

Turkey's Necropolitical Laboratory

Democracy, Violence and Resistance

Edited by
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The Cemetery of Traitors

Osman Balkan

The corpse arrived on a balmy summer afternoon. Neither the ambulance driver nor the cemetery workers knew the identity of the deceased, whose unwashed, bloodied body was shrouded in mystery and a simple white cloth. No prayers or religious incantations were uttered as workers lowered the body into an unmarked, anonymous grave. No friends or family members were present to witness the burial. The only onlookers were a pack of stray dogs who languidly roamed the rock-strewn fields of the hastily constructed cemetery. The body, that of thirty-four-year-old military captain Mehmet Karabekir, was not to be mourned.

Karabekir had the dubious honour of being the first inhabitant of the 'Cemetery of Traitors' (*Hainler Mezarlığı*), a burial ground established by Turkish authorities to house the remains of putschists killed during their attempt to overthrow the government of President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan in a failed military coup on 15 July 2016, which led to the imposition of a two-year state of emergency and the arrest and/or dismissal of an unprecedented number of civil servants, teachers, academics and journalists in Turkey. The cemetery was the brainchild of Istanbul's then mayor, Kadir Topbaş, who unveiled his plans at a massive public rally held in the name of safeguarding democracy on 19 July 2016. 'I ordered a place to be reserved and to call it the Cemetery of Traitors,' he told the flag-waving crowd that had gathered in Taksim Square. 'Those who pass by should curse them! They cannot escape hell but we must also make them suffer in their graves!'¹

Adjacent to an open-air municipal dog shelter on the eastern outskirts of Istanbul, the Cemetery of Traitors is not a typical graveyard. As its name unmistakably asserts, it is intended as a burial ground for the enemies of the Turkish state. To be buried there is a form of posthumous punishment. The

cemetery is a striking example of Turkish statecraft that reflects a longstanding strategy of targeting the dead as a means of governing the living. It is part of a morbid set of practices that political theorist Banu Bargu subsumes under the heading of 'necropolitical violence', that is, 'violence that takes as its object the realm of the dead'.²

Necropolitical violence includes the disfiguration, desecration, denuding and public display of corpses as well as the destruction of cemeteries and memorials to the dead, the prohibition or violent repression of funerary rituals and processions, and the inhumation of bodies in mass or anonymous graves.³ Different groups, including Kurds, Alevis, Armenians, leftist political dissidents and LGBTQ communities have all been subjected to such acts of necropolitical violence by the state or para-state organisations at various moments in the tumultuous history of the Turkish Republic.⁴ According to Bargu, the point of such violence is not to produce 'bare life' or to reduce the living to the status of 'living dead', but rather to target the dead in order to *dishonour, discipline and punish the living*.⁵

In this chapter I examine the aftermath of the failed military coup in Turkey through the political afterlives of its victims and perpetrators. Building on the work of Bargu and other theorists of necropolitics, I consider the relationship between sovereign power and the dead body in an effort to illustrate how corpses become politicised sites of struggle and resistance. I argue that the determination of where and how dead bodies are buried (or otherwise disposed of) is a critical means through which states and other actors demarcate the contours of national, religious and political communities. Focusing on the Cemetery of Traitors as well as the funerals of soldiers and civilians who died during the coup attempt and in its immediate aftermath, I show how the treatment and commemoration of the dead marks the difference between martyrs and renegades, friends and enemies, Muslims and infidels, and more broadly, serves to delineate the boundary of the nation and its authentic demos.

Necropolitical Statecraft

Max Weber famously observed that the state is 'the form of human community that (successfully) lays claim to the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force within a particular territory'.⁶ States mete out violence and death on a regular basis, though by no means is this violence distributed evenly across the population at large. In an effort to make sense of this variation and to better understand its underlying causes and long-term consequences, recent scholarship has theorised politics as 'the work of death'

and has investigated the ways in which sovereign power functions through the division of populations into those who must live and those who must die.⁷ Building on the work of Michel Foucault and the proposition that the ultimate expression of sovereignty lies in the ability to exercise control over life and death, Achille Mbembe has developed the concept of necropolitics to describe and interpret 'contemporary forms of subjugation of life to the power of death'.⁸

Drawing on examples such as the slave plantation, the penal colony and territories under military occupation, such as contemporary Palestine where 'new and unique forms of social existence' have appeared, Mbembe sees the emergence of necropolitical regimes whose function is not to foster or optimise life but rather, to create conditions of maximum deprivation. In these 'death-worlds', populations are not killed off en masse in spectacular acts of violence. Rather, they are reduced to conditions of life that confer upon them the status of 'living dead' through wilful neglect. The exercise of sovereign power in these spaces lies in its ability to define which lives matter for the vitality and future strength of the political community. In Mbembe's framework, by marking certain lives as valuable or expendable, necropolitics is thoroughly invested in the uneven allocation and distribution of death among certain populations.

Mbembe's influential account has generated a wealth of scholarship on the politics of death, destruction and precarity that has helped advance our understanding of the modalities of necropolitical statecraft. In focusing on the differential allocation of death, however, many of these studies overlook one of the key sites where necropolitics occurs: the human corpse. Dead bodies are critical sites of statecraft, not least because of their materiality, symbolic power and association with the sacred.⁹ As anthropologist Katherine Verdery has argued, a body's materiality can be vital to its symbolic efficacy. Unlike abstract notions like 'patriotism' or 'the nation', dead bodies 'can be moved around, displayed, and strategically located in specific places', but what makes them effective as political symbols is their ambiguity or 'capacity to evoke a variety of understandings' to different actors.¹⁰ Drawing on such examples of what she calls 'dead body politics' during the transitions from socialism in Eastern Europe, Verdery skilfully demonstrates how the corpses of both (in)famous and ordinary people become sites of political contestation in moments of political upheaval or change, as different groups struggle over where they should be (re)buried and what they should signify.¹¹

Dead body politics need not involve 'exceptional' or politically charged corpses such as those of public leaders, notable citizens or enemies of the state. The corpses of ordinary citizens also play a role in routinised, banal

practices of necropolitical governance. As Finn Stepputat has argued, all states, irrespective of their regime type or level of socioeconomic development, establish a range of institutions, laws and practices to oversee transitions from life to death, including what happens to dead bodies.¹² Even in situations where states delegate certain responsibilities over the dead to non-state actors, such as private firms or religious entities, they usually claim ultimate authority over the definition and governance of the dead within their jurisdiction through legislation and institutionalised procedures. For Stepputat, the death of a person is an occasion for the performance of sovereignty by both states and a range of sub-, trans-, and supranational entities that manage (or aspire to manage) dead bodies in ways that overlap or come into conflict with legally institutionalised state practices.

In light of these examples, it may be useful to expand the notion of necropolitics to try to make sense of the ways that power is exercised and contested *after* the termination of life. By doing so we can better appreciate the multiple registers through which necropolitics operates. At one level, the creation of 'death-worlds' where certain populations are reduced to the status of the 'living dead' by means of deprivation or wilful neglect reflects a biopolitical logic in which sovereign power manifests as the imperative to 'make live and let die'. At another level, murderous practices aimed at certain individuals or groups fall within a paradigm of sovereignty that understands power in terms of its ability to 'let live or make die'. Finally, there are those practices that Bargu subsumes under the heading of 'necropolitical violence', and which Verdery calls 'dead body politics', which take place upon or around the corpse itself. These include both explicit acts of violence directed upon the body (dismemberment, desecration, etc.) or acts of symbolic violence that aim to erase or strip an individual of her identity (anonymous burial or interment in mass graves).

To understand why sovereign power targets posthumous subjects requires engaging with both material and symbolic dimensions of necropolitical statecraft. This means paying attention to how states and other actors treat and handle dead bodies (are they physically harmed, violated, disappeared, displayed, kept in confinement, buried in secret or not buried at all?) and to the symbolic practices, rituals and narratives that different groups employ in their efforts to commemorate, memorialise and ultimately (re) signify the dead (funeral processions, public rallies, obituaries, memorials, prayers, mourning practices, etc. in which the central protagonist is the deceased and the narrative arc concerns their biography, the circumstances behind their death and how they should be remembered). Taking dead bodies as a field of struggle over meaning and signification allows us to identify how the management of the dead helps constitute, consolidate

and territorialise national, political and religious communities around the world.

The political stakes of corpse management become clearer when we juxtapose 'problematic' corpses such as those of individuals that have an antagonistic or conflictual relationship with the state, with those that the state relies upon to consolidate and reproduce a particular way of imagining the national community. The most spectacular example of corpse management in Turkey is arguably the mausoleum built to house the remains of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, founder of the Turkish Republic. The Anıtkabir ('Memorial Tomb') structure in Ankara is a massive, open-air complex that architectural historian Sibel Bozdoğan has described as the 'holiest' site in modern Turkey.¹³ Anıtkabir incorporates a range of different architectural styles, including twenty-four Hitite lions, representing the 'strength and power of the Turkish nation', a Greco-Roman mausoleum that resembles the Parthenon, and Soviet realist statues of a soldier, a peasant, a teacher/student and three women holding wheat, one weeping, which honour the ordinary citizens that comprise the body politic and guarantee its reproduction and survival.¹⁴ Groups of soldiers constantly patrol the grounds in complex step formations, while other soldiers stand motionless, guarding key points in the complex.

Anıtkabir hosts millions of visitors annually and serves as a central site for the public commemoration of important milestones in the history of the Republic (including 10 November, the anniversary of Atatürk's death). It is a striking example of monumental political architecture that is as much a homage to Atatürk as it is to the Turkish nation itself. Its symbolic power derives from the materiality of Atatürk's remains, which are buried under a 40-ton sarcophagus in Anıtkabir's 'Hall of Honour'.¹⁵ Etched in a marble slab near the sarcophagus are Atatürk's famous words, 'One day my mortal body will turn into dust, but the Turkish Republic will stand forever.' Visiting dignitaries frequently lay wreaths at this site, which has a quasi-religious aura.

Atatürk is an exceptional figure in the historiography of the Turkish nation-state and plays a central role in the national self-imaginary. As soldier/statesman, his story is one of heroic sacrifice in the service of a higher cause. However, such tropes are quite common in commemorative acts that honour ordinary soldier dead. As Onur Bakiner shows in his contribution to this volume, tropes of sacrifice and martyrdom are central features of Turkey's death-politics nexus, and have helped legitimate acts of state violence in Turkey. The Turkish word for martyr, *şehit*, has religious connotations, though it is applied to all soldiers killed in combat (most

often in reference to those who have perished in the ongoing civil conflict with the Kurdistan Workers' Party, i.e., the PKK). Martyrs are buried in cemeteries that are reserved for them (called *Şehitlik*) and their funerals are often broadcast by the media, thereby transforming what would otherwise be a private, familial affair into a public one, allowing citizens across the country to participate in collective mourning. Such rituals have been impacted by new media technologies, as evinced by the creation of internet websites and Facebook groups dedicated to Turkish martyrs, which create new potentials for communicative action between the living and the dead and help to extend the memory and presence of those who have departed from this world.¹⁶

Beyond martyrdom, we can point to the constitutive work that dead bodies perform in the creation and reproduction of national and political communities the world over. Consider the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier. A memorial invented by the Italian, French and British governments during the last years of World War I, the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier has been described by Benedict Anderson as the most 'arresting emblem of the modern culture of nationalism'.¹⁷ The sacred admiration that such monuments command reminds us that the nation is an altar that demands the blood sacrifice of its citizens. The fungibility of the unknown in the tomb (he or she could be any one of us) reflects a democratic ethos. The same logic is at work in the uniformity of tombstones in grand national war cemeteries like Arlington, Tyne Cot or Gallipoli. 'Void as these are of identifiable mortal remains or immortal souls,' writes Anderson, 'they are nonetheless saturated with ghostly *national* imaginings.'¹⁸ These dead are *our* dead. Their veneration, through physical monuments and commemorative rituals, helps consolidate the idea of a national community by linking past sacrifices to present political orders.

What about the bodies of the enemies of a given political community? How are they incorporated into the national imaginary? Like fallen heroes or celebrated public figures, the enemies of the state also serve an important boundary maintenance function. They lay bare the distinction between insider and outsider. As I have already suggested, one important strategy through which states and other political actors make claims about the boundaries of the nation and its authentic demos is through material and symbolic acts that target human remains. In the next two sections I aim to further substantiate this claim by analysing the funerals of the victims and perpetrators of the failed military coup of 15 July 2016, a watershed moment in Turkish political history.

As the self-appointed guardian of the Turkish Republic and its values, the military has been an active and powerful force in Turkish politics,

staging three bloody coups in 1960, 1971 and 1980, as well as a bloodless so-called 'post-modern' coup in 1997 during which it removed Islamist prime minister Necmettin Erbakan from power via memorandum rather than by force. In 2016, the military's attempt to violently overthrow the government of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan backfired, in no small part because of the intervention of ordinary citizens who took to the streets to repel putschist soldiers. Many people on both sides were killed in the process.

In the next section I analyse the public ceremonies held in honour of pro-government soldiers and citizens who died in clashes with putschist forces on 15 July 2016. Held up as martyrs, the funerals for these individuals were public spectacles that attracted thousands of onlookers and offered an emotionally charged site for the reaffirmation of political loyalties, communal solidarities and national boundaries. I focus on the pageantry of the funerals, paying particular attention to the speeches and eulogies delivered by high-level state authorities in honour of the dead.

'They may have tanks and guns but we have faith'

The Cemetery of Traitors was established by Turkish authorities after putting down a military coup that left more than 300 dead and several thousand injured. At around 11 p.m. on 15 July 2016, a faction of the Turkish Armed Forces calling themselves the 'Peace at Home Council' launched attacks on key sites in Istanbul and Ankara. Armoured tanks rolled in to block the Fatih Sultan Mehmet and Bosphorus bridges, the two main land routes across the Bosphorus Strait in Istanbul. Armed soldiers occupied Taksim Square in central Istanbul and descended upon the city's major air hub, the Atatürk Airport. Meanwhile, military helicopters and tanks opened fire on the parliament building as well as the headquarters of the special police forces in Ankara.¹⁹ Around midnight, armed soldiers entered the offices of the Turkish Radio and Television Corporation in Ankara (the national public news station) and coerced a news anchor to read a prepared statement asserting that the Turkish military had 'completely taken over the administration of the country to reinstate the constitutional order'. The statement also noted that 'the democratic and secular rule of law has been eroded by the current government' and that the Peace at Home Council would 'preserve the democratic order' and 'ensure the safety of the population'.²⁰

The coup itself was short-lived. President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, who was on holiday at the seaside resort town of Marmaris and barely eluded capture by military forces, took to the airwaves via FaceTime urging the

public to pour out onto the streets to defend the nation. Similar messages were broadcast via loudspeakers in mosques across the country. Throngs of people took heed of Erdoğan's message. Hundreds made their way to the Bosphorus Bridge to confront the military. In the clashes that followed, several civilians were killed and a soldier was lynched and beheaded by the angry mob. In a rapid turn of events, the coup plotters were repelled and defeated.

By daybreak, the government could confidently assert that it had regained control over the country. The soldiers on the bridge had surrendered and hundreds of military personnel were arrested. Turkish newspapers hailed the event as a victory for democracy. Prime Minister Binali Yıldırım and other high-ranking members of the Turkish government laid the blame for the coup on Fethullah Gülen, an exiled cleric living in the Pocono Mountains in Pennsylvania. Others saw an American hand behind the coup attempt. A poll published by a pro-government newspaper reported that sixty-nine per cent of Turks believed that the CIA had supported the coup plotters.²¹ Still others speculated that it had been an inside job in order to shore up the AKP's power. While investigations are still ongoing, arrests and purges of individuals believed to have links with Gülen and his organisation have taken place at an unprecedented scale.²²

In the immediate aftermath of the failed coup, Turkish authorities were faced with the question of what to do with all the dead bodies. According to Prime Minister Yıldırım, 240 pro-government forces, including civilians, were killed during the coup attempt, while a further 2,195 were wounded. On the other side, thirty-six putschist soldiers died, while forty-nine others were wounded.²³ Turkish officials bestowed honours upon the pro-government forces, praising them as martyrs. Many received heroic public funerals that were attended by high-ranking members of parliament and thousands of ordinary citizens.

Major Ömer Halisdemir, one of the first pro-government soldiers killed in action, was buried in his hometown of Çukurkuyu in central Anatolia on 17 July 2016. Halisdemir had played a critical role in preventing the success of the coup attempt by assassinating one of its leaders, Brigadier General Semih Terzi, as he and a group of soldiers tried to seize the Special Forces Command building in Ankara. Halisdemir was mortally wounded after shooting Terzi in the head at short range. His body was taken to Çukurkuyu and displayed in a flag-draped coffin in the town's central square, where close to five thousand onlookers gathered to pay their final respects.

According to İleri Koçak, the town's mayor, more than one hundred thousand individuals from across Turkey have since visited his grave. 'If

Ömer hadn't intervened where he did, perhaps thousands of people would have died,' noted Koçak. 'He brought honour to our town and to our nation. We thank our citizens for the respect they have given him. Çukurkuyu now belongs to all of us.'²⁴ The local university was subsequently renamed Ömer Halisdemir University in his honour, as were several public schools in Ankara, Istanbul and Izmir. In interviews with the press, his father, Hasan Hüseyin Halisdemir, told reporters: 'I'm honoured. I raised him for the nation and I gave him to the nation. I accept the sacrifice he has made. He's a child of the nation now . . . Long live the nation.' Noting that Ömer 'saved our people and our nation', Hasan said that he thanked God for giving him such a son.

Another notable public funeral was that of Erol Olçok, an advertiser with longstanding links to the AKP. Olçok and his sixteen-year-old son, Abdullah Tayyip, were both killed on 15 July 2016 as they confronted soldiers that had taken the Bosphorus Bridge. A close ally of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, having worked with him during his tenure as Istanbul's mayor, Olçok was the campaign manager of the AKP's 2002 electoral campaign and a close ally of Erdoğan. He designed the party's name and logo and helped formulate its slogans and party platforms. Erol and Abdullah Tayyip Olçok were buried in Istanbul's Karacaahmet Cemetery after a public funeral ceremony held at the Marmara University Faculty of Theology.

The funeral attracted thousands of citizens and was attended by many high-ranking political officials, including President Erdoğan, Speaker of the Grand National Assembly Ismail Kahraman, former President Abdullah Gül, former Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu, Governor of Istanbul Vasip Şahin and a dozen other ministers, cabinet members and members of parliament, all of whom stood within close proximity to the flag-draped coffins.²⁵ Flanked by a row of imams wearing Ottoman-style taqiyahs and ornamental robes in white and gold, President Erdoğan told the crowd that 'the funeral prayers of our martyrs are being performed after the Asr prayer across various locations in Turkey'. 'Erol was my comrade,' he continued, his voice straining as he began to weep into the microphone. As he wept, the crowd erupted, chanting 'Ya Allah, Bismillah, Allahu Ekber!' 'May God rest his soul!' Erdoğan cried out, his voice cracking as he embraced Olçok's coffin. 'We want the death penalty!' the crowd responded.

Visibly distressed, Erdoğan struggled to contain his sobs. 'I can't continue,' he said, 'my condolences to the nation. But let it be known that we will march with our burial robes towards these assassins, this Fethullah Terrorist Organisation, and we will eradicate them! We will carry this country into the future with solidarity and unity. May God's mercy be upon our martyrs!' Putting down the microphone as he wiped his tears away, Erdoğan

moved back into the crowd, which continued its chants. Erol Olçok's name was subsequently given to a football stadium, a hospital and several public schools in Çorum, the city of his birth.

Erdoğan attended other funerals, notably that of İlhan Varank, brother of Erdoğan's chief consultant Mustafa Varank. Varank died in front of the Istanbul Municipality Building after a group of putschist soldiers opened fire upon the crowd that had gathered there after Erdoğan urged Turkish citizens to take to the streets to defend the nation. He and several other civilians killed during the coup attempt were honoured at a public funeral held at the Fatih Mosque in Istanbul, one of the largest and most important mosques in the city. Many high-ranking political officials were present, including Erdoğan, Abdullah Gül and Ahmet Davutoğlu. As Erdoğan took the microphone to deliver a speech, again flanked by a row of imams in traditional dress, the crowd of several hundred people that had gathered to pay their respects broke into a spontaneous chant, exclaiming, 'Here is our army and our commander!'²⁶

'My dear brothers, we are gathered here for a very meaningful funeral ceremony,' began Erdoğan, this time speaking coolly and assuredly. 'Here we have our 15 July martyrs. These martyrs have reached the highest rank after the prophets . . . Those who could not stand our nation's unity, solidarity and brotherhood, turned 15 July into an armed insurrection and attempted to take control of our government!' The crowd hissed, jeered, booed and then began chanting 'Fethullah will come here and pay for what he's done!' Gaining momentum, Erdoğan spoke of the valiant efforts of ordinary citizens who filled the nation's squares and challenged the putschists. 'They may have tanks and guns but we have faith!' he bellowed as the crowd burst into another set of chants, this time 'Allahu Ekber' (God is Great) and 'We want the death penalty!' 'In democracies, you cannot ignore the will of the people!' he continued. 'This is your right!'

Speaking about the ways in which the Gülenists had infiltrated different branches of the Turkish state, Erdoğan outlined the ongoing arrests and purges, promising the frenzied crowd that he would continue to wipe out this 'virus' which has 'spread throughout the state like a cancer'. Noting that he had formally requested the extradition of Gülen from the United States, he called on the crowd to maintain vigilance, urging them to continue to fill the public squares with their bodies and voices. 'This isn't a twelve-hour-operation, we can't slow down now. We must continue with determination!' he said as the crowd roared in approval.

The public ceremonies held in honour of the '15 July martyrs' offered an emotionally charged stage for the performance of sovereign power and necropolitical statecraft. The ritualistic veneration of the dead, their

conspicuous display in coffins adorned with the Turkish flag, and the patriotic eulogies delivered by elected officials all served to uphold a triumphalist narrative about the indivisible Turkish nation, which perseveres in the face of threats both foreign and domestic thanks to the sacrifices of its heroic citizens. The very public display of the material remains of individuals killed in the coup attempt offered incontrovertible visual evidence of the truth of sacrifice, while the paeans made by political officials helped discursively and symbolically link the individual to the nation. The (dead) body stood for the body politic.

'They must suffer in their graves'

The funerals of the coup plotters offer a stark contrast. Unlike the heavily orchestrated spectacles surrounding the burial of the victims of the coup attempt, the funerals of the perpetrators were secretive, ad hoc and stigmatised events that, in some cases, took place under considerable duress. In what follows, I offer a few brief vignettes to illustrate how the corpses of coup plotters became politicised sites of conflict.

A few days after the coup attempt, the Turkish Directorate of Religious Affairs (the highest official religious body in the country) issued a formal directive to its imams concerning their religious obligations vis-à-vis the dead coup plotters. 'A funeral prayer is intended as an act of exoneration for the faithful,' it read. 'But these people, with the actions that they undertook, have disregarded not just individuals but also the law of an entire nation and therefore do not deserve exoneration from their faithful brothers and sisters.'²⁷

The Directorate prohibited its imams and all other religious functionaries from performing any sort of religious ceremony for individuals involved in the coup attempt. Its public statement read as follows: 'Our office will not provide funerary services (washing, shrouding, prayers) to the coup plotters who revolted against our country's legitimate government and targeted the survival of our state, who dropped bombs on the Turkish Parliament and other public buildings and who mercilessly took up arms against the people and died in the process.'²⁸

The Directorate's unprecedented withholding of Islamic funerary rites was intended as a form of posthumous punishment for both the individual in question and their community. It can be read as an act of necropolitical violence targeting the dead in order to discipline and dishonour the living. As a form of necropolitical statecraft, moreover, the official denial of burial rites served to delimit the boundaries of the political community by casting the illegitimate or problematic dead outside of the demos. In a further twist,

the coup plotters were excised not only from the imagined community of the Turkish nation, but from the broader community of the faithful Muslim Ummah, a point to which I shall return below.

In light of the Directorate's orders, the funerals of the coup plotters were highly circumscribed. As I mentioned above, the first person buried at the Cemetery of Traitors was thirty-four-year-old Mehmet Karabekir, a military captain killed during the coup attempt.²⁹ Speaking about his decision to establish the cemetery, Istanbul's then mayor, Kadir Topbaş, told reporters:

No cemetery will accept these people. We can't bury them in our indigent (pauper's) cemeteries because people of faith are buried there and that's not acceptable. So I ordered a place to be reserved and to call it the Cemetery of Traitors. Those who pass by should curse them. Everyone should curse them and not let them rest in their tombs. They cannot escape hell but we must make them suffer in their graves as well.³⁰

Topbaş echoed the order issued by the Directorate of Religious Affairs and went even further, encouraging citizens to curse the dead. 'It's a loaded term,' he admitted, speaking of his decision to label the burial ground the Cemetery of Traitors. 'But they deserve it. They used bullets that ripped people apart. Wouldn't you call these men "traitors"?'³¹ Karabekir was buried in an anonymous, unmarked grave with no family or witnesses present. To date, he is the only inhabitant of the rock-strewn, makeshift cemetery located near an open-air municipal dog shelter on the eastern outskirts of Istanbul. Several other graves have been opened up in anticipation of new arrivals, though the site resembles an abandoned worksite more than a burial ground. There is no tombstone or grave marker indicating the location of Karabekir's corpse. A large black-and-white sign that marked the entrance to the Cemetery of Traitors (*Hainler Mezarlığı*) was eventually removed by municipal authorities after gunshots were fired at Karabekir's grave.³²

In other instances around the country, family members of coup plotters faced many obstacles in their efforts to bury their dead. Municipal authorities in the north-eastern coastal city of Ordu denied requests to bury junior officer Nedim Şahin in the town's cemetery. Şahin died in clashes with pro-government forces at the Police Special Forces Headquarters in Gölbaşı, just outside of Ankara. Speaking at the regional parliament, Ordu's mayor, Enver Yılmaz, asserted that 'We refuse to provide any burial space or funerary services for this individual, who betrayed the Turkish military and the Turkish nation. I informed all of our officials that Ordu is not a city that will harbour traitors in its soil. There will be no compromises with traitors!'³³

Şahin's family had petitioned the city to bury his body in a public cemetery after holding requisite funeral prayers at a local mosque. All of these requests were denied. Ordu's mufti (a senior Muslim legal expert), Mustafa Kolukısaoglu, said that 'These are traitors who rebelled against the state and were killed. They will not receive funeral prayers. Their bodies will not be brought into our mosques. No one will pray for them. Our religion commands this.'³⁴ Kolukısaoglu added that he would bring legal charges against any religious functionary who performed religious rites for coup plotters or allowed their corpses to be brought into the city's mosques. Having been denied both a burial plot and religious funerary services, Şahin's family interred his body in their own land, in a hazelnut grove adjacent to their house. A similar dynamic unfolded in at least three other cities in Turkey, including Sivas, Samsun and Erzincan. In each case, local authorities denied family requests for public cemetery plots and religious services. Consequently, the families were compelled to bury the bodies themselves on their own properties.³⁵

In another instance, local residents prevented the body of a coup plotter from being brought into the town mosque for funeral services. On 18 July 2016, family members of Major Mehmet Akkurt repatriated his corpse to his hometown of Umurlu (near Aydın) in southwestern Turkey in an effort to bury him there.³⁶ Umurlu residents turned out in droves believing that the body belonged to a pro-government soldier, but upon learning that it was a coup plotter, blocked access to the mosque where they had congregated. Police were brought in to maintain order. 'The funeral prayer will not be held here [at the mosque], because he is not a martyr,' a mosque official explained.³⁷ While local authorities allowed Akkurt to be buried in the municipal cemetery, the town's imam refused to perform funerary rites and prayers. Instead, this task was undertaken by a local citizen who finished his prayers with the statement: 'May God protect our people and our nation from internal and external enemies.'³⁸

Public officials in Turkey were vehemently opposed to the idea that these infamous dead would be buried in their hometowns and, in many cases, they were able to block access to public cemeteries. While Turkish law guarantees citizens the right to burial, the state denied this possibility and went even further to ensure that no religious rites would be extended to its enemies. Through the differential treatment of the dead, the state sought to distinguish between its friends and foes. In denying burial rites to its enemies, it attempted to foreclose any possibility of public mourning. Through sovereign acts targeting the corpse that rendered the dead ungrievable, the Turkish state articulated the boundaries of its political community.

Conclusion: You Only Die Twice

At a press conference held a few weeks after the failed military coup in Turkey, US State Department spokesman Admiral John Kirby was asked whether the denial of religious rites to coup plotters constituted a violation of religious freedom. Kirby acknowledged that the freedom of expression, religion and worship were universal values that 'we obviously hold in very high regard'. Pressing him to clarify with specific reference to the US government's decision to bury Osama Bin Laden at sea in accordance with Islamic traditions, the reporter asked Kirby whether as a general principle he supported the idea that all individuals, irrespective of their crimes, should be granted requisite religious rites during burial. 'Absolutely,' Kirby responded. '[Bin Laden] was a famous example of how we observe that ourselves . . . In keeping with our belief in the freedom of worship, we believe that individuals should be accorded those customs, those traditions, those rites, to be laid to rest in keeping with the same practices by which they worshipped when they were alive.'³⁹

While the actual circumstances behind Osama Bin Laden's burial remain uncertain, given the US government's reluctance to publicly release any photographic evidence of the act, Kirby's insistence that even enemies of the state should be accorded proper funerary rites in line with their religious beliefs and traditions is notable for several reasons.⁴⁰ First, it mirrors the position taken by other Western governments in the aftermath of acts of violence and terrorism carried out by self-professed jihadists on their territories. To give one recent example, French authorities buried the perpetrators of the *Charlie Hebdo* attacks, all of whom were French citizens, in Islamic cemeteries in their hometowns in France with requisite funerary rites and rituals.⁴¹ Although their graves were unmarked and anonymous, 'to prevent any threat to public order and to preserve the tranquility of the city', according to one of the mayors who oversaw the process, the decision to extend religious funerary rites and privileges to terrorists is important for at least two other reasons.

First, it affirms the state's commitment to human rights, religious freedom and the dignity of all persons in death, thereby implicitly drawing a distinction between those who respect the bodies of their enemies and those who do not. In practice, this distinction may ring hollow given the well-documented abuse and torture of 'enemy combatants' by US soldiers in places like Abu Ghraib and Guantánamo. Yet the rhetorical force of Kirby's argument stems from the proposition that the US government holds the freedom of religious worship and other 'universal' values in 'very high regard', whereas others do not.

Bin Laden's burial at sea becomes legible within a global economy of violence that hinges upon legitimacy, in both form and content. The sanitary, law-abiding violence of the state stands in contrast to the spectacular violence perpetrated by terrorists and other illegitimate actors like ISIS or al-Qaeda, whose beheadings and suicide bombings are understood as archaic and barbaric. The treatment of bodies, both living and dead, serves a boundary maintenance function that helps distinguish the legitimate from the illegitimate, the civilised from the barbaric.

Furthermore, US and French efforts to extend religious burial rites to jihadists are important because these efforts also affirm the jihadists' identity as Muslims, thereby strengthening the link between Islam and violence and conferring a religious valence upon acts that might otherwise be construed as political. Turkey's decision to withhold religious rites for coup plotters while honouring pro-government soldiers and civilians as 'martyrs' is instructive when read alongside the US and French examples. Whereas American and French officials foreground the religious identities of their enemies, Turkish authorities rely on religious language and symbolism to honour their heroes.

For Turkey, a Muslim-majority country where a *laïque* state structure ensures that public religion is under the control of the state, the denial of Islamic funerary rites can be understood as a form of posthumous punishment. Religious authorities claimed that Islam forbids the extension of funerary rites in such circumstances, a claim that to the best of my knowledge has no religious justification.⁴² Through this denial, officials sought not only to expel the putschists from the Turkish nation (as traitors) but also to dispense with their Muslim identity by turning them into infidels. Recall the public statement released by the Directorate of Religious Affairs, which argued that 'a funeral prayer is intended as an act of exoneration for the faithful, but these people, with the actions that they undertook, have disregarded not just individuals but also the law of an entire nation and therefore do not deserve exoneration from their faithful brothers and sisters'. In this formulation, the coup plotters experience two deaths: a physical, biological death that comes with the cessation of life, and a symbolic, figurative death that comes with their expulsion from the Turkish nation and its community of faith. Sovereign power is invested in the material and symbolic governance of the dead in order to shape the conditions of their memorialisation. In the process, dead bodies become a site upon and a means through which a new chapter of Turkish history is written.

Speaking to reporters after the establishment of the Cemetery of Traitors, Eren Keskin, a prominent lawyer and human rights activist in Turkey, argued that burial is a human right. 'We are living in a space where even the right to

burial is taken out of people's hands,' she noted. 'I haven't seen anything like this anywhere in the world. It's completely incongruous with the concept of human rights and has no religious justification either.'⁴³ In March 2018, Keskin was sentenced to seven and a half years in prison for publishing articles that 'degraded the Turkish nation' and 'insulted the Turkish president'. She is not alone.

While the two-year state of emergency imposed after the failed military coup of 15 July 2016 was allowed to expire by Turkish authorities in 2018, the crackdown on political dissidents and opponents continues with alarming intensity. Turkey now holds the dubious honour of being the world's biggest jailer of journalists, surpassing both China and Egypt. In the years following the coup attempt, more than 30,000 people have been imprisoned on terror and coup related charges. Another 150,000 people have lost their jobs. This figure includes 6,021 academics and 4,463 judges and prosecutors. One hundred and eighty-nine media outlets have been shut down and 319 journalists have been arrested. The deans of more than 1,600 universities have been asked to resign and several academic departments have been shut down entirely.⁴⁴

After a snap election held in July 2018, Erdoğan was sworn in for another five-year term as Turkey's president. His Justice and Development Party (AKP) has since proposed new anti-terrorism bills that retain measures from the state of emergency and that allow local governors to impose curfews and ban demonstrations by making some areas off limits to the public. While the politicisation of the dead and the treatment of dead bodies have been instrumental in legitimising the erosion of Turkey's already precarious democracy, the real victims of Turkey's necropolitics are the living, whose freedoms have deteriorated in the name of national unity and security.

Notes

1. 'Darbeciler için "vatan hainleri mezarlığı"'.
2. Banu Bargu, 'Another Necropolitics'.
3. Ibid.
4. See Aslı Zengin, 'Mortal Life of Trans/Feminism: Notes on "Gender Killings" in Turkey', and Nicholas Glastonbury, 'What Does the State Want from Dead Bodies? Suruç and the History of Unmournability'.
5. Bargu, 'Another Necropolitics', p. 3.
6. Max Weber, 'Politics as a Vocation', p. 33.
7. Achille Mbembe, 'Necropolitics'.
8. Ibid. p. 39.

9. Katherine Verdery, *The Political Lives of Dead Bodies: Reburial and Post-socialist Change*.
10. Ibid. p. 27.
11. For another excellent study of 'dead body politics' in Eastern Europe that uses the exhumation and reburial of Bela Bartók to analyze Hungarian state socialism, see Susan Gal, 'Bartók's Funeral: Representations of Europe in Hungarian Political Rhetoric'.
12. Finn Stepputat, *Governing the Dead: Sovereignty and the Politics of Dead Bodies*.
13. Sibel Bozdoğan, *Modernism and Nation Building: Turkish Architectural Culture in the Early Republic*, p. 282.
14. Leda Glyptis, 'Living Up to the Father: The National Identity Prescriptions of Remembering Atatürk; His Homes, His Grave, His Temple'.
15. For more on Anıtkabir and its role in shaping national memory see Christopher Wilson, *Beyond Anıtkabir: The Funerary Architecture of Atatürk and the Construction and Maintenance of National Memory*.
16. For a fascinating analysis of the internet presence of Turkish martyrs, see Julie Alev Dilmaç, 'Martyrs Never Die: Virtual Immortality of Turkish Soldiers'.
17. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism*.
18. Ibid. p. 10.
19. For a timeline of the coup attempt as it unfolded, see <<http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2016/07/turkey-timeline-coup-attempt-unfolded-160716004455515.html>> (last accessed 28 May 2019).
20. A video of the broadcast is available online: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6MW_MakickE> (last accessed 28 May 2019).
21. Tim Arango and Ceylan Yeginsu, 'Turks Can Agree on One Thing: US Was Behind Failed Coup'.
22. In August 2016, the *New York Times* reported that more than 45,000 civil servants from the Ministries of the Interior, Health, Culture and Tourism, National Education, Development, Economy, Forest and Water Management, Transport, Science Industry and Technology, Family and Social Policy, and Environment and Urban planning were dismissed, alongside thousands of military personnel, for their alleged links to Gülen.
23. 'Başbakan açıkladı: Kaç darbeci öldürüldü'.
24. 'Kahraman asker Ömer Halisdemir'in mezarını 100 bin kişi ziyaret etti'.
25. For video footage of the ceremony, see 'Erdoğan, Erol Olçak'ın cenaze töreninde gözyaşlarını tutamadı'.
26. A video of the funeral ceremony is available online: <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rAZra62hDfE>> (last accessed 28 May 2019).
27. 'Diyanet: Öldürülen darbecilere din hizmeti verilmeyecektir'.
28. Ibid. The Directorate did, however, make an exception for soldiers who were forced to take part in the coup and 'who had no idea what they were doing or what they were involved in', stating that these individuals would not be barred from receiving religious services.

29. Not everyone has been so enthusiastic about the cemetery. Serhun Baturay, a fifty-seven-year-old volunteer at the municipal dog shelter adjacent to the cemetery, told reporters that 'they should have buried them somewhere far from our animals . . . They shouldn't be placed near our dogs. They shouldn't be anywhere in Turkey. They should be cremated and their ashes tossed into the ocean. There shouldn't be a trace of them anywhere in the country. As a Turkish citizen, I don't want such a thing.' Quoted in Associated Press, 'Turkey Builds Traitors' Cemetery for Insurgents Who Died in Failed Coup'
30. 'Darbeci askerler vatan hainleri mezarlığına gömülsün'.
31. 'Kadir Topbaş: Hain lafını hak ediyorlar'.
32. 'Hainler Mezarlığı'ndan kuşun sesleri . . . Ve tabela kaldırıldı'.
33. 'Darbeci Astsubay'a mezar yeri verilmedi'.
34. Ibid.
35. For Erzincan (Semih Terzi) see 'Erzincan'da "Semih Terzi" Krizi'. For Sivas (Burak Dinler) see 'Darbeci diye öldürülen er Burak'ın ailesi "şehitlik" istedi'. For Samsun (Ercan Sen) see 'Darbeci subay Şen'e mezar yeri verilmedi, cenaze tarlaya gömüldü'.
36. 'Binbaşı Mehmet Akkurt'un Cenazesi Toprağa Verildi'.
37. See the news report, 'Darbeci Binbaşının Cenazesi Camiye Alınmadı'.
38. 'Binbaşı Mehmet Akkurt'un Cenazesi Toprağa Verildi'.
39. US Department of State, 'Daily Press Briefing', 29 July 2016.
40. For an alternative account of what happened to Osama Bin Laden's body, see Seymour Hersch, *The Killing of Osama Bin Laden*.
41. Although it should be noted that they initially attempted to 'repatriate' the corpses to Algeria and Mali, the two countries from which the perpetrators' parents had emigrated to France. See Balkan, 'Charlie Hebdo and the Politics of Mourning'.
42. According to Ibn Hazm, a Spanish-born Arab theologian and jurist who is considered a leading exponent of the Zāhirī (Literalist) school of jurisprudence, the '[f]uneral prayer should be offered for all Muslims, whether good or bad, including those sentenced to death and those that die fighting or in revolt. The imam, or anyone other than him, may lead the funeral prayers. Likewise, funeral prayers should be said for an innovator, provided his innovation does not become blasphemy, and prayer may be said for one who commits suicide or kills someone else. A funeral prayer may be offered in all such cases even though the deceased might have been the most evil person on the face of the earth.' See *Fiqh-us Sunnah, Vol. 4: Funerals and Dhikr*.
43. Quoted in 'Avukat Keskin: Hainler mezarlığı gömme-gömülme hakkına aykırı'.
44. See <<http://www.turkeypurge.com>> (last accessed 28 May 2019).

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