



## Henasedayîn | Exhale

**Zehra Doğan**

**VIDEO on Vimeo**

7:00 min

**Camera:** Zehra Doğan

**Editing:** Refik Tekin, Naz Oke

**Venue:** Nusaybin

**Year:** 2016

**Translation:** Renée Lucie Bourges, Naz Oke, Daniel Fleury

Street and sky combine. Kurdistan Blues. One more beat and the breath of wind uncovers the barricade. Sky and concrete combine. Kurdistan Greys. A burst of gunfire and the barricade makes sense. These images were filmed by Zehra Doğan in 2016, in the town of Nusaybin under siege. By the journalist or the artist? These blue tarps stretched out and taking the wind served to protect the people from the snipers. Their life and their freedom depended on them.

Without the wind, one cannot see the barricade. Without the sound, one does not understand their existence. What are we seeing? A street, a blue curtain, in a peaceful Middle-Eastern town? The blue canvas in turn protects and conceals. It protects the spectator as well from a raw understanding of violence, just as it conceals the reality of war: this war against Kurdish towns that Western Turkey refused to see. Blue street, blue war. Empty street filled nonetheless with the sound of confrontations, as if the sounds were added on, unreal.

Am I really in that reality?

**Daniel Fleury**

\* \* \*

From December 14 2015 to March 2nd 2016, the Turkish army conducted military operations against Kurdish towns in Turkey.

According to the Amnesty International Report from 2015-2016 , in the course of these operations by Turkish armed forces in Kurdish towns, approximately 500 000 people were forced to flee for their lives, while 2 360 people - among them 368 civilians - were killed.

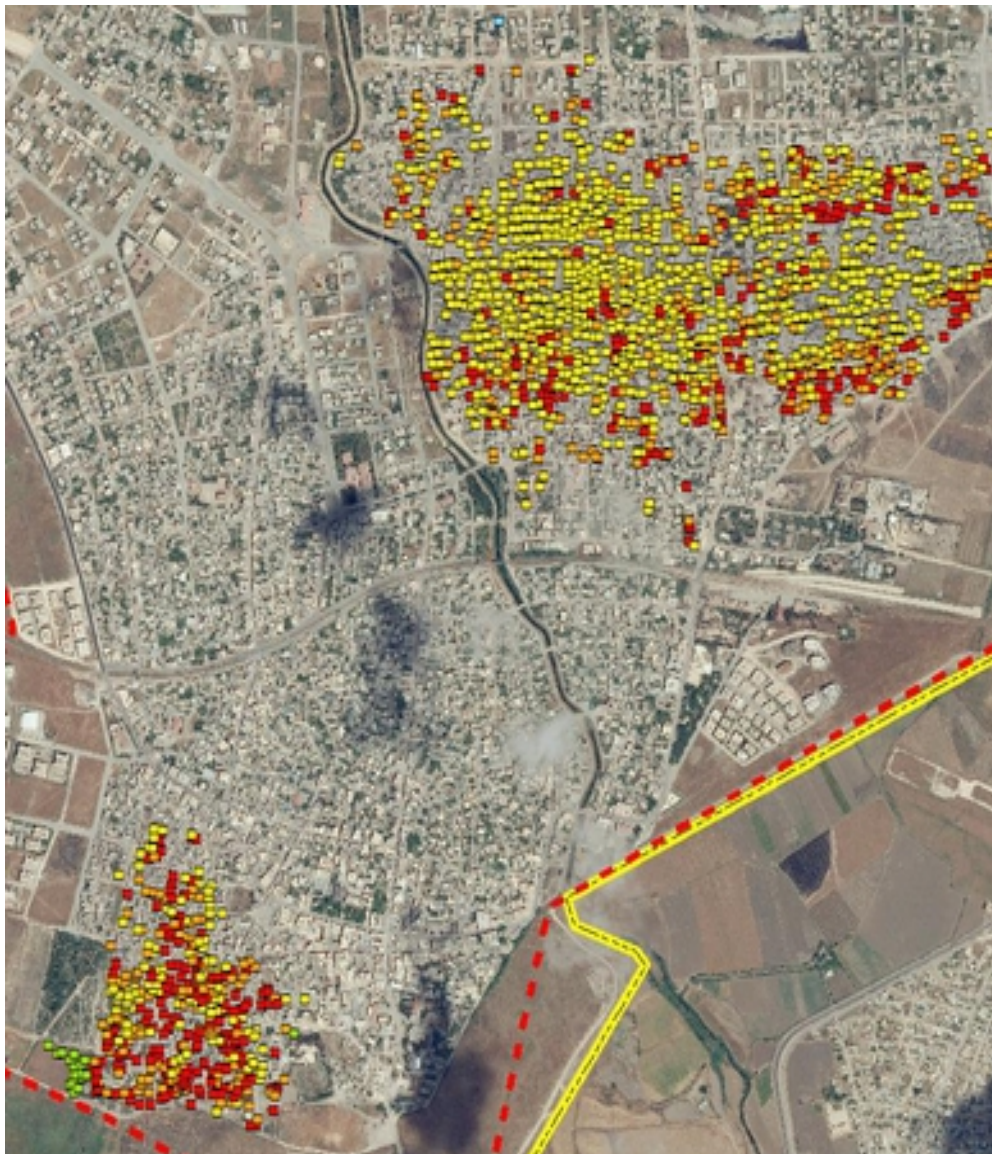
According to another sources, that of the United Nations High Commission for Human Rights the operations covered over 30 towns, districts and their surroundings, and between 355 000 and 500 000 were forced to flee.

Satellite images of the destroyed zones in Nusaybin, Mardin district, and of Sur, Diyarbakır's historical quarters, were published by the United Nations which raised alarms at the High Commission for Human Rights as these images showed that the homes had been destroyed by heavy weapons.



*Nusaybin, destructions.*

In Nusaybin, 1 786 homes and other buildings were destroyed or damaged.



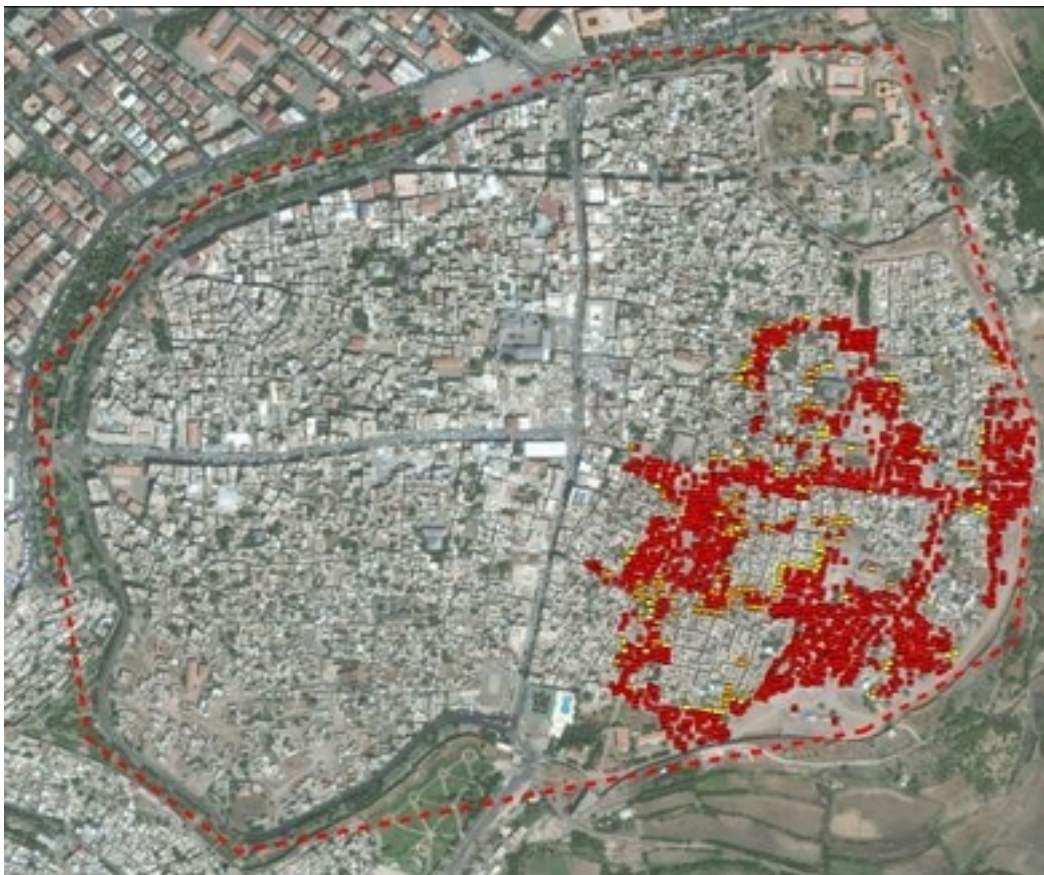
*Nusaybin (Mardin) 25 Mai, 2016. (Image [Report OHCHR](#))  
Red: destroyed. Orange :severe damage.  
Yellow: moderate damage. Green: impacts.*



In Sur, 70% of the buildings located in the eastern section of the neighborhood were destroyed by constant bombing with heavy weapons. The destruction of the area, no longer recognizable, continued well after the end of the operations, into August 2016.



*Sur, destructions.*



*Sur (Diyarbakır), 26 July, 2016 (Image [Report](#) OHCHR)*

*Red: destroyed. Orange :severe damage.*

*Yellow: moderate damage. Green: impacts.*

One cannot ignore the heavy toll in Cizre, Şırnak district. At the beginning of 2016, in Cizre, 189 were trapped in cellars, without water, electric power, treatment for their wounds and were burned to death. Searches conducted to establish identities were rendered difficult due to the destructions. Rather than opening a relevant inquest on these deaths perpetrated through the use of heavy weapons and the excessive use of force, the authorities accusing the victims and prosecuted their relatives. The Turkish Constitutional Court did not examine these cases.

## **Detailed look at the combat zones and the exactions committed by the Turkish army in 2015-2016**

**Diyarbakır districts:** Sur, Silvan, Lice, Hani, Hazro, Bismil, Dicle, Bağlar, Kayapınar, Yenişehir, Kocaköy. **Mardin districts:** Nusaybin, Dargeçit, Derik Şırnak merkez, Silopi, Cizre, İdil. **Muş district:** Varto. **Batman district:** Kozluk. **Elazığ district:** Arıcak. **Bitlis district:** Yukarıölek

### **Nusaybin**

The confrontations began in December 2015 and continued in various ways until June 2016. 70 identified persons died, including children and the elderly. More than 100 000 people were held under intensive bombing, deprived of electric power and of any trace of social life. 1 786 homes were destroyed, 42 000 people were affected. Thousands of others were forced to flee their living spaces.

State forces, committing war crimes even set themselves against lifeless bodies. Military personnel and policemen shared on social networks photos of hanging bodies, mutilated with knives, burn bodies or others thrown into the streets, naked, in order to terrorize populations. 70 represents the number of the dead who could be identified, but dozens of corpses were buried as "unknown".

### **Cizre**

The town was kept under curfew from September 14 2015 to March 3 2016. The population was subjected to very heavy bombing: *"as if the bombs were raining out of the sky"*.

Thousands of people were forced to abandon their homes. Most of them did not recover them after the war, a great number of homes had been destroyed, the others, ransacked and wrecked by the Turkish military. Truckloads of furniture and household appliances were even sent off to other Turkish regions.

According to State figures, 665 people, including children and elderly citizens, were killed during this period by Turkish armed forces.

The Turkish resistance mentions the loss of 61 members of the YPS, 193 civilians and 22 cadres.

A massacre was committed that qualifies as a "war crime": some 300 people, including civilians, children and Kurdish political figures took shelter in the basements of three buildings, in an attempt to protect themselves from the heavy confrontations. These people informed television stations, via their phones, that they were being bombed and would die if nothing was done to help them. Attempts to save them came from human rights organizations, politicians, and even a march of civilians towards Cizre, blocked by the forces of the Turkish State. These 300 people were attacked and 189 of them were burned alive in the basements where they had found refuge.

Here also the bodies of armed young people and those of unarmed civilians were killed in the street, tortured, mutilated. Women's bodies in particular were undressed and exhibited. Military personnel and policemen widely shared terrifying photos and videos of their acts on social networks, demonstrating the savagery of what was experienced in Cizre.

### **Diyarbakır, Sur neighborhood**

Diyarbakır's historical quarter was subjected to curfews on a number of occasion from September 5 2015 to March 15 2016. Official sources declared the end of operations on March 9 2016, but the curfews continued beyond that date.

Thousands of people were forced to leave their homes. 20 000 people lost their house. On a zone covering 75 hectares, 10 hectares were totally destroyed.

90 people lost their life. Here also, corpses were mutilated by the soldiers and the police forces.

During the same period in Bağlar, another neighborhood of Diyarbakır, 7 people were also killed.

Tags and graffiti left on the walls such as *"You will see the strength of the Turk"*, *"Even if our blood is shed the victory will be Islam's"*, *"Allah is all we need"*, drawings of three crescents and signatures from the "Esadullah Team" show that para-military structures similar to the Hizbullah and JITEM from the 90s were reactivated in the region during the sieges.es.

### **Bitlis**

During the curfew that began on December 19 2017 in the Yukarıölek neighborhood of Bitlis, the bodies of 282 PKK guerilla fighters were exhumed from the destroyed cemetery in Garzan. The fate of the remains were unknown until the declaration by the Governor of Bitlis on January 2 2018 who announced that the bodies had been transferred to Istanbul's Forensic Medecine Institute. Following insistent judicial requests from the families of the deceased, it came to light that a sidewalk along the road to the cemetery of Kilyos in Istanbul had been dug up, the corpses laid out in rows and that the sidewalk had then been covered with concrete. To this day, 261 of the bodies are still awaited by the families, only 21 assorted identified bones were turned over to the relatives. In April 2020 for example, Halime Aksoy, a mother living in Diyarbakır, received the bones of her son fallen in the mountain, sent to her by parcel post.

*"Dead people come with a curriculum vitae or résumé - several possible résumés depending on which aspect of their life is being considered. They lend themselves to analogy with other people's résumés. That is, they encourage identification with their life story, from several possible vantage points. Their complexity makes it fairly easy to discern different sets of emphasis, extract different stories, and thus rewrite history."*

**Katherine Verdery**

*The Political Lives of Dead Bodies: Reburial and Postsocialist Change.* Columbia University Press

## **İdil (Hezex)**

War began here in September 2015 and reached its paroxysm on February 16 2016. It ended on March 8 2016 after thousands of homes had been destroyed during the bombings. The population was forced to leave the area. The toll was of 53 persons killed, of which 4 were children.

## **Silopi**

The confrontations lasted from September 2015 to April 2016 and caused the death of 46 people.

## **Dargeçit (Kerboran)**

The confrontations lasted from December 19 to December 21 2015, causing 46 deaths.

## **Yüksekova (Gever)**

The confrontations lasted from July 24 2015 to April 20 2016 and caused 63 deaths.

## **Silvan (Farqin)**

The confrontations lasted from September 14 2015 to November 23 2015 and caused 10 deaths.

## **Şırnak**

The confrontations lasted from September 2015 to June 3 2016 and caused 51 deaths. Two neighborhoods were bombed, thousands of people were forced to leave their environment.

## **Bismil**

During a short period of confrontations beginning on October 6 2015, 4 young people were captured, detained and then executed by the police.

## **Varto**

The confrontations lasted from August 15 to 17 2015, and resulted in 4 deaths.

## **Van**

The confrontations began on August 2015 and resulted in 15 deaths.

## **Derik**

2 people were killed here.

## **Zehra Doğan**

*English translation: Renée Lucie Bourges*