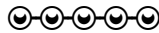


CHAPTER 16

Mothering the Dead

Care beyond Life in Kurdistan

Mediha Sorma



Taybet Inan, mother of eleven, was killed on 19 December 2015 by the Turkish army during the curfew enforced by the state of emergency regime. Her body was left on the street to rot while her family watched for seven days (see figure 16.1). The image is a reiteration of her death from the short movie *7 days, 7 nights* by Ali Bozan. I am not sharing this image to provoke an emotional response. It is not here for the shock value. The point I am trying to make with this image is that it has no shock value. I still remember quite vividly how, when I saw the movie, I thought that she blended so smoothly with the debris of war. She was part of the debris of war. Her blood looks as black as the burn marks on the wall, on her right, probably the wreckage of a house. I was shaken to my core by my reception of the image, how I thought Mother Taybet did not stand out in this picture. She did not seem out of place. She seemed to fit. Then I pondered my reception. What had shaped my mental imagery so that I saw Mother Taybet as part of the debris? Was it merely oversaturation of Kurdish death? Was it simply desensitization? What was it that made a Kurdish body so intimately attached to death? And lastly, how do you care for a racialized body as a racialized body when you both are marked with death since birth?

The suffering and death of Kurdish people are presented as a normal part of their existence in contemporary Türkiye. Kurdish people are further seen as a distinct racial community, and their racialized bodies are excluded from the national and international humanitarian care frameworks. Under a never-ending state of emergency declared by the Turkish state, humanitarian care is impossible. By focusing on the mothering practices of Kurdish women, I reveal



Figure 16.1. • A still from the short movie *7 Days, 7 Nights* by Ali Bozan. Wikipedia Commons, public domain, CC-BY. Screen capture by Mediha Sorma.

how they are stripped from their humanity and therefore their humanitarian subjectivity by the constant state of emergency regime that constructs them as the “breeders of separatist insurgency.” An intersectional feminist approach is imperative to create an alternative humanitarian framework that attends to the gendered aspect of internal colonization.

Understanding the behavior of the Turkish sovereign in relation to the Kurdish subject over a span of a hundred years is a matter of understanding “the relationship between politics and death in [the] systems that can function only in a state of emergency.”¹ The ongoing racialization of the Kurdish body is a site where the state of emergency becomes the norm. The Kurdish body, individual and collective, as a *colony*, “represents the site where sovereignty consists fundamentally in the exercise of a power outside the law (*ab legibus solutus*) and where ‘peace’ is more likely to take on the face of a ‘war without end.’”² In the context of this “war without end” where the Kurdish body is dehumanized, humanitarianism, in the conventional sense of the word, becomes impossible. Therefore, Kurdish women mother and care through a maternal grief register in which neither death is negated as a site of nonexistence nor life is necessarily affirmed as an existence free of death.

The *insurgent care* framework I call for in this chapter is a feminist intervention into conventional humanitarian discourse that reduces women living through a humanitarian crisis to their suffering as victims of war. Kurdish

women analyzed in this chapter tell a different story. They not only expose the project of modern nation-state building as a site of racialized violence that creates forms of oppression and displacement that fall through the cracks of international humanitarian law. They also generate forms of insurgency through practices of care and social reproduction that are not recognized by the conventional humanitarian frameworks that emerged out of the global North.

In order to understand the complexity of what happened to Mother Taybet and why the Kurdish reproductive body is so intimately connected to death that she doesn't stand out in the debris of war, we need to decenter two dominant tropes associated with humanitarian care: the unquestioned objective to care for the living, and the binary, hierarchical understanding of humanitarian care that is delivered by international humanitarian organizations to the passive recipients in the war-torn global South.

This chapter tells the story of Kurdish mothers who defy both tropes. This is the story of humanitarian subjects who prioritize resistance and liberation over survival. An insurgent care framework helps us understand care as a form of resistance. It acknowledges the racialized body as a humanitarian subject that practices care in a militant way not only to survive a humanitarian crisis but to actively expose and respond to the state as the primary violator of human rights. I first present a brief historical account of the conflict between the Turkish nation-state and the Kurds to show how state violence against the Kurds strips them of their humanity and therefore their humanitarian subjectivity. Then, I present cases of extreme dehumanization where the line between life and death is blurred. These cases reveal how state violence and subjection create violent, corporeal intimacies between the living and the dead. I show that what emerges out of these violent intimacies is a form of mothering and care that reaches beyond death. Finally, I offer examples of insurgent care that urge us to rethink the human, humanitarian care, and resistance by decentering the living and recognizing forms of care that go beyond death.

The Kurdish Question

The examination of the displacement of Kurds and their humanitarian subjectivity or lack thereof offers a unique opportunity to rethink humanitarian care from a nonstatist perspective. Kurds' exclusion from conventional humanitarianism frameworks attests to the statist stance of these frameworks. The resulting dismissal of violence and human rights violations perpetrated against Kurds by the Turkish nation-state exposes not only the limitations and failures of international humanitarian organizations but nation-states themselves as sites of violence. Kurds stand out as the most populous nation in the world that has not established a nation-state. The majority of the Kurdish population

is living in the Kurdistan region within the borders of Turkey, Iran, Iraq, and Syria. For the purposes of this chapter, I focus on the Kurdish people that reside within the borders of the Turkish nation-state and the state violence they have been subjected to for over a hundred years.

Racialization of Kurds in Turkey began in the 1910s with the decline of the Ottoman Empire and became a significant part of the construction of the newly emerging, ethnically homogenous Turkish identity following the collapse of the empire. This chapter elaborates on how Kurds navigated the “long and bitter process of attempting to transform the state from a decentralized empire, based on negotiated arrangements and loose, local control . . . to a modern state capable of competing economically and militarily with European incursion, while addressing the growing threat of nationalist separatist movements within its own boundaries.”³

As the only Muslim empire “that survived into the age of modernity,”⁴ the Ottoman Empire had to transform itself to survive in a new world order and respond to the project of modernity. With increased pressure and threats from neighbors and the rise of nationalisms in Europe, the Ottoman Empire had to respond to the requirements of running a modern state. Ottoman and Turkish intellectuals and Ottoman statesmen who were under the influence of European thinkers “grew increasingly wary and harshly critical of nomadic tribes and other migrants in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.”⁵

As part of this modernization competition, the Ottoman Empire embarked on a project of internal colonization of its borderlands. This project brought with it an attack on the heterogeneity of the identity of internally colonized peoples because this heterogeneity was an obstacle in the centralization and homogenization attempts of the empire.

The construction of Kurdishness—with its own language, traditions, and cultural codes characterized as a threat to the integrity of the Turkish nation-state—has created conditions of violent racialization that continue to this day. Since the last two decades of the Ottoman Empire and throughout the history of modern Turkey, nationalist narratives have figured Kurdishness as the biggest threat to the Turkish existence, and state violence against Kurds has since become their normative experience. The cases presented in this chapter focus on state violence against Kurds during the latest state of emergency regime, which started after the 2015 general elections.

In June 2015, after the unprecedented victory of the Kurdish party HDP (People’s Democratic Party) in the general elections, which caused Erdogan’s party to lose its majority in the parliament, the government reinstated the war against the Kurdish population after five years of ceasefire and peace negotiations.

The state violence that was intensified after the 2015 general elections, however, cannot be explained away with the rising authoritarianism of the Erdogan administration. The current administration has been using the same tools

and tactics that date back to the late Ottoman era. The history of the conflict between the Turkish state and Kurds is freighted with mass graves, unsolved murders, and enforced disappearances. The 1990s in Kurdistan was an era of “unmarked white Toros Renault cars,” cars everybody knew led to torture and death. Since Kurds are not seen as legitimate war victims or refugees, they have never become humanitarian subjects in their homes or in diaspora. The 1990s saw the largest wave of forced migration; over four thousand Kurdish villages were destroyed by the Turkish army, and approximately four million Kurds were displaced. Between 1990 and 1998, 107 Kurds were extrajudicially executed, 1,683 were killed in unsolved political murders, 179 were “disappeared,” 348 were killed in police custody and prisons, 468 died in mine/bomb explosions, 1,053 were executed in shootings against civilians. In total 17,955 people were killed by Turkish security forces in the 1990s. In addition to military violence, Kurds were also kept under 24/7 surveillance, physically and psychologically tortured and stripped of their sources of income, which forced them to migrate to non-Kurdish cities in the south and the west, historically hostile environments for Kurds.⁶

The concept of forced migration usually focuses attention on migrants that cross international borders from a statist humanitarian perspective. The humanitarian framework does not concern itself as strongly with internally displaced people who do not qualify for the refugee status, just as the internal colonization that causes their displacement is not recognized as war or disaster by international humanitarian agencies. The Turkish nation-state displaced Kurds throughout the twentieth century through attempts at “Turkification” of the Kurdish region and the forced removal of Kurds to predominantly Turkish cities in the south and west, where they were expected to assimilate. Similarly, the Erdogan administration attempts to “dekurdfify” the Kurdish region by changing the demographics once again, and internal displacement of the Kurds is now further complicated by the fact that external migrants like Syrian refugees are integrated into the process by replacing Kurds in the region. Turkey has been praised for hosting millions of Syrian and Afghan refugees through humanitarian practices. Yet, it would be inadequate and inaccurate to figure Turkey as an alternative genealogy of humanitarianism or as a refugee host country without looking at the ways in which Turkey uses modern categories to grant rights to “external” migrants while denying those it considers “internal” migrants, such as the Kurds. In other words, examination of modern Turkey as a biopolitical settler nation-state that hides its forced migration of Kurdish people and its denial of their political status is crucial to any account of Türkiye’s emergent position as a host country.

Analysis of the violent exclusion of the Kurds from humanitarian subjectivity and humanitarian care frameworks requires imagining an alternative frame of care. The insurgent care framework I call for exposes the Turkish nation-state

as a site of colonial violence that is not recognized as war by international humanitarian frameworks, and it acknowledges the insurgent and militant forms of care practiced by the racialized maternal body. I locate this alternative framework in the Kurdish women's militant response to state violence through their insurgent mothering practices. The alternative frame of care offered in this chapter is organized into two main manifestations of insurgent care: care beyond death and refusal of care as resistance.

Mothering the Dead, Rethinking Care

To explain how a state of emergency regime where all national and international laws are put on hold makes provision of humanitarian care impossible, I started this chapter with the story of Mother Taybet, whose dead body was left on the street to rot in front of her family and neighbors for seven days. Kurds are already excluded from the international humanitarian framework, and they are also prevented from organizing their own care systems due to constant state violence. Mehmet Inan described what it was like to watch his mother, Taybet Inan, rot right before their eyes:⁷

She just laid there. She was moving indistinctly first, then hours passed, her movement diminished. She stayed out there for seven days. None of us slept thinking dogs could get to her, birds could chip away at her. She laid out there, we died 150 meters away. Seven days. For 7 days, my mother laid out there in dead winter. And the worst part is that we don't know how many hours of it she was injured. I wish, I hope she died instantly. You killed my mother.

The image was something onscreen that I consumed. A still image that did not rot. I did not observe her cross the border between life and death in real time. Even if I looked at the picture for seven days straight, she would still be the same distance from death or life as she was when this image was captured. It was never a temporality issue for me. I did not think about the exact time of her death, nor was I haunted by the lack of that information. All I know is that she died on 19 December 2015. Her family watched her die all day and still do not know when exactly she did die. To me, it was an image of a past event with a recognizable beginning and an end that happened on a linear temporality. For them, she is still dying out there.

The state violence Kurds have been experiencing for decades has created conditions where traditional practices of care that occur after death—such as funerals, memorial services, collective mourning, and religious rituals—are made impossible. Kurdish funerals have always been a site of conflict due to the politicization of Kurdish death both by the Kurds and the Turkish state. The oppression of the Kurdish people and their resistance movement offer

numerous examples of how a racialized body remains a site of conflict after his/her death. In other words, examination of the alternative framework of care Kurdish women create requires seeing Kurdish death not as a physical and temporal end of a life but as a politically charged site of oppression and resistance where racialization and state violence continues. State violence against the racialized body continues beyond death, and so does Kurdish mothering. The following examples reveal the limitations of the conventional frameworks of humanitarian care that focus on rescuing and caring for the living and dismiss the systems and practices of care where the line between life and death is violently blurred.

Mother Emine is one of the mothers who lost a child during the Cizre siege. Her daughter, Cemile (ten), was shot while playing in their garden. Because of the curfew and constant gunfire in the streets, the family could not bury her. Mother Emine had to keep Cemile's body in the freezer for six days (see figure 16.2). Mother Emine lived with the body and the specter of her dead daughter in her kitchen: "We have kids who we keep in the fridge, who died in our basements. . . . What are we supposed to forget, huh? Our basements, which became our kids' graves? I open the door of the freezer 20 times a day, I see her body every time."⁹

The violent intimacies established between the dead/dying children and their mothers have been a part of the Kurdish history and collective Kurdish memory for decades. A lot of the mothers I interviewed in Istanbul and Amed referred to certain images embedded in this collective memory and constantly reproduced in the present through racialized maternal grief. The image of Ceylan Önkol, a fourteen-year-old girl who was a shepherd and was killed grazing her animals, is one of them. The officials claimed she stepped on a land mine, but her family and local NGOs believe she was hit by a mortar fired from a military base. Upon her death, Ceylan immediately gained historical significance because her death lays bare the violent intimacy forcibly created by the state between Kurdish mothers and their dead children. Her dismembered body was placed in the front yard of the gendarmerie (rural police force) station, not covered, displayed publicly (spectacularized), and her family members were questioned right by her body parts for four hours. After the questioning, Ceylan's mother, Saliha Önkol, picked up the pieces of Ceylan's body, put them in her skirt and carried her home. Kurdish death is a dying without a foreseeable end. The state turns spaces of care and intimacy and reproductive body into sites of conflict. Out of the violent intimacies where death spills into life and dead bodies literally blend with the living emerges a form of care that seems counterintuitive from a traditional humanitarian perspective. Militarization of the private sphere and reproductive body reorganizes Kurdish mothering from being an affective practice into an act of militancy.



Figure 16.2. • A photo of a viewer looking at the online news site *Evrensel*'s coverage of Emine Çağırğa standing in front of the freezer where she kept her daughter's dead body for six days, 2022.⁸ © Mediha Sorma.

Militant Mothers: Rescuing the Dead and Refusal of Care

Mother Emine and Mother Saliha were/are spatially and temporarily stuck in a coexistence with their dead children. Violent intimacies forged between the dead and the living and the temporal and spatial reorganization of the boundary between life and death in the Kurdish context radically transforms the way Kurdish women mother and relate with death. As demonstrated in the previous section, state violence against Kurds continues beyond death, and so does the resistance to it. This section centers stories of Kurdish mothers whose mothering practices and systems of care in response to state violence are not only affective but also militant. The insurgent care framework I call for challenges the humanitarian care narratives that recognize racialized women only as victims of war and fail to see them as political subjects actively involved in anticolonial resistance movements. In other words, Kurdish women are not only excluded from humanitarian subjectivity; their suffering also falls through the cracks of national and international laws suspended by the state of emergency. They are erased from the imagination of what resistance looks like, as well. The stories in this section disrupt the narrative trope of gendered erasure. The following cases reveal three interconnected practices of insurgent mothering and care that are essential to the imagination of the insurgent care framework I am calling for: rescuing the dead, refusal of care, and mothering toward death.

The first story is about Kurdish women who divorce their grief from the physical body of the lost subject. Dead bodies of the loved ones are deliberately unconsecrated by Kurdish women for the dead to escape further state violence. Sinan Antoon urges us to think about care beyond the living. He says that “material and discursive resources and energies are dedicated to rescue the living and to tend to their wounds,” which is never enough; care is always carried out unequally. Indeed, “humans live very unequal lives and the inequalities that structure their lives extend to their deaths and beyond as well.”¹⁰ Systems of racialization not only make certain lives expendable but also make certain deaths ungrievable.

The mothers of Cemile and Ceylan know all too well that death of a body does not necessarily stop its racialization and remove it from the state’s reach. Antoon aptly argues in his talk that “death is not the total equalizer. It is rather the in-equalizer.” Inspired by real-life examples of caring beyond death, the novelist Antoon creates fictional characters such as Jawad, a man who strives to rehumanize the dead by washing the corpses in *The Corpse Washer*, or Wadood, an eccentric bookseller in *The Book of Collateral Damage*, who tries to catalogue everything destroyed by war: from objects, buildings, books, and manuscripts to flora and fauna, even humans. In both books by Antoon, the boundaries between the dead and the living and the human and nonhuman are blurred.

Two Kurdish women who “rescue the dead” employ a different strategy. They do not rescue them by physically tending to the corpses but by freeing their value from the corporeality of their bodies. Indeed, “even the dead will not be safe from the enemy if he is victorious,”¹¹ and therefore the dead must be rescued.

Kurdish mothers take away the state’s power over dead bodies by devaluing the physicality of a dead body and saving it from being a site of power to discipline the living. As Mother Bedia told me:

My daughter joined the PKK and fell martyr five months later. . . . When we went there to claim her body, I chanted “Martyrs don’t die!” The policeman said they wouldn’t give us the body if I kept doing it. I said, “Give her to me or not. It doesn’t matter. I saw my kid. I know she is a martyr. You killed her. That’s all I need to know. You can feed her to dogs if you want. It doesn’t matter whether I bury her, do this or that. You can let the dogs eat her!”

Mother Bedia’s approach to her daughter’s dead body is almost identical to that of many Peace Mothers I interviewed. After three decades of witnessing extreme dehumanization of the Kurdish body by the state, Kurdish women created an alternative register of care and grief that operates beyond death and does not require a physical body for care to happen. The radical dismissal of the physical connection between the dead and the living as the ultimate condition for the emergence of maternal grief and the insurgency that follows it prevents the state from managing the Kurdish body successfully as a site of intimidation and discipline.

Mother Emine’s is another case where DNA connection loses its significance as part of the Kurdish grief register. When I interviewed her, Mother Emine told me that her father and her uncle were taken from their house, executed at the police station, and buried in a mass grave.

To clarify, I asked her, “So your father doesn’t have a grave?” And Mother Emine responded:

He does not, Love. They say he does, but he doesn’t. My dad is buried in a hole with ten people. I went there a year ago. I went and had those eleven people dug up. They have a grave now in our village. We buried them all together. They said they could run a DNA test [to identify which bones belonged to her father]. I said I didn’t want a DNA test. They gave us the bones. We brought them to the village and buried them together. They say, “Let’s do a DNA test.” I say, “They all are my father,” because our blood became one with those who were killed with my father.

Her account demonstrates that Kurdish women reject the individuality of death and grief and that Kurdish maternal memory operates in a collective and noncorporeal fashion. Death is not about an individual body. It happens to the Kurdish body as a collective.

As the examples above suggest, Kurdish mothers create a unique register of care and rescue the dead by detaching Kurdish maternal memory from the physicality of the subjects it remembers, and by doing so Kurdish mothers neutralize the sovereign's power over death. The state retains its power to kill, but the reach of state violence ends when the body dies, which is also when Kurdish mothers' insurgency through radical practices of care starts. Kurdish mothers not only free the Kurdish body from being a disciplining tool against the living but also create an insurgent memory and a radical grief register that operate in an eternal temporality that is noncorporeal, collective, repetitive, and militant.

The second story is the story of Kurdish women who refuse to care. The conditions of the never-ending war that make it impossible for Kurdish mothers to do care work in traditional ways do not lead to a failure in motherhood but to a refusal of traditional motherhood roles for the sake of militant insurgency. Kurdish mothers acknowledge the fact that the affects, roles, legitimacies, and values that have traditionally been attached to motherhood have never been granted to them in the first place due to their construction as the breeders of separatist insurgency. They are discursively excluded from the nationalist configuration of motherhood in which mothers are recruited as the mothers of the nation who reproduce Turkishness. Kurdish mothers claim an "illegitimate" motherhood role to resist the state and reproduce bodies of insurgency and antinationalist political discourse.

Mother Didem is a Kurdish mother I interviewed in Amed. She is one of the most active members of Peace Mothers with a long history of political activism and incarceration.¹² She told me:

I was actively involved in Kurdish politics even before I joined Peace Mothers. I would go to the Newroz celebrations, protests, etc. Sometimes my family would ask me why I was going, and I would say, "I feel guilty if I stay home. My conscience would eat me away if I stayed." Luckily my kids took after me. They are involved in the movement. Their dad would blame me for getting them involved. I was arrested twenty-one times. They raided my house twenty times, kept me in police custody for three, four days every time I was arrested.

What her statement demonstrates is that the urge she feels to participate in the Kurdish resistance outweighs her urge to care for and protect her children, which is traditionally the ultimate life purpose of a mother. Mother Didem does not do the care work because, as a political activist arrested repeatedly, she is simply not there to do it. However, her agency as a political subject must be acknowledged here. The arrests are not the reason why she does not do the care work. The fact that she does not do the care work is the reason why she is arrested. Kurdish mothers' consciousness and conscience as a racialized subject to commit to the Kurdish resistance and caring for the Kurdish body as a col-

lective rather than operating in a framework where motherhood is restricted to an affective relationship between an individual mother and her child has been the driving force for the state to mark them as a threat to the Turkish nation. The “illegitimate” mothering practices of Kurdish women criminalize them.

During my fieldwork, I listened to Peace Mothers’ self-reflexive accounts of their mothering practices. It is a constant internal conflict for them to reconcile their political identity with their motherhood. As Mother Didem told me:

My children were never happy. You will ask how I mean. They were never happy because I kept leaving them to go to protests. I was aware what I was doing. I would tell myself to stay home with my kids, but I never did. It was not what they signed up for. They didn’t choose that life. Do I have regrets? Definitely not. I was never there for them. I would leave them on their own and run to the streets. I was fighting for peace. I left them alone a lot. . . . They are proud of me, though. They support me. They say, “Mom, you go, we got this.” I sometimes tell them, “How unfair it was for me to treat you like that. I would leave you alone when you were little.” They would look after each other. The older would take care of the younger. I feel guilty sometimes because I left them alone a lot, but I had to. I am not afraid of the state. I have one life. If it has come this far, it can go wherever from now on. I do not care.

Almost every mother I interviewed made self-reflexive comments like the one presented above, and yet none stated that they regret the way they cared for their children. None of them called themselves a failure as a mother. Moreover, all the children I talked to were unanimously proud of their mothers all the while acknowledging the hardships they went through when they were kids. Kurdish children’s appreciation of their mothers despite what they have been put through by them is proof that Kurdish mothers may neglect their daily motherhood duties for the sake of resistance, but they never neglect the social reproduction aspect of their motherhood that instills Kurdish political consciousness into their children.

The third story is the story of women who mother toward death. A common thread in the narratives of Peace Mothers I interviewed is the pride they feel toward their guerilla children, dead and alive. I did not hear a single expression of resentment, anger, or disappointment from Peace Mothers I interviewed toward their guerilla children. On the contrary, three of the Peace Mothers I interviewed in the Istanbul diaspora complained about their children not being politicized enough. They asserted that the perks of modernity and urban life and the diaspora conditions of urban capitalism led to their assimilation. As Mother Emine said:

Vallah, my dear, I wanted them to go to the mountains, but their dad and his family stopped them. They are not as close to the movement as I am. I cannot lie, they are not. My husband also minds his own business. I went through a lot. I was humiliated, I was beaten. Only those who tasted state violence know how I feel. My children don’t know.

Peace Mothers' celebratory attitude toward violence is not only a vicarious one that they develop through their children. As I argued earlier, their role in Kurdish resistance is much more than being peripheral subjects of affective resistance.

When there are only three forms of existence available to Kurdish children (dead, guerilla, or prisoner), there is no point in taking a defensive stance against the state. Therefore, Kurdish maternal politics become militant and offensive. Mother Perihan's account is a clear example of how the Kurdish home operates as a site of counterknowledge production:

I was expecting my daughter to join the army. I knew it. She was such a patriotic child [*yurtsever*] that she was going to go to the mountains sooner or later. As I mentioned before, resistance [*mucadele*] is all we talk about at home. Resistance is our whole world. We know nothing else. We don't talk about anything else. . . . I am extremely proud of my daughter who joined the army. I am so happy that a piece of me is fighting in those mountains. . . . When I see Yazidi women being sold in street markets, or ISIS militants kidnap women and girls or this or that, I tell my other daughter, "I won't stop you, if any of you decide to go to the mountains. I am so grateful that my daughter is fighting against the brutality." I felt so proud when she left. I never cried. Not even once.

Thus, instead of keeping the conflict out of the private space, Kurdish mothers make conflict a constant component of their household. Even when there is no physical conflict at home, they make conflict constantly present at home by not talking about anything but resistance and watching the resistance on TV. They make sure the enemy and its unspeakable actions are known to their children. When she says, "I was expecting my daughter to join the army. I knew it. She was such a patriotic child [*yurtsever*] that she was going to go to the mountains sooner or later," Mother Perihan implicitly points at how her mothering practices led to her daughter joining the army and makes explicit reference to the insurgent social reproduction she practices when she says, "When I see Yazidi women being sold in street markets, or ISIS militants kidnap women and girls or this or that, I tell my other daughter 'I won't stop you, if any of you decide to go to the mountains. I am so grateful that my daughter is fighting against the brutality.'" Mother Perihan's involvement in Kurdish politics and her construction of the private space as a site of insurgency is the driving force that led her daughter to join the Kurdish army.

The conditions created by the never-ending state of emergency Kurds have been living in for over a hundred years has transformed their relationship with death. The fact that death has been a constant part of their everyday lives, a physical component of their household, and a specter that dominates their collective memory strips away death's threatening quality. In other words, death stops being the ultimate physical and temporal state that marks the boundary

between the dead and the living. There is more to life than life itself. Care work, then, stops being about survival of an individual subject. It is about reproducing resistance in ways that do not necessarily lead to survival.

Leyla Güven, who has been in prison since 2019, is a former member of the parliament affiliated with the Kurdish Party (HDP). I interviewed her during my fieldwork in Amed, and she told me the reason why she went on a hunger strike and almost died when she was in prison:

When we believe in a cause, we act knowing that we should risk death for that cause. We definitely do not glorify death, though. We do not live to die. We fight to live and ensure our people live. We say everybody has the right to live and live happily. However, sometimes in order to live, you have to walk toward death.

Leyla Guven is a significant figure in Kurdish politics and Kurdish feminism. She follows a legacy of Kurdish women who engaged in practices of violent insurgency such as self-immolation, guerilla warfare, hunger strikes, and suicide bombings. The tradition of self-harm as a form of resistance exemplifies an important trait that characterizes Kurdish resistance where the Kurdish reproductive body stops being an affective subject in the periphery of resistance and becomes a militant political subject that creates violent insurgency through her body.

Conclusion: Daring to Care

After a hundred years of oppression and extreme state violence, Kurds respond to being excluded from the national body and international humanitarian care frameworks by refusing to become humanitarian subjects and instead shifting the focus of resistance from valuing life to radically embracing death both for themselves and their children. They not only mother their children beyond death but also mother them *toward* death. The Turkish state's internal colonial practices have created forms of care and resistance that are not immediately recognizable due to the limitations of statist humanitarian care frameworks. *Mothering the dead*, *refusal of care*, and *mothering toward death* are practices of care that break away from the established norms of mothering and imaginations of resistance that cannot aim beyond the preservation of life. The Kurdish reproductive body has always been situated at the limits of life and death both as breeders of life and makers of death.

Mother Taybet lies "comfortably" in the debris of war. She has always been there. What shaped my mental imagery when I thought she didn't stand out in the picture is, then, the physical and epistemological proximity of the Kurdish reproductive body to death. When you constantly transgress the line between

life and death, the line disappears, and you mother in the absence of this line. In other words, the act of care for the racialized body, with her lack of humanity and humanitarian subjectivity, is an act of transgression.

The insurgent care framework I offer in this chapter attends to the complexities of internal displacement, acknowledges racialized women as active members of anticolonial resistance movements, and reveals practices of mothering and care that prompt us to rethink the boundaries of the human and humanitarian care. Exposing life as a form of prolonged suffering rather than the antithesis of death due to constant state violence takes away the sanctity of it and therefore denies the state the power to use death as a deterrent to insurgency.

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Notes

1. Mbembe, *Necropolitics*, 70.
2. Mbembe, 76.
3. Eissenstat, “Modernization, Imperial Nationalism,” 432.
4. Deringil, “They Live in a State,” 1.
5. Kasaba, *Movable Empire*, 7.
6. Gazi, “Faili Meçhul Cinayetler.”
7. Degirmenci, “Bitmeyen Yedi Gunluk Karanlik.”
8. The headline in Turkish reads “Cemile Çağırğa'nın annesi: Nasıl 'evet' diyelim?” (Cemile Çağırğa's mother: How could we say “Yes”?).
9. Muftuoglu and Zozan, “Cemile Çağırğa'nın annesi.”
10. Antoon, “Rescuing the Dead.”
11. Benjamin, “On the Concept of History,” 391.
12. Peace Mothers is an organization established by Kurdish mothers in 1997.

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