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The Aesthetics of Extractivism: Violence, Ecology, and Sensibility in Turkey's Kurdistan

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Abstract: Focusing on dams and sand quarries, I discuss extractivism's racialised workings along the uppermost stretch of the Tigris river in Turkey's Kurdistan. In conversation with decolonial scholarship on "the Anthropocene", I theorise through aesthetics the symbolic, epistemic, and corporeal violence of reducing the value of human and nonhuman life and agency to that of an extractable resource. My contribution to this scholarship involves a twofold argument. First, extractivism is upheld not only by the *negation* (or rendering insensible) of humans and nonhumans, but also the *affirmation* (or rendering excessively sensible) thereof, insofar as the latter shares the former's racialised logic of valuing life and agency quantifiably. Second, the affirmations are not always straightforwardly territorialisable as they are often geographically entangled with the negations, particularly in times of crises that throw extractivist excesses into sharp relief. I conclude by thinking with activism to flesh out the counter-extractivist implications of my argument.

Keywords: Amed/Diyarbakır, construction, dams, rivers, sand, violence

Kurte: Li ser bendavan û kanên qûman sekinîm, ez qala operasyonên nîjadperestî yên ekstraktîvîzmê yên li beşa herî jorîn a Çemê Dîcleyê ya li Bakur dikim. Di diyaloga bi lîteratûra dekolonyalê a li ser "Antroposen" de, ez bi rêya estetîkê şîdeta sembolîk, epistemîk û laşî ya kêmkirina nirxê jiyan û çalaktiya mirovan û nemirovan, nirxa çavkaniyek ku were derxistin teorîze dikim. Beşdarbûna min a ji bo vê lîteratûrê du xalan radixe pêş çavan. Ya yekem, ekstraktîvîzm ne tenê bi şêweyê înkarkirina mirovan û nemirovan (ku wan bêhîs bike), bi erêkirina wan jî (ku zêdetirîn bihîs bike) tê doman. Erêkirin û înkarkirin dikarin bên hevberkirin, bi şertê ku ew her du jî bi çendahî û bazirganîyê jiyan û çalaktiyê dinirxînin. Ya duyemîn, zehmet e ku meriv erêkirinan ji înkarkirinan veqetîne, ji ber ku her du jî li ser heman cihwaran û bi heman materyalê dixebitin, nemaze di demên krîzê de ku zêdehiyên ekstraktîvîzmê eşkere dibin. Di dawiyê de, bi rêya aktîvîzmê, ez li ser encamên îdîaya xwe ya dij-ekstraktîvîzmê difikirim.

Peyvên sereke: Amed/Dîyarbakir, avahî, bendavan, çeman, qûm, şîdet

Introduction

In June 2019, German state-owned broadcaster DW published a video news segment in Turkish titled "Swallow Sensibility" (Figure 1)—sensibility to the needs of the bird swallow.[1] It featured the owner of a sand-quarry-cum-concrete-plant on the banks of the Tigris river within the district of Bismil in Turkey's largest predominantly Kurdish-inhabited province Diyarbakır. The video's caption read:

Figure 1: Screengrab of the news segment "Swallow Sensibility" (reproduced by permission of Deutsche Welle Türkçe) [Colour figure can be viewed at wile yonlinelibrary.com]

> They did not remove birds' nests *despite losing 100,000 lira a month*. All work came to a halt at this concrete plant when swallows nested in the *5,000 tons of* sand stored there. Rather than remove the nests, the owner hired new equipment to quarry sand from scratch as well as buying sand from elsewhere. (Bozarslan 2019, emphasis added)

The story spread across Turkish media of various political persuasions, including state-owned or pro-government outlets otherwise critical of Turkey's recent coverage by international broadcasters like DW (AA 2019; Kaplan 2019; Orkçu 2019). A major pro-government newspaper titled it "Humanity in Action" (Kaçar 2019). The story incited much commentary online, where the tendency was to interpret the quarry owner's "humanity" or "sensibility" as characteristic of "the Kurds" or "the people of Diyarbakır" and their "chivalry" and "nobility" (Ekşi Sözlük 2019). Some articulated this interpretation in greater detail than others:

> If we could all be as decent as the Kurds, then this country wouldn't be in this condition. If you were abandoned on the street and knocked on people's doors to seek shelter, in much of the country from the Black Sea to Central Anatolia all you'd receive is a good beating. But, in the east and southeast, people will open their homes to you. That is, except the PKK [Partiya Karkerên Kurdistan or Kurdistan Workers' Party, the guerrilla organisation fighting state forces since the mid-1980s], … the imperialist pawn seeking to destroy the country. The PKK is a No.1 terrorist organisation that needs elimination. And eliminate them we shall; we'll soon drop bombs over your heads! (Ekşi Sözlük 2019)

The "swallow sensibility" story, where events at an industrial quarry become a reason to celebrate a people for their benevolence and simultaneously call for war against an organisation fighting in their name, introduces an underexplored aspect of contemporary extractivism I discuss in this article. Recent critical scholarship approaches extractivism as a racialised reduction of the worth of particular lands and peoples to that of a mineable and marketable resource (Childs 2020; Gómez-Barris 2017; Malm 2017; Rosa and Díaz 2020; Yusoff 2018a, 2018b; Yusoff et al. 2012). The violence of this reduction involves not only a corporeal

register—extraction proper (i.e. the mining of labour and materials)—but also an epistemic and symbolic one—the production and dissemination of knowledges and meanings that facilitate and legitimise the reduction of lands and peoples to an extractable resource (Barry 2013). Such knowledges and meanings include the type that engages or forecloses sensibilities and the senses (Boal 1996; Childs 2020; Erickson 2020; Gómez-Barris 2017; Guyot 2011; Li 2013:32–33; Linke 2014; Yusoff 2018a, 2018b) and that I unpack here through the theoretical lens of aesthetics. In engaging aesthetics to theorise ways of doing politics through sensibilities and the senses, my methodology is broadly—but, as the article will clarify, not exclusively—Rancièrian and thus follows the growing number of geographers who have engaged his theory over the past decade and a half (e.g. Dixon 2009; Ingram 2016; Tolia-Kelly 2019), and particularly those who have done so beyond its initial arts-related basis (e.g. Dikeç 2013; Ruez 2013).

In relevant scholarship, what I call the aesthetics of extractivism figures primarily as a *negational* force. Extractivism *negates*—or renders insensible—the life and agency of certain humans and their lands, and in so doing normalises the exploitation of their labour and resources or, more fundamentally, Eurocentric theories of aesthetics and their notions of humanity and sensibility are themselves based on the *negation* of that which is "inhuman", "non-human" and/or "insentient" (Hall 2011; Hawkins and Straughan 2015; Rosa and Díaz 2020; Yusoff 2018a, 2018b; Yusoff et al. 2012). I contribute to this scholarship by attending to the flip side of what scholars have amply problematised—to the *affirmative* aesthetics of extractivism that accompanies the negational. The "swallow sensibility" story foreshadows what this might entail. The sand quarry owner's portrayal as the epitome of "humanity" and of animal-friendly "sensibility" involves less a negation of agency than an excessive affirmation thereof. That this excessiveness is *measured quantifiably* against the market value of the sand pile in which the birds had nested (100,000 lira a month, then equivalent to US$17,200) or its sheer weight (5000 tons) bears extractivism's imprint. The attribution of this unrivalled sensibility to "the Kurds" or "the people of Diyarbakır" sweepingly burdens the inhabitants of a geography affected by extractivism with the obligation to mitigate its consequences, meanwhile obscuring those who are culpable and duty-bound. Finally, references to the PKK show how the spectre of war haunts even the most generous praise of Kurds' humanity and sensibility, demarcating which sorts of Kurdishness are praiseworthy. Violence, then, is central to extractivism's aesthetics not only where agency is negated but also where it is inflated.

There are context-specific reasons for attending to the affirmative aesthetics of extractivism. The empirical context I explore, contemporary Diyarbakır—or, in Kurdish, Amed—is the unofficial capital of Turkey's Kurdistan, the northern part of a stateless nation that colonialism has first split through post-World-War-I borders and then maintained as such through the policies of individual nation-states.[2] Since the 1980s, when a violent military coup instituted neoliberalism in Turkey, Kurdistan has seen both armed conflict and extractivist enterprise intensify, especially but not exclusively along the Tigris and Euphrates rivers. In the early 1980s, the junta pursued a violent Turkification policy in Kurdistan through prison torture and a Kurdish language ban (Zeydanlioglu 2009). It also pushed through the

Southeastern Anatolia Project comprising mega water infrastructures in the upper Tigris and Euphrates (Harris 2002). The ostensibly pro-democracy cabinet that succeeded the junta, headed by its deputy prime minister, declared a region-wide emergency rule in 1987 that remained in effect until 2002, and that made the 1990s a decade of village evacuations, extrajudicial killings, and forced disappearances in northern Kurdistan (Jongerden 2007:85–86, 138–146).[3] This spatiotemporal context informs my own research on contemporary Amed's riverbanks along the uppermost stretch of the Tigris.

The "contemporary" context I explore stretches between the late 2000s and late 2010s. In the late 2000s, the riparian impact of the first two major Tigris dams—built upstream of central Amed—became apparent, prompting restorative efforts including a project to transform the city's riverbank into a recreational landscape. Concurrently, a construction boom began that eventually doubled the city's urban area. Then, in the late 2010s, Amed witnessed profound changes in precipitation patterns, the failure of one of the dams upstream, and a recession in the construction sector. The period between the late 2000s and late 2010s is also significant because it began with the government's attempt to address the Kurdish question by granting certain cultural rights alongside conducting peace talks with the PKK, but it ended with a fresh episode of full-blown war in urban centres and a clampdown on the pro-Kurdish political movement. My empirical context therefore saw neoliberal promises of peace and prosperity—bolstered by the construction sector and energy infrastructures like dams—come to fail not only gradually within a decade but also increasingly spectacularly; war arrived in city centres, building activity stalled, a dam burst open, and untimely downpours became frequent.

I consider this context the epitome of a world where neoliberalism's failures are becoming increasingly conspicuous, while also approaching it in the way that recent decolonial scholarship has approached the Anthropocene, situating the late liberal/capitalist politics of ecology within a long and ongoing history of colonialism and its racialised violence (Baldwin and Erickson 2020; Dillon and Sze 2016; Eichen 2020; Luke 2020; Vasudevan 2019; Yusoff 2018a). Anti-Kurdish racism in contemporary Turkey is the subject of a growing literature (Bilici 2017; Ergin 2014; Ünlü 2018), including analyses that focus on cities (Saraçoğlu 2010; Yarkın 2020). I contribute to this literature by approaching not only cities but the Earth itself as the medium through which racialised and "entangled processes of settler colonialism, empire, and … capitalism" unfold (Heynen and Ybarra 2021:21). I unpack how the racialisation of Kurdishness in Turkey functions geographically— through materialities extracted from the Earth and made to travel across various spatial scales, including spaces of representation. My empirical focus is on two materialities: water and sand. I consider them interlinked due to the rise in sand mining that followed the damming of the upper Tigris, fed Amed's construction boom, and constituted the more recent and less overtly violent reverberations of the 1980s and 1990s racialised violence in northern Kurdistan. I argue that what I term the "affirmative" aesthetics of extractivism becomes particularly influential in times of crisis that throw extractivist excesses into sharp relief. That these excesses are deprived of profitability or concealability while remaining fully palpable lends

them to popular media representations (both print and online, and often across party-political lines) of ecological sensibility where they serve as material and visual evidence for the agency and vitality of landforms like the Tigris and peoples like the Kurds. While not as overtly destructive as its negational counterpart, this affirmation nevertheless perpetuates the latter insofar as it values life and agency in quantifiably measurable terms and obscures the political (i.e. racialised and racialising) specificity of extractivism's causes and effects by characterising those whose labour and resources are extracted as excessively resilient. I conclude by fleshing out the counter-extractivist implications of my argument.

My insights derive from a mix of methods: ethnography, textual analysis, and notes from conversations with activists and/or artists, especially those I took during visits to relevant sites such as sand mines, dams, and riverbanks. My relationship with Amed began in the early 2010s, when I conducted fieldwork there on the urban-spatial legacies of 1980s and 1990s state-endorsed violence (Çaylı 2021a). More recently, I spent the better part of the 2018–2019 academic year there to study how the same legacies inform the politics of ecology. Approaching extractivism as not only a research topic but also a methodological question, I pursued a relation of reciprocity and collaboration with those working on the politics of ecology in Amed. I volunteered to coordinate a summer school on behalf of the local architects' chamber (a leading NGO campaigning on matters of ecological concern) and two workshop programmes at an independent artist-run space; admission for these events was free. Arts-related insights from my fieldwork are the subject of a separate publication (Çaylı 2021b). Here, where I approach the aesthetics-as-politics of ecology as informed by but also irreducible to art, I conclude with activism as the stuff of counter-extractivist aesthetics. That I present activist practice in my conclusion, rather than subjecting it first to empirical analysis, is my attempt to do its political agency justice.

The Aesthetics of Extractivism

Both the historical responsibilities for (Baldwin and Erickson 2020; Eichen 2020; Luke 2020) and current effects of (Dillon and Sze 2016; Vasudevan 2019; Yusoff 2018a) what has been termed "the Anthropocene" are differentiated by colonialism's racial violence. Indeed, this violence pervades the term itself. Even when employed to date the emergence of the "human era" to Columbian colonisation (Simpson 2020), the imaginary of humanity in question indexes the white male European coloniser as the sole bearer of agency (Davis et al. 2019; Erickson 2020:113). The Anthropocene's violence, then, operates not only corporeally but symbolically and systemically, permeating symbolic (meaning) universes and knowledge systems employed to make sense of ecology. Recent scholarship on extractivism contributes to critical analysis of this violence in two ways. It understands the corporeal, symbolic, and systemic registers through which racial capitalism's violence pervades the politics of ecology as operating not discretely but interdependently, and approaches this interdependence as a material or even "geological" question rather than a merely "epiphenomenal" one (Rosa and Díaz

2020; Yusoff 2018a:23–85, 2018b). In this section, I build on these two contributions to theorise what I call "the aesthetics of extractivism".

Extractivism's corporeal violence against racialised lands and peoples has, from the outset of colonialism, hinged on a specific symbolic universe and knowledge system. Coal-driven British colonialism in the early 19th century, a milestone in the history of the fossil economy, attracted investors through a racialised imagery of colonised lands and peoples as an extractable resource (Malm 2017:19–20), thereby "affix[ing] … race to space" (Linke 2014:1225) and giving visuality a role in extractivism that has remained prominent to this day (Barry 2013:116–136; Boal 1996:304; Childs 2020; Erickson 2020:113; Gómez-Barris 2017:5–7; Guyot 2011:682). The slavery-based plantation economy, which drove colonialism in the Americas by extracting land and labour from racialised peoples, hinged on a "grim calculus of cheap labor-power and acceptable deaths" that turned the continent into one of "capital's laboratories of modernity" and "proletarianization" (Eichen 2020:35). These extractivist calculations, manipulations, imaginaries, and representations constituted an epistemic and symbolic structure through which colonialism quantified (Yusoff et al. 2012) and marketised peoples and geographies as "things" (Rosa and Díaz 2020:122–123). As extractivism operates today beyond colonies proper (Childs 2020:201–202) and even across postcolonial geographies (Gómez-Barris 2017), it remains structured by the same valuation logic based on quantifiability and marketability (Li 2013). In short, the politics of extractivism's basic epistemic and symbolic structure has not necessarily only preceded but often also derived from the presentation (and continual representation) of environments and people as an extractable resource.

There is, then, not only a politics but also an aesthetics to extractivism's racialised workings, insofar as these two notions are understood in Rancièrian terms. According to Rancière (2004:13), aesthetics is "the system of a priori forms determining what presents itself to sense experience"—"a delimitation of spaces and times of the visible and the invisible, of speech and noise, that simultaneously determines the place and the stakes of politics as a form of experience". Aesthetics addresses "the distribution of the sensible" or the establishment of the material terms on which to partake in politics "by first defining the modes of perception in which they are inscribed", and doing so through inclusion as well as exclusion and separation (Rancière 2010:36). Regressive politics—in Rancière's terms, "statist practices" and "the police"—hinge on "a partition of the sensible that is characterised by the absence of void and of supplement" or the "exclusion of what 'is not'" (ibid.). Dissentient politics "consists in disturbing this arrangement" through "an intervention in the visible and the sayable" (Rancière 2010:36–37). That I focus my political analysis of extractivism on the ways northern Kurdistan's geography and inhabitants are rendered "sense-able" and rationalisable *collectively*— both *as* a collective and *by* collectives—follows Rancière in understanding aesthetics as that which engages and/or forecloses sensibilities, and politics as an intervention in existing orders upheld by such engagement and/or foreclosure.

However, my use of the aesthetic as a theoretical lens is only broadly (rather than exclusively) Rancièrian, as I acknowledge the limitations of both aesthetics in general and his theory in particular. Already evident in my deliberate reference to

aesthetics as a *theory*, I understand it as "not the material and textual forms aesthesis (sensibility) takes" but rather "a theory for making sense of the sensible" that requires "critical and political work" in order "to problematize or decolonize" structures of the sort that constitute extractivism (Jackson 2016:10; cf. Hawkins and Straughan 2015:3). Aesthetics is neither intrinsically emancipatory nor necessarily tantamount to depoliticisation; its politics is not self-evident (Ingram 2016:4; Saldanha 2012:278). What aesthetics helps theorise may serve "geopower" in both Grosz's and Ó Tuathail's senses of the term, facilitating not only struggles for justice (Grosz 2008; Yusoff 2018b:274) but also governmentalities "that make territory and the biosphere accessible, legible, knowable, useable" (Ó Tuathail 1996; Parenti 2015:835). Engaging aesthetics as such differentiates my methodology from Rancière's, where regressive politics figures as the aesthetic norm and progressive politics as its disruptive exception. A related difference concerns the hierarchical ethics characterising Rancière's notion of (progressive) politics as disruption. Insofar as "the ethical" is "the relational framework within which sense, action, and speech become possible" (Butler 2015:12, cited in Yusoff 2018a:62), the ethics of a theory like Rancière's itself requires reflection for its own exclusions and separations. Specifically, the very possibility of sensing, acting, and speaking in ways that, for Rancière, qualify as (progressive) politics is itself based on a Eurocentric humanist ethics grounded in and productive of racialisation and colonialism, which privileges certain agencies and vitalities at the expense of others (Yusoff 2018a:51–62; Yusoff 2018b:266–268).

A number of aesthetics-inflected debates in geography and allied fields have highlighted non/inhumanity as the common denominator of lives and agencies excluded from Eurocentric humanisms, suggesting that challenging this exclusion requires decentring the humanist ethics at work here rather than simply incorporating non/inhumans into it (Hawkins and Straughan 2015:10, 287–289; Povinelli 2011:7; Rosa and Díaz 2020:128–129; Yusoff 2018a:65-85, 2018b:260; Yusoff et al. 2012:972–973). Just such an incorporation has indeed characterised recent and current iterations of capitalism, which increasingly co-opts rather than disregards notions of non/inhuman life and agency (Braun 2015; Gergan 2015:271–272; Millar and Mitchell 2017:88; Povinelli 2016; Qian and Wei 2019:247; Saldanha 2012, 2020). Relatedly, the racial capitalist shaping of geography that constitutes the Anthropocene today draws on whiteness more as "an onto-epistemic structure" that upholds "a broadly racialized landscape" than as a reified and straightforwardly delineable identity (Baldwin and Erickson 2020:6–7). This landscape includes not only human and sociocultural elements but also non/inhuman and biophysical ones, including those from deep within the Earth, all of whose "life" racial capitalism continually "strives to bring … into its preternatural ambit" (Saldanha 2020:25). As a major means through which racial capitalism reorganises geography and geology, extractivism in its contemporary iteration may then draw on both the affirmation and negation of agencies and vitalities historically excluded from Eurocentric humanisms.

Two strands of existing scholarship on the politics of ecology provide insights into how these affirmations and negations work alongside each other. The older of these strands explores, and has developed coevally with, the late-capitalist or

neoliberal production of "nature" as both a socially constructed and a material phenomenon (Parenti 2015:831). Central to this production, scholars show, are parts of the Earth set aside for "environmental protection" to then serve functions around leisure or cultural consumption (Guyot 2011:682; Vasudevan 2019:16) that hinge on such colonialist geographical imaginaries as "wilderness" (Walker 1979:9), "wetlands" (Robertson 2000) and "indigeneity" (Erickson 2020:113) and therefore affirm colonial agencies and vitalities. The second, newer strand of scholarship explores racism as central to contemporary extractivism's negation of the life and agency of those reduced to extractable resource. Resonating with the broader geographical-aesthetic critique of racialisation that operates in cities through imaginaries such as "danger" (Dikeç 2013) and "endangerment" (Zeiderman 2020), this strand shows how the racialised negation of the "subaltern" (Paquette and Lacassagne 2013) and "inhuman" (Vasudevan 2019) perpetuates the geographically uneven distribution of not only extractive activity but also the production, circulation, and management of the waste and toxicity extractivism causes. If, taken together, these two strands of scholarship acknowledge that extractivist capital and governance operate both by affirming some sensibilities and negating others (Peyton and Franks 2016:459), they largely understand the physical sites of negation to be separate from those of affirmation.

The discussion above raises the following questions about what I call the negational and affirmative aesthetics of extractivism. How does the interplay between the two operate to uphold and perpetuate extractivism's basic logic of quantifiability and the racialisation that underpins it? Under what conditions does one become more prominent than the other, and how might the answer to this question inform counter-extractivist imaginaries? While these questions draw considerably on the scholarship discussed in this section, how I explore them through the context of contemporary Amed differs in one significant way: Whereas existing analyses tend to explore each mode separately and thus imply that the sites of affirmation are not the same as those of negation, I explore the ways they operate together in Amed at various spatial scales through the materialities of sand and water.

The Materiality and Spatiality of Violence and Its Legacies in 21st Century Amed

Today, Amed continues to witness the fallout from the late-2015 flare-up of war in northern Kurdistan. Ongoing is the wave of expulsions launched by the central government in 2016 by using wartime emergency powers against democratically elected pro-Kurdish mayors across the region and replacing them with appointed "caretakers".[4] Prior to the expulsions, the metropolitan municipality in Amed had been continuously run by pro-Kurdish politicians for more than 15 years.[5] Osman Baydemir served as mayor for most of that period, from 2004 to 2014. Baydemir's tenure witnessed a semi-official peace process that helped suspend more than two decades of fighting between the PKK and Turkey's armed forces. Running Amed throughout this period of relative quiet, Baydemir spoke of his vision to make it the region's "trademark city" and its "capital of culture" (Yüksel 2011:447–453). The neoliberal undertones of this vision materialised in numerous

construction projects from 2007 onwards, including one I discuss below, as it concerned the upper Tigris valley stretching just east of the city's historic centre. Before proceeding with that discussion, I wish to outline how Kurdish municipalism in Amed has featured in recent critical scholarship relevant to my work. Doing so will not only help detail the empirical context but, following from the previous section, will also clarify how the scholarship has approached the materiality and spatiality of violence and colonialism in contemporary Amed.

Three approaches are discernible in recent scholarship on violence and its urban legacies in 21st century Amed. The first characterises Baydemir's tenure—and that of his Kurdish mayoral contemporaries—as a shift from the paradigm of colonialist violence to one of "decolonization" (Gambetti 2009), "anti-colonization" (Jongerden 2009:13–18), and "de-Turkification" and concurrent "Kurdification" of the urban (Güvenç 2011) by "activists in office" (Watts 2010). Spatial transformations evidencing this paradigm shift are found at socio-culturally significant sites such as monuments, public squares, protest venues, and community centres (Gambetti 2009; Güvenç 2011), and in the "spectacle" value of activities held therein (Güvenç 2019). The second approach, while sharing the first's argument regarding a shift away from violence, identifies neoliberalism as the new paradigm's defining characteristic. It points to how developmentalist imaginaries around cultural tourism and an unprecedented variety of commercial interests deriving from local, international, and national actors exerted their influence on the city and municipality, engendering a socio-political landscape no less problematic or complicated than that of the previous era, due to a new bureaucratic and intellectual elite and economically ascending classes (Gambetti and Jongerden 2011; Genç 2016; Güven 2019; Yüksel 2011). This second approach is refreshing in its consideration of urban transformation less an expression of existing and mutually conflicting political positions than the very medium through which to do politics, and which therefore involves everyday spaces including streets, offices, and homes, as well as socio-culturally significant sites.

While mirroring this understanding of space and attention to class, the third approach uses ethnography to challenge the second's characterisation of this context as post-violent, tracing violence's permeations into the rapidly urbanising city. This mirrors my attention to violence and thus merits further discussion. According to Özsoy (2010), violence permeated late-2000s Amed through ongoing militant sacrifice in prisons and guerrilla war in the mountains; it remained central to how the city's communities of resistance gauged commitment to the pro-Kurdish cause. For Yıldırım (2019:459), who is openly critical of previous scholarship, colonialist violence remained ever-present through material remnants of the 1990s warfare: "shanty towns", "bullet marks", "dispossession", and high youth unemployment. These shaped what Yıldırım calls—based on the experiences of individuals who upheld "the imaginary of Kurdistan" while working for institutions transforming the city (2019:452-453)—a politics of "dissonance" theorisable only through "affect" rather than "reason, sight and narrative" (2019:465). This is a dissonance that Gambetti (2009), Özsoy (2010) and Yüksel (2011) all overlook, argues Yıldırım (2019:461); it is not reducible to emergent class conflict, a monolithic anticolonial movement, or militant sacrifice. Its politics

hinges not on speech, conventional forms of organisation or mobilisation, and compliance with the pro-Kurdish movement, but rather on silence, associational relationality, and negativity.

While my approach resonates with these three approaches in certain respects and diverges from them in others, both the resonances and the divergences derive from how they all limit to the city proper the sites through which to study the relationship between violence and urban transformation. Doing so overlooks not only that perceptions of "the city proper" continuously fluctuate but also that urbanisation is as much constituted in "landscapes of extraction" (Arboleda 2016:234) and large-scale (Loftus and March 2016) or "networked" infrastructures (Angelo and Wachsmuth 2015:24; Connolly 2019:71–72; Kaika 2005) as it is in streets, squares, homes, and offices. Indeed, foremost among such landscapes and infrastructures are those involving water (Gandy 2004), whose centrality to violence's imbrications in 21st century Amed are explored below through a focus on the colonialist attitude that has, since the early 20th century, characterised the nation-state's attitude towards the Tigris, and has shaped the aesthetics of extractivism. Bridging city and country also promises to contribute to existing spatially focused work on the modern-day damming of northern Kurdistan's rivers by framing it as a question of urbanisation rather than merely one of international conflict over riparian resources (Jongerden 2010), or militarisation of the countryside and dispossession of villagers (Akıncı and Tan 2016).

Returning to how this bridging speaks to relevant scholarship on 21st century Amed, it reframes Özsoy's linking of the city to prisons or mountains so that material interventions, assemblages, representations, and flows are considered as the linkage's primary medium rather than as auxiliary to or symbolic of ideology. Focusing on such cross-scalar and geographical linkages, then, echoes "the second approach" mentioned above in attending to how urban politics unfolds through the physical environment of Amed as a whole—rather than simply through the city's socio-culturally significant or evidently scarred elements (e.g. bullet holes and unemployed youth or public squares and community centres)—while also extending this attention to environments beyond the city proper. Doing so, finally, avoids limiting colonialist violence's presence in contemporary urban politics to its remnants that generate materially sensible dissonances among and between those upholding the pro-Kurdish cause. Instead, my focus on the aesthetics of extractivism understands colonialist violence as a force that continues to shape the very regime of sensibility and insensibility at work in Amed. Adopting such an understanding, I argue, helps clarify not only the politics of the urban but also that of scholarship on the urban. Focusing on extractivism's continuing influence on regimes of (in)sensibility prioritises (methodologically rather than only rhetorically) spotlighting colonialist racism as the adversary against which to regroup, rather than only pointing to the dissonances between adherents of an anti-colonial imaginary.

Sensing the Tigris via Extractivism

In late 2006, the municipality launched the Tigris Valley Landscape, Planning, Urban Design and Architecture competition. Mayor Baydemir described its

objective as "bringing the Tigris to life" (Evrensel 2007). This in many ways was a response to the riparian impact of the first Tigris dams built as part of the state's Southeastern Anatolia Project, which had recently become palpable after the dams became fully operational in the early 2000s. Following a century of attempts by Britain and then Turkey to render the Tigris and the Euphrates navigable and measurable, the Southeastern Anatolia Project comprised mega-infrastructural undertakings in upper Mesopotamia.[6] The project entered implementation in the mid-1980s with the first three major dams constructed on the rivers, two being on the Tigris (Jongerden 2010). The latter were built about 50 kilometres upstream of central Amed, a region historically considered as the Tigris' origin. By the time their reservoirs were fully impounded in 2000, the dams had immensely changed water-land relations around Amed and especially across the floodplains just north of the city centre. Caused historically by the region's semi-arid climate, their geomorphologically diverse and wide coastal zones of sand, aggregate, and gravel were no longer being flooded (Altınbilek 2004:18). Varieties of watermelon, melon, peach, and cucumber unique to Amed—named after their terroir (e.g. sand peach, gravel watermelon, etc.) and grown across these floodplains—became uncultivable. Similarly, the Rafetus softshell turtles historically found in great numbers along the Tigris are now rated as "endangered" by the International Union for Conservation of Nature; the sand that once characterised the Tigris' floodplains and is integral to the livelihood of this animal is now largely gone (Biricik and Turğa 2011).

Precisely how Baydemir's objective of "bringing the Tigris to life" would materialise was prescribed in the competition guidelines: by erecting barriers along the length of the two bridges bookending the stretch of the river that Amed's historic centre overlooks (Özer 2007:198–199). Taming "the river's irregular regime", these barriers would volumise the water to enable views for all to enjoy and thus "reunite the city with the Tigris", on which it had hitherto "turned its back" (Erten and Çimen 2011:42–43). The winning entry was geared towards recreation by both proposing a water-sports centre and foregrounding the idea of the river as a vista. The latter involved building viewing terraces on the slope between the walled city and the riverbank, and installing perpetually glowing lights on the water that invoked a now-lost multifaith and multi-ethnic ritual historically held here to celebrate the watermelon harvest by using rinds as lanterns and floating them down the river (Figure 2).

The municipality proved unable to complete the project in its entirety during the early 2010s; the central government withdrew the cooperation it had pledged especially for the two barriers key to the idea of "bringing the Tigris to life". Simultaneously, the central government began claiming the project as its own (Aslanoğlu 2011). It used the late-2015 flare-up of war and the subsequent emergency rule to push ahead with the project, completing phase one in summer 2020. Meanwhile, the project became the subject of much criticism. Pro-Kurdish voices, in particular, protested its obtrusive elements completed during Baydemir's tenure—including a panoramic observation terrace and an upscale café with a view—for "damaging the natural landscape" and furthering the Kurds' "urban and spatial assimilation", and therefore dovetailing with extractivist politics

KENT TERASINDAN KUZEY GÖLETE BAKIŞ
DİCLE'NİN İNCİLERİ-IŞIKLI DUBALAR

Figure 2: Computer-generated rendering of the winning entry in the Tigris valley design competition (reproduced by permission of SekizArtı Architecture and Urban Design) [Colour figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

(Aydın 2014). While such architectural consequences as the terrace and the café are questionable for this reason, I suggest each is indeed only a consequence of a much profounder influence that extractivism exerts across the political spectrum as a value system based on quantifiability. This influence is evident in how actors like the Baydemir administration—despite their contrasts from the Turkish state—sense the river's life in terms of the *amount* of water it retains visibly and continuously, a sensibility manifested in such elements as the terrace and the café that capitalise on this visible and continuous presence. This, then, is as aesthetic an influence as it is a political one.

Dams, Downpours, and the River's Agency

The profoundness of extractivism's influence on sensing and making sense of the Tigris' life in quantifiable terms is evident in how, despite the sort of criticisms raised against the Tigris valley project, it has remained forceful throughout the 2010s. Consider two instances from the tail end of the 2010s which, due partly to the dams' climatic impact (Daggupati et al. 2017), was marked by unusually heavy rainfall in Amed. In December 2018, following a sudden downpour, a floodgate in one of the two dams upstream of Amed collapsed, and the city's riverbanks were flooded. Some local journalists celebrated the incident for having revitalised the river after all those years in which it had "flowed submissively", remarking that "such is the Tigris' might" (Erbay 2018) and "free-spiritedness" (Akdemir 2018). Popular social media users posted historical photographs

alongside those of the incident as evidence of this revitalisation (e.g. Emek 2018). During a subsequent episode of downpours in May 2019, the dam's operators this time preemptively opened the floodgates. As water levels increased in a way unseen since the construction of the dams and the snowmelt accumulated in the reservoirs rapidly discharged southwards, the Tigris began to flow under Amed's UNESCO-listed bridge in a way that newspapers from across the political divide celebrated as unprecedentedly "clear" and "voluminous" (e.g. Ergin 2019; İke 2019).

In both of these sets of responses to an unforeseen manifestation of the mutual impact between dams and the weather, then, the vitality of the Tigris—known historically for dramatic seasonal changes in its colour, volume, and width—was perceived as per extractivism's valuing of the Earth in terms of the quantity of resource extractable from it. Moreover, unlike the late 2000s, in the late 2010s, quantifiability framed perceptions of the Tigris' vitality not only as a static quality demonstrable by the river's looks. Vitality figured here also as a dynamic quality considered evident in how the Tigris flows despite attempts to submit it to authority—or, in the river's *agency*. Recall that a similar quality featured prominently also in the "swallow sensibility" story that introduced this article and that praised the quarry owner for demonstrating "humanity in action". As the story dates from the same period of unusual downpours (late 2018 and early 2019) discussed here, I wish to revisit it in order to further unpack the sort of conditions within which extractivism influences perceptions of agency.

Sand, Recession, and the Locals' Agency

The sand quarry in Bismil is but one among many private industrial quarries that have appeared in the region since the late 2000s. Understanding how these quarries came about requires discussing a piece of legislation known as the Coast Act (Kıyı Kanunu). The legislation is dedicated to coastal protection, and passed in 1984 when the contradiction between tourism and construction—two sectors central to the economic neoliberalisation enforced by the 1980 military junta—became salient. The Coast Act sought to resolve this contradiction by outlawing construction activity (except when geared toward public interest) along Turkey's coastlines, including both the banks of major rivers like the Tigris and Euphrates, and the Mediterranean, Aegean, and Black Sea shores. Between 1984 and 1990, the Coast Act was repeatedly amended to enhance its protectionism—by, for instance, expanding the geomorphological definition of what constitutes a coast and narrowing the programmatic one of what qualifies as public interest (Kurt 2015:96–99)—that is, except one amendment. This amendment, made in August 1990, was titled "The List that Specifies What Part of Our Watercourses are Identified as Rivers". It defined the Tigris as originating in the district of Bismil in Diyarbakır province. This is 100 kilometres downstream of the geography historically considered the river's origin, or where the first two Tigris dams were built. Note that their construction had already been underway for a few years by the time the amendment was added. Halfway between them and Bismil is central Amed, meaning that the amendment annulled the "riverness" of the Tigris along the

stretch skirting the city centre—the primary area of the dams' impact on flood-plain geomorphology once they went into operation.

If the violence of abstraction underpins prevalent hydrological approaches today, ranging from the colonialist "invention of rivers" that imprisons conditions of "wetness" (Da Cunha 2019) to the modernist notion of "water" that homogenises diverse waterscapes and deprives them of context-specificity (Banister and Widdifield 2014:36), the Coast Act's redefinition of the Tigris evidences the geographically uneven ways such abstractions are distributed. In other words, the racialisation characterising this violence is constituted not in abstraction per se but rather in the uneven distribution thereof. Affected most severely by this unevenness is the uppermost stretch of the Tigris—specifically, upstream of Bismil, the scene of the swallow sensibility story and the Tigris' origin according to the Coast Act. The quarries dug here grew in both number and size with Amed's construction boom around the turn of the 2010s, which expanded its urbanisation westward along the six-lane inner-city roads that Baydemir's municipality built. Today there are more than 20 such quarries in the valley's uppermost 100 kilometres, where it has been deprived of river status. The quarries have caused immense and often irreversible damage to the riverbank and the riverbed (Figure 3). One of the first and most conspicuous of these quarries appeared as an offshoot of the aforementioned Tigris valley project launched in 2007. The project's first feature to be constructed was the two lakes that the winning competition entry had intended for water sports. What followed the breaking of ground

Figure 3: A stretch of the riverbank 25 kilometres north of central Amed as seen in 2019, plundered by successive enterprises in sand mining (author's photograph) [Colour figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

Figure 4: Google Earth images showing a sand quarry turned lake (see just right of top centre of each image) located just across the river from central Amed (left: 2013; right: 2019) [Colour figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

here in 2008, however, was not lakes but rather quarries feeding sand into the city's booming construction industry (Figure 4). When there was no more sand to quarry, the hollowed-out pits were turned into industrial fishponds. Use of groundwater for this purpose further weakened the already sedimented river, at times encroaching on the riverbed itself. Meanwhile, many quarries that are less visible from central Amed have remained operational, including the one featured in the "swallow sensibility" story. As the construction industry went into recession in the late 2010s, sand dug from these quarries began piling up. The unusual downpours Amed experienced between late 2018 and mid-2019 worsened the recession's impact on the industry. Not only did the rain further decelerate construction activity in and around Amed, it also damaged the quality and the market value of the sand piled up in quarries.

These are the crisis conditions that have thrown into sharp relief such extractivist excesses as the sand pile featured in the swallow story. That these excesses have become repurposed as measurable evidence of an excessive ecological sensibility and agency—attributed first to the quarry owner and then, through a racialised ethics, to the people of Amed and Kurdistan in general—recalls Yusoff's (2015:399) proposal to understand human "identity" as "always in excess of itself". This "excess", for Yusoff, has "non/inhuman" as well as "social" constituents and, as such, renders subjectivity a "geologic" and "distributed affair" involving "a wider ecological and mineralogical field" (ibid.; cf. Yusoff et al. 2012:972–973). Alongside helping problematise the neglect of non/inhumanity that characterises the Rancièrian notion of aesthetic "surplus" and some of its recent uptakes by geographers (Millner 2015:76–78), Yusoff's proposal critically reconsiders the contemporary question of extractivism-driven growth. Many

"Anthropocene-inflected" responses to this question have focused on resource "scarcity" and considered planetary "limits" a testament to those of growth. Yusoff (2018b:262) reformulates the question instead as one of "abundance" or "what to do with the accumulated excess when growth is no longer biophysically possible". That extractivism's excesses feature prominently in both the sand quarry story and the floods discussed above—the former through sand and the latter through water—indicate the urgency of Yusoff's reformulation. The urgency, specifically, is not only to challenge extractivism-driven growth but also to halt the expansion of extractivism's influence on the ways human and nonhuman life and agency are rendered sensible or affirmed and made insensible or negated.

It is crucial to take seriously the affirmations of life and agency explored in this article precisely because they are intertwined with the negations. Just six weeks before the swallow sensibility story came out, a young man drowned near that spot whilst fishing (DHA 2019). Drowning due to quarry-induced riverbed and riverbank deformation has, over the 2010s, caused an increasing number of deaths along that stretch of the Tigris in the spring and summer months. It affects both people and their livestock—animals fall into former sandpits and die whilst drinking the water accumulated in them—and has therefore prompted protests by villagers otherwise inactive in party politics (Gündüz 2013). Quarry-related deaths have occurred in a militarised context, too; at the outset of the fighting that flared up in 2015, access roads that quarry owners had opened during the years of the peace talks became a theatre of war due to their being under-surveilled territory (Emen 2016). If "nature … is a medium through which military and paramilitary violence is conducted" (Gregory 2016:4–5), then Amed's quarries show how, in such geographies as northern Kurdistan racialised through extractivism, redesigning "nature" is not simply a means to a violent end but constitutes violence in its own right.

Towards an Aesthetics of Counter-Extractivism

Sites of extractivism undoubtedly continue today to witness the negation of racialised peoples and the geographies they inhabit. But what more fundamentally underpins this negation is a symbolic and systemic structure that reduces the worth of racialised peoples and geographies to the marketable value of an extractable resource. The instances discussed above, where the vitality of the Tigris, the sensibility of Kurds, and the agency of both, etc., were excessively affirmed—albeit only quantifiably—demonstrate that the symbolic and systemic structure upholding extractivism may well manifest in affirmations of life and agency, just as it may in negations thereof. Recall the crisis conditions that framed these instances: a dam shutter breaking open, and downpours combining with recession to cause sand to pile up disused in quarries. What I have conceptualised as the affirmative aesthetics of extractivism, then, looms particularly large when extractivism experiences a crisis. The concept warrants critical attention beyond the immediate context explored above, as the contemporary juncture in the history of racial capitalism is one where crises recur increasingly frequently. Each such crisis reduces, if temporarily, the profitability of extractivism's excesses while

also laying bare their excessiveness—an example the media covered widely at the time of writing was all the oil being extracted despite the dramatic drop in fuel consumption due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Coupled with the fact that a basic concern for the environment has long become part of the mainstream, such crises, I argue, render extractivism's excesses conducive to an ecological sensibility that values life and agency through the racialised logic of quantifiable measurability. They call for a critique of extractivism focused not on resource scarcity versus abundance but rather on the politics of quantifiability that underpins this dichotomy.

I intend my argument to have counter-extractivist implications. I conclude by unpacking these implications in the hope of furthering the existing scholarly understandings of aesthetics and its critical potential against extractivism, which have informed my own. I do so by thinking with Amed's eco-activists. Their practices, I suggest, help imagine an aesthetics of counter-extractivism by shifting away from valuing life and agency quantifiably to a valuation based on unquantifiable relationality. As discussed earlier in the article, recent extractivism scholarship has also considered the latter sort of valuation for its critical potential, associating it particularly with "indigenous" (e.g. Hawkins and Straughan 2015:9) or "local" senses of and attachments to place (e.g. Li 2013:32). My argument's counter-extractivist implications both confirm the significance of these associations and nuance them, while also contributing to above-mentioned critiques of Rancièrian aesthetics' focus on disruption as the articulation of progressive politics (e.g. Yusoff 2018b:266–268). The nuance is that the counter-extractivist imaginaries I chart practice a kind of localism and attachment to place whose criticality derives from an ability to zoom into and out of one's own locality and indigeneity. That this ability involves temporality as well as sociality, by zooming out to moments of urgency other than one's own and zooming into everyday life and its processual details, complicates the Rancièrian prioritisation of disruption.

Consider eco-activist Ferat Demiroğlu's interviews with villagers living near the quarry shown in Figure 3, the context being his six-episode ecology-themed series broadcast in 2015 by the Kurdistani channel Özgür Gün TV. Villagers lambaste the quarry for having damaged their *quality* of life, as well as its toll on lives and the landscape, also noting that the damage has been experienced differentially along generational, occupational, and gender lines. The minibus driver who connects the village to the city centre, for example, complains about roads wrecked by earth-moving equipment; a subsistence herder laments that his livestock are drowning; a homemaker complains about dust constantly accumulating inside her home; a subsistence farmer complains that the dust is getting all over the vegetables in his garden. These interviews indicate a counter-extractivist aesthetics that values life and agency as unquantifiable relationalities by zooming into the everyday and grappling with the unevenness characterising that which is local. Finally, note the Amed-based ecology collective Bûka Baranê's response to a private housing estate built in 2012–2014, right across the valley from the historic city centre on a hitherto undeveloped hilltop overlooking the Tigris. Protesting the estate and the municipal authorities who had given it planning permission,

many in the pro-Kurdish movement demanded its demolition. In contrast, Bûka Baranê demanded that the estate be employed to house refugees who were then beginning to arrive in Amed from war-torn Syria. "The project's urban-ecological damage is irreversible", reasoned the collective; the valley and its inhabitants had already been exploited for materials and labour, and demolishing the estate would only create more toxicity and waste (Rûspî 2015). A further downside to demolition that Bûka Baranê could not have foreseen would manifest in March 2018 when the centrally appointed "caretaker" mayor did indeed demolish the estate, then using the quantifiably measurable ethical leverage he derived from the demolition to push ahead with the Tigris valley project. Rather than performing a local ecological sensibility by clearing away extractivism's excesses, Bûka Baranê had proposed to expropriate them as a material resource for the dispossessed. The proposal beckons to an aesthetics of counter-extractivism; it considers awareness of extractivism's longstanding attempts to dispossess one's locality and fellow locals as a basis from which to zoom out and connect with others whose dispossession may require a more urgent and direct response than one's own.

Acknowledgments

Endnotes

[1] All translations are mine.

[2] The notion of Kurdistan being a colony originates with modern Turkey's pro-Kurdish political movement which, since its outset in the 1970s, has considered as colonisers both Turkey and the Allied powers that carved up Kurdistan during and after World War I (Duruiz 2020; Jongerden 2007:54–57). It also featured prominently in the official policies that the founders and first administrations of the Republic of Turkey themselves devised and implemented in northern Kurdistan (Jongerden 2007:173–217), albeit never granting Kurdistan official colony status (Yarkın 2019).

[3] The state carried out these village evacuations as part of its scorched-earth offensive against the PKK (Jongerden 2014:166–167). This geographically charged strategy had precedents in the nascent republic's measures that sought to expel Kurds and Kurdishness from Kurdistan or replace them with Turkish-speaking refugees from ex-Ottoman territories (Jongerden 2007:129–130). For instance, the 1934 Settlement Act No. 2510 settled Turkish-speaking migrants at sites of strategic importance such as the vicinity of infrastructures and borderlands, while also forcibly displacing Kurds, which the law described as non-Turkish-speaking Turks—to Turkey's western regions (Jongerden 2007:173–217). Legislators called these assimilationist measures "civilizing" missions (Jongerden 2007:198).

[4] In Turkey, there are two types of local administrative authority, each with its own remit: mayors, who are democratically elected, and governors, who are appointed by the Ministry of Interior Affairs.

[5] By "pro-Kurdish", I mean politicians from the succession of legal parties founded since the 1990s to advance the rights and freedoms of Turkey's Kurds, whose latest iteration is the Peoples' Democratic Party or HDP (Gunes 2018).

[6] Following its failed attempts in the 1830s to carve out a "Euphrates Route" to India, Britain launched a commercial steamship navigation programme along the Tigris in 1861 to "buffer" its colony "against Russian and French aggression" (Cole 2016:75). In 1935, the nascent Turkish Republic launched a "river flow monitoring" programme, following in 1946 by constructing "Research and Observation Stations" on the Tigris and Euphrates rivers (Öziş et al. 1999:2030). Also in the 1930s, the state built a new railway line that connected Amed to Turkey's Eastern Mediterranean cities of maritime and industrial significance, and later to its capital Ankara. If post-World War I borders had already impaired the Tigris' centuries-old function as a cross-Mesopotamian thoroughfare, this railway line went a step further by reorienting the upper Tigris valley to Anatolia (Kaynar 2019:269–270). The new railway was dubbed "the copper line" after the metal extracted from mines just north of Amed, which it would transport to central Turkey (Kaynar 2019:282). In 1937, Amed's official name was changed from Diyar-ı Bekr, "Land of Bekr" (after the Arab tribe that settled here during the 7th century Muslim conquests) to Diyarbakır, "Land of Copper" (Kaynar 2019:271). Extractivism's reduction of geography to resource in the early republican period had more overtly violent components as well. In 1937–1938, the state carried out a campaign in Dersim (located just northwest of Amed at the northernmost tip of Mesopotamia) against Kurdish-Alevi tribes refusing to relinquish their semi-autonomy to the early republican administration (Kezer 2014). The campaign was extractivist in character in that its main objective was to subjugate the people of Dersim to a new and stricter taxation and military conscription regime, which underpinned its genocidal scale and thus distinguished it from the republic's earlier counterinsurgency campaigns (Kezer 2014:509). In the prelude to the campaign, in 1935, the state renamed Dersim as Tunceli, "Land of Bronze".

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