hardships stemming from lack of electricity and water are harder than satisfying their needs regarding food and shelter (Cizre Gözlem Raporu, 2016: 44). Even though one might conclude that lack of electricity and water services is due to the mutual conflict in the region, the intentional targeting of water depots in most homes can be considered as an act of punishment by making the sustenance of life harder for those remaining residents. Statements from many residents of the area clearly suggest that water depots have been intentionally targeted and damaged in more than one instance (Cizre Gözlem Raporu, 2016: 9, 11, 17-18, 23, 28).

CONCLUSION

In relations of power, violence is both a result and a tool. The degree of its utilization and the way of its manifestation depends on the type of power exercised in these relations. In this paper, the author focused on the concept of sovereign power that has been operating in Bakur since after June 7, 2015 elections in Turkey. It is argued as sovereign power because it punishes, it restricts and it makes a spectacle out of it. It doesn't tolerate disagreement as it perceives disagreement as disobedience; disobedience to the will of the sovereign. Reading Foucault, one understands that power is not something to be curbed with or something to be measured however it may be personified in those that exercise it. The state is that personification. The state is the tool that exacts violence for punishing those who act against the will of the sovereign. In Turkey, Erdoğan and his party took the election

results of June 7, 2015 elections and declarations of self-rule as an act of disobedience. The results constituted an obstacle in the way of long desired goals like making a new constitution and shifting to the presidential system. In these attempts to punish those disobedient subjects, the first and most concrete glimmer of hope that Turkey has ever experienced for solving the decades long war between the state and the PKK has been sacrificed. It is true that the process of negotiations have had its hardships owing it to the both sides of the table. It is true that the PKK has had made grave mistakes which made others doubt its sincerity in the search for peace but it is not the PKK that claims responsibility for the rights of those living in Bakur. It is the state that has been vested in protecting the rights of its citizens whatever their religion, gender, ethnicity or even political affiliation. That is why this paper focuses on the atrocities committed by the state and claims that it is a way of punishing the people of said region collectively.

As we have seen in several statements both from the authorities of a political party that has dominated the region in last two elections as well as the residents themselves, the people of the region also feels that they are being punished. It is clear that the common people of Bakur can't comprehend the level of atrocities committed especially when a year ago they were hopeful that peaceful solution might be on the horizon. In an attempt to comprehend the situation, they make clear links between June 7 elections in which HDP can be considered as the most successful political party in terms of the results of the election and the atrocities being committed. The people view these atrocities as a way of punishment after HDP successfully prevented Erdoğan's desire of presidency by sweeping off seats in the region from AKP. By failing to achieve majority in the parliament, Erdoğan and his party began taunting for war in the region by even clearly threatening the people of the region. It is within the period of political chaos that followed June 7 elections when the region began to be militarized accompanied with curfews declared. Serving as a purgatory between normal life and state of emergency in the region, curfews provided the security forces with an ample room for freely executing operations. These operations have been the way in which the atrocities are being committed. The operations that have been legitimized by the trenches and the barricades in the region set up by PKK affiliated youth groups however in most cases the vio-

lence hasn't been limited between clashing parties. Several reports from the region by different human rights associations as well as stream of information provided via social media shows that civilians are intentionally and indiscriminately are being targeted in these operations. Hate speeches, humiliation, destruction, pillaging and killing are recorded as common practices employed by the security forces. In line with Foucault's arguments on sovereign power, these practices can be considered as a way punishing people the way that the would-be regicides or enemies of the crown would be punished. While they are being punished as dissidents to the will of the sovereign, they are also being made an example.

Whether they may or may not be serving a political agenda, it is clear that the people of Northern Kurdistan are being punished as the lines of this article are being written. What is certain is that these operations conducted by the security forces that have been legitimized as a way of combating terrorism, create an ever deepening social wound. Although no monarch, dictator or fuhrer has ever left an ever-lasting political inheritance, the social wound growing among the peoples of Turkey might provide an even greater obstacle for peace one day. It is therefore very important to acknowledge the atrocities committed by the state as collective punishment targeting specific group of people and to hold those responsible accountable for these atrocities if there will ever be peace among the peoples of Turkey.

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[15] Graffiti graphics: http: //bianet.org/bianet/siyaset/169368-devlet-geldi-silvan-daki-duvar-yazilari-uzerine

[16] An account named @JiTEM on Twitter has been the main outlet of the images of terror and humiliation coming from the area. Images and footages of people executed, stripped naked, dragged behind cars and houses trashed are being serviced via this account.

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