

Legitimate Means of Dying: Contentious Politics of Martyrdom in the Turkish Civil War (1968–1982)

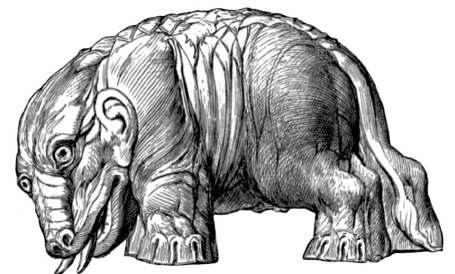
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Abstract

Until today, commitment to the ‘martyrs’ of the Turkish civil war of the 1970s continues to be a crucial part of Turkey’s political culture. This paper will offer a historical-comparative sociology of state conventions and non-state contentions in defining political cultures of martyrdom during the Turkish civil war of 1970s. First, by outlining the historical semantics and political sociology of the state’s culture of martyrdom, I will argue that the state came to claim a monopoly over legitimate means of dying in the name of the state-nation-religion triad and explain how official martyrdom manifested itself during the civil war. In the second part, this paper will discuss cultures of martyrdom in processes of social mobilisation, collective identification and moral legitimisation in contentious politics, and how the radical-revolutionary left and the ultra-nationalist far-right in Turkey constructed their own cultures of martyrdom. Non-state claims to political martyrdom from the left and right emulated the state’s martyrdom discourse without rejecting its legitimacy. By (de-)legitimising lethal political violence, cultures of martyrdom establish lasting solidarities across people, times and spaces—and in seclusion against ‘others’.

Keywords: political sociology, contentious politics, civil war, governmentality, martyrdom, Turkey, 1968 movement, 1970s, far-right, radical-revolutionary left

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Introduction

The student protests of 1968 in Turkey turned into a civil strife between the radical-revolutionary left and the ultra-nationalist far-right that was interrupted by the military intervention of 1971. Yet, clashes between the left and right escalated into a low-intensity civil war after 1976 that ended in the military intervention of 1980 and was formally resolved in the constitutional referendum of 1982. Although the Turkish ‘civil war’ did not constitute ‘warfare’ in the militarised sense of the word, according to estimates at least 5,000 people (Hale 1994, 224; Sayari 2010, 201) were killed in the events and episodes of political violence. The violence came in the form of urban mob violence, clandestine political violence, rural paramilitary violence, and extra-legal state violence (Apaydın 1978; Bozarslan 2004; Ergil 1980; Gourisse 2014). For the entire political spectrum of Turkey, these years have been especially crucial in the formation and consolidation of new politicised identities. In fact, most of Turkey’s current leaders politically came of age in these turbulent years. Therefore, there is still a vivid legacy of the political violence of Turkey’s ‘long 1970s’.

Commemoration of ‘martyrs’ of the Turkish civil war of the 1970s is a shared but divided cultural practice across Turkey’s polarised political spectrum (Değirmencioğlu 2014). For example, in the case of two radical movements that were both founded in the late 1970s and are still involved in political violence, namely the PKK (Worker’s Party of Kurdistan) and the DHKP-C (Revolutionary People’s Liberation Party-Front), it remains a public taboo to refer to their casualties as “martyrs”. However, both militant organisations, although Marxist and secular in their discourse, cultivate crypto-Islamic symbols and scripts of martyrdom in their vernacular communication. Meanwhile, the secular state establishment determines that soldiers, police officers and gendarmes who were killed by “the enemies of the state” are only to be referred to as “martyrs” (Kaya 2015). Even today, iconographies and hagiographies of “martyrs” of the radical-revolutionary left of the 1970s, such as Deniz Gezmiş whose pictures decorated walls during the Gezi Park protests of 2013, are part and parcel of Turkey’s mainstream leftism, yet such posters and books can still be considered as criminal evidence by state surveillance.[1] Then again, one of the major violent groups of the era, the ultra-nationalists, popularly called *Ülkücüler* (Idealists) or “Grey Wolves” (*Bozkurtlar*),[2] have a public monument dedicated to their “martyrs” of the Turkish civil war.[3] Since 1970s, martyrdom is a contentious matter in Turkish politics.

“Is all of politics contentious?” Not according to scholars of contentious politics (McAdam et al. 2001, 5), because conventional politics “consists of ceremony, consultation, bureaucratic process, collection of information, registration of events, and the like” and “usually involve little if any collective contention”. In contrast, contentious politics is “episodic rather than continuous, occurs in public, involves interaction between makers of claims and others, is recognized by those others as bearing on their interests, and brings in government as mediator, target, or claimant”. When approaching martyrdom from the perspective of contentious politics, I refer to this transdisciplinary

I presented my first findings and ideas that now build the foundation of this paper at the workshop *Martyrdom in the Modern Islamic World* at the University of Freiburg, 15/16 December 2017. I would like to thank Olmo Gözl for the invitation to participate at that fruitful workshop and contribute to this special issue as well as for comments on various manuscripts and notes. Comments by the two anonymous reviewers helped me to calibrate and situate my own approach within a diverse conceptual and theoretical terrain of research between history and sociology. I would like to thank also Kadir Dede, Department of Political Science and Public Administration of Hacettepe University in Ankara and currently visiting research fellow at the University of Amsterdam, for his invaluable comments in reviewing the paper’s conceptual structure and its empirical findings.

[1] “Deniz Gezmiş Posterini Taşımak da Suç Sayılacak!” T24, 25.11.2014. <https://t24.com.tr/haber/deniz-gezmis-posterini-tasimak-da-suc-sayilacak,278226> (08/04/2019).

[2] Although the term *Ülkücü* (Idealist) is more commonly used in Turkish, in English “Grey Wolf” is the more established description of Turkish ultra-nationalists, hence I use both interchangeably despite their slightly different connotations in Turkish.

[4] “Bahçeli Ülkücü Şehitler Anıtı’nı Açtı.” *Hürriyet*, 27.05.2011. <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/gundem/bahceli-ulkucu-sehitler-anitini-acti-17892329> (08/04/2019).

research agenda (Tilly/Tarrow 2007).

There is a duality in cultures of martyrdom because martyrs can represent both coercion and subversion of sovereignty. Shi'ite cultures of martyrdom have been more influential in effecting political activism in the modern Muslim world by providing symbols and scripts of subversion, as discussed by Olmo Gözl (this issue) and Simon Fuchs (this issue). Nevertheless, as this paper will illustrate, Turkey offers a distinct trajectory of how state sovereignty defines the culture of martyrdom. Yet, coercion and subversion complement and condition each other (Tilly 2006). Therefore, this paper will offer a historical-comparative sociology of state conventions and non-state contentions in defining political cultures of martyrdom during the Turkish civil war of the 1970s.

In the first part, this paper will discuss how far martyrdom in the name of the country, the nation and the faith is a matter of *raison d'état* in Turkey. On the one hand, historical semantics of dying and surviving from the Ottoman Empire to the Kemalist Republic will demonstrate how the Turkish state developed what I call a 'monopoly over legitimate means of dying'. On the other hand, I will highlight the commonly overlooked crypto-Islamic foundations of Turkey's state nationalism in order to illustrate the exceptional trajectory of the state's culture of martyrdom and how it manifested itself during the civil war in the 1970s. The second part will discuss cultures of martyrdom in processes of social mobilisation, collective identification and moral legitimisation in contentious politics, and how the radical-revolutionary left and the ultra-nationalist far-right in Turkey developed their own cultures of martyrdom that still bore the mark of the state monopoly. The radical-revolutionary left developed a concept of "revolutionary martyrdom", which drew back on Kemalist-revolutionary notions of patriotic self-sacrifice and cultivated a para-religious cult of martyrdom inspired by Sunni and Alevite symbols and scripts. Conversely, the ultra-nationalist far-right directly imitated and emulated the state's culture of martyrdom and considered its fallen members as warrior and guardian heroes killed for the sacred cause (*dava*, from Arabic-Islamic *da'wa* for "mission"), if not treacherously murdered in peace. In the conclusion, I will briefly discuss the societal consequences of the persistence of cultures of martyrdom in Turkey today.

Raison d'état of Martyrdom

Following Weber's fundamental formula (1922, 29) that states claim "monopoly over legitimate means of violence", neo-Weberian historical sociologists underlined the role of violence and war in the making of modern statehood. In this 'bellicose' sense, states are matters of life and death. Following Foucauldian logic, dying and surviving is a matter of *raison d'état* (Foucault 2009), as modern states ended up establishing many other monopolies for the purpose of monitoring and disciplining the lives of their citizens. Modern states define the quality and quantity of their citizens through birth and death certificates as well as population records, statistics and censuses (Kertzer/Arel 2001). States traditionally certify the legitimacy of the death of a distinguished subject by granting official recognition, calling for public mourning, conveying

burial ceremonies and institutionalising commemoration in order to create shared beliefs on behalf of a ‘state of existence’.

Ultimately, states define and distribute the status of martyrdom. Although patriotic reinvention of martyrdom dates back to at least Medieval kingdoms (Kantorowicz 1951), its bureaucratisation, routinisation and monopolisation by state apparatus is a modern phenomenon. It is the result of the recent “governmentalisation” of statehood (Foucault 2009, 109). This is what I shall call ‘state’s monopoly over legitimate means of dying’. Certifying formal martyrdom is a distribution of social good into a market of beliefs, which in return, legitimises the symbolic currency of state’s sovereignty. Beyond means of social disciplining, which certainly accompany cultures of martyrdom, the state’s call to its population to collectively participate in cultural practices of official martyrdom manifests the means of “governmentality” (Foucault 2009). Acknowledging Foucauldian bio-powers yet remaining in the neo-Weberian political sociology, ‘statisation’ of martyrdom (in the sense of *Verstaatlichung*) is understood within a reciprocal process with the ‘nationalisation’ of martyrdom by society (in the sense of *Vergesellschaftung*); where official martyrdom offers both “revelation” and “redemption” in state-society relations (Migdal 2001, 18f., 25).

Semantics of Dying and Surviving

From the Ottoman Empire to the Kemalist Republic, the state developed a monopoly over Islamic concepts of martyrdom. The historical semantics (Koselleck 2004) of dying and surviving in the political language of modern Turkey illustrates a trajectory of the state’s discursive agency and cultural hegemony in defining martyrdom in ever statist and nationalist terms. In Ottoman times, the Turkish word for martyr, *şehit* (derived from the Arabic-Islamic concept of *shahīd*), progressively gained an extra-religious and statist meaning. It became the honorific title for a post-mortem heroisation of fallen soldiers and assassinated statesmen. Although the religious connotation of *şehit* was certainly ubiquitous in the ears of Ottomans, a semantic shift towards a more secular meaning of the word has manifested itself since the nineteenth century. The word *şehit* was applied to war casualties ‘killed in action’ in the military sense, replacing other descriptive Ottoman words such as *maḳtūl* for “killed” and *ḡā’yīb* for the war-demographic “losses”. Military losses increasingly came to define nationalist sacrifice at the turn of the century. In his poem *Soldier’s prayer*, Ziya Gökalp (1876–1924), chief ideologue of Turkish nationalism and Professor of Sociology at the Imperial University of Istanbul, wrote: “How many strong young men have become martyrs for the religion and the homeland on the battlefields” (quoted in Hess 2007, 258).

Martyrdom was semantically reformulated by the Ottoman and Republican state in more secular, national and military terms by designating the fallen soldiers and statesmen beyond ostensible religious motivations. Besides the other-worldly understanding of “martyrdom” (Arabic *shahāda* or Turkish *şehadet*), the other Turkified variation *şehitlik* developed a distinct this-worldly and spatial meaning in the sense of a “place of the martyrs”. Ottoman war

memorials and cemeteries dedicated to the commemoration of fallen soldiers have been commonly named *şehitlik*. This idea of a “place of martyrs” connected notions of martyrdom with territorial nationalism, most prominently expressed in the Turkish national anthem (1921):

See not the soil you tread on as mere earth,
But think about the thousands beneath you that lie without
even shrouds.
You're the noble son of a martyr, take shame, hurt not your
ancestor!
Unhand not, even when you're promised worlds, this para-
dise of a homeland.
What man would not die for this heavenly piece of land?
Martyrs would gush out if you just squeeze the soil! Mar-
tyrs![4]

Achille Mbembe (2003, 35) notes that “the logic of martyrdom” and “the logic of survival” are intrinsically linked to one another, whilst the term *şehit* usually comes with its conceptual pair *gazi*. Like *şehit*, *gazi* is also an Arabic term (*ghāzī*) originating from Islamic jurisprudence on war, referring to a warrior who has participated in military expeditions (*ghazw*). Founders of the Ottoman state carried the title of *gazi* in their names and it later became an Ottoman honorific title for the official heroisation of triumphant war commanders. The underlying Muslim nationalism during the Turkish War of Independence (Zürcher 1999) entitled all Anatolian Muslims who fought in the “national struggle” (*millî mücadele*) the *gazi* status. This collective heroisation of the population functioned to erase the devastating trauma of imperial collapse and violent nation-state formation by imagining a new heroic community of warriors and survivors in an epic ‘land of martyrs’. Soon in daily practice, *gazi* became the modern Turkish term for “war veterans” that fully replaced the more descriptive Ottoman terms of *muhārib* for “battle-trying” soldiers and *ma'lūl* for soldiers “invalided” in action. In modern Turkish semantics, therefore, *şehit* refers to “those who die in war” and *gazi* to “those who survive wars”.

If we take the popular saying in Turkey, “every Turk is born a soldier” (*her Türk asker doğar*), at face value, every Turk would ideally grow up to be a *gazi* and might die as a *şehit*—unless they choose to live and die as traitors. The state’s culture of martyrdom is enhanced by Turkey’s distinct culture of militarist nationalism (Altınay 2004). Semantics of dying and surviving contribute to Turkey’s “banal nationalism” (Billig 1995) where symbols and scripts of sacrifice in the name of the state are inconspicuously repeated and reproduced in everyday life (Kaya/Copeaux 2013).

State of Exception

Although subscribing to ‘Turkish exceptionalism’ is methodologically problematic, Turkey does offer a distinct trajectory of state formation due its unique transition from the Ottoman Empire to the Turkish Republic. Contrary to a radical rupture, however, imperial continuities explain Turkey’s political

[4] Quoted from the English translation in <http://umich.edu/~turkish/links/manuscripts/anthem/english.htm> (08/04/2019).

sociology as a nation-state. Sociologist Şerif Mardin (2005, 147) argued for a “Turkish Islamic exceptionalism” based on a “very special dialectic” which cultivated a shared belief “that the state was a life-form through which channels all authorities, whether secular or religious, operated to achievement and success”. The Ottoman Empire’s modernisation reforms in the nineteenth century resulted in the popularisation of state-nationalism and the politicisation of Islam (Karpas 2001). Under the secular-progressive elites, from Young Turks to Kemalists, who marked the cataclysmic transition from empire to republic, Muslim nationalism and state cult remained dominant features of identity politics (Zürcher 2010). The Kemalist version of *laïcité* (*laiklik*) was not anti-religious either (Toprak 1981), but rather subordinated the “religious field” (Bourdieu 1991) under the state’s hegemony, while crypto-Sunni identity politics targeted non-Muslim citizens with discriminatory measures (Çağaptay 2006). With the transition to a democracy after 1950, Turkish society developed in diverse and divergent ways according to global currents and increasingly autonomous from state control and direction. Nevertheless, state-centric, militaristic, crypto-Muslim and Kemalist-modernist notions of nationalism continued to be dominant, albeit diversified and redefined (Keyman 2011).

The state monopoly over legitimate means of martyrdom in Turkey comes with the formal limitation that only representatives of the state are entitled to martyrdom. Hence, theoretically only statesmen, diplomats, bureaucrats, civil servants, military officers, soldiers, policemen, gendarmerie and firemen can become martyrs in Turkey in the case of an unnatural death (excluding suicide, due to crypto-religious reasons). The use of the official title of “martyr” for non-military state officials became more popular after the first assassination of Turkish diplomats abroad by Armenian avengers after 1973, in which “victims were immediately considered martyrs” (Göçek 2015, 429). They were commonly referred to as “our martyred diplomats” (*şehit diplomatlarımız*) in the contemporary press.[5] Following the Islamic conception that also awards martyrdom in case of accidental deaths while travelling, for example, Turkish Air Force pilots killed in flight accidents outside battles were commonly called “air martyrs” (*hava şehitleri*).

Independent from the political violence of the civil war of the 1970s, the state discourse of martyrdom was boosted during the military intervention against Cyprus in 1974. The military operation had resulted in ca. 500 casualties for the Turkish Armed Forces, who were immediately called “Cyprus martyrs” (*Kıbrıs şehitleri*). Casualties of Turkish-Cypriot partisans (commonly called *mücahit* from the Arabic *mujahid*) were also referred as *Kıbrıs şehitleri*, indicating that irredentist ethic-religious nationalism could also define parameters of martyrdom outside the state’s civic categories of belonging. [6] Hence, sacrifice was framed both in nationalist and moral notions of redemption. “Hail the homeland”, said one father of a “martyred colonel” in an interview, for instance, and added that his son was “martyred for the sake of humanity”. [7] The popularisation of martyrdom was clear as a mother whose three sons were all “martyred” in Cyprus was elected “mother of the year” in 1976. [8] The banal reality of state martyrdom’s Islamic background became clear as it was reported from Cairo that “in all Muslim capitals” the

[5] “Bir Şehit Diplomat Daha.” Cumhuriyet, 18.12.1980.

[6] “Yalnız Lefkoşa’da 80 Mücahit Şehit Oldu.” Milliyet, 29.07.1974.

Qu'ran was recited in the honour of the "Cyprus martyrs".[9]

The Turkish state not only certifies individual sacrifice and heroism in the name of the nation and state, but also distributes monetary allowances to veterans and relatives of "martyrs". It was during the political violence of student groups in the early 1970s that relatives of "martyred" gendarmerie (*Jandarma*) personnel were allowed to receive a dependent's pension similar to relatives of military personnel.[10] "It is the police that is providing the most martyrs" said Minister of Interior Hasan Fehmi Güneş (*1934).[11] Indeed, police forces were on the front line of urban guerrilla warfare. Yet, it was still bureaucratically very complicated for relatives of a "martyred" police officer to apply for a dependant's pension (Dikici 2017, 100).

The secularised, nationalised and militarised state discourse of martyrdom became increasingly banal-religious in government language in the 1970s. One of the most prominent politicians of time, the Justice Party's Prime Minister Süleyman Demirel (1924–2015), proudly declared: "Our struggle against communism will continue. If necessary, we will reach the rank of martyrdom in this struggle." [12] After an act of political violence in which police officers were killed in the city of Gaziantep, the Minister of Interior, Oğuzhan Asiltürk (*1935), of the National Salvation Party (*Millî Selamet Partisi*) said in a public speech: "As martyrs, they [the police] have reached the highest level that even prophets long for. With gratitude we commemorate those martyrs who defended the republic, the homeland and free democracy." [13] After an incident in which Palestinian guerrillas stormed the Embassy of Egypt in Ankara where one police officer was killed, a police director made a press release where he said that the killed policeman "reached the honorary status of martyrdom [...] through the relentless shots of international [Palestinian] terrorists when in duty he opened his benevolent arms to the well-being of humanity regardless of religion, race and creed". [14]

Contentious Politics of Martyrdom

Although dying is, in the words of Hannah Arendt (1969, 67), "perhaps the most antipolitical experience there is", she did not fail to indicate that death can empower the political struggles of survivors. It remains, however, understudied how political violence in contentious politics (Della Porta 2006; Tilly 2003) is translated into a culture of martyrdom and vice versa. A collective action that demands voluntary human self-sacrifice is not necessarily inviting from a rational point of view (Olson 1965). "For many, martyrdom is its own reward", however as Jasper (1997, 38, 83) noted, because culture "provides the context and criteria for recognizing and judging rationality, which cannot exist in a pure form outside of social contexts". Yet, the culture of martyrdom is also mostly insufficient for voluntary self-sacrifice (Kurzman 2011). Therefore, the martyrdom of victims of targeted or collateral political violence needs attention in the study of contentious politics. Culture of martyrdom provide political opportunity, social cohesion and moral legitimacy in contentious politics.

First, cultures of martyrdom create opportunities for political mobilisation in

[7] "Şehit Albayın Babası: 'Vatan Sağ Ol-sun...'" Milliyet, 23.07.1974.

[8] "Kıbrıs'ta 3 Şehit Anası 'Yılın Annesi' Seçildi." Milliyet, 12.05.1976.

[9] "Kıbrıs Şehitleri İçin Bütün İslam Başkentlerinde Hatim İndirildi." Milliyet, 24.04.1975.

[10] "Şehit Erin Ailesine Maaş Bağlanıyor." Milliyet, 01.10.1971.

[11] "Bu Savaşta En Çok Şehit Veren Polistir." Milliyet, 05.05.1979.

[12] "Şehit Olmanın Da Bir Zamanı Var." Milliyet, 05.08.1976.

[13] "Asiltürk: 'Şehitler Cumhuriyete Sahip Çıkmıştır.'" Milliyet, 11.06.1976.

[14] "Gerillaların Öldürdüğü Polis Toprağa Verildi." Milliyet, 17.07.1979.

social movements. Funerals and commemorative rallies constitute the collective actions of claim making on behalf of the “martyred”. Reciprocal perception and vindictive mobilisation of violence between the radical-revolutionary left and the ultra-nationalist far-right was, for instance, a major feature of the Turkish civil war (Uğur Çınar 2014). As Sayari (2010, 204) noted on the Turkish civil war of 1970s, “the number of the ‘martyrs’ on each side grew at an accelerated pace, thereby perpetuating the vicious cycles of violence”. These “cycles of contention” (Tarrow 2011, 195–214) underline the interactive contention across groups, spaces and times. In the Turkish case, Sayari (2010, 203f.) describes the cycles as follows:

The attacks and counterattacks between the revolutionary left and the ultranationalist right followed a predictable pattern of escalation: The murder of a leftist terrorist—who was immediately declared a “martyr” by his comrades and given a political funeral—triggered the revenge killing of a right-wing terrorist. This, in turn, prompted the rightists to respond in a similar fashion: A political funeral for their “martyr” was followed by the assassination of a leftist militant.

Second, cultures of martyrdom contribute to the construction and conservation of collective identities in social movements. The violent death of a political activist calls for extreme “emotional investment” from the community of survivors and forces them to engage in “active relationships” with each other—factors which, according to Alberto Melucci (1995, 45), are crucial for the construction process of collective identities in social movements. Through boundary work between the in-group and out-groups, cultures of martyrdom construct collective identities (Eisenstadt/Giesen 1995; Flesher Fominaya 2010). While ultra-nationalists idealised notions of martyrdom for the survival of the nation, they simultaneously excluded the leftists from belonging to the “nation” (Burriss 2007). The culture of martyrdom contributed to a strong “*esprit de corps*” among the radical-revolutionary left (Özkaya Lassalle 2015). The religious connotations of culture of martyrdom utilised by the Turkish ultra-nationalists against the left created distinct spheres of belonging and identity (Uğur Çınar 2014, 4).

Third, cultures of martyrdom empower moral legitimisation of social movements. Martyrdom is contentious because it makes claims of morality of lethal victimhood in the face of illegitimate political violence. Shared beliefs can claim and disclaim the legitimacy of political violence against legal and extra-legal confines. Collins (2001, 33) is right to assume that “[t]here is a good Durkheimian reason for the connection between martyrdom and moral power” that causes strong emotional reactions. For believers, martyrdom is a zero-sum game. Only one (namely one’s own) group can claim the right of martyrdom. Hence, the legitimisation of martyrdom is fiercely contested.

After the transition to a multi-party system in Turkey in 1950, the state’s hegemony over society started to decrease (Ahmad 1977). The ‘liberal’ constitution that was established after the 1960 military coup enabled the development of an active civil society and a vibrant public sphere in which the state had to

share ground and compete with non-state actors. The rapid socio-economic processes of urbanisation and migration (Karpas 1976) affected the political scene by creating new forms of provincial conservatism, labour solidarity and poverty in urban spaces. With the eruption of political violence after 1968, the state started to lose its grip on the monopoly over violence. In the subsequent turbulent episodes, lethal victimisation and the political self-sacrifice of civilians found popular legitimisation without the symbolic certification of the state. Although political cultures of martyrdom were irreversibly democratised and popularised beyond the state's monopoly, they continued to resemble the state's familiar culture of martyrdom.

Claiming Revolutionary Martyrdom

The radical-revolutionary left's culture of martyrdom competed with the Kemalist state over 'revolutionary martyrdom'. As the Kemalist ideology was defined as subscribing to "revolutionism" (*inkılâpçılık*), those who were killed in the name of the Kemalist Revolution have been popularly called "revolutionary martyrs" (*inkılâp şehidi* or *devrim şehidi*). The first "revolutionary martyr" was Kubilay, a twenty-two year old teacher and army lieutenant who was beheaded by Islamist reactionaries in the Menemen incident in late December 1930. In the words of the Minister of Interior of the time, this crime was "committed against the martyrs, the Revolution and the fatherland" (quoted in Azak 2010, 32). Public and popular commemoration of Kubilay continued throughout Republican history and was strongly embedded in patriotic-revolutionary phraseology. The cult of Kubilay's revolutionary martyrdom was still a part of the public discourse during the 1970s, in which "Kubilay's revolutionary persona was recounted".[15]

An early episode of a leftist claim over martyrdom took place during a student protest against the government of the Democrat Party in the prelude to Turkey's first military intervention on 27 May 1960. On 28 April 1960 at the Beyazıt Square in Istanbul, a twenty year old student, Turan Emeksiz (1940–1960), was killed by police fire during a protest rally. After the coup, the military junta declared Emeksiz a "martyr of freedom" (*hürriyet şehidi*) and buried him at Atatürk's mausoleum in Ankara (Gülpınar 2012). The martyrdom of Emeksiz was celebrated by Turkey's left. Communist poet Nazım Hikmet (1902–1963) wrote from his Moscow exile:

A dead is lying
Textbook in one hand
In the other his dream that was over before starting
in the April of Nineteen Sixty
In Istanbul, at Beyazıt Square.

[...]

A dead will lie
His blood will drain drop by drop on soil
Until my armed nation comes with the folk songs of liberty
To capture
The Great Square.

[15] "Devrim Şehidi Kubilay Anıldı." *Mil-liyet*, 24.12.1978.

The global cycle of protest in the summer of 1968 also mobilised Turkey's student movements (Alper 2016). At the occasion of the arrival of the US Navy's 6th Fleet to Istanbul, sporadic acts of harassments against US military personnel developed into a major protest march in July 1968 where protesting students threw US sailors into the Marmara Sea; a symbolic act that in leftist imaginations resembled the victory of the Turkish troops in Izmir in 1922, when Greek soldiers (and the non-Muslim population of the city) had thrown themselves into the sea whilst trying to escape the onslaught. While the leftist students were still preparing demonstrations, the police executed a wave of arrests. The "first revolutionary martyr" of the Turkish left was Vedat Demircioğlu (1943–1968), a law student who was thrown out of a window during a police raid at a student dormitory. His funeral turned into a political rally and created a pattern for future political funerals. Since the government offices refused to give the body of Demircioğlu to his friends, the protesters filled a symbolic coffin with stones and carried it on their shoulders (Dündar 2016, 133). Posters and flyers with Demircioğlu's face were distributed. Banners during his funeral used tropes of patriotism and anti-imperialism, while his 'martyrdom' discourse referred to notions of immortality and afterlife: "He was a patriot / He was an anti-imperialist / He was against the 6th Fleet / He was killed / He will live on". The aftermath of the 6th Fleet demonstrations took place in 16 February 1969 when far-right groups under the leadership of the conservative National Union of Turkish Students (*Millî Türk Talebe Birliği*) organised a counter-rally after the Friday prayers against the "communists" with slogans such as "Muslim Turkey" (Ahmad 1977, 381). Two leftist students were stabbed to death by the violent mob in front of impassive police officers.

Yet only after the death of its two charismatic guerrilla leaders, Mahir Çayan (1946–1972) and Deniz Gezmiş (1947–1972), did the revolutionary left's culture of martyrdom turn into personality cult (Ulus 2011, 131). The "martyr no. 1" of Turkey's left is Mahir Çayan (Kozaklı 2007, 500). Çayan, a student at the Faculty of Political Science at the University of Ankara, was active in the circles around the Labour Party of Turkey (*Türkiye İşçi Partisi*). In the ideological division among the left between those who favoured military coup by revolutionary officers and those who favoured a guerrilla revolution of the people (Lipovsky 1991, 103), Çayan sided with the latter group that formed the Revolutionary Youth Federation of Turkey (commonly referred as *Dev-Genç*). Adopting the urban guerrilla method, Çayan was one of the founding members of the People's Liberation Party-Front (*Türkiye Halk Kurtuluş Partisi-Cephesi*) in 1970. Arrested and imprisoned, Çayan managed to escape from prison. He and his friends kidnapped several NATO personnel on the run from the law. During the siege of the security forces, Çayan famously shouted: "We didn't come here to return, we came here to die!" (*biz buraya dönmeye değil, ölmeye geldik!*). After Çayan and his friends were killed, they were instantly commemorated as "revolutionary martyrs". Before turning into a "revolutionary martyr", Mahir Çayan was himself cherishing a culture of revolutionary martyrdom. In a poem, he described the funeral procession of fallen comrades as follows:

Vedat [Demircioğlu], Taylan [Özgür], Battal [Mehetoğlu],
 Mehmet [Cantekin],
 Necmi
 They died for the revolution
 Walking through the streets of the capital,
 The revolutionary martyr going ahead.[16]

Even more than Mahir Çayan, Deniz Gezmiş became the Che Guevara-like iconographic face of revolutionary martyrdom that still exists today. A law student at the University of Istanbul, Gezmiş was an active member of the Labour Party of Turkey. Tall and charismatic, he soon became the ringleader of revolutionary-leftist student actions. Like many fellow Marxists and socialists, Gezmiş remained a Kemalist. In November 1968, he organised the Mustafa Kemal Student March from Samsun to Ankara. After being arrested several times, he went to Syria to receive training in guerrilla warfare from the Palestinian *al-Fatah* (Dündar 2016, 167f.). Upon his return, he and his friends at the Middle East Technical University founded the People's Liberation Army of Turkey (*Türkiye Halk Kurtuluş Ordusu*). Involved in acts of clandestine political violence, Gezmiş and his friends were captured after the 1971 military intervention. In his defence in court, Gezmiş framed the socialist struggle as Turkey's second war of independence: "In our fight for the independence of our country, we declare that we are determined to protect the dignity of those who are martyred in the War of Independence and the fate of our nation." (quoted in Behram 1998). Gezmiş received the death penalty and was executed by hanging. In a poem that commemorated the martyrdom of Gezmiş and his friends, poet Mahzuni Şerif (1939–2002) described the homeland in similar anti-capitalist patriotic terms as "watered with blood of martyrs / parcelled with palaces and warehouses" (Beki 2006, 13).

Beyond Kemalist legacies of revolutionary martyrdom, global frames of decolonisation of the Third World provided the Turkish leftist movements further sources of emulation. One source of revolutionary martyrdom was of Palestinian origin where the cult of martyrdom played a significant role (Khalili 2007). Many Turkish revolutionary leftists went to Jordan and Syria to train with Palestinian resistance organisations. One famous Turkish guerrilla, Cengiz Çandar (2000, 69), later recalled the cultural affinity of the Palestinian cult of self-sacrifice and martyrdom:

For Turkey's growing leftist student movement, the Palestinian Fedayeen movement that emerged in the wake of the 1967 war had particular appeal as a model of resistance to neo-imperial domination. The word "fedai", meaning he who sacrifices himself, is the same in Turkish and Arabic; in both languages it is a term of deep respect. So not only were there cultural and religious bonds, but the "anti-imperialist struggle", far from being an abstraction as in Latin America or Vietnam, was in Turkey's own backyard.

Turkish guerrillas killed in action in Palestine were considered "martyred" even in mainstream (centre-left) newspapers.[17] The return of Turkish guerrillas fighting in Palestine changed the culture and repertoire of Turkish contentious

[16] This poem is titled *Bu Adam Kurşunların Değil Kahredici Okların Hedefi*.

politics (Olson 1973, 198f.).

Another source for the revolutionary left's para-religious cult of martyrdom came from Anatolian Alevism. Alevism belongs to the heterodox denominations of Shi'ism and hence subscribes to the "Karbela paradigm" (Gözl 2018, this issue; Zırh 2014). Therefore, the culture of revolutionary martyrdom has generally been more profound among Alevites (Özkaya Lassalle 2015). In Alevi leftist circles, pictures of Deniz Gezmiş, İbrahim Kaypakkaya (1943–1973) and Che Guavara were collaged side by side with iconography of the twelve Shi'ite Imams, as well as saints of Anatolian Alevism such as Pir Sultan Abdal and Hacı Bektaş Veli as well as Kurdish-Alevite "martyr" Seyit Rıza (1863–1937) of the Dersim revolt (Küçük 2007, 911). "In their lyrics [...] and in their discussions", writes anthropologist Peter J. Bumke (1979, 544) of Alevi folk culture, "the martyrs of Karbala are identified with the left-wing victims of militant conflicts in the cities and the guerrillas hanged or shot after 1971, who defined themselves as Marxist-Leninist [...]." Although himself not an Alevite, leftist singer and author Zülfü Livaneli (*1946) explicitly used Alevi symbolism in honouring the "revolutionary martyrs" (Küçük 2007, 910).

Martyrdom was still understood as the honourable price of a patriotic struggle for the liberation of the people, but at the same time martyrdom at the hands of the "fascist" state was represented as the ultimate culmination of social injustice. The cult of self-sacrifice, martyrdom and heroism was most strongly emphasised in the *Devrimci Sol* (Revolutionary Left), founded in 1978 and later renamed as the Revolutionary People's Liberation Party/Front (*Devrimci Halk Kurtuluş Partisi-Cephesi*, DHKP-C) in 1994. Death was defined as a "a part of ideological existence", because it countered the "bourgeoisie's existential "cult of safety" (Sarioğlu 2007, 1020). In the vernacular communication platforms of the journal *Revolutionary Path*, fallen comrades were commonly dubbed as "martyred", even in cases where they were not killed in action but died of accidents or disease (Özdemir Taşdan 2011, 151). In public posters, however, the radical-revolutionary left tried to avoid the term "martyr" due to its conservative-religious connotations. Instead political death was framed in moral-legal notions of being murdered and killed by the "fascists".^[18] Despite its secular and progressive outlook, the culture of revolutionary martyrdom celebrated ideals of moral impeccability and the 'healthy' masculinity of their "revolutionary martyrs" (Lüküslü 2015, 100–113). While state security and far-right activists involved in political violence were labelled as "fascists", "cowards" and "rowdies", the radical-revolutionary left depicted their own martyrs and comrades in idealised cultural norms of young manhood (*yiğit*) (Özdemir Taşdan 2011, 146–153). Para-religious notions of immortality or a post-mortem afterlife of the revolutionary martyrs was repeated again and again in their publications.

While Kemalist-patriotic framing was still very dominant, especially during the first cycle of political violence from 1968 to 1972, revolutionary martyrdom was mostly a reformulation of the patriotic pathos of the Kemalist state in Third Worldist framing (Ulus 2011, 21–42). Moreover, the radical-revolutionary left's culture of martyrdom created its own para-religious cult of 'opiate' rituals and values under the veil of Marxism and secularism. While subscription to

[17] Yılmaz Çetiner, "El Feth'de Türk Gerillaları: Şehit Ali'nin Cesedi Bile Emperyalistlere Ölüm Saçmış." *Milliyet*, 04.05.1970.

[18] See a collection of these posters in <http://www.devrimciyol.org/Devrimci%20Yol/afisler/afislerindex.htm> (08/04/2019).

Kemalist nationalism declined throughout the second half of the 1970s, the radical-revolutionary left became more indulged in para-religious subcultures.

Martyrdom as a Patriotic Raison d'être

For Turkish ultra-nationalists, martyrdom is a birth right and even a desirable *raison d'être*. The far-right's political culture of martyrdom directly copied and co-opted the state's claim on the monopoly over legitimate means of martyrdom. Political martyrdom was conceptualised by the ultra-nationalist far-right as a civic-patriotic sacrifice defending the survival of the state and the honour of the nation. The far-right discourse expressed martyrdom in ultra-nationalist, hyper-religious and folkloric-mythological symbols and scripts.

Turkish ethnic and Sunni-Muslim nationalism play a dual role in the culture of martyrdom among the far-right. Turkish ultra-nationalism also gave rise to secular-racist variants that had opposed both the civic-nationalism of Kemalism and supra-nationalism of Islamism (Aytürk 2011). However, during of the Adana Congress of the Nationalist Movement Party (*Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi*, MHP) in 1969, the Islamisation of Turkish ultra-nationalism was finalised and adopted as party policy (Aytürk 2014). Although the Islamist spectrum of the far-right was associated with the National Salvation Party, Turkish ultra-nationalism based on the idea of a "Turkish-Islamic synthesis" was mostly represented by the MHP. The MHP and its youth organisation *Ülkü Ocakları* (Idealist Hearts), their members popularly called *Ülkücüler* (Idealists) or Grey Wolves (*Bozkurtlar*), constituted a strong and unified political youth movement of the era. It was possible for the MHP's martyrdom discourse to unite and utilise symbolic capital associated with notions of state, nation and religion without any restraints, because the far-right claimed indigenous ownership over the Turkish state-nation-faith triad. In an anthology of poems dedicated to the 22 "Idealist martyrs" (*Ülkücü şehitler*), the editor's definition of martyrdom as an Islamic norm rather echoed the Turkish state's semantical re-invention of the concept (Öner 1975, 5f.):

According to the Islamic belief; Those who die while fighting for holy concepts such as Allah, religion, state, nation, homeland and flag are *şehit* and those who survive are *gazi*. [...] Our ideal must be to take this sacred homeland and the noble Turkish people who live in it from this point of departure and bring them to an advanced and higher stage. For this ideal [*ülkü*], giving blood and life is a duty that will be carried out with pleasure by every Turkish *ülkü* today as before.

The MHP and its youth organisation unified the far-right under a single political party and was able to represent it in the parliament—two things that was lacking among the factionalised leftist parties. With access to state bureaucracy, the MHP pursued a policy of infiltration of the state security services (Gourisse 2011), allowing them to influence the mentality of the state's coercive apparatus. In combination with the existing anti-communist attitude of the Justice Party, the strongest party of the era, the Turkish state apparatus

became ever more hostile towards leftist movements. In addition, Turkey's NATO membership also enabled US covert action in supporting anti-communist and 'neo-fascist' groups in Turkey as part of stay-behind contingency plans in case of a Soviet invasion or a communist take-over (Ganser 2005, 224–244). As part of this support, several "commando camps" for the Grey Wolf students were organised in the late 1960s to indoctrinate the youth in anti-communist ideologies and train them in paramilitary drills and hand-to-hand combat under the supervision of retired Turkish special forces officers (Landau 1974, 214–217; Soylu 1975; *Ülkücü Komando Kampları* 1997). These relations that were formed between the Turkish state's security-intelligence-military complex and the ultra-nationalist organisations constitute in many ways the origins of the Turkish 'deep state' (Gingeras 2014, 218f.). The popular ultra-nationalist slogan, "Oh my country, it does not matter whether I take your bread and food or a bullet on your behalf" (*vatanım, ha ekmeğini aşım ha uğruna bir kurşun yemişim*), which was formulated by the MHP leader Alparslan Türkeş and used in Grey Wolf graffiti, framed martyrdom as an honourable price in the service of the patriarchal state. The crisis of masculinity in face of political violence was also a common theme in the martyrdom cult of the far-right—very much similar to that of the revolutionary left (Günay-Erkol 2016). A martyr's poem (Beki 2006, 18), quoted:

We've been broken, but never bent
 We've died like men, we've died bravely [*yiğitçesine*]
 We didn't betray our loved ones when walking to the gal-
 lons,
 We've upheld the flags of the crescent and lived by the
 code of the Grey Wolf

The first "Idealist martyr" (*Ülkücü şehit*) was Ruhi Kılıçkiran. He was shot down by revolutionary-leftist students during a fight that started because of the Ramadan fast-breaking at a student dormitory's cafeteria in January 1968. His gravestone commemorates him as a "mujahid student" (*mücahid öğrenci*). The backside of his gravestone quotes the Qur'anic verse (3:169), "Do not call those, who were killed in the path of God, dead; on the contrary, they are still alive" and continues: "Oh, you martyr son of a martyr, do not demand a grave from me, the Prophet stands with open arms to meet you."

While Kılıçkiran's murder was certainly an emotional shock for the far-right students, the popularisation of a martyrdom cult was a cumulative process that took place partly as a reaction to the "leftist versions of solidarity and martyrdom" in the aftermath of 1971 military intervention. Only thereafter, for instance, did authors of the far-right start writing novels to honour their very own "martyrs" (Günay-Erkol 2013, 122f.). In a poem by Grey Wolf poet Ozan Arif (1949–2019) dedicated to the "Idealist martyrs" (Beki 2006, 17), he names Kılıçkiran and others who were killed in the first cycle of political violence (1968–1971) such as Süleyman Özmen (1948–1970), Yusuf İmamoğlu (1945–1970) and Ertuğrul Önkuzu (1948–1970): "These are the ones that fell at the beginning, but that was only the beginning / Not only with those we could escape the fire / Young and old, we gave martyrs of all generations

/ I cannot forget them [...].” The increasing number of “Grey Wolf martyrs” created a shock for the ultra-nationalists who perceived the world in chaos, the nation disoriented and the state inept to react. Faruk Akkūlah (1927–1991), a founding member of the MHP, in a radio speech during an election rally, called on both the state and the nation to appreciate the sacrifices of the Grey Wolves:

Suffering a great ordeal, we come from the core of the nation and we want the totality of State services!...
In every period of history, those states that could remain great and those nations that were not worn down by history were nations that gave martyrs for the sake of freedom and for the sake of the truth...

[...]

My honourable Nation...

Listen!

Only yesterday, you could not avenge the 22 Grey Wolf martyrs who spread their blood in the prime of their lives in face of a handful of anarchists for the sake of religion and for the sake of the state!

Shame on you!... (quoted in Soylu 1975, 78ff.)

After 1975, the MHP was even part of government coalitions which, on occasion, enabled governmental protection of ultra-nationalist violence. For instance, a parliamentary report, prepared by the MHP in 1977, publicly announced that there were 68 “martyred” MHP members by the attacks of “leftist assassination bands”.^[19] Back in opposition in 1979, the MHP’s leader Alparslan Türkeş told the press: “The guilt of the increasing martyrdom of our party members in Istanbul rest on the shoulders of the governor and the police director.”^[20] On other occasions, he could easily blame the prime minister and his government for the “martyrdom” of his fellow MHP and Grey Wolves members:

Thanks to the government of [Bülent] Ecevit, bandits patrol the cities, anarchy continues with the utmost rapidity, the security of life and property of our citizens is gone with the wind. Yesterday MHP supporter Mustafa Eryiğit became a martyr, today our party members Mehmet Güllü and Mehmet Çolak Fakıoğlu were martyred in Gaziantep [...] by machine gun fire. In Ankara too, a house where young Grey Wolves live in the district Etlik was attacked by armed militants. [Two] members of our youth organisation [...] became martyrs.^[21]

After giving his condolences to relatives of “martyred” Grey Wolves in Adana and Nizip, Türkeş said to the press: “They are not only martyrs of the MHP, but of the whole Turkish nation.”^[22] This conservative formula, that in times of chaos and crisis—which was certainly the case in late 1970s—one should align on behalf of the commonwealth of the nation and obey the orders of state officials, was simultaneously propagated by the state apparatus. In 1980, the official journal of the Directorate of Religious Affairs, *Diyanet Gazetesi*,

[19] Örsan Öymen, “MHP’nin Barış Gönüllüleri.” *Milliyet*, 18.11.1977.

[20] *Milliyet*, 21.11.1979.

announced in a cautionary article against the temptations of civil war (quoted in Kenar/Gürpınar 2013, 29):

Our prophet prescribes us to obey the legitimate state forces who are prescribed the responsibility of governing society. He foresees that some Muslims will rebel against the state forces, and in those times he orders Muslims to keep their patience and silence, avoid strife and fighting, and prevent the spread of *fitna* [Islamic concept of “civil war”]... In times of *fitna*, every Muslim is obliged to side with the legitimate state forces and help the security forces. Every Muslim who dies in the service of the state forces achieves the status of martyrdom...

Conclusion

The 1980 military coup that brought an end to the civil war was a watershed event for Turkey that created its own traumas and tragedies—as well as numerous new “martyrs” from left and right—for generations to come (Bora/Can 1991; Karacan 2016). Commitment to the “martyrs” of the 1970s and their cause continues to be a matter of contention in Turkish politics today. Hagiographic albums (Küçükizsiz 1990; Partizan 2002) and countless internet pages continue to serve as a reminder of the “martyrs”. The persistence of cultures of martyrdom go beyond a simple reasoning of collective identification, as it is the commitment to a notion of legitimisation and delegitimisation of lethal political violence that establishes solidarity and mobilises collective action across people, times and spaces—and against ‘others’.

Looking back at the Turkish civil war of the 1970s, the state’s monopoly over legitimate means of dying in the name of the state, nation and faith was not categorically denied by either the radical-revolutionary left or the ultra-nationalist far-right, but criticised and challenged in order to include one’s own victims to the patriotic pantheon of martyrdom. Therefore, challenging the state’s monopoly over martyrdom by non-state actors did not, for the most part, deny the Turkish Republic’s normativity and reality. Contentious claims to political martyrdom by the radical-revolutionary left and the ultra-nationalist far-right tended to copy or co-opt the Turkish state’s moral and symbolic capital in para-state terms without rejecting the Turkish state’s right of existence, because state-nationalism, popular patriotism and crypto-Islamic norms were still the common denominators of Turkey’s wider political spectrum, especially in the early 1970s. In the second cycle of political violence after 1976, however, the state increasingly lost its grip on its monopoly over legitimate means of violence. Along with the popularisation of the leftist slogans “killer state” (*katil devlet*) and “fascist state” (*faşist devlet*) towards the end of 1970s, the revolutionary left became more antagonistic towards the Turkish state’s ontological existence. The victimisation experience of the Grey Wolves at the hands of the state officials during the 1980 military coup traumatised the far-right’s idealised notions of the state’s eternal impeccability and pushed them furthermore to establish a state within a state that would

[21] “Türkes MHP’lilere Yapılan Saldırıları Kınadı.” *Milliyet*, 17.05.1979.

[22] *Milliyet*, 04.05.1979.

support the righteous cause of Turkish nation regardless of the façade of everyday politics. Emerging movements of Kurdish separatism and Islamist radicalism in late 1970s developed their own notions of political martyrdom that were essentially counter-hegemonic against the Turkish state's existential legitimacy.

“Show me your martyr, I'll tell you who you are”, once joked a wise friend about Turkish political culture. Only recently, the Bosphorus Bridge between Europe and Asia was renamed the *15 July Martyrs Bridge* after the failed coup attempt of 2016 whilst the state denied the coup plotters that were killed during clashes the legally mandatory religious burial ceremony.[23] In the greed-versus-grievance scale of civil wars (Kalyvas 2006, 64ff.), cultures of martyrdom pushes conflicts towards grievance. Commitment to martyrdom make reconciliation equal to a betrayal. Those who gave an oath to the martyrs are cursed if they make peace with the perpetrators. There is no sportsmanship when it comes to martyrs. As long as cultures of martyrdom prevail and compete with each other, there can be no imaginable ecumenical heaven or bipartisan utopia in which enemy martyrs can rest in peace and in equal terms—at least not without establishing a shared culture of legitimate means of co-existing

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[23] “Turkey Builds ‘Traitors’ Cemetery for Insurgents Who Died in Failed Coup.” *The Guardian*, 28.07.2016. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/jul/28/turkey-builds-traitors-cemetery-for-insurgents-who-died-in-failed-coup> (08/04/2019).

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