

VIRTU'NUN KARNINDA (In Virtù's Belly)

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8:40 mn

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During my childhood, I used to throw stones against the Turkish military's armored vehicles guarding every street corner in the Northern part of Kurdistan where I was born, the part offered to Turkey out of the four pieces in which Kurdistan had been divided. My mother would grab my arm and scold me. *"Do you really think your little stones will break those enormous vehicles? They are powerful vehicles. They come from Europe, from Germany. German products are of very good quality, nothing will happen to them..."*

For a long time, because of these words, I looked on my mother as someone who gave up. I became angry with her and underestimated her. A few years later, still a child, I was arrested and taken into custody during Newroz – the Kurdish Spring Festival - because I had thrown stones and carried a Kurdish flag. In my cell I thought a lot about my mother's words. Why could she – a person who never hesitated to stand up with great courage, how could she speak on this topic like someone who gives up? Was my mother possibly attempting to tell me something else?

This questioning did not leave me for years. Then I thought that my mother was no doubt trying, in her own way, to show me there were other means of action against a totalitarianism against which she also experienced hatred. If my mother was right, what then were those means?

In fact, my mother was right. Indeed, I could not break down these vehicles with the tiny stones in my hands. But, at the same time, I was not wrong because, even though it was impossible to break them, the mechanism at work showed my intent. In this questioning of the conflict between us, where two truths were in confrontation, there was something in which my mother was absolutely right. They were solid. These vehicles came from Europe, from the continent of Machiavel, the father of State violence. Despite the centuries that have gone by since Machiavel expressed his thoughts, the State model for powerful leadership he drew up has not disappeared. It has evolved.

The leaders of Machiavel's virtù are now those who reign under the name of democratic State. Nowadays, they do not wage war with their own hands, but do so at a distance, through colonialist policies, leading humans to kill their own humanity. If Machiavel were still alive, I think he would be proud to see this. Because he would see that leaders of virtù, virtuous and powerful, have for a long time already offered a model of democratic life in their own country, while sending their armored vehicles to the Middle-East, and stoking the interior conflicts there, feeding off their blood.

In light of this militarized world where all human beings are considered to be potential soldiers, in the name of the perennity of supreme States, I can't seem to forget my mother's words.

Solidly shielded, profusely armed, in its cold and indestructible shell, is not the armored vehicle the quintessence representation of a militarized world?

This militarist, machist and violent world enfolds every human on earth. With or without our approval, we are all inside this world.

Against my own will, I am in it also. In attempting to enter the mechanism, I must admit that I am in it already.

If I can't break it, destroy this frightening mountain of iron from the outside, why not attempt doing so from the inside? Instead of stubbornly facing off, I can act from within its belly. In this interior it cannot look into,

might I not knot the threads of my thoughts around all its inner workings and neutralize its mechanism?

And also knotting up elements outside the mechanism, might this not also put it in trouble? Knots of strength and resistance, might they not block the iron machine?

The machine will then have but two possibilities. To give up, become a cowardly ruin or, in an attempt to function despite everything, in a final surge of virtù, break into a thousand pieces that can never be brought together again. I think this is what my mother meant. And perhaps, this is the most difficult of all.

My mother also said: *"Don't be a fighter only physically but also use your head."*

"For Machiavel the question was: how to achieve a unified Italy? It is as a response to this question that violence was justified in its orientation and received its plausibility from this implicit argument: you cannot build a table without killing trees, you can't make an omelette without breaking eggs, you cannot make a republic without killing people."

The crisis of culture, Hannah Arendt.

Zehra Doğan

This performance took place in Southern Kurdistan, in Irak, one of the four parts of Kurdistan which was split and shared between Irak, Iran, Turkey and Syria by dominant States that met in Lausanne one hundred years ago.

The armored vehicle shown in the the video is one among the many such vehicles that killed thousands of Kurds under Saddam Hussein's regime.

The venue in which the performance was held is a former torture center, now a memorial: the Amna Suraka Museum. Under Saddam, Amna Suraka (Red Prison) served as headquarters for the Northern wing of Mukhabarat, Irak's secret intelligence organization. In the memory of the region's Kurdish population, it is also "the house of tortures".

Between 1986 and 1989, the Iraki State conducted Operation Anfal, a genocide against Kurds. Ordered by Saddam Hussein's Iraki regime, it was conducted by Ali Hassan al-Majid, with the aim of annihilating the Kurdish population. Anfal used bombings, terrestrial attacks, chemical and gas weapons, destructions of homes, massive deportations, executions, tortures...The massacre in Halabja with its 5 000 killed with chemical weapons is one of the most cruel phases in the Anfal which globally caused a minimum of 50 000 and perhaps up to 100 000 systematic and premeditated assassinations of Kurdish civilians, according to the report by Human Rights Watch.

This venue in which thousands of Kurds were arrested, tortured and assassinated was liberated in 1991 during the Desert Shield Operation, the first phase in the Gulf War, following attacks led by the Peshmergas.

Henceforth, Amna Suraka has the status of war museum and memorial.

Translation by Renée Lucie Bourges