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***Bear Witness: embedded coverage of Turkey's urban warfare and the demarcation of sovereignty against a dynamic exterior***

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**Introduction**

Do you want to access the truth? Do you want to find the truth? Then, first, go to the source of the event. And find the human in there. Touch them. Listen to them. See it through their eyes. Bear witness to events. Bear witness, so that you can assume responsibility both morally and conscientiously—so that you cannot just ignore, turn back and leave. Bear witness, so that the truth is appreciated.

So goes the opening monologue of Turkey's recently launched factual television series *Bear Witness*.<sup>1</sup> Broadcast on the state television TRT's documentary channel and online,<sup>2</sup> the series is hosted by an ex-special-forces-commando-turned-risk-management-consultant.<sup>3</sup> In each episode, the host follows counter-terrorism units and special police forces across urban centers in the country's predominantly Kurdish-inhabited southeast, a region which has since the mid-1980s seen numerous episodes of armed conflict between the Kurdistan Workers' Party PKK and the Turkish Armed Forces. *Bear Witness*' raison d'être is the conflict's most recent and ongoing episode, which started in August 2015 after more than two years of ceasefire and peace talks, and

has taken the form of urban warfare involving ditches and barricades set up in towns by PKK-affiliated groups and intensified law enforcement raids accompanied by successive, localized, round-the-clock curfews.<sup>4</sup> The series chronicles this warfare by way of dashcam (cameras attached to dashboards of law enforcement vehicles), hand-held filmmaking, and aerial videography, therefore combining the genres of true crime TV, citizen journalism and military surveillance. This stylistic and methodological hybridity is reflected also in the conceptual framework, aspects of narration, and characters involved. Instead of portraying the conflict as one between the stock categories of ‘gallant soldiers’ versus ‘helpless terrorists’, the show zooms in on the often-precarious life of members of the law enforcement in their everyday architectural spaces. As opposed to involving scripted and detailed elaboration of images, verbal narration is intermittent, disjointed and subordinate to its visual counterpart. As indicated in the opening monologue, *Bear Witness* purports to be less about emphases on sovereignty, which have hitherto defined the state’s position on the conflict, than about grander concepts, foremost among which is ‘truth’.

In what follows I aim to unmask this claim, by discussing *Bear Witness* as an indication of how the state reconceives sovereignty through urban warfare and its embedded reporting. I begin by analyzing the approach to filmmaking by which the TRT series seeks to undergird its truth claim. While embedded war journalism has already become a genre unto itself globally and a number of recent precedents to *Bear Witness* exist in Turkey,<sup>5</sup> I find the show’s hybridization of reality TV, gonzo reporting, and hi-tech aerial surveillance noteworthy —a medley inspired arguably by not just the global fascination but also local familiarity with these genres due to their prominent role during and after the 2013 Gezi protests, the 2015 Suruç and Ankara bombings and, most recently, the Tahir Elçi assassination and the downing of a Russian jet fighter.<sup>6</sup> This hybridization indicates that *Bear Witness*’ claim to truth builds on an approach to filmmaking which is led by image rather than by word and which presents itself as direct sensory experience of urban warfare rather than as content to be cognitively perceived and interpreted.

The rest of the essay is dedicated to the spatial and temporal underpinnings of this approach, which I argue renders urban warfare exterior to the sovereign’s time and space. This has significant implications as regards the relationship between urban warfare and sovereignty.

In his work on the Israeli military's operations in Palestinian neighborhoods and towns, Eyal Weizman has interpreted the destruction of homes as a shift in the object of the state's pursuit of strengthening its sovereignty through siege warfare. The shift is from the walls of another state to those of the home.<sup>7</sup> But what might such destruction indicate as regards the state's efforts to bolster its sovereignty if ubiquity and instantaneity increasingly characterize not just urban warfare, but as Paul Virilio has shown, also its embedded reporting?<sup>8</sup> The answer lies, I suggest, in the specific manner in which *Bear Witness* employs televised and embedded coverage to bring urban warfare to the multiplicity of interiors proper that comprise the national interior as conceived by the sovereign. I argue that this manner is less about presenting the state as the active force that reinforces its sovereignty by engulfing its exterior. What the series does is the exact opposite; it renders the exterior in question the dynamic force that constantly threatens to engulf what are imagined as the immobile space and linear time of the sovereign.

### **Discourse-light & image-heavy**

"In this broadcast, we will say very little but show a lot," opens Episode Seven of *Bear Witness*. Indeed, the series is considerably discourse-light in comparison to the mainstream media coverage of the armed conflict. The latter's heavy use of state-endorsed lexicon, dwelling on the words 'terror' and 'terrorist', is brought to a minimum here. Instead, generic categories like 'humanity' and 'people' are employed to refer to the various actors involved. Similarly, the series avoids overt references to "national security, sovereignty and territorial integrity," which are characteristic of state-endorsed rhetoric on the conflict<sup>9</sup> and refer to the event being covered. Instead, it emphasizes grander concepts such as 'truth', 'impartiality', and 'credibility', which primarily concern the coverage itself. If and when verbal narration is more extensively used, this is mainly to highlight such qualities of coverage the series lays claim to, as evident in the following phrases frequently uttered by the host: "none of what is happening right now is fictional," "whatever we experience is what we are relaying to you," "we are bearing witness on your behalf," and "you are witnessing a moment right now." All in all, *Bear Witness* is a show in which image prevails over word, epitomizing the age of televisual sensationalism that prioritizes

videography over speech in order to stir up public emotion while also purporting to give viewers direct access to on-the-ground reality.<sup>10</sup>

How does the show's use of images, then, compare and contrast with that of words in terms of its attempts to abstain from deep-seated conventions of state-endorsed discourse? Consider the following three-minute-long scene about halfway through Episode Seven, in which the film crew gets caught up in a skirmish. As militants and officers begin to exchange gunfire, the host merely relays the chain of events without qualifying them or naming the actors involved:

Right now, as far as I can see, there is a response. And right now a bomb exploded. Right now, right now, yes, right now a skirmish has started—yes, yes, yes, yes, right now, just when we are also there. We are right there, right now, yes. Right now there is a response. Yes, right now we are in the middle of the skirmish. . . . Yes, yes, yes, yes, what you are seeing, witnessing right now, is a spontaneous event. . . . Yes, you are seeing right now all that is happening. You are seeing right now. Contact has been established on all points. Contact has been established. If you want to grasp the events and see the difference, there you go, either you will come here and live through it, or nobody shall speak. . . . Right now it is impossible for you to even hear my voice. Yes, with what is happening right now, it is impossible for you to hear my voice.

These descriptive words are accompanied by footage consisting of hand-held follow shots of the host, static shots obtained at ground-level from behind the law enforcement convoy (Image 1), dashcam recording of the context, and aerial videography as seen from the control desk. The result is that the events are portrayed solely through the eyes of the law enforcement units, and militants are never seen except from bird's-eye-view, as is the case throughout the entire series. In short, although verbal discourse may have given way to image-making as the main mechanism of narration in *Bear Witness*, this is only to enhance the viewer's emotional identification with officers—an effect that film seeks to achieve by engaging the senses rather than just engaging cognition.<sup>11</sup>

Image 1. (4.jpg) Scenes such as this one capturing a skirmish are when *Bear Witness* most closely resembles citizen journalism, combining hand-held camera footage and near-ground-level filming.

### **Operation zones as the spatial exterior of sovereignty**

Such portrayal of the operations is also noteworthy for its spatial implications. It demonstrates that *Bear Witness*' primary spatial interest lies in interiority as experienced, ostensibly, by the law enforcement units. This interest is evident not only in the series' use of aerial footage as seen from the control desk (Image 2) and that of neighborhoods as seen from inside combat vehicles (Image 3), but also in the type of settings in which law enforcement officers are interviewed: the interiors of police cars and/or headquarters (Image 4). This enhances the above-mentioned sense of identification by molding it into the two affects of intimacy and entrapment.

Image 2. (20.jpg) Aerial views of towns are often presented as they are seen from the police's control desk.

Image 3 (9.jpg) The series features streetscapes in the way they are seen from inside law enforcement vehicles.

The establishing of intimacy between officers and viewers is pursued mainly through the interviews, and through content as well as form. Officers share their problems, including personal ones, such as the difficulties of working "in the region," which is evidenced, according to one officer, by the high incidence of resignations and divorces. Professional problems are also exposed, as epitomized by the same officer's remarks that "we are way, way behind other public officers in terms of social security and other types of security" and that "everyone's life just gets

worse by the day.” In an interview with the police chief of Şırnak’s Cizre district in his office, the host draws attention to bullet holes in the office’s walls to suggest that there is not one place that remains unaffected by the skirmishes. In follow shots during operations, urban warfare is depicted as presenting further professional difficulties as it is argued to render impossible the distinction between civilians and insurgents. In episodes filmed before early December 2015, that is, before the curfews became standard practice, the camera occasionally happens upon children or the elderly amid the operations. In such moments, editing slows down and the usual acid-techno underscore gives way to a strings-based elegiac piece. “On the one hand, people continue to live,” comments the host, “and on the other is a group that makes life miserable. It is not so easy to tell one from the other. . . . the most difficult job on earth.” Importantly, whereas officers have their faces blurred out for anonymity but are interviewed in depth, civilians’ identities are visually exposed while their voices are virtually never heard—lest the militants find the civilians’ remarks menacing and track them down, suggests the host. The blurring paradoxically heightens emotional identification on the part of the viewer, as it stimulates the rest of the senses by obstructing vision.<sup>12</sup>

Image 4 (27.jpg) Face-blurred members of law enforcement are interviewed primarily in the interiors of vehicles and/or headquarters.

The sense of entrapment is most evident in scenes capturing operations as they unfold in urban settings, which draw heavily on hand-held camera footage. The camera follows counter-terrorism units through winding streets, labyrinthine alleyways and narrow staircases, turning abruptly in cases of skirmish to walls and paving or shooting from below eye-level. Reporting on the aforementioned skirmish in which the crew gets caught up, the host has the following to say about the curfews declared by the state to undergird the operations:

Right now we are inside a neighborhood. The fact is that people could have been here. If the curfew had not been declared and people had not left this area, they would be experiencing this, right? I cannot imagine, believe me. You know, I am used to these

sounds. But I do not want to imagine what children go through when they find themselves in the middle of such sounds. Believe me, I do not want to imagine.

The emotional manipulation involved in conjuring an image of cowering children aside, the host's comments are significant in that they testify to the practical spatial implications of the curfew. Here, it is important to remember that the Turkish-language term for curfew, translated literally, is "ban on going out on the street" (*sokağa çıkma yasağı*). But, as the host's reference to people's flight from "this area" implies, the effect of the recent and ongoing curfews across the region has been to altogether evacuate curfew-affected areas rather than just oblige residents to stay indoors, thus sealing entire neighborhoods off from the outside world. This exteriorization is also demonstrated on the scale of individual homes, as the host follows officers into living rooms and kitchens of abandoned houses. Set in Diyarbakır's Silvan district, Episode One navigates such spaces, where the host reports thus:

Instead of staying side-by-side with violence, people have deserted their homes. Where we are currently in is one of those hastily abandoned houses. As you can see, people had to run leaving pots and pans as they are. . . . A year ago this was a house full of all sorts of joy. They were going to work and to school in peace, going about their daily life.

As these words are being uttered, law enforcement units are shown entering a home the intended way—using doors and staircases rather than overtly destructive means—and inhabiting what used to be someone's living room as temporary shelter (Image 5). Therefore, if urban warfare eradicates the physical distinction between the home and its urban context and exteriorizes both from national space, *Bear Witness* does much more than just confirm this exteriorization. It socially reproduces the exterior in question as an expansionist space with dynamic boundaries by portraying law enforcement units trapped in interior spaces, going so far as to replace civilians with officers as the domestically besieged, and pursuing the viewer's identification with this entrapment.

Image 5 (24.jpg) Scene showing law enforcement units in what used to be someone's living room.

In sum, the way *Bear Witness* engages interiority serves two aims: to forge intimacy between viewers and law enforcement units, and to prompt the viewer to share the officers' purported sense of entrapment.<sup>13</sup> Exclusive to officers, up-close and personal conversations portray them as no different from the ordinary citizen—frail and precarious rather than mighty and invincible—while the blurring of their faces enhances the sensory aspect of this portrayal. The sense of beleaguerment is furthered in scenes capturing the operations. When they are not interviewed inside their vehicles and headquarters, officers are portrayed as socially respecting the physically violated integrity of the home and replacing the civilian who remains voiceless and appears in flashes if not altogether missing from the picture. Areas affected by the operations are therefore not only rendered exterior to the rest of the country but also presented to the viewer as an expansionist space. As demonstrated above, this is sought through the viewer's emotional identification with the purported entrapment of officers. Importantly, it is also an effect that is furthered by the instantaneity and ubiquity of the medium itself. Telecommunication's ever-accelerating transmission of events to increasingly more distant and effortless viewers, as Virilio has suggested, makes the movement of that which is transmitted seem much faster than it really is, thus creating the delusion that it is the transmitted that is rushing towards the audience, not unlike the way passengers inside an accelerating vehicle perceive slower or static objects outside.<sup>14</sup>

### **Operation zones as the temporal exterior of sovereignty**

*Bear Witness* also involves a temporal counterpart to the spatial demarcation outlined in the previous section. This follows from how, as discussed above, the state as the bearer of



sovereignty is implicated in the series as largely uninvolved in what is happening, if not altogether absent, by way of its representatives' being presented as frail, precarious and besieged. The implication is furthered also in the reverse direction, by way of scenes that do explicitly refer to the state and its presence. This presence is referred primarily to the before and after of the operations rather than the present moment. It seeks to render the state the driver of economic and infrastructural development, which is implied to have come to an unexpected halt due to what is currently happening in the region. The temporality of the operations is thus expelled from what is implied as the country's consistent path to increasing prosperity and its linear movement in time as imagined by the sovereign.

A case in point is observed in Episode Three. As aerial views of Diyarbakır's historic center Sur appear on screen, the host reminds us that over the recent years tens of renovation projects were undertaken here in conjunction with the district being declared a UNESCO World Heritage site. The idea that the current conflict has interrupted construction-led economic development marks not just the scenes set in historic areas such as Sur but also the coverage of operations in ordinary neighborhoods. Construction sites where work has come to an abrupt halt due to the skirmishes are second only to damaged sites as building types that feature most frequently throughout the series. The theme of development marks also the way in which the host speculates about the aftermath of the operations. Ditches dug by PKK-affiliated groups are presented as severe damages to urban infrastructure, followed by the emphasis that the state will undertake the necessary repair work as soon as the operations are over.<sup>15</sup> The immediate shift to slow-motion editing and elegiac background music whenever the camera comes across children or the elderly in inhabited areas is also applied to scenes set in curfew-affected neighborhoods where the host encounters damaged shops and stores. In one such scene, the camera enters into a ground-level office through its broken windows (Image 6), as the host elaborates thus:

This, after all, is a business. . . . The fact is that the people living here are seriously affected by all that is happening. There may be financial compensation—all costs are covered by the state—but the reality is that there is a type of cost that cannot possibly be compensated: the psychological one.

Such scenes therefore position the state more as an organization that undertakes economic and infrastructural development both before and after armed conflict than as one which is party to the conflict itself and is culpable, even if partly, for the damage inflicted.<sup>16</sup>

Image 6. (14.jpg) A close-up of what used to be an office space in Mardin's Nusaybin district.

The abstraction of the state as a sociopolitically detached driver of development is so integral to *Bear Witness*' account of the operations that it is pursued at the expense of contradicting some of Turkey's best-known political positions and engagements in the region. Consider, once again, Episode Seven set in Mardin's Nusaybin district just across the border from the town of Qamishli in Syria, whose center is controlled (at the time of writing) by pro-Assad forces. Following the aforementioned scene in which the film crew is caught up in a skirmish, the host contrasts the situation in Nusaybin with that in Qamishli:

Across the border is Qamishli. When there is no single shot being fired there, I run out of words to say to those who inflict this situation upon my country. . . . Believe me, unless this society raises a collective voice against those who are trying to turn this country into Syria, there will be no peace and joy.

This excerpt is significant because it demonstrates the extent of the depoliticization caused by *Bear Witness*' detachment of the state from the region's present. The extent is such that the host associates the state with an actor renowned, among all parties involved in Syria's civil war, to be the least-favored by Turkey's government.<sup>17</sup> But the excerpt is also noteworthy because it abstracts urban warfare as a temporal vacuum that is at least as expansionist as it is apolitical, presented as posing the threat of spilling over borders and threatening to divert countries from the path they are set on.

In short, *Bear Witness* depicts the state's role in the region as an actor that undertakes economic and infrastructural development before and after conflict, rather than one that is inextricably entangled in various conflicts on either side of the border between Syria and Turkey.<sup>18</sup> The series therefore expels the operations from the sovereign's domain temporally as well as spatially; it presents them as outside the country's linear movement in time as determined by the sovereign.

## Conclusion

In this essay, I have analyzed the factual series *Bear Witness*, which was launched on Turkey's state television near-simultaneously with the advent of the most recent episode of operations by counter-terrorism units in urban settings across the country's southeast. My aim has been to shed light on how official propaganda might reinvent itself in an age when both warfare and its reporting have become instantaneous and ubiquitous. As demonstrated above, *Bear Witness* avoids verbal references to themes characteristic of statist rhetoric on such conflicts as the present one. Does this indicate a diversion from the state's course of action? I have suggested that it does not. Indeed, the series furthers this course of action by seeking the viewer's identification with those carrying out the operations. The difference is that it does this cinematographically rather than just discursively. The question then becomes if and to what extent this stylistic and methodological shift impacts on the idea most integral to the state's workings: sovereignty. My response involves two points. First, *Bear Witness* detaches the state and its claim to sovereignty from the places and times in which the operations are carried out. These places and times are thus rendered the spatiotemporal *exterior* of sovereignty. Secondly, the series attributes to this exterior a certain dynamism and expansionism whereas it presents the interior as vulnerable, besieged and threatened.

Urban warfare's physical reality may involve the accelerated consolidation of sovereignty by infiltration into homes in areas under curfew. *Bear Witness*' portrayal of the events, however, offsets this acceleration by first reversing the direction of the infiltration and then setting it into motion towards the myriad interiors the show reaches. Inhabited by viewers who are made to feel

beleaguered due both to the show's cinematographic claustrophilia and to the medium's immediacy and sensationalism, these interiors thus become the object of the televisual counterpart to the physical consolidation of sovereignty pursued by way of armed operations.

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<sup>1</sup> The original Turkish monologue uses the word *doğru* to refer to what I have translated here as 'truth'. This is a word with multiple denotations, which include straightness, rightness, and correctness as well as truth. The name of the series in the original Turkish, *şahit olun*, translates as 'bear witness' in the second person plural.

<sup>2</sup> Episodes are weekly, around 25 minutes long each, and can be viewed at <https://goo.gl/lbMyVy>.

<sup>3</sup> The host's name is Mete Yarar. When asked the reasons behind his 2004 resignation from the army, Yarar cited three: "the increasing distance" that has separated the army from the people in the aftermath of the 1980 military coup in Turkey; the so-called Hood Event in which a number of Turkish soldiers situated in northern Iraq were seized by the US military who put sacks over the former's heads and kept them for 60 hours; and, simply, "wanting to live life" (Müjgan Halis, 'Hayatımı yaşamak için orduyu bıraktım', *Sabah*, April 22, 2012, <http://www.sabah.com.tr/pazar/2012/04/22/hayatimi-yasamak-icin-orduyu-biraktim>). Such statements implying adventurousness, unorthodoxy, and most importantly, a part-insider/part-outsider position vis-à-vis the military, are in perfect concert with a number of the show's own characteristics that are unpacked in this essay—especially, its claims to impartiality and credibility, and its prioritizing of sensation and experience over perception and discourse.

<sup>4</sup> According to Human Rights Foundation of Turkey, 52 curfews have taken place between mid-August and mid-December 2015 across seven of the region's provinces, amounting to an area inhabited by approximately 1.3 million people. See Şeyhmus Çakan, 'Clashes in southeast Turkey kill seven, new curfews declared', *Reuters*, December 14, 2015, [uk.reuters.com/article/uk-turkey-kurds-idUKKBN0TX18O20151214](http://uk.reuters.com/article/uk-turkey-kurds-idUKKBN0TX18O20151214). For a brief history of the armed conflict see Ahmet H. Akkaya and Joost Jongerden, 'Confederalism and Autonomy in Turkey: the Kurdistan Workers' Party and the Reinvention of Democracy', in *The Kurdish Question in Turkey: New Perspectives on Violence, Representation and Reconciliation*, ed. Cengiz Güneş and Welat Zeydanlıoğlu (London: Routledge, 2013), 186-204; Ahmet H. Akkaya and Joost Jongerden, 'Democratic Confederalism as a Kurdish Spring: the PKK and the Quest for Radical Democracy', in *The Kurdish Spring: Geopolitical Changes and the Kurds*, ed. Michael M. Gunter and Mohammed M.A. Ahmed (Costa Mesa, CA: Mazda, 2013), 163-186. For more on the recently halted peace talks (officially called 'the resolution process', see Bahar Başer, *Diasporas and Homeland Conflicts: a Comparative Perspective* (Surrey: Ashgate, 2014), 64-70).

<sup>5</sup> The best-known precedents of state television series chronicling the army's operations against the PKK, produced between the 1990s and today, include (in near-chronological order) *Anadolu'dan Görünüm* (View from Anatolia), *Silahlı Kuvvetler Saati* (The Armed Forces Hour), and *Savaşta Barışta Türk Ordusu* (The Turkish Army in War and Peace).

<sup>6</sup> Tahir Elçi, who was the head of Diyarbakır Bar Association, was assassinated on 28 November 2015 in his hometown's historic center moments after reading a press statement that criticized all parties involved in the armed conflict for the damage they have impinged upon the city's architectural heritage (Zia Weise, 'Top human rights lawyer shot dead in Turkey's restive south-east', *The Telegraph*, November 28, 2015, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/turkey/12022765/Top-human-rights-lawyer-shot-dead-in-Turkeys-restive-south-east.html>). Military surveillance from both sides and footage filmed by anti-Assad forces in Syria played an important role in the debates around the downing of the Russian jet fighter on 24 November 2015 (Huizhong Wu, 'Maps from Russia and Turkey tell very different stories about the downed jet', *Mashable*, November 24, 2015, <http://www.mashable.com/2015/11/24/turkey-russia-plane-map/#UIROoN7eOqN>).

<sup>7</sup> Eyal Weizman, *Hollow Land: Israel's Architecture of Occupation* (London and New York, NY: Verso, 2007), 185-210.

<sup>8</sup> Paul Virilio, *The Original Accident* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007), 57-69 and 83-101.

<sup>9</sup> M Hakan Yavuz, *Secularism and Muslim Democracy in Turkey*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 172.

<sup>10</sup> Virilio, *The Original Accident*, 62.

<sup>11</sup> Amy Coplan, 'Catching Characters' Emotions: Emotional Contagion Responses to Narrative Fiction Film', *Film Studies*, 8:1 (2006), 26-38.

<sup>12</sup> Jennifer M. Barker, *The Tactile Eye: Touch and the Cinematic Experience* (Berkeley, CA and London: University of California Press, 2009), 23.

<sup>13</sup> Such forging of intimacy recalls the etymological link between the concepts of 'intimate' and 'inmost' found in a number of languages relevant to this essay. The word 'intimate' originates in the Latin concept of *intimus*, meaning 'inmost'. The connection exists also in both of the two Turkish-language words that correspond to 'intimate': *içten*, which literally means 'from inside', and the loanword *samimi*, which originates in the Arabic concept of 'inmost' (*ṣamīm*; صميم).

<sup>14</sup> Virilio, *The Original Accident*, 83-101.

<sup>15</sup> The theme of post-conflict reconstruction has featured also in a much more sinister way in the mainstream media coverage of the operations, as "urban transformation" in areas like Sur has been proposed as a potential measure for preventing the recurrence of insurgency (Zübeyde Yalçın, 'Sur sakinleri yeni evlerine taşınacak', *Sabah*, December 20, 2015, <http://www.sabah.com.tr/gundem/2015/12/20/sur-sakinleri-yeni-evlerine-tasinacak>), and has been criticized as such (Bedri Adanır, 'Sur'un Harap Edilmesinin Kentsel Dönüşümüyle Bir İlgisi Var mı?' *Bianet*, December 18, 2015, <http://bianet.org/bianet/siyaset/170272-sur-un-harap-edilmesinin-kentsel-donusumle-bir-ilgisi-var-mi?>).

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<sup>16</sup> Methods and tools associated with construction work feature prominently also within *Bear Witness*' coverage of the operations. More specifically, there is heavy emphasis on armored excavators, which law enforcement units employ to level the streetscape by filling in ditches and demolishing barricades in areas under curfew.

<sup>17</sup> Richard Spencer, 'What does Turkey's involvement in air strikes mean for Kurds, Isil, Syria and Nato?', *The Telegraph*, July 29, 2015, [www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/turkey/11769463/What-does-Turkeys-involvement-in-air-strikes-mean-for-Kurds-Isil-Syria-and-Nato.html](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/turkey/11769463/What-does-Turkeys-involvement-in-air-strikes-mean-for-Kurds-Isil-Syria-and-Nato.html).

<sup>18</sup> Such positioning of the state vis-à-vis the conflict was in many ways heralded by the AKP's television commercial produced ahead of the 2014 local elections. Set in Hakkari's long-conflict-ridden Yüksekova district, the commercial starts with an extremely close-up shot of visually illegible machinery accompanied by machine-gun-like sounds to then zoom out and reveal that this is in fact the construction site of the district's recently built airport and that the machines are actually hydraulic bursters and crushers (Editor, 'Türkiye AK Parti'nin Hakkari reklam filmini konuşuyor', *Yeni Şafak*, March 14, 2014, [www.yenisafak.com/video-galeri/turkiye-ak-partinin-hakkari-reklam-filmini-konusuyor-14458](http://www.yenisafak.com/video-galeri/turkiye-ak-partinin-hakkari-reklam-filmini-konusuyor-14458)). More recently, in the aftermath of Kobane's liberation from ISIS, this positioning was also extended to the Turkish authorities' involvement in Syria, when President Erdoğan said the following about those celebrating the liberation in Turkey: "Now, they (Kurds) are dancing. What happened? ISIS was ousted from there. Okay. But who will repair the places that were bombarded? Who will repair those demolished places?" (Yerevan Saeed, 'US congratulates Kurds over Kobane as Turkey slams celebrations', *Rudaw*, January 28, 2015, <http://www.rudaw.net/english/middleeast/syria/28012015>).