

Despite the overall success of the book, there is still some room for improvement. The theoretical depth of the book is weaker than its empirical breadth. While focusing more on empirical material might be a methodological choice of the author, not having the guidance of a social theory has its own drawbacks. For example, the introduction of the book promises to unearth “the roles gangs and gangsters have played in the making of the Turkish state and Turkish politics” (p. 2). The catchy phrase “the making of the Turkish state and Turkish politics”—which also resonates in the book’s title—conjures up a more theoretical engagement regarding state, society, and power relations in Turkey. Nonetheless, without the guidance of such a theoretical perspective, the detailed narration of historical events sometimes loses connection with the more general process of state-making. Nevertheless, this book would be of interest to students of Turkish politics, of comparative state-making or historical institutionalism, and to more general readers interested in the political history of modern Turkey.

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**Banu Bargu. *Starve and Immolate: The Politics of Human Weapons*.  
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Banu Bargu’s *Starve and Immolate: The Politics of Human Weapons* is a sophisticated and meticulously documented analysis of the death fast struggle organized by radical leftist organizations in Turkey between 2000 and 2006 in opposition to the Turkish state’s project of transition to high security prisons. Comprised of six chapters plus an introduction and a conclusion, the book traces and historicizes the changing fault lines of politics in Turkey *vis-à-vis* the death fast struggle as a self-destructive political practice on the one hand, and on the other introduces a theorization of biosovereignty as the incipient power regime and necroresistance as the corresponding response to this new global power regime.

The book starts with the observation that the convergence of the structural features and practices of such sites as “military and civilian prisons, [...] detention centers and refugee camps” (p. 14) blurs the boundaries between what is exceptional and what is acceptable. But more importantly, political actors in such comparable sites around the globe increasingly “resort to a

repertoire of self-destructive techniques” (p. 13). Taking inspiration from Frantz Fanon and Walter Benjamin, Bargu approaches the politics of self-destruction as a constitutive practice, as a form, as an expressive capacity, and as a meaning-making process that cannot be reduced to its content. Through its effects, it carries a claim to justice and political subjectivity. The book effectively deploys the dialectical tension between political expression and instrumentality, form and content, and body and ideology as a ground over which to trace the ramifications of the growing intensification of the corporeal dimension of political struggles.

Chapter 1 opens with a striking comparison of two death events: the execution of Robert-François Damiens that Michel Foucault narrates at the beginning of *Discipline and Punish*, and the slow death of Mehmet, the hunger striker in one of the resistance houses in Küçükarmutlu, İstanbul. Drawing on these two events, Bargu critically engages with the Foucauldian trajectory of the emergence of disciplinary and biopolitical forms of power, respectively, and raises the question of “what happens to sovereignty within the biopolitical problematic?” (p. 48). She proposes a theory of power criticizing the contrast that Foucault draws between sovereignty based on the power of life (and death) and governmentality based on the power over life. Rather than being “in the process of disappearance” (p. 26), she writes, sovereignty “grows and augments itself by increased control and governance over life” (p. 26). In order to address this incipient situation, the book traces the biosovereign assemblage as it unfolds in the case of the death fast struggle. This assemblage “builds on the argument that neither sovereignty, nor discipline, nor security singly defines the dominant characteristic of the contemporary power regime” (p. 51), or the struggles against it.

Antidisciplinary and biopolitical struggles revolve around the oppositional discourses that emphasize the right “to life, to one’s body, to health, to happiness, to the satisfaction of needs” (p. 61), the redistribution of resources, and the recognition of “cultural and symbolic injustices” (p. 61). As opposed to such affirmative struggles relying on the politicization of life, Bargu brings our attention to self-destructive practices that work through the politicization of death (p. 62), which she terms “necroresistance.” Drawing upon a critical reading of Giorgio Agamben and Achille Mbembe, Bargu argues that the necroresistance of death fasters “is not the resistance of bare life but resistance to bare life” (p. 81); that is, it is a political response, a claim to an alternative sovereignty.

Chapters 2 and 3 investigate the development of biosovereignty, or rather the “biopolitization of sovereignty” (p. 33), in Turkey. Chapter 2 discusses the constitutive ideologies of the Republic of Turkey and tells the story of the criminalization of the left, especially following the 1980 *coup d’état*. As a response to the challenge posed by extraparliamentary groups—Kurdish

separatists, radical leftists, and political Islamists—in the late 1980s, the state promulgated the Law for the Struggle against Terror in 1991. Bargu's illuminating analysis of the antiterror law shows how biopolitical techniques that redefine, classify, regulate, and manage "threats as an integral part of the health and well-being of the population" (p. 104) become indispensable for the construction of sovereign power itself. During the 1990s, prisons emerged as the site of radical confrontation between insurgents and the state as "political prisoners increased in numbers" (p. 107) and prison wards turned into self-governing enclaves for prisoners (p. 108). In the official diagnosis, the mass hunger strike of political prisoners that started in 2000 thus epitomizes the crisis of sovereignty, which requires a solution that will simultaneously modernize both the prisons and the state's sovereign power through biopolitical techniques (p. 124).

Chapter 3 delves into the tactics mobilized by the state to "implement biopolitical government and strengthen sovereignty" in the face of the crisis of sovereignty (p. 127). Bargu argues that the state deployed a three-pronged program that epitomizes the biosovereignization of the state: i) enacting laws to single out "internal enemies" as "the objects of the new penal regime" (p. 127); ii) waging war against prisons and prisoners in order "to transfer them to the new high security prisons" (p. 127); and iii) making peace, which gave "prisoners a second lease on life through the granting of selective pardons" (p. 127). This seemingly contradictory program normalizes "the exceptional situation created by the crisis of sovereignty" and repairs "the state's tarnished authority by reaffirming its grounding on the 'right to live'" (p. 161). This chapter shows in detail how the instruments of sovereignty and biopolitical government are deployed in such a way as to reinforce each other's effectiveness within the biosovereign assemblage.

Chapters 4, 5, and 6 tell the story of the death fast struggle from the perspective of its participants. These chapters are based on a close and careful reading of the textual material produced by prisoners and interviews with the participants of the death fast struggle. Chapter 4 examines the history of resistance and the weaponization of life in Turkish prisons, especially since the 1980 *coup d'état*. The chapter "recounts the emergence of the death fast struggle, the main incidents that shaped the prisoners' course of action, and the debates that surrounded their choices" (p. 165) as well as their demands. Bargu ends this chapter with a discussion of the implications of the death fast "movement's tactical instrumentalization of a human rights discourse" (p. 34). This instrumentalization culminated in 2006 in the prominent human rights lawyer Behiç Aşçı's participation in the death fast struggle beside his clients, in order to "gain mass support" (p. 34) and end the protest with concrete gains regarding prison conditions. Despite the positive gains thus secured by an emphasis on humanitarian and human rights discourse, it marked a definite deviation from "the radical, albeit failed, politics of human weapons" (p. 34).

Chapter 5 explores necroresistance by delving into “the theologization of leftist politics at the margins” in and through the “cultural world, rituals, values and myths” (p. 34) of the radical political community. Tracing the intersecting genealogies of different radical leftist organizations, this chapter shows how these rituals produce a new tradition that “has grounded its very existence, meaning and legitimacy on the sacrifice of life for the attainment of political ends” (p. 225). Bargu thus provides a Benjaminian reading of the leftist historiography in Turkey in which the oppressed see the sacrifices of the past in the figure of the militant-martyr (p. 268) and build the future upon them (p. 258).

Chapter 6 deals with three ways of conceptualizing the death fast struggle by its participants; namely, as an act of resistance, as an act of class war, and as an act of refusal. These different ways of conceptualizing show that the death fast struggle is a contradictory assemblage encompassing not only biopolitical claims emphasizing human rights, dignity, and prisoners’ rights, but also a “necropolitical refusal of the existing order” (p. 305). However, it was the emphasis on human rights and humanity that came to dominate the manner in which this struggle ended and was appropriated by the larger public.

By squarely “reckoning with” human weapons and “their intervention into politics” (p. 350) and taking “inspiration from their commitment to live and their readiness to die for their convictions” (p. xii), this book offers an invaluable contribution to the existing literature on power and resistance. Toward the end of the book, Bargu asks a vital question: how may we come to terms with the troubling legacy of the disappearance of human weapons, those who weaponized their lives for “the survival of the revolutionary cause” (p. 307), when biological life is exalted as “the supreme and sacred value” (p. 307)? There are three other related questions that are implicitly or explicitly raised in the book. First, if human rights and humanitarian discourses come to the fore at the expense of certain radical political imaginaries and practices, then to what extent and in what ways does the prominence of human rights discourses limit the boundaries of the thinkable and the possible in politics? Second, what are the continuities and ruptures between the “violence” of the state (and the “counter” or “constitutive” violence of radical leftist organizations) in the 1990s and the present? And third, how can the commonalities and divergences between the self-destructive and sacrificial radical politics of the Turkish left and the Kurdish liberation movement be traced? Bargu’s narrative helps the reader to address these questions under the pale but haunting light of the legacy of the death fasters.

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