

memory of the present and urged discussions about the potential that the future holds. Başcı adeptly demonstrates that cinema has the power to defy official narratives and disturb conventional accounts of identity and history while constructing a new public discourse through the depiction of the suppressed. *Social Trauma and Telecinematic Memory* reminds us of the refreshing notion that cinema has the power to rewrite history. Despite the all-pervading authority of official history that silences memories, “[c]hildren remember, and grow up to tell stories” (p. 196).

### U. Ceren Ünlü

Istanbul Medeniyet University, Turkey

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**Salih Can Açıksöz. *Sacrificial Limbs: Masculinity, Disability, and Political Violence in Turkey*. Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2020, xxiv + 246 pages.**

“They risked their lives for this homeland” reads a recent news article on the disabled veterans of Turkey’s war on Kurds in *Sözcü*, a popular nationalist newspaper in Turkey. As the article unfolds, the reader is left with startling and contradictory portraits of disabled veterans. On the one hand, they are lionized as self-sacrificing, altruistic heroes who devoted their lives to the nation. On the other hand, they appear as victims of war who protest and demand rights from successive governments and yet fail to get compensation for their bodily injuries. Assembling nationalist discourses on the war-torn bodies of disabled veterans and the images of their protests, this piece in *Sözcü* makes visible the paradoxes involved in post-war experiences of Turkish disabled veterans and the controversies that mark popular discourses concerning them. Such contradictions that surround the post-injury lives of conscripted veterans of the Turkish army’s war against Kurdish guerillas lie at the heart of Salih Can Açıksöz’s award-winning *Sacrificial Limbs: Masculinity, Disability, and Political Violence in Turkey*. Meeting the reader in a historical conjuncture when “sacrifices of military conscripts” are increasingly instrumentalized as a means to justify the military expansion of the Turkish state, the book offers a timely, rare, and robust look at the making and unmaking of political subjectivities, communities, and the state through a profound analysis of conscripts’ experiences of war and bodily loss. In doing so, it also makes novel contributions to the scholarly discussions on the notions of sovereignty, disability, masculinity, and trauma.

Drawing on a rich ethnographic account of the veterans' narratives on the counter-guerilla warfare waged in mountains and their post-injury experiences in urban spaces, Açıksöz brings the reader to the "narrativized gray zone" where boundaries between the categories of perpetrators versus victims of violence increasingly blur (p. xviii). The conscripted soldiers, he proposes, are at once perpetrators and victims of sovereign violence. Delving into this gray zone so affectively charged by experiences of sacrifice, betrayal, and crisis, he provides a compelling analysis of the ways in which experiences of disabled veterans are hardened into ultranationalist politics that, in return, augment the Turkish state's nationalist psychological warfare.

Açıksöz begins with conscripts' own narratives of their memories of war. From the start, his approach sidesteps perspectives that explain the shocking war experiences of conscripts through the notion of trauma. Through his elegant writing, he denounces the hegemonic conceptualizations of trauma for positing a linear link between present sufferings and past events, and for assuming that these pathologized effects can be cured. Instead he shifts the focus to the lingering bodily effects of armed conflict in war's afterlives and draws attention to the ways in which subtle and ordinary affects of warfare erupt in the post-injury lives of his interlocutors. These ordinary affects, according to Açıksöz, situate former conscripts in a "magical-realist world" that is "populated by supernatural beings, the ghosts of dead friends, shadowy political figures" and guerillas (p. 3).

In the second and third chapters of his book, the author brings to light various shades of the gray zone occupied by the veterans. Compulsory military service is the key institution through which the Turkish state promises its male subjects masculine sovereignty. But being severely injured, Açıksöz demonstrates, radically disrupts the course of disabled veterans' heteronormative adult masculinity. Resulting in increased dependence on families, the medicalization of lives, and the loss of financial independence, severe injury breaks the "sexual contract" of compulsory military conscription by reversing this foundational rite of passage. In return, the Turkish state grants disabled veterans the religiously loaded, honorific military title of *gazi*, celebrating the veterans as sacrificial heroes of the homeland. This does not necessarily fix, according to Açıksöz, the broken sexual contract. To the contrary, the war-damaged bodies of veterans occupy an ambivalent space in gendered and ableist normativity that associates disability with mendicity. Pursuing his analysis by delicately following the various subject positions that disabled veterans occupy, Açıksöz underlines veterans' oscillation between the status of masculine hero and needy "half-man" or, in other language, between *gazi* and disabled pauper. Conscripted disabled veterans' ambivalent status, he concludes, signifies a "sacrificial crisis" that is key to understanding their post-injury political agency (p. 76).

In the second half of the book Açıksöz shifts focus to the ways in which gendered and classed experiences of disabled veterans inform their post-injury political subjectivities. The nationalist spectacle of debt, in his view, plays a prominent role in disabled veterans' post-injury political careers. Often referred to as *vatan borcu* (debt to homeland), military conscription is perceived as a debt owed by able-bodied men to the state for their heteropatriarchal privileges. Being severely injured inverts this debt relationship as the bodily losses of veterans become symbols of an unreturnable debt owed to them by the nation-state. Açıksöz writes that particularly the state's failure to provide welfare provisions in the milieu of a neoliberalizing healthcare system drives the veterans toward private loans for financial and medical assistance, including the acquisition of prosthesis. Finding themselves marginalized and disenfranchised in the ableist, gendered, and neoliberal social order, the veterans gather around formal and informal communities that provide legal and therapeutic support. In addition to mediating veterans' relationships to state institutions, these communities fabricate new forms of belonging and care by invoking a collective identity of national "victim-heroes" (p. 56).

These victim-heroes, Açıksöz argues, do more than demanding that the state pay its debts by providing prostheses and welfare benefits. They also look for scapegoats to blame for their fears, anxieties, and anger. This search, according to Açıksöz, found its immediate object in the body of Abdullah Öcalan, founder of the militant Kurdistan Workers' Party (*Partiya Karkerên Kurdistanê*) and charismatic leader of the Kurdish movement. During the course of Öcalan's trial, the state discourse sensationalized disabled veterans' bodily losses as gifts to the nation and its sovereignty. Concomitantly, disabled veterans and families of the martyrs agitatedly demanded Öcalan's execution as a form of retaliation in kind. In demanding so, writes Açıksöz, disabled veterans brokered collective experiences of bodily injury and loss into prosthetic protests where they removed and exhibited their prosthetic limbs as artifacts symbolizing the debt owed to them. The eventual conversion of Öcalan's death sentence to aggravated life imprisonment upon abolishment of the death penalty (as part of the European Union harmonization process in 2002), on the other hand, left disabled veterans in search of a new scapegoat. This new scapegoat, according to Açıksöz, emerged from within growing anti-Western and nationalist public sentiments: dissident intellectuals, who were perceived as a threat to the bodily integrity of veterans and the nation alike, abruptly replaced Öcalan's image and turned into "surrogate victims" (p. 145) of disabled soldiers. It was now the scapegoated bodies of dissident intellectuals to whom disabled soldiers channeled their post-injury resentment with discernible enjoyment.

Precisely in the author's encounters with the veterans' "quest to recover their masculine sovereignty to the ultranationalist agenda of 'restoring' state sovereignty" (p. 101) lies the methodological force of the book. In the preface of the book, Açıksöz thoroughly reflects on the challenges he encountered in entering the militarized sociality of disabled veterans during his ethnographic research in Istanbul and Ankara between 2005 and 2008. But the challenges do not stop there. During Açıksöz's writing of *Sacrificial Limbs*, the militarized state violence toward Kurds was reaccelerated to which various academics responded by signing a petition demanding peace. His own participation to "Academics for Peace," Açıksöz suggests, turned him into "the ethnographer-cum-'terrorist'" in the eyes of his interlocutors (p. xxii). As the families of the martyrs and disabled veterans declared that "the [missing] arms and legs of disabled veterans will call traitor academics to account" (p. xxii), Açıksöz ceased to be a neutral observer in their eyes. Instead he turned into an object of hatred for the ultranationalists whose politics he was studying. The sacrificial limbs of his interlocutors were now turned against dissident intellectuals, including himself.

Against the backdrop of the scarcity of ethnographic attention to far-right movements, Açıksöz's research exemplifies the ethical and political complexities such research entails. Writing from the position of a scapegoated victim of his interlocutors' hatred, moreover, Açıksöz complicates the conventional image of ethnographers as outsiders progressively immersed in the cultures they study. His self-reflexive account of the ways in which he navigated his socio-economic background and political choices that are remarkably distinct from his interlocutors' raise important yet unresolved questions as to the conduct of ethnography in political worlds that are alien to one's own.

Beyond its forceful intervention to the debates pertaining to ethnographic research, *Sacrificial Limbs'* outstanding theoretical innovation lies elsewhere in the author's interrogation of the nexus of sovereignty and violence through the lens of sacrifice. The entanglements between the monopoly of violence and sovereignty have been addressed by various scholars. Açıksöz contributes to this literature by highlighting the "monopoly of sacrifice – that is, control over sacralized, transcendental loss" (p. 10). Sovereignty claims, according to him, entail not only struggles over the meaning and means of violence but also over the selective ascription of political and symbolic meaning to violent loss. Sovereignty, it has often been said, is founded on the violent exclusion of certain subjects from the body-politic, converting them to bare life stripped of social, political, and legal rights and protections. Açıksöz adds that banishment of certain bodies from the body-politic always depends on the sacralization of others. It is in the name of those sacralized, he suggests, that the excluded are rendered disposable.

Through his profound account of the sacralization of veterans' bodies in legal and political discourses, Salih Can Açıksöz demonstrates how the

Turkish state mobilizes its monopoly of sacrifice to reinforce its monopoly of violence against Kurds. *Sacrificial Limbs* powerfully shows how sacralization of veterans' bodies helps both to militarize civilian psychology and to render those proclaimed "enemies of the nation," including Kurds, Armenians, and dissident intellectuals, legitimate targets of harm with impunity. One area that demands further analysis, on the other hand, concerns the prominent role that discourses and performances of sacrifice play in the affective organization of oppositional politics in Turkey.

Even as the veteran bodies are sacralized as *gazis* and martyrs, Kurdish communities and dissidents reclaim these categories for their own: leftists and the Kurdish movement attribute value to their political engagement by invoking the phrase of *bedel ödemek* (paying the price); images of bodies injured by state violence are widely circulated as a means to mobilize oppositional politics; and the families of slain guerrillas, often referred to as *değer ailesi* (families of value), hold a central place in the political mobilization of Kurds. The list can be extended. Açıksöz acknowledges these contesting discourses in the concluding chapter of the book but his analysis remains centered on the reproduction of nationalist state violence. A closer look at these alternative discourses on loss, sacrifice, and martyrdom, on the other hand, can complicate the analytical framework of bare life by fleshing out the ongoing human struggles in the intricacy of individual and collective experiences. The concept of bare life, on which Açıksöz builds his analysis, attracts criticism for denying those abandoned from the body politic the possibility of a political life. Reminiscent of such criticisms, contesting discourses on sacrifice and loss attest to the ways in which those abandoned by the state can strike back by mobilizing the very same discourses and practices that supposedly relegate them to a depoliticized space.

There is more. Since Açıksöz completed his ethnographic research, the hegemonic formulations of martyrdom have been altered, spectral performances of national sacrifice have proliferated, and the status of *gazi* was officially reconceptualized as belonging to new groups. Açıksöz recognizes these shifts in his impressive statement that "as ethnography quickly became history and what was regarded as history lingered in the present, I often felt unable to capture the present tense in ethnographic writing" (p. 175). When ethnography fast becomes history, Açıksöz's insights on monopoly of sacrifice will remain crucial for researchers of the shifting modalities of state sovereignty.

### Hazal Hürman

Princeton University, Princeton, NJ, USA