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# Waiting for justice amidst the remnants: urban development, displacement and resistance in Diyarbakir

This paper looks into the lives of displaced people and their material bonds with the past while waiting for justice during exceptional times in Diyarbakir, Turkey's Kurdistan. Diyarbakir is known for its central location in the Kurdish conflict in Turkey for many decades. In August 2015, the old city of Diyarbakir called Sur joined other resisting cities and districts in the Kurdish region of Turkey, where Kurdish militants built barricades all around their controlled neighbourhoods against the state's violent attacks and declared autonomy. Months after the beginning of the resistance, the Turkish state managed to take back control of Sur after heavy clashes between Turkish security forces and Kurdish militants. All the resisting neighbourhoods of Sur were razed to the ground, and close to 24,000 residents were displaced. Since then, a massive urban transformation project for Sur has been in the making. The everyday survival of the displaced people from Sur depends on the ways they negotiate with the state in a long process of waiting. Bringing together different accounts of waiting, I intend to shed light on temporal dimensions of forced displacement embedded in the remnants of the past and shaped by present history of subjugation and state violence.

**Key words** waiting, displacement, urban development, rubble, Kurds

## Introduction

Hasan's<sup>1</sup> family is among thousands of families that were displaced from their homes in Sur, the old city of Diyarbakir,<sup>2</sup> after the urban armed clashes between Kurdish militants and the Turkish security forces started in their neighbourhoods in November 2015. Their new apartment, where Hasan with his wife and their two children had resettled, was only 10 minutes' walking distance from their old neighbourhood, which had been obliterated and they could not visit. The last time Hasan and his wife were at their old house was in March 2016, when the round-the-clock military curfew was lifted on Sur for only a day for the people to collect whatever remained from their houses. When I first met him, Hasan showed me some pictures and videos on his phone that he took during that very last visit. Their house had partially burned down, and most of their furniture was destroyed. 'Not much was left', Hasan said. But they still took all they could anyway. The first time I visited Hasan's family, he was

<sup>1</sup> All names of the people mentioned in this paper are pseudonyms.

<sup>2</sup> Sur is one of four districts of the city of Diyarbakir. The interior part of Sur district that is surrounded by a historical fortress is called Suriçi.

impatient to show me a room where he stored their furniture from their old house in Sur. As soon as I got to their apartment, he insisted that I should first see that room and then we could chat and have tea. He led me into a room full of dusty household items: a fridge with its door detached from it and kept on its side; a stove and a gas cylinder; a large brown wooden cabinet unit with shattered glass doors; a toddler's bed filled with pillows of different sizes and colours; a queen bed on which carpets, mattresses, duvets, blankets, and sheets were stacked; a big electric heater with broken heating bars; a few household items and two large cardboard boxes on the floor; a tall round vase with discoloured plastic flowers; a large flat-screen TV; a few white plastic chairs; a white desk with a computer case on top of it; and beside the case, an old computer monitor with a hole right in the middle of its broken screen. My eyes were locked to that screen for a few moments, and Hasan was quick to notice. 'They shot at the screen. The bullet must still be inside', Hasan said. 'Do you know whose bullet?' I asked him, and he responded with conviction 'of course, I know'. Hasan told me that he has carefully documented these items from their old house. 'All of these are evidence of what they have done to us. I live with them, but there comes a time when others will look at them as well'. Hasan said except for some of the blankets and mattresses, they haven't made use of the items stored in this room. Yet, everything in that room had a reason to be there.

Hasan and many displaced families that I met in Diyarbakir were in a state of limbo, not knowing their fate during the exceptional times that Turkey, and particularly Diyarbakir, was going through. They were involved in multiple legal cases, and to comply with requirements of their cases and other bureaucratic paperwork, they were obliged to meet exact dates and timelines put in place by officials while they had no medium to (re)make time in their favour in order to get the response they expected. The many forms of waiting that dominated their relationship with the state were deeply embedded in everyday life: waiting for the removal of the curfew and having access to old places; for value estimation of their properties and what they had lost; for the outcome of their legal cases at each stage; for any development in other cases that they knew of; for officials to give them a call or send them a letter; for upcoming appointments; for finding a lawyer they could trust; for their lawyer to give them a response; for a response that could make a change in their life; for a life that could be peaceful and just or at least close to what they had in the past; and ultimately, for justice in a time that may never come.

The waiting experience dominating Hasan and other displaced families lives is shaped by a past that remains materially in different forms of rubble and remnants. The embodiment of a ruined past in the everyday material forms in which these displaced families inhabit brings up the vital question that Ann Stoler asks: 'what they do about what they are left with' (2013: 12). This paper evolves around this question and follows the materiality of displacement in the lives of the displaced people in Diyarbakir during the times of waiting. I argue that the possibility of justice is the primary engine that makes waiting bearable for the displaced, but the displaced person's endurance is filled and materialised with the bonds they develop with the 'leftovers' of the past (Stoler 2013). On the one hand, these remnants of material belongings help anchor a dearly held past that is 'idealized and harmonious' (Brun 2015: 24). At the same time, they are held on to because they serve as evidence for the infinitely deferred future, when the hope is that justice will be served.

This paper looks at the remnants of Sur and materiality of displacement from a more recent anthropological inquiry into ruins, ruination and rubble. Stoler shifts discussions around ruin to the process of ruination as a ‘*political project* that lays waste to certain peoples, relations, and things that accumulate in specific places’ (2013: 11). For Stoler, the focus is beyond the gaze at the ‘ruins of empire’ and more about the question ‘how people live *with* and *in* ruins’, which in turn takes us to ‘the politics animated, to the common sense such habitations disturb, to the critiques condensed or disallowed, and to the social relations avidly coalesced or shattered around them’ (2013: 12–13). While she looks at ‘imperial debris’ around the world and its effects on the people left with them, I argue that ruination in a political project of displacement produces unexpected material bonds beyond ruined places. Lefebvre would make an important contribution here that space does not disappear but leaves traces (1991: 164). And more importantly, space evolves through bodies surrounding them, and as Lefebvre puts it succinctly, ‘it is by means of the body that space is perceived, lived, and produced’ (1991: 162). My research is interested to see what the ruined homes of displaced people in Diyarbakir leave for them, and how they carry what has remained for them in their displaced times as personal mementos from a life destroyed. I ask how do these ‘leftovers’ of the life before displacement offer rupture into the never-ending presence of the present time and their waiting for justice in a future they hope for? How do the displaced people find and attach meaning to the remnants of a past not so distant and ruined homes not too far, and how do they remember through them?

What exactly are these leftovers? Gaston Gordillo (2014) distinguishes between ruin and rubble by looking at how abstraction in space is produced in their connection with the past. While rubble is rendered as insignificant matter that is going to be removed, ruin comprises value for its pastness and mostly is considered as heritage (Gordillo 2014: 10). The material remaining of Sur I examine here are neither ruins nor rubble; as the signs of continuity of the place in the displaced people’s lives, their value of pastness is crystallised by personal memories of the space that no longer exists. For those displaced, remains of Sur have a significant afterlife, especially during a time spent in waiting. I consider waiting as an important factor here that shapes the ‘constellation of rubble’ (Gordillo 2014: 11). The afterlife of leftovers surviving destruction is nuance in their role and meaning. They become personal mementos, as Carol Kidron (2009) shows in the case of a spoon from Auschwitz, to remember the past through them and to pass on the embodied memories attached to them. They mark the time and place of suffering; ‘melancholic objects’ that Yael Navaro-Yashin (2009) speaks of. I think remnants of Sur accumulate all these meaning in their afterlife of destruction. But I will argue that beyond all this, these remnants are also both witness to grief and testaments to a home ruined. They are kept for a time they are looked at. Waiting for the time of justice – and maybe return to their home, a home – is the curse that the displaced live with.

The leftovers that I examine in this paper are of different nature and symbolic value. I begin with the story of a mulberry tree that represents a home that no longer exists. But it also speaks for a history of soil, territory and injustice against excluded people in an unresolved sovereignty project. Mulberry trees have become witness to a city in ruins that was once distinguished by its glory and diversity, and a place for mutual existence of different nationalities and religions; a memory that has been wiped out of the city in the process of Turkish-Islamic nation-building. But like many trees in literature and especially Victor Turner’s milk tree in *The forest of symbols* (1967), the

mulberry trees of Diyarbakir condense other meanings around ruined livelihoods. From a mulberry tree to broken household materials of Hasan and other remnants of Sur in the lives of my interlocutors, I trace different trajectories of ruination in Diyarbakir. It is also important to note that my interlocutors in this paper are mainly men; I address the gendered nature of displacement, dispossession and waiting in Kurdistan elsewhere.<sup>3</sup>

## Waiting in times of emergency

I first met Hasan in December 2016. It was during the last phase of my ethnographic fieldwork in Diyarbakir for my doctoral dissertation. This was one of the most repressive times in the history of the Turkish republic. Just a few months had passed since the failed coup of July 2016, and the entire country was in the state of emergency. Waiting for 'normalisation' was the dominant mood in the country, but in Diyarbakir the wait had started before the failed coup. Diyarbakir had been going through extraordinary times since a year before the failed coup. In the late summer of 2015, many neighbourhoods in Sur joined resisting cities and districts in the Kurdish region in declaring 'self-rule zones', where the Kurdish militants had built barricades around their controlled neighbourhoods against the state's continuous attacks on their communities. Military curfew against Sur, which is still partially in place,<sup>4</sup> practically separated this part of Diyarbakir from the rest. Months after the beginning of the resistance, the state managed to take back control of this district after heavy clashes between Turkish security forces and Kurdish militants. Many neighbourhoods were severely damaged. According to a report published by Amnesty International,<sup>5</sup> close to 24,000 residents of Sur were displaced, more than 2,000 houses were destroyed or damaged, and a number of civilians were killed. In March 2016, following urban clashes in Diyarbakir, the Turkish government issued an order to expropriate most private properties in Sur. Since then, an urban development project for Sur has been in the making, demolishing the entire district of Sur (except for historical sites and structures) in order to rebuild it anew.

Hasan's family and other displaced families were stuck in a condition of being that was not only determined by their spatial displacement but also within temporal constraints that profoundly disrupted their life course. They developed day-to-day survival strategies as they were negotiating with the state on the streets, court halls, municipality and government offices for the possibility of return to their old neighbourhoods, to rebuild their houses, and for fair compensation of what they had lost. They were put in a long process of waiting through which many transformations occur in their living experiences and in their understandings of their relationship with the state power. These transformations are not always in the ways that are desired by the sovereign (Feldman 1991; Hage 2009; Brun 2015). In fact, different forms and acts of

<sup>3</sup> For example in my PhD dissertation (Saadi 2020).

<sup>4</sup> By November 2019.

<sup>5</sup> 'Turkey: displaced and dispossessed: Sur residents' right to return home', <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/eur44/5213/2016/en/> (accessed 6 July 2018).

resistance take place in this process of waiting, which are marked by the memories of displacement and conditioned within a history of subjugation and state violence. Many of those I met engage in active refusal (cf. Simpson 2014) against a resolution process offered by the state that is based on a much lesser monetary compensation of what they had lost or were about to lose in Sur. Seeking justice in a Kafkaesque legal and bureaucratic process that could take more than a decade was the more acceptable and dignified option that many had taken, and Hasan's endeavour to collect evidence of what his family had been through was in preparation for this quest.

Making people wait, Bourdieu (2000) famously says, is the essential part of the way domination works. Waiting is not equally distributed, and one's ability to intervene in time is relational, especially when it comes to socio-political contexts where one's position in power and capital relations determines the length and environment of waiting. As Auyero observes in his remarkable ethnographic study of waiting among urban poor for welfare benefits in Argentina, 'waiting is stratified, and there are variations in waiting time that are socially patterned and responsive to power differentials' (2012: 27). It is in this stratification of waiting time and the power to make one wait that subordination is reproduced, and uncertainty of the future dominates the passing through of 'the here-and-now' in which history is dismissed for the sake of progress (Benjamin 1940). In the case of Diyarbakir, waiting is embedded in many traumatic experiences of war, state violence, displacement, dispossession and oppression. While they wait for a possible justice to come, they also, as Ghassan Hage puts it, 'wait out' the misery of the presence they are in. Hage defines 'waiting out' as 'a specific form of waiting where one is not waiting for something but rather waiting for something undesirable' to end (2009: 102). As Cathrine Brun discusses in the case of Georgian internally displaced people, 'people in protracted situations of displacement often live their lives in a present and at a place where they do not want to be. They dream about a future they cannot reach, which often lies in the past and is represented by the places and lives they were forced to leave' (2015: 23).

The current stories of waiting in Kurdistan are not separated from the long-awaited justice for the Kurds, minorities and those excluded in the Turkish republic. The latest Kurdish rebellion led by the Kurdistan Workers Party, PKK (*Partîya Karkeşên Kurdistan*), has been going on since the late 1970s. The PKK initiated an armed resistance in 1984, and Turkish military operations in the Kurdish region in response have cost more than 40,000 lives. During the war in Kurdistan in the 1990s, more than three and a half million people were internally displaced in the Kurdish region (see Jongerden 2007). Diyarbakir's central location in the Kurdish region of Turkey made it a primary host city for hundreds of thousands of internally displaced Kurds. Diyarbakir's population almost tripled from 300,000 to close to 800,000 in less than a decade (Ayata and Yükseser 2005). The PKK declared a ceasefire in September 1998, months before its leader, Abdullah Öcalan, was captured. This ceasefire, with many ups and downs, was followed by negotiation efforts to pacify the situation in Kurdistan. A relatively peaceful condition in Kurdistan after the ceasefire provided a great opportunity for a shift in Kurdish resistance with the aim of self-determination toward urban spheres of legal politics, municipalities and civil society. Since the 1999 municipal elections in Turkey and the major victory of the pro-Kurdish legal political parties in the municipalities of the Kurdish region and most importantly Diyarbakir metropolitan municipality, a victory subsequently repeated, municipalities have been unofficial administrative bodies of the Kurdish movement in the region (Watts 2010).

They provided an operational space for the Kurdish movement to implement their new political agenda of building a Kurdish 'democratic autonomy' in the Kurdish region based on principles of radical democracy (Akkaya and Jogerden 2012).

Diyarbakir has been in the centre of this urban turn in the Kurdish movement. The historical status that Diyarbakir has among the Kurds has made this city an important site of the struggle for self-determination. The Turkish state has been particularly keen to suppress and contain the Kurdish movement in this city. Much academic research, such as studies of the legal and institutional politics in the Kurdish movement (Watts 2010), spatial transformations and 'decolonisation' of urban spaces in Diyarbakir by the pro-Kurdish municipality (Gambetti 2009) and transformations in Kurdish political subjectivity (Özsoy 2010), has shown the significance of the urban turn in Kurdish politics and the role the city has played in Kurdistan in the last two decades. The events of 2015 and the process afterward directly targeted this turn.

In a promising attempt to find an end to the conflict, in the spring of 2013 negotiations between the Turkish government and the PKK's leader Öcalan started. It was short-lived, with an ultimate violent end in 2015. In general elections in June 2015, the left-wing pro-Kurdish People's Democracy Party, HDP, made a historic win by securing 13% of votes and for the first time passing the 10% threshold. The AKP lost its majority government after over a decade. Furious at the Kurdish political movement, the Turkish government under the AKP's rule conducted a country-wide campaign of arrest and repression, and the state violence against Kurdish politicians, activists and civil society reached an unprecedented level. In the summer of 2015, Kurdish youth militants started a campaign of establishing autonomous neighbourhoods and districts in different cities of Kurdistan against violent and continuous attacks by the Turkish security forces against their neighbourhoods and spaces of organising. This move was later called *Berxwedana Xweserî* or 'self-rule resistance'. In Diyarbakir, six neighbourhoods of the eastern part of Sur (Cemal Yılmaz, Cevatpaşa, Dabanoglu, Fatihpaşa, Hasırlı and Savaş neighbourhoods) took part in this resistance. Soon after, round-the-clock curfews were declared against these urban pockets of resistance, and Turkish security forces started a full-range attack against them. The military takeover in Kurdistan was completed by the spring of 2016. After the failed coup of 15 July 2016, the crackdown against the Kurdish movement began in urban, legal and civil society spheres. Hundreds of Kurdish politicians, including mayors, city council members, members of parliament and members of pro-Kurdish political parties, were arrested. Eighty-three pro-Kurdish municipalities (including Diyarbakir) were occupied by government-appointed trustees (Kayyums) and hundreds of non-governmental organisations, collaborative initiatives between municipalities and civil society, and Kurdish media outlets were shut down. In a matter of a few weeks, what Kurds had achieved in urban spaces since 1999 was taken away.

## **Remnants of an unjust past: mulberry trees of Diyarbakir**

There are many stories of violent destruction to be told about Diyarbakir, histories of destruction and genocide that left their own remnants. These remnants from earlier genocidal politics cannot be separated from the current rubble of Sur. As of March

2017, those parts of Sur where 'self-rule resistance' took place continued to be under curfew despite the fact that only bare ground was left behind. Satellite images from Google Maps and a very few blurry photos of the city from above taken by passengers on planes on their way in or out of Diyarbakir airport have been the only sources showing the level of destruction in Sur. Except for a few historical buildings, the rest of the eastern residential part of Sur was completely destroyed. In many cases, even historical ruins of Sur were destroyed and re-ruined. Sur is surrounded by astonishing walls, commonly called Diyarbakir fortress, most of which have survived destructions and remain intact. These walls, with the ancient farms beside its eastern fronts on the banks of the Tigris river (called Hevsel Gardens), were inscribed on UNESCO's World Heritage List in the summer of 2015. Içkale is the inner part of Sur that is separated from the rest by another wall. It is where old governmental and administration buildings, historical structures, and Diyarbakir's former notorious prison where Sheikh Said, the leader of the first Kurdish rebellion after the foundation of the Turkish Republic, was held before being executed in 1925 in Dağ Kapı Square (also known as Sheikh Said Square) of Diyarbakir. Outside the administration quarter of Içkale is where the centuries-old Hz. Suleyman Mosque is located. The urban renewal plan started from this part of Sur in a project called the 'Urban Design and Landscape Project in Içkale Valley', developed by the Ministry of Environment and Urban Development. This ministry is the official body in charge of renovating Sur. When I first visited Diyarbakir in 2013, an entire neighbourhood surrounded this mosque, but that has now disappeared. It is right now buried under green spaces of a modern-design recreational park. Along with building this park, some structures inside the government quarter were renovated and turned into buildings for the Diyarbakir archaeology museum and other touristic attractions.

In the spring of 2017, the government opened Içkale to the public. I visited this area a few days after the opening. The entrance to Içkale was through police checkpoints and under the gaze of security forces guarding from the walls. Visitors had overcrowded the area, and most of the people were trying to climb the fortress to see the destruction inside Sur on the other side of the walls separating the rest of Sur from Içkale. The eastern part of Sur visible on top of the walls was the area where curfew was in place. I followed the crowd and went on top of the fortress. The Tigris river and gardens on its banks were at the foot of the external side of the walls. Inside, all I could see was open ground with some dispersed damaged structures and buildings, among them the historical Kurşunlu Mosque, and some trees. People on top of the wall were all looking at the open field, and you could hear sighing and muttering. A few piles of rubble remaining from the demolition of houses were still visible in corners. I noticed an old man sitting on the edge of the wall faced toward the levelled ground and his back to the newly built park. He was still and quiet, with a Tasbih (Muslim prayer beads) in his left hand woven between his fingers. I told myself he must be an old resident of Sur, and he might have something to tell me about what he was looking at. I quietly sat beside him and offered him a cigarette; he accepted. We shared a few moments of silence until he pointed his finger to a tree with newly opened green leaves on its top branches. 'My house was right there. This is either our tree or my neighbour's', he said. I asked some questions about him and his house, but his look was only toward that tree. 'What kind of tree is it?' I asked. He quietly responded 'mulberry', and continued 'in a few weeks, it is going to fruit. It used to give at least five kilos of mulberry. My daughter-in-law used to make mulberry jam from them'. He told me he has been



**Figure 1** The old man showing me his mulberry tree in distance overlooking demolished Sur. Source: Photo by author

eagerly waiting to see what happened to his house after they left, and since the opening of Içkale, every morning he comes to where he was sitting and looks at his tree. He said he only wished to have a home around it again (see Figure 1).

A week after this encounter, the government blocked access to the wall with more fences and security forces after the great interest from visitors coming to Içkale to just go on top of the walls and look at the other side. The old man's mulberry tree was not far away from where we were sitting, but it was beyond his reach, most likely forever. His story of such a profound loss displayed the trauma in the city that was submerged under exceptional circumstances of the state of emergency. Borrowing Cathy Caruth's words, it was in every definition an 'unclaimed experience' that exhibited itself in each encounter between place, time and bodies, all implicated in a long-standing conflict (Caruth 1996). That mulberry tree could in fact be a window to a troubling past that perhaps even the old man was not aware of; a past that was forcefully erased from the memory of the city, and the few remnants of it were vanishing.

The mulberry season in Diyarbakir starts in May. Walking down toward the old city on Gazi Street from Dağ Kapı Square, it is possible to pass many vendors sitting under the shadow of mulberry trees and selling mulberries in different colours on their trays. Mulberry trees are plentiful in this city. It is (or was) one natural element of the backyards of many old houses in the old city. Around the city's central parts, you can find sidewalks covered with sticky and brownish spots from the sweet juice of mulberries fallen from trees along the way. After meeting that old man from Sur, I was trying to learn about the story behind the many mulberry trees in the city, and quite a few times in small conversations with shopkeepers I asked 'Why are there mulberry trees in front of your store?' No one had a clear answer. Later I found out the impressive yet

tragic history behind them. Mulberry trees tell the story of a disturbed past of a city that is condemned to forget. Leaves of mulberry trees are crucial for breeding silkworms, and Diyarbakir was an important centre of raw silk production on the Silk Road. For centuries, silk production was a traditional craft primarily mastered by skilled Armenian and Assyrian residents of the city. In the last decades before the disintegration of the Ottoman Empire and especially in 1915, Diyarbakir was one of those places where the genocide of Armenians and Assyrians took place (Şengül 2014). Today, except for a few families, they no longer exist in Diyarbakir and neither does silk production in its traditional form.<sup>6</sup> Yet, mulberry trees continue to fruit all around the city.

After the takeover of Diyarbakir, the AKP government decided to raze Sur completely and reconstruct another one instead of restoring damaged houses and structures in Sur based on their traditional layout. The AKP had all the legal, extra-legal, financial and logistical support it needed, and the state of emergency after the failed coup of 15 July was the best cover it could find to suppress any form of protest against its plan. In Diyarbakir, the AKP's appointed trustee in the municipality started to remove any symbolic and cultural presence of the Kurdish identity in the city that remained from the pro-Kurdish municipality and affirmed the Turkish state's intent to implement its long-desired Islamisation and Turkification of Diyarbakir and Sur. The new Sur was far away from actualisation; however, billboards were installed all around the city advertising it. '*Sur için bismillah*'<sup>7</sup> (for Sur, in the name of God) was written on one of these billboards featuring the AKP's then prime minister Binali Yıldırım, with the background of a graphic visual of what the new Sur would look like. Promotion videos for Sur's urban transformation project were frequently played on major mainstream Turkish TV channels during prime hours. Computer-simulated images of the future Sur included mosques, authentic-looking mansions and houses, parks, cobblestone paved roads, water fountains, families walking around and children playing. Live programmes, interviews with different government personnel, and live broadcasted debates on TV channels were all praising this new project. Sur was a national topic in Turkey.

Despite the AKP government's efforts to turn Sur into an example of its care and benevolence for the Kurdish region, the mood in the city was of despair, disappointment, fury and anger. Almost everyone I talked to was in one way or another involved in a legal case. Thousands of cases were opened against individuals by the government because of their support for the Kurdish movement. Meanwhile, after issuing the expropriation order of Sur in March 2016, a group of lawyers and civil society organisations formed a platform in Diyarbakir and opened a legal case against this order on behalf of 750 property owners of Sur at the administrative court (İdari Mahkemesi). The case was rejected, and the court requested each case to be opened individually, which the platform did. All individual cases were also rejected at the administrative court and later at the higher court, called the Turkish Council of State (Danıştay). At this point, these cases could go to the European Court of Human Rights, a process that would take years to be resolved. Meanwhile the government was implementing

<sup>6</sup> *Bismillah* is an Islamic prayer used by Muslims in the silk industry in Diyarbakir province.

the order, demolishing people's houses and displacing them; even if the legal battle

could win against the expropriation order, the effects of it would be irreversible. While this case was only against the expropriation order, the legal process by each family for their right to return to their homes and for fair compensation of their loss took place separately. It was where many displaced families struggled to navigate, a sphere that was foreign to them.

## From remnants to evidence and testaments

Hasan was not particularly familiar with how he could reclaim his family's rights within the Turkish legal system. Like some other displaced families from Sur, he was receiving a monthly rent allowance from the government until his case for the cadastral evaluation of his property in Sur was resolved. He was told that the initial value estimation of his property in Sur was 65,000 Turkish Liras (from now after TL).<sup>8</sup> The government provided four options to all the displaced property owners in Sur. First, to be compensated with the monetary value of their property. Second, to use their compensation to make a down payment on an apartment in one of the housing complexes being built by TOKI (the government's housing development agency) anywhere in Turkey and be assessed for some mortgage assistance to pay off the price difference for the rest. In February 2017, the value of newly built TOKI housing units in Diyarbakir could be anywhere between 120,000 to 300,000 TL and even more based on square metres, location and other factors. Third, to wait for the urban renewal project in Sur to finish and apply for one of the newly built houses. In this case, they can make a down payment with their compensation and again receive some mortgage assistance to pay for the rest. He was told that the value of the new housing units would be between 400,000 and 600,000 TL, eight to ten times higher than what they would receive for their property. Certainly, none of the displaced families I met would ever be able to pay for such housing, but even if they could afford it, they would clearly become indebted forever after their displacement. And the fourth option was to build their own house in Sur according to the urban renewal plan (their property's location and square metres must match the plan) and pay for it themselves, but they would receive government-subsidised construction materials equal to the value of their old property. In this case, the cost of construction would also be many times higher than what displaced families could afford. Hasan's property in Sur was only 90 square metres and its ownership was shared with much complications. He first had to provide evidence of his part in the ownership of the property, and the curfew and demolitions had made the work of determining his share with the land registration office very difficult. He was told at the ministry that a park was going to be built in place of their property in the proposed plan, so the third and fourth options were not open to him. He told me he would reject the other two options after finalising the estimation process. He was given a letter of accepting the first option beforehand and was asked to sign it, but he refused to do it. He was also offered 3,000 TL for his lost or damaged furniture, which he rejected as well. He believed that their value was much higher than that.

After rejection, the legal process for appeal starts, about which he had no knowledge. He had heard about other families going to lawyers, but he did not know how to proceed. He just knew that he should take pictures of everything he had lost and keep

<sup>8</sup> One Turkish Lira equalled 0.27 US Dollars in February 2017.

them as evidence for the time documentation is needed for his case. He heard about stories of displaced people from the 1990s who went through a similar process for compensation. Evidence of what they had lost had made a huge difference in their legal cases for compensation. Hasan had gone further and kept every damaged household item he could take from their house in Sur.

It was not just Hasan and displaced families who were confused. Even many lawyers I met were not sure about the process, especially during the state of emergency. There were different sides to the legal process that were incommensurable. In terms of individual cases, the legal process was quite ambiguous. The provincial government was in contact with the displaced families of Sur from the areas where urban clashes happened. According to a press release from the Turkish Ministry of Interior,<sup>9</sup> 68% of families had accepted compensation for their damaged and destroyed furniture. This press release was a response to a report published by Amnesty International, mentioned above, and it gave a great deal of data to prove the government's care for the displaced families of Sur. According to this press release, the legal base for these compensations was based on an additional article to 'the Law No. 5233 on the Compensation of Damages that Occurred due to Terror and the Fight against Terror'. The Law No. 5233 was passed in 2004 to compensate citizens who had suffered material damages because of the war in Kurdistan between the Turkish army and the PKK in the 1990s, as a response to thousands of cases opened against the Turkish state in the European Court of Human Rights. More than 400,000 cases were opened under this law, and more than a half were accepted for compensation. However, no application was accepted under this law after 2008 (see Biner 2013). This law and its effects in the region is another story that is beyond the scope of this paper.

In the legal battles over the rubble of Sur, only property owners were eligible for compensation and thousands of residents in rental properties were excluded from this process. Those who were tenants in the rental properties damaged by the clashes could only claim for their damaged furniture and assets. For many, Sur was the refuge that they took after their initial displacement from their villages in the 1990s. It is important to note that many families in Sur live in extremely poor housing that usually is shared with other families. Many private properties are very small. Over the years and after the influx of internally displaced Kurdish villagers to Diyarbakir, extra rooms were added to poorly constructed houses to provide shelter for more people. Rent was much lower than other places in Diyarbakir, water bills were also quite low and electricity was *Kaçak* (illegal). Most often, families would prepare and share food together, and survival was a collective endeavour. Indeed, fundamentally what displacement did and continues to do to the residents of Sur is deprive them of their centres of survival and sociality.

One of the families I met that was more familiar with the legal process was Ramazan's family. Ramazan, an active textile business owner, was a man in his 60s. For generations, Ramazan's family had been through different stages of migration and displacement. In the aftermath of the First World War and disintegration of the Ottoman Empire, his grandfather's family migrated from Heseke in the Kurdish region of Syria to the rural areas of Mardin, a city located south of Diyarbakir. They started a farm and resettled there for decades. In the early 1990s, their village was among many others that

<sup>9</sup> See the press release (in Turkish): <https://www.icisleri.gov.tr/uluslararasi-af-orgutunun-raporuna-iliskin-basin-aciklamasi> (accessed 6 July 2018).

was evacuated and burnt, and Ramazan's family was forcefully removed from the village. Like many thousands of displaced families, they decided to move to Diyarbakir. Ramazan soon managed to get back on his feet and started a textile business. He bought some properties in Sur and settled there for good. Compared with many people in their neighbourhood, his family was considered wealthy. Yet, after the urban clashes started, they had to leave their house and everything in it behind.

Ramazan had gone through a legal case to seek justice after the family's displacement from their village in Mardin. His case was brought under Law No. 5233 for compensation. He was very disappointed by the process and the results of the compensation, not only in terms of the amount they received but also because this law ignored any form of reconciliation with those who had suffered state violence. This law also blamed all that happened in the 1990s on the 'terrorist activities' of the PKK, and applicants had to sign an agreement with the government accepting this claim in order to receive their compensation. Like many others I interviewed, Ramazan was not comfortable talking about the compensation because of the humiliation it brought to him. He told me that he had no other choice because they needed that money, even though it was nothing compared with what they had lost. The wound for him, and many others, was still open, and compensation never intended to heal that or restore justice. As Biner asserts, this law 'did not transform relationships between the state and Kurdish citizens'. Rather, it was used by the state 'to re-establish its rule in the region and to refashion its credibility and legitimacy under the scrutiny of transnational organizations, such as the EU and the European Court of Human Rights' (2013: 86–7).

I often visited Ramazan and his family in their newly rented apartment while I was in Diyarbakir. One night I was invited for dinner at Ramazan's house. After dinner, Ramazan asked his grandson, Welat, to show me their house on TV. I thought they have a video recording of their house, but I was mistaken. Welat quickly took the remote control of the TV in his hand, connected the TV to internet and went on a Russian-based website called Yandex (a research engine similar to Google) that has a map webpage with street view images. The street view images that it had from Diyarbakir were old, and one could browse through them and go inside some of the streets and alleys of Sur accessible by vehicles before they were razed. Soon, Welat paused on an image from the exterior side of a two-storey house and told me this was their house. Ramazan started telling me all about his house and how big it was, his neighbourhood, the small shop beside their house and its owner, the random people in their alley in that image, and the history of a mosque whose minarets could be seen by the end of their alley. While Welat was moving around the images, one of the windows of their house appeared. Ramazan's wife Hatice asked him to stop there. There was a small blue bin in front of the window secured to the fence. Hatice sighed and said 'this is the window of my kitchen and the blue bin is my garbage bin'. On saying that, she quickly went outside of the living room and came back with the same blue bin in her hands. 'I still have it', she said and her composure crumbled. After a few seconds of silence in the room, Ramazan noted that they had taken many screen shots from these images in case they are removed from the website.

Ramazan was always carrying a dossier of maps, aerial images of their property in Sur and other documents related to the government's new urban renewal project. He was also offered the four options, which he rejected all together. 'Let them build whatever they want. I will seek justice somewhere else even if it takes twenty years', he remarked. Ramazan had also rejected the government's compensation offer for their damaged furniture, and he was even refusing to get monthly rent allowance. Because

of his experience with the Law No. 5233, he was more alert about the legal challenges and complexities ahead, and he wanted to take his battle all the way to the European Court of Human Rights. ‘I will wait. One way or another, I will have my house back. I will turn it into a boutique hotel with a small café for visitors, and I will tell my story to everyone passing by my house. I will not die until I see that day’.

## Conclusion

For the urban displaced people in Diyarbakir, landscapes of temporality are shaped under the influence of the state’s spatial configuration politics where citizens are subjected to forced migration. In Diyarbakir, ‘person-object’ (Kidron 2009) relationships between the displaced people and the remnants of destruction in Sur produce bonds and meanings that move beyond rubble. These remnants have an afterlife that tells a history of violence inscribed on the cityscape of Sur. For those displaced from Sur, these leftovers are also testaments to their suffering. The meanings the displaced people associate with them are connected to their everyday waiting for a change and for the time when justice may be served. Experiences of waiting in Kurdistan have been conditioned by a history of annihilation and assimilation politics against the Kurds and ceaseless insurgencies. A peaceful resolution for the Kurdish question and more prosperous living conditions have been long-hoped for in Diyarbakir. Yet, after decades of conflict, the Turkish state more than ever makes every effort to maintain its sovereignty in the Kurdish region. This spatially has meant more destruction. As Azoulay remarks in her study of the demolishing of Palestinian houses by Israeli occupation forces, ‘by means of the architecture of destruction, the sovereign strives to finalize the lack of structural agreement between it and the governed’ (2013: 209).

It was impossible for anyone living in Diyarbakir to avoid the billboards all around the city advertising the urban renewal project in Sur. For the displaced people, these were constant reminders of their traumatic present and a future that was going to be built on their destroyed houses. The set of meanings the displaced people of Sur established in their new displaced lives is in relational link to the remains of their household items, pictures of their placed times, collective memories of daily life in their old neighbourhoods, unfamiliar cadastral maps of the very familiar places of their livelihood, web-based street view images that can be removed anytime, legal papers they may or may not understand, and even a mulberry tree that would tell a life history. These are more than evidence of compensable belongings. They fill their ‘constant and immediate present’ (Bandak and Janeja 2018: 7) and make hours and days of unbearable waiting more tolerable. The hope is that one day justice will be served, even though the prospect of the future is dreadful. I heard many times from different people in Diyarbakir that ‘*daha kotusu gelecek!*’ – ‘the worst is yet to come!’ ‘The worst is yet to come’ has become the remedy for the misery of the present in which being does not belong to one’s own space and time.

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## En attente de justice au milieu des vestiges : développement urbain, déplacement et résis- tance à Diyarbakir

Cet article examine la vie des personnes déplacées et leurs liens concrets avec le passé, alors qu'elles attendent la justice dans des circonstances exceptionnelles à Diyarbakir (au Kurdistan, Turquie). Diyarbakir est connue pour sa position centrale dans le conflit kurde en Turquie depuis plusieurs décennies. En août 2015, le quartier historique de Diyarbakir (connu sous le nom de Sur) a rejoint d'autres villes et quartiers en résistance dans la région kurde de Turquie, où les militants kurdes ont construit des barricades tout autour de leurs quartiers contrôlés. Ayant créé ces barrières contre les attaques violentes de l'État, ils ont déclaré leur autonomie. Plusieurs mois après le début de la résistance, l'État turc a réussi à reprendre le contrôle de Sur après de violents affrontements entre les forces de sécurité turques et les militants kurdes. Tous les quartiers résistants de Sur ont été rasés et près de 24 000 habitants ont été déplacés. Depuis lors, un projet massif de transformation urbaine de Sur est en cours d'élaboration. La survie quotidienne des déplacés de Sur dépend de la manière dont ils négocient avec l'État au cours d'un long processus d'attente. En rassemblant différents récits d'attente, je mets en lumière dans cet essai les dimensions temporelles du déplacement forcé. Celles qui sont ancrées dans les vestiges du passé et façonnées par l'histoire actuelle de l'assujettissement et de la violence d'État.

**Mots-clés** attente, déplacement, développement urbain, décombres, Kurdes