

historical analysis while informing the reader about the period-by-period transformation of Turkish foreign policy. Thus, it is a valuable manuscript, which I can particularly recommend for general readers.

Endnotes

1. Alexander Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).
2. Ahmet Davutoğlu, *Stratejik Derinlik*, (İstanbul: Küre Yayınları, 2001).

Starve and Immolate: The Politics of Human Weapons

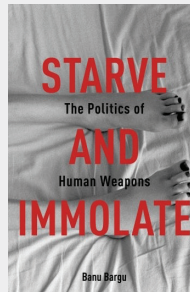
By Banu Bargu

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The category of political prisoners has rarely been discussed as a theoretical and philosophical concept. However, the book under review tries to fill that gap by presenting a nuanced theoretical perspective on political prisoners. *Starve and Immolate: The Politics of Human Weapons* is a meticulous articulation of the Turkish state's checkered history of treating dissent by testing the endurance of political prisoners in supermax solitary confinement F-type prisons. Argumentatively, this work builds on Foucault's notion of power and biopolitics and Agamben's "bare life" thesis. Banu Bargu provides a critique of Foucault's arguments as well, particularly when the latter presents prisoners as obedient and docile members. The book traces the process of the biopoliticization of sovereignty meeting the necropoliticization of resistance (p. 27). The narrative is based on weaponization of life whereby the bodies of political prisoners are forged into human weapons (p. 14).

Divided into six chapters, the first part discusses sovereignty as a central concept in various modalities of power relations. With



modernization, sovereignty has been transmuted into a new hybrid, changing its modality from politics of life (and death) to politics over life, which Bargu calls biosovereignty (p. 51). Resistance against the sovereign power is inevitable and is always present like a shadow (p. 54). Here, this resistance is elegantly presented as a case of self-destruction and immolation by political prisoners and is called necroresistance (p. 63). This conceptualization projects the transformation of the body from a site of subjection to a site of insurgency.

The second chapter provides an overview of the political history and contours of state tradition and ideology from Kemalism to *coup d'état* to Turkey's current political scenario. Explaining how the Kemalism six arrows (p. 90) prove a mere allusion to authoritarianism, this chapter also contextualizes the utilization of biopolitics transcending through various regimes from authoritarianism to democratic government. This is presented by discussing how the Left was criminalized by the state to be considered as an "internal

threat” (p. 97). The implementation of anti-terror laws since 1991 and the similar legal apparatuses are also detailed. These laws proved consequential in making prisons a site of confrontation between the state and insurgents. This gave rise to a ‘prisons problem,’ (p. 89) which was diagnosed as not merely related to spatial arrangement but as a ‘crisis of sovereignty’ as well. This was detrimental to the Turkish state’s self-representation as the ‘benevolent father’ who could not ensure safety and well-being of prisoners within its own control and ensconced within its own institutions (p. 122).

In order to restore sovereignty and control the emerging fierce resistance seen in the form of hunger strike of political prisoners launched in October 2000, a three-pronged strategy was employed (p. 127), oscillating between hawkish and dovish tactics, discussed in the third chapter, titled “Biosovereign Assemblage and its Tactics.” The new strategy aimed to limit the ‘prisons problem’ by putting the insurgents in high-security solitary confinement. In addition, tactics such as “Operation Return to Life” (p. 149) were adopted by the government with the ostensible purpose of eradicating dissent at any cost. To purge the political opposition, the government resorted to a policy referred by the political prisoners as “cellularization.” Cellularization is the process of creating a ‘cell’ –a new model of social organization to transform the Turkish society into a society whereby the dissent is neutralized, citizens transformed into consumers, solidarity into competition, and sociality into individualism (p. 164). In defiance of ‘cellularization,’ the prisoners resisted persistently through hunger strikes extended to a *fast unto death*, as presented in the fourth chapter, “Prisoners in Revolt.” The prisoners perceived the conditions as an existential threat and thus shaped the prisons according to their will and

political ideals, transforming them into ‘islands of communism’ (p. 164). These changes provided a meaning to their imprisonment, hence they often called themselves “free captives” (p. 169). To bring respite to their lives and to pursue the cause, the prisoners put forward strategically- and politically-motivated demands which not only would provide them relief but would also inhibit the human rights violations and bring reparation to the previous abuses and injustices.

In the fifth chapter, Bargu explains the political conviction which governs the struggle: it is motivated by Marxism. She does not see death as an end but as a fuel to reproduce and rejuvenate new fervor to the movement by constructing a memory of it. She describes this under the philosophy of ‘Marxist Martyrdom’ (p. 224). The author is meticulous enough to introduce a gender perspective in a “A Wedding with Death” (p. 248- 260). Lastly, in the sixth chapter, she sums up the multivalent nature of this necroresistance at three levels: (i) as act of resistance –resistance against the inhumane conditions in prisons, (ii) as an act of war –a class war against neoliberal capitalism, and (iii) as an act of refusal –a formidable challenge to the existing order and assertion of the ‘right to die.’

The field of penology has been vastly enriched with such an interpretation of the unwavering commitment of political prisoners in a hopeless environment. The book highlights subjective lived experiences and tries to remain unbiased as much as possible; these individuals are neither romanticized nor excused, neither condoned nor condemned. The sole purpose is to theorize the agency and aspirations of political prisoners.

However, no work is absolute in itself. *Starve and Immolate: The Politics of Human Weap-*

ons undermines certain pioneer concepts in penology making its argument slim. The undermining of 'prisonization'¹ neglects the possibility of explaining the case of prisoners' conformity with the prison authority. There is every possibility that prisoners succumb to the brute repression of the prison authorities and conform to their objective or become docile bodies. The analysis only revolves round political conviction as a source of resistance; other determinants such as social, economic, personal, etc. are not discussed and

explained, thereby concealing their influence on the behavior of prisoners. Neglecting this leads to an oversimplification of the phenomenon. Furthermore, the repetition at certain places in the book can make a reader pause and lose interest in an otherwise significant piece of scholarship.

Endnotes

1. Donald Clemmer, *The Prison Community*, (New Braunfels: Christopher Publishing House, 1940).