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Sacrificial Limbs of Sovereignty:

Disabled Veterans, Masculinity, and Nationalist Politics in Turkey

Over the last decade, disabled veterans of the Turkish Army who were injured while fighting against the Partiya Karkerên Kurdistan (PKK; Kurdistan Workers' Party) have become national icons and leading ultranationalist actors. While being valorized as sacrificial heroes in nationalist discourse, they have also confronted socioeconomic marginalization, corporeal otherness, and emasculation anxieties. Against this backdrop, disabled veterans' organizations have become the locus of an ultranationalist campaign against dissident intellectuals. Building on two years of ethnographic research with disabled veterans in Turkey, this article analyzes these processes through the analytical lens of the body. Locating the disabled veteran body at the intersection of state welfare practices, nationalist discourses on heroism and sacrifice, and cultural norms of masculinity and disability, I illustrate how disabled veterans' gendered and classed experiences of disability are hardened into a political identity. Consequently, I show how violence generates new modalities of masculinity and political agency through its corporeal effects. [disabled veterans in Turkey, the body, nationalism, masculinity, violence]

Prologue: A Puzzling Confrontation

In the morning of December 16, 2005, an unusual crowd gathered in front of the Şişli Courthouse in Istanbul to protest the world-renowned novelist Orhan Pamuk, who was on trial on the charge of insulting Turkishness under the infamous Article 301 of the Turkish penal code. "Martyrs never die! Motherland will not be divided," shouted the crowd fervently waving Turkish flags. Chanting nationalist slogans targeting him and other "traitor" intellectuals, some protestors confronted the riot police in attempts to assault Pamuk and his supporters, who included members of the European Parliament. Then, the cameras focused on Pamuk's car, which was desperately moving away with a broken windshield and pelted with eggs.

I uncomfortably watched these scenes live on TV at my apartment in Istanbul. I knew about the protest one day in advance because I had received an SMS group message from one of my informants, inviting all patriots to the protest. During my fieldwork in Turkey between 2005 and 2007, similar protests took place in front of different courthouses against dissident intellectuals like the columnist Perihan

Mağden and the Turkish Armenian public intellectual Hrant Dink, who was later assassinated by an ultranationalist teenager. After each protest, I met with my informants, mostly disabled veterans in their thirties, who became some of the main actors of these ultranationalist demonstrations that started and ended within the span of my fieldwork. The story of their participation in these protests is the story of a violently disabled male body caught between political rites of consecration and quotidian rites of desecration.

Introduction

Over the last decade, disabled veterans of the Turkish Army who were injured while fighting against the *Partiya Karkerên Kurdistan* (PKK; Kurdistan Workers' Party)¹ as conscripted soldiers have become potent political symbols and leading ultranationalist actors.² Granted with the honorary military title of "gazi" by the Turkish state during the trial of the PKK leader in 1999, these veterans have been valorized as sacrificial heroes in the political realm, while confronting socioeconomic marginalization, corporeal otherness, and emasculation anxieties in their everyday lives. Against this backdrop, disabled veterans' organizations have championed an ultranationalist agenda around issues of state sovereignty and Turkey's pending European Union (EU) membership, becoming the leading actors of an ultranationalist witch hunt against dissident intellectuals who espoused critical perspectives on the same issues.

In this article, I trace the embodied sociocultural and political processes that constitute disabled veterans as ultranationalist political subjects. I approach this political subjectification process through the analytical lens of the body to understand how disabled veterans' gendered and classed experiences of disability have been hardened into a political group identity. Locating the disabled veteran body at the intersection of the medicolegal technologies of rehabilitation and compensation, nationalist fantasies of heroism and sacrifice, and cultural norms of masculinity and disability, I illustrate how disabled veterans' political subjectivities are formed at the nexus of these multiple and often conflicting forces. Further, I explore the tensions between the nationalist construction of the disabled veteran as a sacrificial hero and disabled veterans' embodied experiences as lower-class disabled men to show how a particular economy of the sacred and profane translates the everyday embodiment of disability into a political force.

Throughout the war zones in the world, disabled veterans stand as gendered icons of national heroism and sacrifice. They are historically privileged figures and actors in biomedicine, nationalist politics, war- and peace-making practices, disability rights, and trauma discourse. However, scholarship on the representations, embodied experiences, and political agencies of disabled veterans is only embryonic, predominantly focusing on Western contexts in the post-World War eras (Bourke 1996; Feo 2007; Gerber 2000; Jarvis 2004; Koven 1994; O'Connor 1997); and, in the case of Turkey, is simply nonexistent.

As an ethnography of the disabled veteran body, this article is situated at the intersection of medical anthropology, gender and disability studies, and political anthropology. While positing the disabled veteran body as an analytical object, I draw from different theoretical approaches to the body, which conceive it

as a crucial source of representation and symbolic elaboration (Comaroff 1985; Douglas 2000; Kantorowicz 1997), a spatial unit of power (Foucault 1979, 1980), and as the very ground of subjectivity and experience (Csordas 1994; Good 1994; Merleau-Ponty 1962). This syncretic approach enables me to address the dynamic interrelations between power, meaning, and embodied experience in the formation of disabled veterans as particular masculine subjects and political actors. Informed by scholarship on violence (Aretxaga 1997; Feldman 1991; Peteet 1994), nationalism (Anderson 1991; Mosse 1990; Taylor 1997), and sacrifice (Agamben 1998; Hubert and Mauss 1964; Girard 1977), I also elaborate on the processes through which the disabled veteran body has become a sacrificial gift for state sovereignty,³ establishing exchange relations between disabled veterans and the state and instigating a series of sacrificial crises, which produced dissident intellectuals as surrogate victims. Consequently, I demonstrate how a war within the nation generates new modalities of masculinity, political violence, and community through its corporeal effects.

Research Methods

The ethnographic analysis presented here is based on fieldwork conducted in Istanbul and Ankara, Turkey, over 2005 and 2007.⁴ In my fieldwork, I combined series of archival and ethnographic research methods—such as interviews, life stories, and oral histories—to obtain as complete a picture as possible of how disabled veteran activism emerged. To grasp the wider historical context of my research, I analyzed an extensive array of sources, including early republican novels, TV serials, military officers' memoirs, military publications, and legal documents such as codes of law and verdicts of military courts. I also examined the representations of disabled veterans in print media in three historical periods—the Korean War in 1950–53, the Cyprus War in 1974, and the contemporary context of the Kurdish conflict since 1984—to trace the changing discourses, narratives, and images about disabled veterans. To decipher the processes of collective identity formation, I conducted participant-observation in a variety of different settings. Most important among these were two associations in Istanbul that brought together disabled veterans and martyrs' families under the same roof.⁵ Approaching these organizations as a complete outsider seeking research permission, I first gained the status of a “student doing homework,” then a “welcomed guest,” and later an “adopted son.” 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. Participant-observation in these organizations helped me to learn about the tacit aspects of the political-cultural repository in which disabled veteran activism was anchored. I also met most of my informants through the contacts I established in these associations. Yet, informed by the recent criticisms of the notion of “field” (Gupta and Ferguson 1992; Marcus 1995), I did not limit myself to a single location during my research. Instead, I accompanied my informants to military hospitals, welfare institutions, coffeehouses, weddings, picnics, and soccer games to learn further about their everyday lives. Participating in political and religious rituals (demonstrations, commemorations, and martyrs' funerals), I have gained insights about the emergent practices of mourning, healing, and revenge. In addition, I

carried out in-depth interviews with ex-military physicians, nurses, and state officials to learn about the institutional experiences of disabled veterans. Finally, I collected life stories from 35 disabled veterans from diverse backgrounds (age, class, military branch, rank, disability type, etc.) as a means to access the subjective world of my informants. These life stories have enabled me to gain 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.

Two Registers of Sovereignty: Masculinity and the State

Compulsory military service in Turkey played a key role in the historical transformation from the imperial mode of sovereignty of the Ottoman Empire into the nation-state sovereignty of Republican Turkey. While establishing the state monopoly of violence within the new national territory, compulsory military service both reflected and consolidated the transformation of the gender regime in line with the efforts to forge a national community of equal (male) citizens (Koğacıoğlu 2004; Sirman 2000). Making each man equal vis-à-vis the state, this exclusively male institution has embodied the republic's gendered promise for its young male subjects: masculine sovereignty. Young men are entitled to become sovereign political and social subjects only on the condition that they submit themselves to the military discipline and authority of the state. The Military Law first established in 1927 has ensured the conscription of all able-bodied heterosexual young males by enabling the state to suspend the citizenship rights of draft evaders. Because a discharge certificate from the army serves as a legally and socially sanctioned prerequisite for formal employment and marriage in contemporary Turkey, compulsory military service still operates as a key rite of passage for hegemonic masculinity (Altınay 2004; Biricik 2008; Sinclair-Webb 2000) like in other comparable contexts (Gill 1997).

This intimate relationship between military service and hegemonic masculinity has been dramatically destabilized after the onset of the armed conflict between the Turkish state and the PKK in 1984. This destabilization has been manifested on multiple levels after the 1990s. In the context of the conflict, the number of draft evaders has reached an unprecedented level, estimated somewhere between 400,000 and 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 from full-term military service, maintaining enrollment in college and graduate school for extended periods, and obtaining medical reports of ineligibility for conducting military service known as the "rotten report." Moreover, the first conscientious objection movement of Turkey has emerged out of the efforts of activists who resisted the draft publicly 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 as a by-product of the conflict.

Disabled Veterans in Turkey

During my fieldwork, I visited 35 disabled veterans at their homes to collect their life stories. All but one of them lived in lower-class neighborhoods at the

periphery of the city, areas coinhabited by politicized Kurdish communities who came to the city as a result of the forced displacement policies of the state. Most of my informants were injured at the height of the conflict between 1993 and 1996 and were between 30 and 40 years of age when I met them. Lower extremity amputations owing to landmine explosions were the most common impairment among them. This was followed by orthopedic disabilities owing to gunshot injuries and bilateral blindness owing to trauma.⁶ 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,⁷ radically separating their preinjury and postinjury lifeworlds. On 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 mazelike 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 "being diapered by the mother" and "asking for cigarette money from the father." Most veterans 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 few already married faced marital problems because of financial troubles, intensified domestic violence, or bodily stigma. They often 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 experience 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, 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 (Davis 2006; Garland-Thomson 1997; Shakespeare 1998). Despite some recent improvements recorded in the scope of Turkey's 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 (Bengisu et al. 2008; Bezmez and Yardımcı 2010). According to the first nationwide disability survey of Turkey conducted in 2002, there are 8.5 million disabled people in Turkey, constituting 12.29 percent of the total population.⁸ The survey findings clearly delineate the socioeconomic inequalities impinging on the lives of disabled people: 78.3 percent of the disabled population do not participate in the labor force; 36.3 percent of the disabled are illiterate; and 34.4 percent of them have never been married. Another nationwide research stunningly reports that the word "disabled" is most commonly associated with the word "needy."⁹ In such a milieu, the postmilitary lives of the vast majority of disabled veterans are characterized by the loss of breadwinner status in the discriminatory labor market and increased reliance on their natal families for financial support and daily care. This situation of dependency is exacerbated by the fact that most disabled veterans are already from rural and urban poor backgrounds. In short, disabled

veterans have been disenfranchised, infantilized, and expelled from the institutions and performative practices associated with hegemonic masculinity.

From Victims to Victim-Heroes

Until the 1990s, relatively few numbers of disabled ex-soldiers of the Kurdish conflict constituted neither a distinct interest group nor a public. Although they shared embodied memories of military service and violence, and arguably a generational consciousness (Gerber 2000), they were certainly not organized as a reflexive social group with a shared political identity. Officially classified as “duty-disabled” in the absence of an interstate war, they had the same legal status with soldiers injured in noncombat activities and other state employees disabled on service and were subject to the same rights and entitlements. Because all disabled veteran organizations were banned by the state alongside all other public associations after the 1980 military coup, never to be opened again, military duty-disabled could organize only under the roof of the sole legal association for military welfare recipients, the Turkish Association for the War Disabled, Martyrs’ Widows and Orphans, established by a special law (no. 2847) during the junta rule in 1983. Until the mid-1990s when a number of competing organizations emerged by maneuvering through the gaps in the law and formed advocacy networks, this association functioned merely as a semibureaucratic institution to mediate the disabled ex-soldiers’ clientelistic relationship with the state. Yet, by virtue of being formed top-down and strictly monitored by the state, and having few branches in only major urban centers, this association was far from facilitating a sense of community among disabled ex-soldiers. Largely isolated from each other, only those disabled soldiers with prolonged stays in military hospitals could form fraternities with fellow patient soldiers. As the individualized victims of clashes with “a handful of bandits,” taking place far away from the major urban centers, disabled ex-soldiers remained mostly invisible in public culture, a sort of “public secret” that everyone both knew but also knew how not to know (Taussig 1999).

This picture started to change after the state undertook to implement a counterinsurgency rule to address the Kurdish issue by the 1990s: a turn that was both a result and a catalyst of the escalation of the armed conflict between the state forces and the PKK guerillas to the level of warfare. The deployment of counterinsurgency strategies has not only dramatically increased the number of permanently injured soldiers, who now form the largest disabled “veteran” population in the history of the Turkish Republic, but has also transformed the meaning of the disabled veteran body in nationalist body politics and restructured disabled veterans’ material-symbolic relationship with the state. In less than a decade, those duty-disabled young men metamorphosed from volatile victim figures, which invoked a variety of gendered, governmental, and political anxieties as the “embodied transcripts” (Feldman 1991) of the state’s failed promise of masculine sovereignty, into politicized victim-heroes, endowed with the highest honorary military title of the Turkish nationalist lexicon, “gazi.”

Underlying this metamorphosis are three dynamically interrelated processes. The first is the fabrication of a new governmental regime through the concerted efforts of the military, welfare, medical, and legal state institutions, which constructed the

disabled ex-soldiers as distinctive legal subjects, whose welfare rights are increasingly defined in political terms. Starting with the Anti-Terror Law No. 3713 of 1991, those ex-soldiers, “who were disabled in the struggle against separatist terror,” particularly those injured by “enemy weapons,” have been granted exclusive material and symbolic entitlements, such as job replacement, interest-free housing credit, medals of honor, and firearm licenses. The gendered logic of these entitlements is clear; they all aim at remaking the disabled ex-soldiers sovereign masculine subjects by making them homeowners, restoring their breadwinner status, enhancing their eligibility for marriage, and endowing them with a new space for violence. A rather less obvious aspect of these entitlements is their sacrificial dimension, which lurks in the attempts to symbolically set apart these ex-soldiers from the other disabled men possessing no sacrificial significance, an issue that I discuss in detail shortly. These entitlements have formed the basis of an emergent interest group and opened up new spaces for those ex-soldiers, in the sense of both new subject positions and new public spaces such as rehabilitation and recreation centers. The first of these public spaces was a new orthopedics clinic at the Gülhane Military Medical Academy in Ankara, which became a crucial nationalist pilgrimage site in the mid-1990s through the mediatized visits of high-rank military officers, senior politicians, football stars, and pop culture icons. Affectionately called “the sixth floor,” this clinic was nostalgically recalled as a space of camaraderie, shared suffering, and even mischievous leisure by several of my informants. Such public spaces have played a key role in the formation of contemporary disabled veteran identity and activism by transforming the individual traumas of the injured soldiers into a collective one.

The second process is the emergence of an increasingly militarized nationalist public culture, in which the soldier bodies (specifically the body of the martyr and disabled soldier) are invested with enormous political value. Throughout the 1990s, ultranationalist actors expanded their political influence by cashing in on the popular discontent fed by the increasing toll of the Kurdish conflict and by successfully mobilizing nationalist intensities in and through spectacular “rituals of thralldom for the state” (Navaro-Yashin 2002), such as flag campaigns, martyrs’ funerals, and soldiers’ farewell ceremonies (Bora 1995). State symbolism proliferated in private and public sites considered outside the state realm, turning nationalism into a form of public intimacy (Özyürek 2004). In such a milieu, disabled soldiers became increasingly present in the media through cover stories, nationalist charity campaigns, politicians’ warmongering, and TV programs merging the genres of epic, melodrama, and elegy. Produced en masse through counterinsurgency strategies in and beyond the front, instrumentally staged in the media, and ideologically consumed, the disabled soldier body has turned into a political commodity, imbued with national fantasies of heroism and sacrifice.

The final process is the genesis of local communities of loss, pulling disabled soldiers and martyrs’ families together around shared losses, sentiments, and needs. Most of these communities were initially forged in the early 1990s by small groups from the same neighborhoods, who came to know each other at mourning and commemoration sites, and then expanded their sphere of influence with the help of the military. For example, the founders of one of the associations I attended during my fieldwork were a group of women who met in a *dolmuş* (a local form of shared taxi) while commuting to the Edirnekapı Martyrs’ Cemetery to visit their

sons' graves. At a banquet organized by the military, these martyrs' mothers were introduced to a group of disabled veterans from their neighborhood, who had already formed their own circle after meeting each other at a Medal of Honor ceremony. These two groups were later united to organize under the charismatic leadership of a martyr's mother, and they still form the core constituency of the association. Since the mid-1990s, most such communities have taken the flexible form of association, acquiring both a legal personality and a political body. These associations have performed a variety of social, economic, and political functions: They have created nonmedicalized spaces of healing in which silenced forms of suffering are shared with those who have gone through similar experiences of loss, acted as redistribution centers for nationalist charity, and served as increasingly influential hubs of welfare and ultranationalist activism. This final function was particularly significant as the state strategically endorsed the formation of these publics against the "rival" communities of loss, such as the Saturday Mothers, a dissident group formed around the mothers of the "disappeared."¹⁰

These three interlocked processes finally merged in 1999, the year when the PKK's founding leader, Abdullah Öcalan, was captured and put on trial in Turkey, the militant Nationalist Movement Party (MHP) came to power in a nationalist coalition, the state conferred the title of *gazi* title to the disabled soldiers, and the EU accepted Turkey as a candidate for membership. By the end of 1999, disabled veterans were not merely victims but victim-heroes pursuing a politics of revenge against those whom they held responsible for their losses.

The Öcalan Trial and the Genesis of Disabled Veteran Activism

The capture and trial process of the PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan was a foundational event for the contemporary disabled veteran activism.¹¹ During "the hunt for Öcalan," the instrumental staging of the disabled soldier body in the media reached its height, producing it as a metonymy of the suffering of the nation. The best example of this metonymization was the incident when state officials and editors of mainstream newspapers called for a mass demonstration, in which disabled soldiers would parade through the streets of Rome to visualize the atrocities committed by the PKK, in response to Italy's rejection of Turkey's request for the extradition of Öcalan. Then came the capture of Öcalan, which was celebrated by martyrs' families and disabled soldiers with great nationalist-religious fervor, to the extent that some even sacrificed cattle on streets and distributed sacrificial meat among the poor as if it were the Feast of Sacrifice. Subsequently, the State Security Court accepted a carefully chosen group of martyrs' families and disabled security personnel as plaintiffs in the case against Öcalan, who was personally charged responsible for all 30,000 deaths that occurred during the internal conflict. The nationalist communities of loss throughout Turkey were finally united under a common cause: the execution of Öcalan.

Notwithstanding the profound effects of this spectacular trial, the main impetus for the completion of the transformation of disabled soldiers into full-fledged political figures came from a seemingly trivial legal amendment of Law No. 2847, which regulated military-based associations. The amendment was passed unanimously in the parliament in less than a month after the announcement of Öcalan's

death sentence with the announced objective of “providing spiritual satisfaction for disabled ex-soldiers in accordance with Turkish customs.” It was this amendment that enabled the state to confer one of the most ambiguous yet powerful terms of the Turkish nationalist lexicon, *gazi*, on disabled soldiers.

The Turkish term *gazi* is often translated into English as war veteran or disabled war veteran depending on the context of utterance. Yet this translation risks erasing not only the peculiar historical and religious significance of the term but also its historically overdetermined polyphonic nature. Derived from Arabic *ghazi*, *gazi* is originally an Islamic honorary title denoting a warrior who wages a holy war against infidels. The rulers and successful commanders of several tributary Muslim empires, most prominently the Ottoman Empire, were granted and used the title of *ghazi* to underpin the politicoreligious legitimacy of their empire-states (Anooshahr 2008; Kafadar 1999; Tekin 2001). During the foundation of the Turkish Republic, this honorary title was incorporated into the Turkish secular–nationalist discourse as a part of the attempts to sacralize nation-making practices by using Islamic references. In 1921, both the city of Antep and Mustafa Kemal, the founder of the Turkish Republic, were granted the title of *gazi* by the Grand National Assembly as a tribute to their contribution to the War of Independence. Interestingly, even after the Surname Law of 1934 had abolished all titles of the Ottoman order in line with its radical modernization and Westernization project, the title of *gazi* was preserved as if it were the only honorific worth retaining from the Ottoman past. Mustafa Kemal continued to use the title until his death, even after choosing “Atatürk” (the father of Turks) as his last name. More importantly, the state kept granting the title to veterans who fought in wars in which the Turkish Republic had participated officially (Independence War, Korean War, Cyprus War). It is important to note here that despite the secular–nationalist shift in its meaning, the figure of *gazi* has retained its popular religious resonances up until the present (Delaney 1991; Mardin 1969).

In contemporary Turkey, *gazi* is a nationalist figure, which is semantically and politically rich enough to evoke imageries of legendary Muslim warriors, Ottoman sultans, medieval warrior dervishes, Atatürk, distinguished war ships, and Turkish war veterans. Produced and circulated through nationalist iconography, school curricula (Kaplan 2006), and popular historical epics of the Yeşilçam film industry, this figure weaves together radically different historical personages as the different incarnations of national Geist and bestows a religionationalist aura on war veterans.

Given its historical significance, the state’s decision to bestow the title on disabled soldiers in the course of Öcalan trial was obviously a strategic move, aiming at forming an invaluable political symbol under the monopoly of the state.¹² This legal move rested on two important juridical exceptions: On the one hand, the state for the first time granted the title in the absence of an official war by extending the eligibility criteria to include the cases where the sovereignty of the state is threatened by a nonsovereign party such as a terrorist organization. On the other hand, through the amendment, the state granted the title exclusively to disabled soldiers, leaving millions of conscripted soldiers who fought in the conflict zone outside the scope of the law. It was through these two sovereign exceptions that the state transformed the status of the disabled soldiers of the conflict from duty disabled

(a welfare category with political implications) to gazi (a political category with welfare implications).

The conferment of the title on disabled soldiers of the conflict was a consecratory act, which elevated the disabled soldier body into the domain of national sacred. By granting the title, the state not only retrospectively redefined the moment of injury as an instant of self-sacrifice but also constructed bodily sacrifice as the only officially recognized heroic act other than death in the context of the Kurdish conflict. Thus, disabled veterans became constructed as heroes who, in the words of every other nationalist politician, “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. It is these “sacrificial limbs of sovereignty,” laden with the power of gift, that create moral bonds and reciprocal exchange relations between the state and disabled veterans. In this sense, the title of gazi is a reciprocal gift for the sacrifices of disabled soldiers, assigning a metameaning to their losses and giving them a distinguished place in national cosmology as the embodiments of the everlasting Turkish military spirit, side by side with past gazi heroes.

The historical irony of this legislative act is its stipulation that one would become a hero in “the struggle against the PKK terror” by becoming a victim of it. A set of medical reports, including the “rotten report” that indicates ineligibility for military service and another confirming the measured degree of economic loss caused by a particular disability, are now the preconditions of being eligible for the status of gazi; that is being marked as a hero in state symbolism. But before dwelling on the repercussions of this historically specific juxtaposition of heroism and victimhood in the formation of disabled veteran identity, let me return to the Öcalan case, during which the contours of an emergent brand of disabled veteran activism first manifested itself.

The trial of Öcalan was the most important televised public drama in fin de millennium Turkey, and as such it was saturated with theatrical scenes. One of the most charged and circulated scenes featured a disabled police officer who suddenly took off his prosthetic leg during the proceedings in the courtroom, raised it in the air, and shouted: “Who is going to account for this?” This moment witnessed the emergence of a new form of embodied protest, the public doffing of artificial limbs, through which disabled veterans have raised questions of blame and accountability by unleashing the spectral power of loss. In the context of the trial, the prosthesis as a symbolic weapon was pointed at the body of Öcalan, verifying its reciprocal exchange value in relation to the sacrificial gifts of disabled veterans.

Yet, the nationalist coalition in power backed off from executing Öcalan’s death sentence in the face of intense international pressure, particularly after the European Council declared that Turkey’s EU membership prospects would be ruined by the execution. Enraged by the state’s failure to reciprocate for their sacrificial gifts in kind, disabled veterans and martyr’s families did everything in their power to push for execution. They organized angry protests, including one that blocked the Bosphorus Bridge for several hours, in which dummies of Öcalan were theatrically hanged in front of the cameras, and even carried their case to the European Court of Human Rights. Nevertheless, the Turkish state abolished the death penalty in 2002 as a part of the EU harmonization process, leaving disabled veterans embittered

against the EU and in search of a scapegoat that could be substituted for Öcalan's body to quell the sacrificial crisis.

This surrogate victim was found or, rather, produced within the interstices of ultranationalist political culture of the mid-2000s: the dissident intellectual. To understand the logic of this mechanism of sacrificial substitution, one needs to consider the everyday reality of disabled veterans, where the tensions between nationalist valorization of the disabled veteran body and everyday experiences of being a lower-class, disabled man in Turkey become palpable, provoking another sacrificial crisis.

Gazis and Beggars

The particular symbolic economy of heroism and victimhood condensed in the title of *gazi* constitutes disabled veterans as split subjects, caught in the tensions between the nationalist construction of *gazi* figure and the everyday embodiment of disability. A major challenge that disabled veteran activists face in their efforts to forge a collective identity is negotiating these tensions within the nationalist doxa. One of the most highlighted political mottos of disabled veteran organizations, "We are not disabled but *gazis*," attempts to provide a narrative closure around this question by disengaging disabled veterans from the socially stigmatized disabled body. This slogan has become such a constitutive trope for the self-fashioning of disabled veterans that most disabled veterans deem the adjective "disabled" an explicit insult and the nonrecognition of their political status as *gazis*. 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 *gazis*." Within the context of the Kurdish conflict, one can only become a *gazi* 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, deal with this paradox by explaining their disabilities in terms of the realization of divine will, reflecting the popular religious understanding of *gazi* 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, they resignify their disabilities as a sort of stigmata that should not be confused with morphologically similar but genetically different 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 veterans' assistance, working "to ensure that the assistance given to their members 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 *gazi* identity as victim-hero renders the symbolic boundary between honorable *gazi* 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 in common with those blind people.”

It should be underlined that disability activists also respect these boundaries.¹³ 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 by representing it aesthetically. Intimidated by the inimical reaction of disabled veterans’ associations, the magazine abandoned its initial plan and printed only the images of people disabled in nonmilitary 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 symbolic 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 work 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 deconsecration 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 deconsecration in the public is the people’s confusion of 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 the corners of pavements and mosques especially in lower-middle- and middle-class districts 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 an informant of mine, Erdem,¹⁴ a disabled veteran missing his left arm. At the exit, 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 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 indistinctly. When I returned to the association the very next day, I found him narrating the encounter in the association, trying to convince others to take action to prevent such scenes from occurring again. I have never seen any beggars near the association since.

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 the 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 on 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, however, 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 encounter day: a "gazi identity card" enabling free use of public transport, a duty-free metallic color pistol, and a medal of honor, which Erdem pins on his chest only at commemorations. Yet, despite these differences, the beggar figure constantly haunts disabled veterans in the 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, gossips and envious comments about their 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. A distant relative of his 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 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 when the driver shifted his bus route. 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 kind of humiliating comments (mooches, freeloaders, malingerers, and 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.

They Must Be Traitors

The blurring of the borders between the sacrificial disabled veteran and the abject beggar body points at the failure of the sacrificial structure, in other words at an(other) sacrificial crisis. Indeed, this crisis is frequently addressed in mainstream media, where the disparity between the idealized gazi figure and the everyday reality of disabled veterans is portrayed in terms of apathy, moral decay, or lack of patriotism, often with an allusion to the degeneration of Turkish national values. Disabled veterans are deeply skeptical about this discourse because it provides them neither with a space in which they can reassert their dignity nor with an account of the state's key role in the very formation of the sacrificial crises they experienced.

In stark contrast with the moralizing tone of this semiofficial discourse, ultranationalism politicizes the same disparity by anchoring it to metapolitical issues. In ultranationalist discourse, the structural violence against disabled veterans is translated into the terms of political violence so that class and disability issues become reanimated as ethnopolitical ones. Disabled veterans' narrations of their everyday problems are full of such examples. For example, a vast majority of my informants believe that private city bus drivers intentionally turn down their free pass cards to impede their mobility in the urban space because "they [the drivers] look like Kurds." Similarly, those working at state institutions as manual workers constantly accuse their supervisors of being PKK sympathizers when they are given physical or demeaning tasks incompatible with their disabilities and sacrificial status. In my informants' accounts, rumors of a government plan to reduce disabled veterans' pensions is interpreted as yet further evidence of the wicked plans of imperialist Western powers to obliterate Turkish national consciousness and divide Turkey. Through this conspiratorial logic, "linking disparate events and discrete registers of knowledge or experience from the body" (Stewart and Harding 1999:290),

ultranationalism provides disabled veterans with an affective and symbolic universe within which they feel and construe humiliating moments in their postinjury lives as moments of political emergency.

The appeal of ultranationalist politics for disabled veterans can be attributed to “the seductions of a coherent and comprehensive world view that is at once ordered and charged with drama and urgency” (Stewart and Harding 1999:290). In the ultranationalist discourse, the different moments of crisis in disabled veterans’ lives are all assumed to be stemming from the same underlying process: the demise of state sovereignty in the face of the threats posed by the PKK, EU membership process, and U.S. Middle East policy. In this framework, the failed promise of masculine sovereignty, the sacrificial crisis stirred up by the “inability” of the state to reciprocate in kind by executing Öcalan, and the everyday desecration of the sacrificial gazi body are just different facets of one single predicament. Ultrnationalism interpellates the disabled veterans exactly through this structure of feeling, linking their desires for recovering masculine sovereignty and demands for the reciprocation of their sacrificial gifts with the ultranationalist agenda to “restore” the sovereignty of the state.

Disabled veterans’ zealous participation in the spectacular protests targeting dissident intellectuals in the mid-2000s has to be understood against this background. These protests were organized by an ultranationalist group, whose members were later tried for being members of Ergenekon, an ultranationalist clandestine organization that allegedly conspired for a coup d’état to overthrow the government and halt Turkey’s pending EU membership process. Building on the long established nationalist tradition of scapegoating intellectuals as traitor figures deserving violent persecution,¹⁵ these protests followed the same performative logic. First, ultranationalist lawyers filed lawsuits against a targeted dissident intellectual on charges of “insulting Turkishness” by exploiting a strategic lacuna in the Article 301 of the Turkish penal code.¹⁶ Then, ultranationalist groups organized volatile protests against him or her, bringing the case to the attention of the media and rendering it a problematic issue in Turkey–EU relations. Finally, the ultranationalist media represented the EU support for the intellectual as a proof of an international conspiracy against the state, while construing the state’s unwillingness to implement penal charges in the face of international pressure as evidence of its incompetence. These three steps completed the cycle of the self-fulfilling prophecy of ultranationalism about the compromised state sovereignty.

Once it is realized that these protests mimetically reproduced the performative structure of the Öcalan trial through this self-fulfilling prophecy, it’s easy to see how disabled veterans made a political transference from the body of Öcalan to the body of the dissident intellectual as the site of vengeance. When the initial object of vengeance for their losses, the PKK leader’s body, became inaccessible with the abolition of death penalty, disabled veterans found or, rather, helped forge a new object through sacrificial substitution. Thus, the body of the dissident intellectual, already marked as a traitor, became a surrogate victim for Öcalan in the eyes of disabled veterans. In the act of asking the state to punish intellectuals as surrogate victims, disabled veterans misrecognized themselves as historical subjects who could restore state sovereignty by demonstrating how compromised it was. It was through

this misrecognition that disabled veterans enjoyed moments of sovereignty that they craved in their everyday lives as they confronted the police and intellectuals with impunity in these protests and made the headlines not as disabled men but as revengeful emissaries.

Let me conclude with an ethnographic anecdote that illustrates this last point. On the next day of the protest against the journalist Perihan Mağden, I met with Recep and Burak, two disabled veterans in their mid-thirties. Recep, carrying a bunch of newspapers under his armpit, enthusiastically asked me whether I had seen the news. “You were on all channels,” I replied and teased him, “You provoked a mess again, huh?” Not taking my sarcastic comment, Recep continued to make amusing but unsettling jokes about the protest. Burak, however, did not share Recep’s fervor, complaining about the pain in his stump induced by standing still on his poor-quality leg prosthesis for hours during the protest. But he also got in the mood after Recep unfolded the newspapers of the day to show us their pictures. “This picture shows only your chin,” Recep made fun of Burak, who in response pointed at another picture and asked, “Don’t I look handsome in this one?” While they scanned all 12 newspapers, ranging from socialist dailies to ultranationalist ones, they tried to decide whom to protest next. Then, Recep called another disabled veteran and scolded him for not coming to the protest. Before he hung up, we heard his didactic message: “We made history yesterday. But you are unaware of the world. You can’t live up to the title of gazi like that.” While on our way to a coffeehouse, where a few other disabled veterans were waiting for us to play Rummikub, I finally found a moment to ask about their motive for participating in these protests. “It is upon us, the disabled, to save the country,” Burak replied cynically. Recep, not satisfied by the answer, immediately broke in:

What do you think our pensions are for? Is it to compensate our loss?
 No! What would then be the difference between paid organ donors and us?
 We were not injured in a traffic accident while driving drunk after an orgy.
 We were injured while protecting the state. If we are being paid for this
 injury, we have to continue this mission.

Discussion

Violence imprints bodies. It injures, disfigures, dismembers, and disables them. Yet, this fact should not occlude the fact that violence is not only a destructive but also a generative force that gives way to new forms of signification, subjectivity, political agency, and community (Daniel 1996; Feldman 1991; Peteet 1994). How can we think about the disabled veteran body in light of this basic premise of the anthropology of violence? What are the chains of signification that are generated as disabled veteran bodies move across public space and circulate in politics? What kind of political and gendered subjects come to inhabit these bodies? How can we understand the interrelations among violence, disability, gender, and politics?

This article attended to these questions through an ethnographic analysis of the disabled veteran body in contemporary Turkey. I illustrated how the disabled veteran bodies were reinvested with political value through the sacrificial symbolism of the Islamo-nationalist title of gazi, while also being subjected to the structural

and symbolic violence of the able-bodied society, iconized in the figure of the disabled street beggar. I further showed how this incommensurability between the political and social values of the disabled veteran body, coupled with the nonexecution of the death penalty of the PKK leader, generated a sacrificial crisis. My analysis suggests that ultranationalism cashed in on the “social suffering” (Kleinman et al. 1997) of the disabled veterans by successfully addressing this crisis through a conspiracy-fueled mechanism of sacrificial substitution, which replaced the PKK leader’s body with the body of the dissident intellectual. Remasculinizing disabled veterans by making them once again the bearers of violence, ultranationalist politics thus expanded the very spiral of violence that afflicted disabled veterans themselves.

The processes outlined in this article are not limited to Turkey. The war-damaged body of the disabled veteran is a ubiquitous but ambivalent presence in all war and conflict zones across the globe. Ambivalent, because the disabled veteran body embodies the horrors of violence and warfare, on the one hand, but it often turns into an affective and ideological impetus for further bloodshed, on the other hand. Ambivalent, also because it is simultaneously at the center and margins of hegemonic masculinity, valorized through the masculine ethos of nationalism, and violently expelled from the world of hegemonic masculinity. Ambivalent, finally, as it occupies an indeterminate space, a sort of “gray zone” (Levi 2004), where the distinctions among the perpetrator and the victim, the sacred and the profane, and the hero and the abject get puzzlingly blurred.

The scholarly and ethicopolitical decision to delve into this gray zone provides a unique opportunity to bring into dialogue issues of the state, sovereignty, nationalism, violence, sacrifice, masculinity, and embodiment. Although all these areas of study have recently come to the fore of anthropological scholarship, the ethnographic scrutiny of disabled veterans has been surprisingly neglected. This is especially unfortunate because ethnographic research has a distinct potential to explore how broader historical forces have a bearing on the bodies, everyday lives, and collective politics of disabled veterans in different cultural milieux. The interdisciplinary approach of medical anthropology, in particular, is in an unparalleled position to enhance our understanding of the social suffering of disabled veterans and the ways in which this suffering is politicized, often in support of jingoism. Therefore, medical anthropologists can contribute to peace and reconciliation efforts by critically engaging with disabled veterans’ social suffering without reproducing its nationalist reification.

Notes

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1. The PKK is an illegal Kurdish organization that has led the still ongoing guerilla warfare against the Turkish state since 1984. Nearly 40 thousand people have been killed in the course of the armed conflict.

2. While using the term *ultranationalism*, I refer to a novel political movement that successfully united the right wing and left wing nationalists around a reactionary bloc against Turkey's EU membership, democratization, and minority rights in the 2000s.

3. For the anthropological notion of gift, see Mauss 1990. For an excellent ethnography of violence that expands on Mauss's ideas about gift and exchange, see Klima 2002.

4. This research has been approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of the University of Texas at Austin, protocol 2005-10-0095.

5. Although the analytical focus of this article is on disabled veterans, it is crucial to note that disabled veterans often inhabit the same cultural, institutional, and political zones with "martyrs' families," the families of soldiers killed in the armed conflict.

6. Although I emphasize the common experiences of disabled veterans in this article, I should mention that different types of impairment have drastically different implications for the social experience and stigmatization of disability.

7. Talking about their injury experiences was not an easy task for my informants. The flow of their life-story narratives was often disrupted by long pauses, silences, inarticulate expressions, and emotional outbursts while they recounted how they were injured. This of course resonates well with trauma literature (Caruth 1996; Leys 2000). Traumatic experiences cannot be easily assimilated into language and symbolism, and even when they are, they produce fractured and erratic narrative structures that "will not sustain integrated notions of self, society, culture, or world" (Robinett 2007:297).

8. "2002 Turkey Disability Survey" was conducted jointly by the Turkish Republic Prime Ministry Administration for Disabled People, State Planning Organization, and the Turkish Statistical Institute (Republic of Turkey Prime Ministry Administration for Disabled People 2002). The full text is available online in Turkish and English on the website of the Turkish Prime Ministry Administration for Disabled People. See www.ozida.gov.tr.

9. "How Society Perceives Persons with Disabilities" is also available on the same webpage (Republic of Turkey Prime Ministry Administration for Disabled People 2009).

10. "Saturday Mothers" consists of the relatives of the leftist and Kurdish political activists, who "disappeared" after being taken by the security personnel. Following the example of the "Madres de Plaza de Mayo" in Argentina, Saturday Mothers demonstrated every Saturday between 1995 and 1999 and restarted demonstrating in 2009.

11. In 1998, Abdullah Öcalan was forced to leave his base in Syria. After unsuccessfully seeking asylum in a number of European countries, he was captured in Nairobi, Kenya, on February 15, 1999.

12. Note that the amendment has also prohibited financial relations among military-based associations and political parties, trade unions, and the like.

13. For a perceptive analysis of the disability rights movement in Turkey, which raises a similar point, see Bezmez and Yardımcı 2010.

14. To protect the anonymity of my informants, I use only pseudonyms in this article.

15. Especially during the 1990s, writers and journalists in Turkey were subjected to all sorts of state-backed persecution and violence, including criminal investigations, torture, and political murders.

16. The ill-defined nature of the Article 301 made it possible to press charges on anyone who criticized state policies or official historiography. The article was revised in April 2008.

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