

*Sacrificial Limbs: Masculinity, Disability, and Political Violence in Turkey*. By Salih Can Açıksöz. Oakland: University of California Press, 2020. 247 pp. (ISBN: 9780520973350). doi: 10.22679/avs.2021.6.1.014

There is increasing scholarly interest from multiple disciplines, such as anthropology, cultural studies, and political science, in the gendered and sexualized quandaries and ramifications of Turkey's deep-seated military masculinity. Numerous studies have documented revealing cases related to the subject and further attempted to problematize and corrode prevailing political discourses (See Altınay, *The Myth of the Military Nation*, 2004; Selek, *Sürüne Sürüne Erkek Olmak*, 2008; Heval and Üsterci, *Conscientious Objection*, 2009; Değirmencioğlu, *Öl Dediler Öldüm*, 2014; Çiçekoğlu and Turan, *The Dubious Case of a Failed Coup*, 2019). *Sacrificial Limbs: Masculinity, Disability, and Political Violence in Turkey* by Salih Can Açıksöz significantly contributes to an emerging critical tradition in this little debated subject by presenting a coherent elaboration combined with a rigorous anthropological approach covering more than five years of ethnographic fieldwork and activism.

The book consists of six consecutive chapters and an epilogue, each contextualizing the production and re-production(s) of the concept of “*gazi*,” which mainly refer to the disabled veterans who were injured during their conscripted duty in the fight against the members of the separatist Kurdish terrorist organization in Turkey, the PKK, through different historical codas. The focal point of *Sacrificial Limbs* is the power relations between the *gazis* and the state, based on a “heteropatriarchal contract” (p. 57) which dynamically defines the role of the state as financially and politically indebted to disabled veterans who are subjectivized by “gendered and classed experiences” and norms in an ableist society.

The first chapter surveys the disabled veterans' war experiences on the mountains of southeastern Turkey, named “*Region*,” and its prolonged effects on their post-injury lives. Based on the *gazis*' narratives, along with the codes of the nationalist discourse, Açıksöz argues that the mountains have become personified as conscious beings (p. 20) and that service in the *Region* becomes an indicator of “manly heroism” and “sacrifice” (p. 43-44). The following chapter elaborates how the *gazis*' bodies reveal, destabilize, and reproduce “gendered citizenships” and masculine sovereignty relationships between the state and the young male subjects. At this juncture, the debt of the Turkish men is construed as a compulsory service to the “homeland,” and that even sacrifice of a limb is part of this duty. Being disabled contradicts the established discourse of sovereign masculine subjectivity, however, since the role of Turkish men is regarded to be bread-winning and gender heteronormative. The experiences and narratives of the author's interlocutors reveal how in reality injured ex-conscripts endure being “disenfranchised,

infantilized, and expelled from the institutions and performative practices of hegemonic masculinity” (p. 51). Encounters with bureaucratic gridlock (p. 59-62) and the failure of the state to fulfill its reparative promise generate further resentment and a sense of lacking hetero-masculinity among *gazis* (p. 74).

The third chapter delves into the sacrificial crises and dilemmas of the *gazis* as on the one hand, they face the difficulties of being disabled in an ableist society, while on the other they become the sublime subjects and exemplification of religio-national discourses in different historical moments. Following Henri Hubert and Marcel Mauss’s conceptualizations of sacrifice, the author interprets indications of the bestowal of benefits and entitlements to disabled veterans and compares their status to that of street beggars (p. 88). After giving a comprehensive genealogy of the concept of the *gazi* (*ghazi*), the author contends that disabled veterans are well aware of the relatively privileged position they hold within society (p. 97) and determinedly persist to preserve their status through political agency. The fourth chapter assesses the underlying spatial, organizational, and specifically emotional elements of both individual and collective disabled veteran activism, which coalesce around reverberations of embodied grief (p. 113). By delving into the shared experiences and sentiments of *gazis* and martyrs’ families, Açıksöz demonstrates how the efficient and determinant activism of “communities of loss” has managed to achieve financial benefits and political gains, and more importantly, members of these communities have found a plane of interaction and binding therapeutic fellowship to deal with both their physical and emotional suffering (p. 124-125).

The subsequent chapter depicts the vicissitudes of *gazis*’ political careers and agencies by tracing the political agenda, and transformation, of the official and national discourses in Turkey from the late 1990s. According to the author, the capture and subsequent trials of the PKK leader, Abdullah Öcalan, constituted both a historical moment and breaking point for the subjectivization of disabled veterans, since Öcalan’s body was constructed as a site for a performative and discursive “reiteration of sovereign power” (p. 141). However, as the author observes, the centre of aggression was re-channelled, and Öcalan’s embodied position was replaced with surrogate victims (p. 145), the “dissident intellectual,” epitomized by the assassination of Turkish-Armenian journalist, Hrant Dink (p. 148). While *gazis* and martyrs’ families demanded Öcalan’s execution in retaliation for their sacrifices and sufferings (p. 142), perhaps unexpectedly, a new form of activism and act of protest emerged when numerous disabled veterans began to publicly remove their prostheses (p. 154-155), indicating the annulment of the terms of the contractual exchange between the state authorities and disabled veterans, and as Açıksöz contends, depreciating the value of their bodies by returning

the reciprocal gifts from the sovereign power, which meant, paradoxically, abandoning the privileged status they had been bestowed thus blurring the lines between the distinguished *gazi* and the street beggar (p. 159-160).

The last chapter explores and specifies the reverberations of late neoliberalism and debt relations on disabled veterans and their privileged status. As the author argues, the new economy and its mechanisms introduce greater convenience to *gazis* through technologically advanced prostheses, for instance, new forms of indebtedness, capitalism, and the logic of so-called “accountability” (p. 170). However, these developments further corrode the reciprocal relationships based on the traditional moral and political norms between the state and disabled veterans. Drawing on the sensational mediatized prostheses repossession cases and debt collections, Açıksöz convincingly argues that, as an outcome of the competing value systems of nationalism and neoliberal finance, the bodily losses of disabled veterans are undermined and their post-injury lives are further tarnished. In the epilogue, Açıksöz deciphers how the titles of *gazi* and martyr have gradually been demilitarized, demasculinized, and deturkificated in the aftermath of the failed peace negotiations in the name of the “Solution Process” in 2010, following the 2013 Gezi Uprisings, and finally after the 15 July Putsch in 2016 (p. 178-183). According to the author, the activism and moral dispositions of the communities of loss were stifled with the new reconfiguration of sovereignty and hegemony of the ruling party.

All in all, *Sacrificial Limbs* is a significant contribution as the book provides insightful analysis into hegemonic, militarist masculinities and into paradoxes which are crystallized in political discourses and practices which seek to reimburse and recover the injured bodies of disabled veterans and their sovereign masculinities. Açıksöz coherently articulates his arguments through the lenses of sociological, cultural, psychoanalytic, and political approaches as he concurrently manages to interrelate seemingly distant concepts, such as sacrifice, gender, and debt, by combining them with cross-references and vivid cases from his fieldwork. Two last original points about the book merit comment. First, translations of the original Turkish concepts and even the local idioms are brilliant, so that the book successfully and clearly conveys the interlocutors’ experiences and the context. Second, the meticulous documentation of recent historical developments makes the book a valuable resource, not only for political and anthropological researchers, but also for those interested in seeking alternative ways to read and understand the history of modern Turkey.

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