with her as I think we are both striving to do critical theoretic work that identifies *how* current conditions are built on specific practices of domination, exclusion, and marginalization that cannot be reformed on the currently accepted normative terms. And even as we are doing this work across different times and geographic spaces, I think we share a commitment to radical theory, direct action, and the reworking of collective practices of freedom in solidarity with those most precariously positioned as unfree.

As Bargu notes, my central claims in *Punishment and Inclusion* are, first, that criminal disenfranchisement polices internal boundaries within the political body of the United States, and, second, that it does so in support of white supremacy as a political system. My focus on voting rights is ultimately in service of moving beyond electoral politics and the norms of inclusion that are managed through the franchise. As I write in the closing pages of the book, this analysis has led me to prison abolition and political solidarity with those who are most subjected to the social and civil death of incarceration. Bargu is quite right to note, however, that it is only in these last pages that such resistance appears.

On the one hand, the lack of voices of resistance from the "many individuals who are captured by the prison system" is partially a product of the discourse of disenfranchisement itself. While voting rights might be of particular interest to political scientists, political professionals, and some mainstream Civil Rights organizations, they are also just one of the many "collateral consequences" of incarceration that perform the pernicious work of enforcing white supremacy in the United States. Such rights are more abstract and arguably less directly relevant to the lived experience of criminalized persons when compared to the more materially harmful and symbolically degrading exclusions from safety, housing, employment, social services, education, and dignity that felons and "ex-felons" experience. Disenfranchisement has not been a *primary* site of organizing by incarcerated and formerly incarcerated persons, and perhaps rightly so, as there are more pressing struggles at hand. Moreover, even when organized resistance against criminal disenfranchisement has emerged, the focus is typically on ex-felon disenfranchisement, with few calls for the rejection of criminal disenfranchisement itself. This is, perhaps, a defensible strategic choice, but it is also through this distinction (between felons and ex-felons) that the "liberalization" of disenfranchisement strengthens white supremacy by fetishizing a form of exclusionary electoral politics that (as critical race and feminist scholars have routinely noted) is largely incapable of addressing systematic forms of exclusion. It is, in part, because of the widespread acceptance of criminal exclusions and lack of resistance to disenfranchisement *itself* that I argue we must look beyond voting rights for sites of resistance to combat white supremacy, ablism, and hetero-patriarchy.

On the other hand, I fully accept Bargu's criticism, and the lack of these voices is a shortcoming of the book. Where her book excels—working with death fasters themselves as agents and theorists—my own book fails. My analysis would have been improved had I done more to think with (and not just about) my subjects. If this has produced a certain functionalism in the book, I nevertheless hope that it can also be destabilized and denaturalized by the genealogical method and the possibilities offered there for reconfiguring subjectivities, agency, and practices of freedom. But I also grant that the best tools for such a destabilization and denaturalization are the voices of the imprisoned and marginalized, as well as those who rebel against the prison itself, resist its techniques of dehumanization, and create new political possibilities and build new political spaces on terms that render the prison impossible. My attention has been turned (in no small part by reading Bargu's work) to these sites of struggle that address both carceral "symptoms" *and* the underlying "diseases" of domination and marginalization: to the recent hunger and work strikes across prisons in California, Ohio, Georgia, and Alabama, and in immigration detention centers; to the rejection of "gender responsive prisons" by persons incarcerated in women's prisons; and, above all, to the everyday acts of resistance, community accountability, and prison and police abolition that occur inside and outside of prison walls.

It is only in retrospect, perhaps, that I recognize the primary audience for this book: those who (like myself) are able to come to these questions "freely," who materially and symbolically enjoy the privileges produced through the unfreedom of others, and who continue to hold that difference-blind forms of liberalism can produce freedom without directly rejecting these enjoyments. This audience can be read analogously to Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s audience in his "Letter from the Birmingham Jail": the white moderate who says "wait," and in doing so, prevents the necessary confrontation with white supremacy that has been naturalized under the sign of liberal freedom and civic equality. And it is precisely this audience that must recognize that voting rights, while perhaps necessary, are insufficient for liberation under the terms of mass incarceration.

Starve and Immolate: The Politics of Human Weapons.
By Banu Bargu. New York: Columbia University Press, 2014. 512p. $65.00.
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— Andrew Dilts, *Loyola Marymount University*

In the opening pages of this excellent book, Banu Bargu identifies a pair of seemingly simple aims. The first is to tell the story of the mass hunger strike launched across Turkish prisons in October of 2000, converted one

month later into a "fast unto death." At its peak, the death fast struggle had 1,500 participants, protesting the removal of prisoners from communal wards (in which prisoners governed themselves) to high-security prisons ("F-type" prisons with a cellular architecture that would isolate inmates). Six years later, 122 people had died as a part of the struggle, either at the hands of the Turkish state or from self-inflicted starvation and self-immolation. Bargu's second aim is to understand the meaning of this self-destruction, taking it seriously as political action and its participants seriously as political agents. The book is a clear success on these two aims, offering both a detailed account of the death fast struggle and giving readers a compelling theoretical framework (a dialectic of "biosovereignty" and "necroresistance") through which to understand that struggle. In achieving these ends, *Starve and Immolate* goes much further and offers more profound and important claims, ultimately pushing the boundaries of how we ought to think about the aporias of political and corporeal life and death.

Bargu speaks directly to questions of sovereignty, biopower, biopolitics, and, most importantly, the (im) possibilities of resistance. Her book is both an ethnography of the "margins" of Turkish political life during the years of the death fast and an impressive work in political theory, engaging these questions in both abstract and concrete terms. Building on Michel Foucault's analytics of power, she corrects erroneous readings of his work and offers a substantial theoretical upgrade to ahistorical accounts of bare life and sovereignty. Against a common reading of Foucault—that in the contemporary period juridical sovereignty's power *of* life and death has been replaced by modes of biopolitical governmentality's power *over* life itself, and that this replacement blocks the possibility of meaningful and liberatory resistance—Bargu demonstrates how sovereign power has not given way to biopower, but instead has been reconfigured as a paradoxical combination of *biosovereignty*. This conceptualization allows her to read the death fast struggle as a sacrificial mode of *counterconduct*: as *necroresistance* to biosovereignty. The death fast emerged in response to specific exercises of biosovereign power by the Turkish state, and the author shows how death fast participants acted not just in spite of but also through and against these exercises. By means of the weaponization of life itself, the participants in the death fast struggle provide Bargu with a model of radical resistance that challenges readers to rethink the categories of success and failure by which we usually judge political agency and radical movements.

The bulk of *Starve and Immolate* details the case, and in particular, the decisive introduction of the 1991 "anti-terror law," which, Bargu argues, marks the moment when Turkish state sovereignty was redefined, through a fixation on the 'health" and "security" of the nation, as *biosovereignty* (p. 104). The provision of the anti-terror law introducing F-type prisons ultimately sparked the death fast struggle inside prison wards. Because the strikes began in a place where the state's authority should have been most absolute, members of the Turkish government interpreted the uprising as a "full-blow crisis of sovereignty" (p. 113). The author argues that the state's response to this "crisis" hinged on three techniques: making law (drawing distinctions between "ordinary" and "political" prisoners); making war (violently invading prison wards to "save" the death fast participants under "Operation Return to Life," transferring prisoners to isolation in high-security prisons and "resuscitating" death fasters with nonconsensual feeding); and making peace (reducing sentences and selectively offering pardons to some participants). Through each of these deployments of biosovereign power, she argues, the state reasserted itself as the only legitimate source of violence, as well as the only legitimate cause to which citizens could sacrifice their lives.

Bargu recounts these events twice, first from the perspective of the biosovereign "center" (Chapter 3) and second from that of the necroresistant "margins" of the communal prison wards (Chapter 4). She thus underscores the radicalism of participants who initially called not only for the complete reversal of transfers to F-type prisons but also for a new constitutional order, a redefinition of Turkish citizenship, and an end to all "antidemocratic laws" (p. 194). From the beginning of the struggle, Bargu argues, prisoners did not simply challenge the state's sovereign *monopoly* on the use of violence, but by the choice to weaponize life itself through a death fast, they also challenged the state's *monopsony* of sacrifice, thereby striking at the core of biosovereignty itself.

It was remarkable that the death fast struggle could be organized across the ideological divisions within the Turkish Left. Bargu argues that what allowed for unity was, first, a shared commitment to Marxism, and second, the specific prison experience that was common across ideological divisions. In particular, the collective life built in prison ward communes both provided space to organize protests and constituted "alternative modes of sociality" that were disrupted by the move to cellular confinement and isolation (p. 224). The unification behind death fasts as a form of necroresistance ultimately transformed Marxist politics, and a new form of *sacrificial marxism* emerged (p. 236) from the death fast struggle's use of theologically inflected rituals tying self-destructive sacrifice (martyrdom) intimately to Marxist militancy.

Such unity notwithstanding, Bargu addresses the internal complexity of the death fast struggle, arguing that necroresistance itself is multifaceted, and (like the biosovereignty it challenges) even paradoxical in its deployment. Drawing from interviews and statements by death fast participants themselves, the author categorizes three strands of self-understanding expressed by participants. First, some participants saw the death fasts as an "act of resistance," struggling *within* the terms of

democratic rights for human dignity, focused on ending the torture of isolation. Second, some participants interpreted the fasts as an act of war against neoliberal capitalism, viewing isolation in high-security prisons as itself a class-based attack on collective life in ward communes, as well as part of broader neoliberal economic adjustments that promoted social and economic isolation and the privatization of the public. Finally, the most radical interpretation (and the one which drives the book's central thesis) saw the death fasts as a refusal of biosovereignty and the state's claims to manage and give meaning to life itself, what Bargu calls a "withdrawal of consent" and an attempt to "think outside the system of power that wrapped itself around individuals" (p. 299).

This radical interpretation—the rejection of the very terms of life and death offered by the state: a claim to a "different kind of sovereignty" rather than a "different sovereign"—is the only path Bargu identifies as offering an "escape" from the current order. She implies that the force of such refusal is also a deferral to a nonsovereign sovereignty *to come*, but which is made possible because of the space opened up by the death fasts as a counterhegemonic force. Necroresistance thus functions through all three strands and is thus "simultaneously within, against, and beyond the biosovereign assemblage, rehearsing its subversion in multiple ways, albeit without success" (p. 309). Bargu is ethically responsive to her subjects here, refusing to define for them the meaning of the death fast, and she also rightly challenges the reader's desires for an unambiguous measurement of "success" or some redemption narrative at the close of the struggle. We would be wrong, Bargu implies, to read "without success" as the same thing as "a failure." Rather, she claims, the death fast struggle may have opened up a possibility not simply for more "humane" prisons, or new forms of Marxism, but for a different world.

If this is a weakness in Bargu's analysis, it is nevertheless a productive one, stemming from such evaluations of success, failure, and future horizons, forcing us to ask new questions and think differently about political agency under biosovereignty. Yet even as the author moves readers in these directions (particularly in the book's last chapter and conclusion), I remain unsure how to read the particular tension between more radical forms of refusal of sovereignty and the human rights discourse that was ultimately "successful" in bringing the fasts to a close in 2006. Bargu recounts that when a well-known human rights attorney, Behiç Aşçi, took up the death fast in 2006, his involvement brought renewed popular support to the movement but also dramatically narrowed the movement's demands to simply the end of cellular isolation in F-type prisons. Aşçi's fast, in contrast to earlier participants, appealed to a liberal rights-based discourse, contesting isolation as a form of torture. A compromise was ultimately reached, but one that, as Bargu notes, necessarily consolidated the state's ideological hegemony as the protector of human life and reified it as the legitimate arbiter of such rights. By the author's own analysis, it seems that this interpretive strand fits uncomfortably (if at all) within necroresistance insofar as it renders the death fast as a primarily instrumental rather than expressive action (p. 330). And while this instrumentalization may have allowed the death fasts to come to an end, Bargu notes that incarceration rates are now at an all-time high in Turkey, and collective confinement continues to be replaced with "solitary or small-group confinement in cells" (p. 331).

It may have been more in keeping with Bargu's own analysis to reject the terms of success and failure themselves and to develop instead the alternative lexicon of "escape" (a term that appears in Foucault's own analysis of biopower but which is seldom taken up).[1] Bargu provocatively gestures at several points in such a direction, analogizing the death fasts to an "exodus" or "prison escape" (p. 308) and a "line of flight" (p. 344). I hear echoes of fugitive slaves, Maroon communities, abolition democracy, and decolonization here and wish that she had carried this thread further, pushing harder on the reformist stance of the liberal rights-based discourse, as it appears that these reforms both practically and theoretically have frustrated such escapes and have foreclosed the very possibilities Bargu sees as having been opened by the death fasts. The limits of such compromises could not be more pressing, I would argue, as we have seen in the retrenchment of isolation and solitary confinement in the United States and elsewhere, even following prison hunger strikes like those which were renewed across California in the summer of 2013.

That I was left wanting more in these directions is a testament to the importance of this book, the skill of its execution, and Bargu's insistence on fearlessly listening to her subjects. *Starve and Immolate* is an exemplary work of critical theory, pushing us to ask different and better questions. Moreover, it is an exemplar of the role that critical theory ought to play in political science: self-consciously bridging subfields and showing how theory is at its best when it draws on empirics and when it is animated by marginalized voices, when it takes participants in political struggles seriously as thinkers and actors, and when it broadens our conceptions of political struggles themselves.

Note

1 Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, Vol. 1: *An Introduction* (New York: Vintage Books, 1990), p. 143.

Response to Andrew Dilts's review of *Starve and Immolate: The Politics of Human Weapons*

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— Banu Bargu

I thank Andrew Dilts for his generous review. His reading perceptively captures the challenge of my book: to think

together the abstract and the concrete. I take his thoughtful critique as an opportunity to address how this task plays out at various levels of argumentation, as well as an invitation to reflect on how our projects intersect.

My work situates the death fast movement in a dialectic between biosovereignty and necroresistance through a political ethnography that conveys the complexity of self-destructive protest. Noting the tensions among the different interpretative strands that I develop relying on the participants of such protest, Dilts first interrogates how these cohere together. The book argues that the death fast movement was an ensemble of contradictory tendencies whose unity was forged in the spatio-political experience of "communes" based in prison wards and through the practice of struggle itself. However, this unity remained internally contentious due to the coalition structure of the movement, waning participation, and the strategic mobilization of different strands in response to unfolding events.

Does the contradictory complexity of the struggle not stand in tension, Dilts asks next, with the book's overarching interpretation? His pivotal question in fact astutely discerns the critical distance between the conglomerate of self-representations of the struggle's participants and my intervention. While my reading is informed by the different tendencies in the movement, it is purposefully not the equivalent of their amalgamation, nor is it same as the tendency that ultimately prevailed at the movement's end. Instead, the book stresses what is ultimately novel and distinct about necropolitical struggle in general, locating its specificity in its refusal of biosovereign domination. It is true that this reading has greater affinities with one of the existing interpretative strands, but it does not adopt its perspective to critique the other strands. Its overarching aim, rather, is to explore the import and limitations of the movement as a whole in relation to the power regime it sets out to challenge.

Finally, Dilts raises the provocative meta-theoretical question of whether it would not be more apt to abandon the narrative of success and failure while evaluating necroresistance, especially if this form annuls, as I contend, the instrumental rationality of traditional protest. I think this question effectively reveals how our conceptual arsenal often lags behind our encounter with the new. I agree with Dilts's suggestion that we need to develop an "alternative lexicon" that would provide political and ethical criteria for assessing this repertoire in keeping with its noninstrumental, expressive character and as immanent to the form of struggle rather than as a function of its goals or effects.

In closing, I would like to note the interesting complementarity between our projects, which I have come to discover through this exchange. Geographically, culturally, and politically, there is ostensibly little that connects racialized felon disenfranchisement in the United States with the hunger strikes of political prisoners in Turkey. However, underpinning our different starting points and distinctive modes of argumentation is a problematic in common: the increasingly global reality of the carceral state, the securitization of prisons, and their deleterious impact on democracy and struggles for political emancipation. Our work is guided by a deeply shared understanding of what it means to be doing critical theory today—one that takes its cue from the margins, where the oppressive structures of our world become more poignantly visible, in order to pursue a tradition of theoretical critique, but also one that attempts to think in empirically grounded ways, experimenting with hybrid forms of research that blur disciplinary boundaries while maintaining fidelity to an emancipatory politics.