

GHAZIS AND BEGGARS: THE DOUBLE LIFE OF TURKISH DISABLED VETERANS

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Ghazis and Beggars: The Double Life of Turkish Disabled Veterans

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Middle Eastern and North African Studies

RÉSUMÉ

Ghazis et mendiants : la double vie des invalides de guerre turcs

Cet article concerne les anciens conscrits turcs qui, blessés au cours des guérillas kurdes connaissent une double vie, entre sanctification nationaliste et marginalisation socio-économique. Il examine cette double vie du point de vue du genre et révèle que les expériences de l'invalidité conduisent ces hommes à développer une position ultranationaliste vis-à-vis de l'Union européenne. *Mots-clés* : Invalides de guerre. Masculinité. Nationalisme. Question kurde. Turquie.

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The political culture of 2000s Turkey has been shaped by the tensions between two major political developments. On the one hand, Turkey's European Union (EU) membership process has corroded the nationalist kernel of Turkish politics by facilitating its restructuration along neoliberal and multicultural democratic reforms. On the other hand, the generations-long armed confrontation between the Turkish state and the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) has reproduced and even intensified the militaristic and chauvinistic tendencies of Turkish nationalism¹. At the volatile nexus of these developments, Turkish political culture witnessed the emergence of a new political actor: the disabled veterans.

Over the 2000s, Turkish ex-conscripts disabled in clashes with Kurdish guerillas have been increasingly valorized in the realm of nationalist politics as sacrificial heroes who, in the words of every other army or political party spokesmen, "sacrificed their arms and legs for the indivisible unity of the state with its territory and nation", that is to say, for the sovereignty of the state. However, while the disabled veteran body has been transformed into a potent object of nationalist reverence, disabled veterans have continued to

face socio-economic exclusion, corporeal stigma, and demasculinization anxieties despite compensation and welfare policies of the state. Against this backdrop, disabled veterans' organizations have championed a reactionary agenda around the issues of democratization and minority rights, becoming the leading actors of an ultranationalist² campaign against Turkey's pending EU membership³.

In this paper, I approach this political subjectification process through the analytical lens of gender to provide insights into the ways in which veterans' disability experiences are hardened into ultranationalist politics in contemporary Turkey. I locate the disabled veteran body at the intersection of the institutional practices of the state, nationalist discourses, and cultural formations of gendered normativity in order to explore the gendered structure of feeling that underlines disabled veterans' ultranationalist political agency. Investigating the tensions between the nationalist construction of the disabled veteran body and veterans' embodied experiences as lower-class disabled men, I show how the dialectic between political rites of consecration and everyday rites of desecration translates disability into a political force.

Research methods

The ethnographic analysis presented here is based on multi-sited fieldwork conducted in Istanbul and Ankara, Turkey over 2005 and 2007. My field site was a dynamic and ever shifting one because I sought to trace the multiple spaces in which the disabled veteran body was embodied, circulated, institutionalized, molded, and represented in contemporary Turkey. The focal locations of my fieldwork were two support and advocacy associations, which brought together disabled veterans and “martyrs’ families” (families of soldiers killed in the conflict) within the same organizational spaces⁴. During my fieldwork, I spent countless days attending these organizations. As I found myself immersed in their daily rhythms, I realized that these advocacy organizations were at once hubs of mourning, welfare activism, and ultranationalist politics. I met most of my informants at these associations and then accompanied them to after-work get-togethers, military hospitals, welfare institu-

tions, coffeehouses, weddings, picnics, and soccer games. In addition, I participated in numerous political demonstrations and nationalist commemorations that took place in locations like stadiums, city squares, or martyrs’ cemeteries. I carried out interviews with disabled veterans, retired military physicians and officers, disability activists, social workers, and journalists. Further, I conducted extensive archival research in order to understand the broader socio-historical forces that impinge on the bodies and subjectivities of my informants. Last but not least, I collected life stories from thirty-five disabled veterans from diverse backgrounds (age, class, military branch, rank, disability type, etc.) as a means to access my informants’ subjective worlds. From these life stories I have gained a deeper understanding of how my informants performatively renegotiated the boundaries of their selves as they narrated and made sense of their experiences of warfare, injury, and disability.

■ A military rite of passage

One cannot overstate the importance of compulsory military service in Turkey for nationalist symbolism, the socialization of men, and gendered citizenship. Leaving aside women, gay men, and the disabled, and thus simultaneously drawing the borders of national hegemonic masculinity and horizontal comradeship, compulsory military service in Turkey applies to all able-bodied heterosexual male citizens upon reaching the legal age of twenty. Those who evade the service face a number of legal and social sanctions that demonstrate the deeply rooted social significance of conscription. Discharge certificates from the army serve as a legally and socially sanctioned prerequisite for formal employment and marriage. Employers are often willing to employ only those who have completed their military service and marriage is not favored until the prospective husband has completed his service. Moreover, draft evaders have to avoid legal registration of their residency and hence cannot obtain various legal documents like identification cards, resulting in the practical suspension of their basic citizenship rights, such as the right to vote. Until recent changes in the Turkish Nationality Law undertaken as a part of the EU harmonization process, those who failed to complete military service by the age of forty could be expelled from citizenship.

Forming a sort of patriarchal contract between the state and male citizens, compulsory military service

in Turkey operates as a key rite of passage for adult masculinity and full membership in the national community [Altnay, 2004; Sinclair-Webb, 2000]. A young man becomes marriageable and employable, a husband and a breadwinner, and a full citizen by virtue of completing his military service. However, this political equation was dramatically destabilized in the context of the Kurdish conflict. This destabilization has manifested in multiple ways. The number of draft evaders has reached an unprecedented level after the 1990s, estimated somewhere between 500,000 [Mater, 2005]. Middle and upper-middle classes have increasingly capitalized on their social and economic resources to develop strategies for dodging the draft, and even more importantly, deployment in the conflict zone, including paid exemption and deferment of military service for reasons of education. Moreover, the first conscientious objection movement of Turkey has emerged out of the efforts of activists who publicly resisted the draft despite the extremely harsh sanctions by the state. Yet, this destabilization is most evident in the case of thousands of conscripted soldiers who were injured and became permanently disabled in the conflict.

■ A reverse rite of passage

In the course of the Kurdish conflict, more than three million Turkish conscripts have been deployed

against Kurdish guerillas. Although official numbers are not disclosed, tens of thousands of these soldiers have been injured and more than ten thousand of them became permanently physically disabled. For these disabled young men, military service is a radically different story than the dominant cultural narrative. It is a story not of “becoming man”, but of expulsion from hegemonic masculinity in a country where disabled people cannot join public life as equal citizens because of the strong stigma of disability and widespread discriminatory practices against the disabled.

During my fieldwork, I collected life histories from thirty-five disabled veterans. The interviews for life histories mostly took place in my informants' homes in lower-class neighborhoods at the peripheries of Istanbul. More than half of my informants had experienced lower extremity amputations after being injured in landmine explosions. The rest mostly had orthopedic disabilities due to gunshot injuries, and a few had bilateral blindness. Nearly all of them were between thirty-five and forty years of age when we met. In almost all cases, the moment of injury constituted a sharp break both in the consistency of my informants' life-story narratives and in their actual life trajectories, radically separating their pre-conscription and post-injury lifeworlds. Upon leaving the military hospital, most became dependent on their natal families for financial support and daily care, either temporarily until their eligibility for compensation and welfare entitlements was eventually approved through a number of maze-like bureaucratic processes, or permanently, as in the case of most paraplegic veterans. This somewhat reverse rite of passage brought about a striking sense of infantilization and shame for disabled veterans, moments condensed in tropes of “the shame of being diapered by the mother” and “the shame of asking for cigarette money from the father”.

Most veterans had lost their former blue-collar jobs and were employed at state institutions as unskilled laborers in accordance with the state's paternalist job placement policies. Those who were single before conscription experienced desertion by their girlfriends or fiancées and difficulties in finding a spouse, whereas the already few married faced marital problems exacerbated by financial troubles, intensified domestic violence, or bodily stigma. They frequently felt themselves cut off from their able-bodied friends, a feeling often reinforced by their inability to perform lower-class male bonding practices such as attending football games. Being both disabled and politically marked, their expe-

rience of the urban space was transformed in a way that made them feel vulnerable to various forces, such as street crime, political retaliation, and the ordinary performative violence of street masculinity.

Over the last two decades, the emergent scholarship on disability has shown us the myriad ways in which the disabled have been stigmatized and excluded from virtually all areas of social life [Garland-Thomson, 1997; Shakespeare, 1998]. Despite some recent improvements pushed through as part of Turkey's European Union (EU) accession process, the country has historically had a bad record in terms of the living standards, employment options, and (social/spatial) mobility chances of its disabled citizens. According to the findings of the *Turkey Disability Survey* conducted in 2002, there are 8.5 million disabled people in Turkey, constituting 12.29 % of the total population. The survey findings clearly delineate the socio-economic inequalities impinging on the lives of disabled people: 78.3 % of the disabled population do not participate in the labor force; 36.3 % of the disabled are illiterate in contrast to 12.9 % of the general population; and 34.4 % of them are never married in contrast to 26.3% in the general population. Another nation-wide research project, *How Society Perceives Persons with Disabilities* [2009], stunningly reports that the word “disabled” is most commonly associated with the word “needy”. Still another recent research pole shows that more than 70 % of the population would prefer not having an orthopedically disabled neighbor⁵. In such a milieu, lives of disabled veterans, most of them already coming from lower class backgrounds, were characterized by their exclusion from the public sphere and wage labor and their consequent social and economic dependency. Moreover, they had to face the strong cultural stigma of disability and to live in a cultural climate in which people called them “half-men” or even “living dead”. In short, military service made the disabled veteran “less of a man” rather than providing a passage into adult masculinity and full-fledged citizenship.

■ Restoring masculinity

Embodying the malfunction of the military rite of passage into adult masculinity, the disabled veteran body has been an important source and surface of gendered anxieties for the Turkish state and society. The disruption of the idea that “military service makes a man” has

especially threatened the legitimacy of the military, and the social suffering of the disabled veteran body risked the rise of anti-war sentiments as a constant reminder of the internal conflict's destructive effects. Therefore, starting in the 1990s, the state has begun to take drastic steps to fix this gendered crisis by ameliorating disabled veterans' lives. Making the disabled veteran body the object of a new governmental regime, various state medical and welfare institutions have campaigned to remasculinize disabled veterans via a variety of discursive, institutional, and medical practices. This governmental regime formed the basis of an emergent militarized and exclusively male interest group whose relationship with the state is politically overdetermined by the vicissitudes of the Kurdish conflict.

An important aspect of this new governmental regime was the introduction of a bundle of welfare rights and entitlements including free high-quality prostheses that, at least in discourse if not in practice, "meet the highest standards of the world", job placement, interest-free housing credits, and firearm licenses. The lurking gendered agenda of recovering the masculinity of disabled veterans is obvious in these rights and entitlements. Prostheses give back normative body image and partially restore mobility, both crucial elements in the process of remasculinization. Interest-free housing credits aim at making disabled veterans homeowners, thereby increasing their eligibility for marriage. Note that the Turkish word for getting married, *evlenmek*, is derived from the root "ev" (house) and literally means "getting a house." The job placement policy seeks to restore their breadwinner status. Firearm licenses provide them with the masculine right to violence that they lost by becoming disabled men. It is exactly this gendered agenda that authorizes disabled veterans to translate the everyday moments of infantilization, disenfranchisement, and demasculinization in their lives into a direct critique of the state, which has failed twice to keep its gendered promises for those young men: first through the malfunction of the military rite of passage into adult masculinity, and again through the failure of the restoration of their disabled masculinities.

■ Disabled veterans as *ghazis*

The symbolic culmination of this new governmental regime was the state's conferral of the highest hono-

rific title in the Turkish nationalist lexicon, *ghazi*⁶, on disabled veterans. The Turkish term *ghazi* is often translated into English as "war veteran" or "disabled war veteran" depending on the context. Yet, this translation risks erasing not only the term's peculiar historical and religious significance, but also its historically overdetermined polyphonic nature. Derived from its cognate in Arabic, *ghazi* is originally an Islamic honorary title denoting a Muslim champion, somewhat similar to *mujahid*. Over the last millennium, the term served as a floating signifier denoting Islamic warrior orders like medieval knights, an idealized warrior masculinity model within tributary empires' Islamically legitimated ideology of conquest and booty, as well as a title of sovereign rulers and top rank military officers. Initially used for fighters at the frontiers of Islam, *ghazi* became in time an honorific title for the rulers of tributary Muslim empires, especially the Ottoman Empire [Kafadar, 1995; Tekin, 2001]. As an irony of history, the title found a new host in secular-modernist Turkish nationalism, which incorporated Islamic idioms like martyrdom to sacralize the new state. During the independence war, the national assembly awarded the title to the founder of the republic, Mustafa Kemal. More importantly, the state has repeatedly granted the title to veterans who fought in wars in which the Turkish Republic officially participated (the Korean War, the Cyprus War). Finally, during the contentious trial of the imprisoned PKK Öcalan in 1999, the parliament passed an amendment that conferred the title of *ghazi* on the disabled veterans of the Kurdish conflict. It is important to note here that despite the secular shift in its meaning, the figure of *ghazi* has retained its popular religious resonances up until the present⁷.

Consider the following quotation from an official sermon issued by several offices of mufti (a scholar with the authority to issue legal opinion – *fatawa* – on Islamic law) in different cities in 2011:

A *ghazi* is someone who remained alive even though he fought in the path of God and for his country with the desire of becoming a martyr. A *ghazi* is at the same level with martyrs since he fights in order to become a martyr and to be elevated to that level. Because he knows that the organs he lost in war will be waiting for him in heaven⁸.

In contemporary Turkish nationalist culture, *ghazi* is a social figure that is rich enough to simultaneously evoke imageries of legendary Muslim warriors, Ottoman sultans, Atatürk, and war veterans. *Ghazis* are

celebrated as national heroes in school textbooks, religious texts, state officials' speeches, soccer fan culture, etc. By endowing disabled ex-conscripts with this title, the state was offering disabled veterans a sacred place in the national genealogy as the latest avatar of the everlasting Turkish military spirit. The current Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan underlines this last point in a speech he gave on September 19, 2012, the official Day of *Ghazis*:

Our country and nation's independent existence in the stage of history is the work of our saintly martyrs and *ghazis*. The sacred land on which we live freely today has turned into a motherland not by paying material costs but through the heroic struggle of our martyrs and *ghazis*. It should not be forgotten that the most glorious civilization of our history has been built on foundations laid by *ghazis* like Ertuğrul *Ghazi*, Osman *Ghazi*, and Orhan *Ghazi*. Similarly, our republic has been founded by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, who has been honored by the title of *ghazi* bestowed by the Turkish Grand National Assembly. Therefore, it must be a national duty for all of us to forever protect these sacred lands entrusted by our martyrs and *ghazis*, to flap our star and crescent flag forever free over these lands, to elevate our civilization even higher, and to look after martyrs' families and our *ghazis*⁹.

The conferral of the title on disabled veterans allowed the state to address the co-constitutive crises of masculinity and political legitimacy sparked by the disabled ex-recruits by granting a hyper-masculinized honorific to the duty-disabled soldiers of the Kurdish conflict. The title resignified disabled ex-conscripts as national heroes whose losses were not a futile waste but an altruistic sacrifice. In so doing, it assigned a meta-meaning to soldiers' losses and offered them a distinguished spot in the national cosmology as comrades in arms of the past *ghazi*-heroes.

According to its preamble, the purpose of the law that turned disabled ex-conscripts into *ghazis* was to recognize disabled veterans' sacrifices for the state sovereignty under threat. "Those who sacrificed their bodies for the perpetuity of the state cannot merely be called disabled", the preamble stated, officializing the sacrificial status of disabled veterans. The preamble further stated that the title of *ghazi* would provide disabled veterans the "spiritual satisfaction" and "rights of honor" that they needed for "an honorable stance in the society". In other words, the law aimed to compensate for disabled veterans' exclusion from adult masculinity by disengaging them from the social stigma of disability.

■ Drawing boundaries

The title of *ghazi* allowed disabled veterans to project themselves socially, emotionally, and politically as sacrificial heroes, distinct and separate from ordinary disabled people. One of the most popular mottos of disabled veteran organizations, "We are not disabled but *ghazis*", attempts to use the honorific of *ghazi* to disengage disabled veterans from the socially stigmatized disabled population. This slogan has become such a constitutive trope for the self-identity of disabled veterans that most disabled veterans deem the adjective "disabled" an explicit insult and non-recognition of their political status as *ghazis*. Yet, it is easy to discern the paradoxical nature of this identity, reflected in the oxymoronic nature of the statement, "We are not disabled but *ghazis*". Within the context of the Kurdish conflict, one can only become a *ghazi* by virtue of being disabled. However, for disabled veterans, it is precisely this title that separates them from the disabled. Most disabled veterans, regardless of how secular they are, strategically deal with this paradox by explaining their disabilities in terms of the realization of divine will, reflecting the popular religious understanding of *ghazi* as a chosen subject of god whose place in heaven is reserved alongside prophets and saints: "This could have happened in civilian life. A car accident! Allah willed that I reached this honor by becoming disabled in military service". In so doing, *ghazis* resignify their disabilities as a sort of stigmata that should not be confused with morphologically similar disabilities.

In their everyday lives, disabled veterans relentlessly seek to dissociate themselves from the larger disabled community, both individually and collectively, even when they share the same problems and welfare demands. Of course this situation is not totally unique to Turkey. One of the main concerns of disabled veterans' rights movements has been patrolling the boundaries between civilian and veteran assistance, working "to ensure that the assistance given to [veterans] was always constructed as an entitlement [...] and mixed as little as possible with the civilian welfare system" [Gerber, 2000:13]. Nevertheless, this tendency takes an extreme trajectory in Turkey, where the paradoxical nature of the contemporary *ghazi* identity as victim-hero renders the symbolic boundary between honorable *ghazi* and marginalized disabled bodies ever more fragile and ambiguous. This is why an informant of mine, who lost vision in both eyes in a landmine explosion, shrugged at my question as to why

he stopped attending the blind association where he was introduced to the Braille alphabet and the walking stick: “Why should I go there? I have nothing common with those blind people”.

It should be underlined that disability activists also respect these boundaries. For instance, the Internet portal of the Turkish Association for the Disabled, archiving the media coverage of disability issues, leaves out the news on disabled veterans. In the rare instances when these boundaries are breached, disabled veterans react furiously. Such a case occurred in 2007, when a monthly magazine attempted to photograph disabled veteran bodies as a part of its disability advocacy campaign, which aimed at countering hegemonic images of the disabled body with aesthetic representations. Intimidated by the inimical reaction of disabled veterans’ associations, the magazine abandoned its initial plan and printed only the images of people disabled in non-military contexts.

However, outside the realms of nationalist politics and media representation disabled veterans hardly have the means to maintain their distance with “ordinary” disabled people. Thus, disabled veteran bodies consecrated in the ideologico-political realm frequently go through moments of desecration in the textures of everyday life. One such instance occurs, for example, when disabled veterans are assigned defiling chores like cleaning toilets at state institutions, where most of them are employed as low-skilled workers as a result of the paternalist job placement policies of the state. Interpreting such instances as violations of their sacrificial status, disabled veterans often contact their associations or familiar military officers, who try to pull strings to improve their work conditions in an effort to keep the sacrificial body away from pollution. Yet, rites of desecration pervade the anonymous public life where disabled veterans avoid exposing their political status because of their anxiety about retaliation from Kurds in the ethnically mixed urban space, a concern manifest in their reluctance to wear their medals of honor outside official occasions.

The paradigmatic rite of desecration in public occurs when civilians confuse disabled veterans with street beggars, as strikingly illustrated in the following quote:

I stopped by this patisserie early in the morning. I couldn’t climb the stairs with my wheelchair and asked the shopkeeper for help. The shopkeeper turned toward me, saw me in my wheelchair, and embarrassedly told

me: “Sorry, no sales yet. I have no money in the cash register. But I’ll give you a free pastry”.

The street beggar is one of the most readily available public images for the lower-class disabled male body in urban Turkey. The disabled beggar figure reflects a social context where the lack of necessary legal, sensorial, and spatial adjustments and persistent stigmas attached to disability deeply hinder people with disabilities from education, employment, marriage and political participation, and reduce them to subjects of charity. Walking on the streets of Istanbul, one sporadically encounters disabled street beggars, inhabiting pavements and mosque exits and erupting in the fabric of the able-bodied public. It was through such an encounter that I initially realized disabled veterans’ anxieties over the conflation of their bodies with those of beggars.

On a spring day, I left an association with my informant, Erdem¹⁰, a disabled veteran missing his left arm. As we exited through the apartment gate, we came across a young man begging on the pavement. The man was also missing his left arm, yet, unlike Erdem, who skillfully placed his jacket on his shoulders to hide his impairment, he was displaying his disfigured stump for the voyeuristic gaze of the passers-by. There was a feeling of intensity lingering in the air, generated by the uncanny encounter of the two bodies, corporeally so similar yet symbolically so set apart. Captured by that intensity, we uncomfortably stood still until Erdem made a hasty and somewhat angry attempt to walk away, grumbling indistinctively. When I returned to the association the next day, I found him narrating the encounter, trying to convince others to take action in order to prevent such scenes from repeating. I never saw any beggars around the association again.

The disabled street beggar is an object of pity, repulsion, and rebuke in urban Turkey. His disability, social suffering, and “neediness” are always already in question, attested by urban myths about the fake-disabled and rich beggars. Therefore, the disabled beggar has to show off his impairment and make his impaired or deformed limb visible and palpable enough to dodge the moralizing rebukes of his spectators, such as: “You are as fit as a fiddle. Why don’t you get a job?” With its tacit equation of the disabled and beggar bodies, this rebuking statement is itself a part of the process of making beggars out of people with disabilities.

The corporeal proximity of disabled veteran and beggar bodies presents a striking contrast with their symbolic distance. The disabled beggar is a socially abject person, relying upon the public pity that his disability

evokes. Because of his total economic dependency and neediness, he does not comply with the gendered norms of sovereign individual status. Moreover, he is a rarely persecuted petty criminal. Erdem, on the other hand, is a generic national hero, whose disability renders him a member of a privileged biopolitical group that exists in an intimate relationship with the state. This relationship can be traced through the objects that Erdem was carrying on the day of the encounter: a “*ghazi* identity card” enabling free use of public transport, a tax-free metallic color pistol, and a medal of honor that Erdem pins on his chest only at commemorations. Yet, despite these differences, the beggar figure constantly haunts disabled veterans in public, evoking deep anxieties about the meaning and worth of their sacrificial losses.

Somewhat paradoxically, state institutions’ efforts to extricate disabled veterans from the beggar stereotype by granting them supplementary welfare benefits further reinforce the stereotype instead of dispelling it. In disabled veterans’ neighborhoods, gossip and envious comments about *ghazis*’ welfare entitlements abound. As the following quote testifies, most of my informants report hearing degrading statements from their relatives or neighbors:

We had tea at a neighbor’s house. His distant relative was also present. The next day, my neighbor’s wife blurted out that this guy was gossiping about me: “Oh, what a great deal! I wish that I were also injured during my military service. I’m ready to give up a leg or arm if the state is going to take care of me.” What a cad! As if I wanted this to happen! As if I’m a beggar! I was so close to chopping off his leg with a blunt knife to say: “Here you go!”

Such degrading statements implying that disabled veterans abuse their disabilities to squeeze money out of the state under the guise of heroism are charged enough to unfold into violent confrontations. Most of my informants have also had such confrontations with self-employed city bus drivers, who often question the authenticity or validity of their free transportation cards. According to his wife’s account, one of my informants even went after one such driver with his gun, and the situation was resolved only after the driver shifted his bus route. In order to describe the quotidian nature of this seemingly extreme example, let me just mention that private city buses did not even pull up at the bus stop in front of a disabled veterans’ association that I regularly visited. When I inquired about it, I was told that several members of the association witnessed one bus driver’s helper saying, “Speed up! Moochers are

coming”. Disabled veterans face these kinds of humiliating comments (moochers, freeloaders, malingerers, and the like) in a variety of social settings, including their workplaces at state institutions. In stunning irony, disabled veterans frequently conjure the beggar image themselves, either by cynically comparing their stipends with beggar handouts or by blaming competing activist groups for being beggars, in other words for “making up to” the state instead of confronting it.

■ Turkish disabled veterans and the European Union

Turkish disabled veterans lead a double life in the textures of their everyday lives, a double life that is characterized by a split between a figure of nationalist exaltation, the *ghazi*, and a figure that condenses the socioeconomic and cultural anxieties surrounding the disabled male body, the beggar. I argue that the gendered tension between these two figures is crucial for the self-understanding and political mobilization of Turkish disabled veterans. In other words, how disabled veterans understand, feel about, and narrativize this double life very much shapes and constrains their universe of meaningful, viable, and culturally intelligible political action. It is enough to spend a couple of hours in a disabled veterans’ organization to observe how in their eyes this double life signifies a failure of the state, which failed to keep its gendered promises and to fix the masculinity crisis of these young men.

The appeal of ultranationalist politics for disabled veterans can be attributed to its success in “linking disparate events and discrete registers of knowledge or experience from the body” [Stewart and Harding 1999: 290] to the question of the state. From the ultranationalist point of view, which is hegemonic among disabled veterans, the masculinity crisis they experience is the manifestation of the weakness of the state, which is supposed to recover their masculinity and provide them “a life compatible with *ghazi* honor.” From this perspective, the alleged weakness of the state is nothing but a result of the compromises given to the EU for full membership, such as minority rights, democratic reforms, or the abolishment of the death penalty during the trial of the PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan. This structure of feeling, which links disabled veterans’ arduous quest for recovering their masculinity to the ultranationalist agenda of “restoring” state sovereignty, constitutes the key to understanding disabled veterans’ political agency.

The nationalist narrative of *ghazi*-heroes that connects disabled veterans to the state is the only thing that makes their losses meaningful, bodies valuable, and welfare rights secure in the neoliberal era. There is no available alternative mainstream narrative (such as a pro-peace narrative) that could give meaning to disabled veterans' losses other than the nationalist *ghazi* one because in the course of the Kurdish conflict the state has crushed and still continues to crush all cultural and political spaces from which such narratives could flourish. Disabled veterans are very well aware that as the Turkish political structure tilts toward a multicultural democracy in the context of Turkey's EU accession process, the Kurdish conflict would be more likely to be resolved, and the title of *ghazi* would increasingly lose its currency. Thus, they became resentful ultranationalist political actors, criticizing EU membership and democratization to challenge the state to be more nationalist and authoritative with the hopes that this would restore them to an honorable *ghazi* life.

Rather ironically, the EU harmonization process has been perhaps the single most important opportunity for the improvement of the life prospects of disabled citizens in Turkey. Over the course of this process, the Turkish state has finally responded to the demands and voices of disability rights movements, increasingly defining disability as a governmental issue to be addressed through legal reform, urban planning, national fundraising, and consciousness-raising and anti-stigma campaigns. Turkey's EU accession process seems to promise decreased stigma, if not improved living conditions, for disabled veterans, who have so far adopted an anti-EU political agenda and radically set themselves apart from disability rights activism. Amidst these complex and sometimes contradictory political developments, the future of Turkey's EU membership bid and the status of Turkish disabled veterans remain intimately interconnected and yet to be unfolded. ■

Notes

1. The Kurdistan Workers' Party (Partiya Karkerên Kurdistan/PKK) is an armed Kurdish organization that has launched guerilla warfare against the Turkish state since 1984 for Kurdish independence/autonomy. Nearly forty thousand people have been killed in the course of the armed conflict.

2. While using the term "ultranationalism", I refer less to an extremist deviation from an unproblematic normative nationalism and more to a novel nationalist political movement in 2000s Turkey. The extremist variant of Turkish nationalism has been traditionally represented by the right-wing Nationalist Action Party (MHP), infamous for its murderous anti-communist legacy. Throughout the 2000s, the destabilization of the Turkish political structure through the processes of globalization and EU harmonization drew together previously antagonistic political groups, such as right-wing ultranationalists and left-wing Kemalists, around a decentered reactionary bloc against Turkey's EU membership, democratization, and minority rights. Some prominent members of this loose coalition, popularly known as the Red Apple Coalition, have been on trial for leading the clandestine criminal organization *Ergenekon*, whose alleged mission was to overthrow the AKP government through a coup d'état to steer Turkey away from the EU.

3. I elsewhere analyze disabled veterans' political activism in detail [Açıköz, 2012]. The political mobilization of disabled veterans started when the Turkish government bac-

ked off from executing the death sentence of the imprisoned PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan after the European Council's declaration that Turkey's EU membership prospects would be ruined by the execution. During my fieldwork in Turkey between 2005 and 2007, disabled veterans faced off the EU one more time when they participated in a series of ultranationalist protests that targeted dissident, and especially pro-EU, intellectuals, like the world-renowned novelist Orhan Pamuk. The EU Commissioner for Enlargement Olli Rehn called Pamuk's trial the "litmus test" for Turkey's full membership prospects. Finally, disabled veterans once again flooded the streets in 2009 to protest the government's peace talks with the PKK.

4. After the 1980 coup, the military government introduced a law, still in effect today, which banned any organization of disabled veterans and soldiers' heirs other than the only state-recognized national association. This official association, which constituted my first field site, accepted all disabled veterans as members regardless of whether they were injured in the context of the Kurdish conflict or not. During the height of the armed conflict in 1990s, several other associations were founded by "martyrs' families" despite the legal ban. One of these associations also enrolled disabled veterans of the Kurdish conflict and constituted my second field site. These associations performed various socio-economic and political functions. They de facto acted as an intermediary between the state and their clients. They served as gatekeepers of legal advice and redistributors of nationalist charity. Finally, they provided an institutionalized center for political identity formation and collective action.

5. <http://www.radikal.com.tr/Radikal.aspx?aType=RadikalDetayV3&ArticleID=1093058>, viewed 4 July 2012.

6. The Turkish spelling of the term is "gazi". In this article I use the Arabic spelling of the word that is recognizable in French.

7. The use of a title so encumbered by its Islamic past within the context of the internal conflict was not unproblematic. Despite the Marxist-Leninist history of the PKK, the "enemy" side comprised not "infidels" but Muslims. Here, the state propaganda that the PKK was the continuation of the ASALA (Armenian Secret Army for the Liberation of Armenia) and that "PKK terrorist corpses were uncircumcised," implying that PKK members were not Muslims, played a key role by relying on the fantasy replaceability of the infidel, the communist, the Armenian, and the Kurdish guerilla in the Turkish nationalist culture. Interestingly, my pious informants were more skeptical about the use of the title of *ghazi* within the context of a conflict with co-religionists, whereas, my secularist informants downplayed the Islamic significance of the term while highlighting its place in state symbolism.

8. http://www.hataymuftulugu.gov.tr/downloads.php?cat_id=2&download_id=7

9. <http://www.akparti.org.tr/site/haberler/19-eylul-gaziler-gunu-mesaji/31307> Erdoğan'dan 19 Eylül Gaziler Günü mesajı, viewed 10 December 2012.

10. In order to protect the anonymity of my informants, I will use only pseudonyms in this article.

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I ABSTRACT

Ghazis and Beggars: The Double Life of Turkish Disabled Veterans

This article centers on Turkish conscripted soldiers disabled in clashes with Kurdish guerillas. These disabled veterans lead a double life, divided between nationalist sanctification and socio-economic and cultural marginalization. This article examines this double life through the analytical lens of gender to analyze how veterans' experiences of disability are hardened into an ultranationalist stance against the European Union.

Keywords: Disabled veterans. Masculinity. Nationalism. Kurdish issue. Turkey.

I ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Ghazis und Bettler : Das Doppelleben von türkischer Kriegsinvaliden

Der Artikel beschäftigt sich mit ehemaligen türkischen Soldaten, die im Kampf mit kurdischen Guerillas verletzt wurden und heute ein Doppelleben führen: Von den Nationalisten werden sie verehrt, sozioökonomisch sind sie jedoch auf der Strecke geblieben. Der Beitrag untersucht das Leben der Betroffenen aus der Genderperspektive heraus und zeigt auf, dass Sie eine ultranationalistische Einstellung gegenüber der Europäischen Union entwickelt haben.

Stichwörter: Kriegsinvaliden. Männlichkeit. Nationalismus. Kurdenfrage. Türkei.

I ÖZET

Gaziler ve Dilenciler : Türkiye'de Savaş Malulu Askerlerin İkili Yaşamı

Bu makale, zorunlu askerlikleri sırasında çatışmalarda yaralanarak, Kürt sorunu bağlamında sakat kalan "malul gazi"lere odaklanmaktadır. Bu gaziler, bir yandan milliyetçi bir biçimde kutsandıkları, bir yandan da sosyo-ekonomik ve kültürel marjinalizasyonla karşı karşıya kaldıkları ikili bir hayat sürmektedirler. Bu makale, bu ikili hayata toplumsal cinsiyet penceresinden bakarak, gazilerin sakatlık deneyimlerinin ne şekilde Avrupa Birliği karşıtı ultramilliyetçi bir politik duruşa yönlendiğini incelemektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Malul gaziler. Erkeklik. Milliyetçilik, Kürt sorunu. Türkiye.