**Nightmare-Knowledges: Epistemologies of Disappearance**

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Between August 2015 and August 2016, 114 round-the-clock curfews were declared in eastern regions of Turkey. One of the longest of these took place in Silopi, where the residents could not leave their houses for a period of twenty-three days.[[1]](#endnote-1) During the curfew, Taybet İnan, a fifty-seven year old mother of twelve, was shot in front of her house, when she was returning from her neighbor’s house. She was alive for about twenty hours afterwards, and her body remained on the street for seven days. During this period, her family was not able to leave the house to retrieve her body from the street.[[2]](#endnote-2) At the end of seven days, İnan’s body was taken first to the Şırnak Public Hospital, and then she was buried by local authorities at midnight.[[3]](#endnote-3) According to the local authorities, there are no records of any calls made to remove the body during those seven days, and the officials were only made aware of the incident after seven days. In a letter, however, İnan’s wrote that there has to be some records of the calls that they have made, as he remembers so clearly that no one in the house was able to sleep during those seven days, for they were all worried that birds might land on the body.[[4]](#endnote-4)

Even though her family was not allowed to attend the burial, İnan’s case is an official burial by the state, with a designated gravesite. However, the relatives of those who were buried by the state do not always get such acknowledgement of the burial process, or have information on the whereabouts of the burial site.[[5]](#endnote-5) The Saturday Mothers, as mothers of the disappeared in Turkey have come to be known, have been meeting on Istiklal Street in Istanbul on Saturdays for the last 704 weeks, at the time of writing this chapter. The oldest member of the Saturday Mothers, Berfo Kırbayır, died at the age of 105, after thirty years of looking for her son Cemil Kırbayır, who was called into a police station in 1984 “for five minutes.” During the thirty years that she was looking for her son, Kırbayır refused to lock her doors or close her windows in case her son might come back one night.[[6]](#endnote-6) In the cases of enforced disappearance, especially when such long time has passed since the person disappeared, it is understood by the relatives that the fate of the person is nothing other than death. Kırbayır, however, was one of the many Saturday Mothers insist that their disappeared relatives are present to them. Another one of the Saturday Mothers, when describing how present her son is to her, says, ‘He is there before my eyes, and he will always remain. For instance, when I am alone, the neighbors visit in the evening, we sit and chat, but when they leave, I am left alone here. Until twelve o’clock, or eleven o’clock. Then he suddenly comes and sits beside me. ‘I see him now,’ I say to myself, ‘he is here.’[[7]](#endnote-7)

Even though virtually all of the mothers insist on the presence of the disappeared, their remains are mostly absent. Very few people have been able to retrieve the bones of their disappeared relatives, or have been informed where such remains might be. The remains were often reported to be in unofficial mass graves, such as unused wells, empty lots, or trash disposal areas, often later found by chance encounters.[[8]](#endnote-8) *Newala Qaseba,* ‘the River of Butchers’ is one of these areas, a trash disposal area in Siirt, another town in Eastern Turkey. While the remains of over 300 people are estimated to be here, the families of 93 people were officially informed about the whereabouts of their relatives. Many families moved to the vicinity of *Newala Qaseba*. One of them states that ever since they moved to Siirt, they have been going there to ‘talk to the river,’ even though there is no river, and what is called the ‘River of Butchers’ is nothing other than a large trash disposal area where public entrance is not allowed. [[9]](#endnote-9)

This paper works on discourses that are strange, or that do not ‘make sense,’ that emerge in the context of improper burial practices, such as the worry of Inan’s family about birds landing on her body, Saturday Mother’s insistence on the presence of their disappeared relatives, or the families in *Newala Qaseba* talking to the river. I aim to understand how and why such discourses emerge, and specifically, what kind of resistant capacities such discourses carry in necropolitical spaces, where life and the living are subsumed under the active production, regulation, and optimization of death. To this end, the paper is divided into three parts: the first part analyzes the relation between necropolitics and knowledge production, in order to establish necropolitics not only as a political technology, but also an epistemic one. The second part investigates the specific techniques of knowledge deployed in necropolitics. These techniques, which are here called *necro-epistemic methods*, target the temporal and logical coherence of memory in necropolitical spaces. The last part focuses on the practices of epistemic resistance, which work through mobilising perplexing realities in order to instigate counter-discourses that challenge official narratives on death. Overall, I argue that these counter-discourses, which I call *nightmare-knowledges*, constitute instances of collective epistemic agency, where memory and grief are mobilised against necropolitics.

**I. Necropolitical Assemblages, Frames of Death**

According to Michel Foucault, contemporary politics is defined not by traditional modes of sovereignty, but rather by a kind of power that works to optimise life, which he calls biopolitics. For Foucault, sovereignty is primarily a model of power defined by its relation to laws and borders: as such, it is invested in life only through its threat to take life in the instances where borders are crossed or laws that are broken. ‘Sovereign power’s effect on life is exercised only when the sovereign can kill.’[[10]](#endnote-10) Such killing is done in the name of the sovereign, and therefore the punishment reflects both the sovereign decision and the sovereign power.[[11]](#endnote-11) Thus, the height of the sovereign power, Foucault argues, is the moment of taking life, and therefore it must prolong and spectacularise that moment. In contrast to sovereignty, biopolitics takes life as its object, its main role is to ‘to ensure, sustain and multiply life.’[[12]](#endnote-12) For this reason, the methods of biopolitics are much more discreet, as it works through a normalizing impulse on behalf of life. Thus, Foucault famously states, while sovereignty is shaped by a power to “take life or let live,” biopolitics works as a power to “make live or let die,” steeping its technologies in the midst of life.[[13]](#endnote-13) Insofar as it is invested in life, death is ‘embarrassing’ to biopolitics.[[14]](#endnote-14)

Various scholars after Foucault have indicated that the politics of life does not mean that there is no death involved in biopolitics. ‘Life can be a threatening force,’[[15]](#endnote-15) as Rosi Bradiotti, asserts; as much as the principal goal of biopolitics is to optimise life, such optimisation is made possible through the regulation of death, as well as life. Achille Mbembe argues that biopolitics is inseparable from the presence of a yet another technology that he calls “necropolitics,” which dovetails biopolitics and consists in the government of death and the dead. In necropolitics, the sovereign right to kill has found itself a normative basis in biopolitics and, therefore, now works in the production of death-worlds, where entire populations become positioned as having a close affinity with death.[[16]](#endnote-16) Round-the-clock curfews, such as the one during which İnan died, would be examples of such death worlds, where sovereign killing is distributed beyond the purview of sovereignty, and is executed beyond its relation to laws and borders. As a result, death dealing is neither spectacular, nor punitive. Instead, killing is normalised, and death within curfew becomes the expected state of affairs.

Death-worlds, for Mbembe, are primarily spaces of normalised exceptionality, where life is subsumed under the powers of death. These are, in his words, ‘new and unique forms of social existence in which vast populations are subjected to conditions of life conferring upon them the status of *living dead.’[[17]](#endnote-17)* Necropolitics in this sense has a mobile relation to space: a necropolitical space refers not to a concrete geography (such as a city, or a country), but spaces of exceptionality that open up in relation to such geographies. Curfew zones, prisons, mass burial sites, or temporary detention centers transformed from parking lots or schools, constitute necropolitical spaces, not because of their locations, but precisely because of their detachment from their location. Mbembe asserts that, politics is a ‘work of death’: if the death of İnan attests to this, it is not only because it demonstrates an exceptional form of sovereign killing, but rather shows the normalization of sovereign killing to such an extent that all forms of life in these spaces are shaped by their relation to death.[[18]](#endnote-18) As such, necropolitical spaces are spaces where not only the possibility of living, but also the entire content and the fact of living, constituted by the ethical, political, and epistemological conditions of life, are subsumed under death.

When it comes to death-worlds, how knowledge is produced, how information is distributed, the normative frames through which it is made available, the kinds of logics that are used, and the value of truth attributed to knowledge become important questions. Foucault argues that power and knowledge are never separable from each other, and instead refers to ‘power/knowledge assemblages’ where ‘the exercise of power perpetually creates knowledge and, conversely, knowledge constantly induces effects of power. ... It is not possible for power to be exercised without knowledge, it is impossible for knowledge not to engender power.’[[19]](#endnote-19) Technologies of power are not inseparable from methods deployed in the field of knowledge. Relations of power that traverse the social body are indeed ‘indissociable from a discourse of truth, and they can neither be established nor function unless a true discourse is produced, accumulated, put into circulation, and set to work.’[[20]](#endnote-20) Similarly, in necropolitics, not only the tactics that are deployed are shaped by death, but so are the modes of knowledge that are produced, practiced, and distributed are organized around normalised death. .

Invaluable work has been produced on normative knowledge production and information distribution around death in necropolitical spaces. Jasbir Puar, for example, argues that the necropolitical work of death is not separable from a normative impulse to protect and optimise a certain *kind of life*. For Puar, discourses such as the war on terror attest to how necropolitics disguises itself by promoting the kinds of life that are normatively deemed acceptable.[[21]](#endnote-21) Thus, Puar argues, what is at stake is a ‘bio-necro collaboration,’ where the ‘latter (necropolitics) makes its presence known at the limits and through the excess of the former; the former masks the multiplicity of its relationships to death and killing in order to enable the proliferation of the latter.’[[22]](#endnote-22) The work of necropolitics, in this sense, would be known only in the cases where lives that are deemed normal and acceptable are endangered; promoting the wellbeing of these kinds of lives would entail actively hiding the necropolitical work of death.

This normative impulse can also be thought of in relation to what Judith Butler calls ‘framing,’ where certain parts of the population, and even entire populations, can be positioned as ‘deadly’ or ‘prone to death.’[[23]](#endnote-23) The act of framing works on political and epistemological levels and refers to the destruction of parts of the population both as political agents and objects of knowledge. İnan’s death during the curfew and the general press silence regarding this death would be an example of such a frame, where the entire population of Silopi is positioned as akin to death, such that the actual dying that takes place would not be an object of knowledge to be registered, known, or distributed. Frames, in Butler’s account, provide a general coherence for events that would otherwise be unrelated or incoherent. Production of social norms, on the other hand, works to regulate the very possibility of knowledge regarding the work of necropolitics. The archive of enforced disappearances is an example of the destruction of objects of knowledge: between names that were taken in and out many times, and those that did not make it to the archive, numbers that are too vague and shifting, and discursive shortcuts used, piecing out the ‘who/what/where’ becomes difficult, if not impossible. The archive itself is destroyed as an object of knowledge, insofar as it does not open itself up to the knower as an object that can be grasped, or as an archive that provides information about a series of things such as the names of the people disappeared, the places of the secret detention centers, or the locations of mass burial sites.

However, as much as the archive of enforced disappearances disappears as quickly as the bodies of those disappeared, the knowledge of enforced disappearances continues to live. If we are to take the question of knowledge in necropolitics seriously, it is necessary to discuss not only the knowledge *of* necropolitics, but also the knowledge produced *in* necropolitics. This would require an investigation not only regarding how information on the work of necropolitics is distributed, but also of the knowledge production practices deployed in and through necropolitical mechanisms, where the inhabitants of death-worlds do not only constitute objects of knowledge, but are also subjects thereof.

**II. Necro-Epistemic Technologies: Memory and Coherence**

Foucault, in *Society Must Be Defended,* discusses what he calls “subjugated knowledges,” knowledges that emerge from interactions with power. There are two modes of subjugated knowledges that he mentions: the first one is the kind where the contents have been actively disguised in relation to political practices, ‘buried and disguised in a functionalist coherence or formal systematization,’ and second, ‘the kinds of knowledges that have been disqualified from counting as knowledge.’[[24]](#endnote-24) The former are the kinds of knowledges whose contents do not match with the official or dominant discourse. These are, in other words, the kinds of knowledges that encounter active dismissal, denial and get buried in the archive: killings in curfew zones would be an example of such knowledge, or the indefinite detentions of the disappeared people. The archive becomes obsolete, and the knowledge of these occurrences may or may not be revealed at a different time. The destruction of entire populations as objects of knowledge through the frames that Butler refers to would be an example of such a subjugation of knowledge, where knowledge of such destruction doesn’t get eliminated, but rather is buried.

The second set of subjugated knowledges is a ‘whole set of knowledges that have been disqualified as inadequate to their task or insufficiently elaborated.’[[25]](#endnote-25) These are a whole set of ‘localised knowledges’ that do not rise to the threshold of official knowledge, where the agent is dismissed from credibility. This kind of a subjugation of knowledge would be what Miranda Fricker calls ‘epistemic injustice,’ where the agent is subjected to games of power that question ‘their capacity as a knower.’[[26]](#endnote-26) These modes of subjugated knowledges suggest that power works on knowledge in more ways than impacting the relation between what is said and how it is recorded.

What are the apparatuses of knowledge operative in necropolitical spaces? I argue that the epistemic techniques of necropolitics work not only on the documentation or suppression of memory, but rather, in shaping, producing, and organising a collective memory of necropolitical death. These methods, which I refer to here as ‘necro-epistemic methods,’ target the temporal and logical coherence of memory through impacting the credibility of the knower and disallowing lucidity regarding the event. These methods involve targeting the coherence of temporality, the erasure of memory, and gendered hysterization of the relatives of the disappeared.

One of the earliest descriptions of enforced disappearance, proposed by the UN Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances (WG), states three main characteristics:

(A) Deprivation of liberty against the will of the person concerned;

(B) Involvement of Government Officials, at least indirectly by acquiescence;

(C) Refusal to acknowledge the detention and to disclose the fate and whereabouts of the person concerned.[[27]](#endnote-27)

In most cases of the enforced disappearances in Turkey, the scenario follows these characteristics: a person is taken in with the direct or indirect involvement of state officials, yet such involvement is denied by the state. In many of the cases, the refusal to acknowledge the detention of the person is accompanied by the production of a temporal lag between the official account and the experiential one, where those who seek to find the missing person are given varying temporal explanations with no concrete reference to the experiential reality of the event. The case of the three people, disappeared in the Doruklu Village of Silopi, is a typical example of this: on New Year’s Eve, three people drive with their own car to the Silopi District Gendarmerie Central Station, in order to bring a turkey to the soldiers, which they had demanded. When others in the village go to the gendarmerie asking after these three people who do not return home, the answer they receive is that ‘they left ten minutes ago,’ although those three people were never seen after this point.[[28]](#endnote-28) The answer that they received, that of ‘left ten minutes ago’ is the most common response in the cases where disappeared person had gone to the government building voluntarily. In the cases of public detentions, on the other hand, the temporal lag in the accounts is larger. In these cases, those seeking their relatives are told that the relatives have been released “a long time ago,” even though the person has disappeared just a day before.[[29]](#endnote-29)

This temporal lag is often shaped along the lines of what Fricker calls ‘testimonial injustice,’ where the testimonies of the individuals searching for the disappeared are not afforded credibility. One necro-epistemic method, then, is to create a temporal displacement, where the experiential temporality is replaced by official temporality, but the official temporality does not constitute a coherent whole. This is perhaps the most conspicuous in cases of ‘unofficial public detentions,’ where the person is taken into detention at a public place, such as a post office or a patisserie, when they were likely by themselves, by individuals that look like civilians, who are not in uniforms.[[30]](#endnote-30) While the witnesses describe the situation as “abduction by unknown people,” the relatives searching for the disappeared are told that the person was afterwards seen here and there, continuing to run errands. Ramazan Bilir, for example, searched for his brother for three years, pursuing a variety of claims made to him by officials about his brother being seen in various cities and he finally himself disappeared after pursuing someone who told him that his brother was last seen in Mardin. The impact of such discordant narratives is to discredit the experiential memories of the relatives or the searchers through crowding them with conflicting information and thereby actively producing temporal discontinuities.

It is not only the possibility of temporal coherence that is targeted in necro-epistemic methods; however, it is also the logical coherence of events. Fricker, discussing epistemic injustice, describes another mode, which she names ‘hermeneutical injustice,’ where the experiences of the knower become obscure to themselves, such that the means of making sense of the experience are made unavailable to the knower and the knower is left with a vague series of memories that consist of silences, unanswered questions, and answers that do not make sense. In Fricker’s words, hermeneutical injustice is an experience one encounters, ‘when a gap in the collective interpretative resources puts someone in an unfair disadvantage when it comes to making sense of their own experience.’[[31]](#endnote-31)As another prominent necro-epistemic method, this gap is often times shaped along gendered dynamics between relatives of the disappeared and the state. Take for example, the Saturday Mothers, as a specifically gendered group, consisting not only of mothers, but also the sisters and wives of the disappeared. For many of them, the process involves both being sexualised as widowers and being hysterisised as grieving women. Many of them recall sexual advances enacted by the officials at one point and being told that the disappearance is their own fault at other points. Being told that they are ‘crazy,’ for still expecting the relatives to return is a common experience for many, so is being told that all they need is a husband.[[32]](#endnote-32) Hermeneutical injustice refers to the insufficiency of one’s own hermeneutical resources to make sense of the events unfolding; between silences, requests for sexual favors, and being held accountable for the continued absence of the disappeared, many of the women indeed refer precisely to ‘not understanding’ what is happening, or why it is happening.[[33]](#endnote-33)

Such a lack of understanding or events ‘not making sense’ is not a peripheral, but rather, a fundamental aspect of enforced disappearances. Many of the elements that make up the organised system called ‘enforced disappearance’ are unbelievable themselves. As Avery Gordon states, ‘secret arrest, transportation under cover of darkness, the refusal to give information as to the person’s whereabouts, and the belief that ‘deterring’ resistance could be best accomplished by people vanishing ‘without a trace’ are the elements that refigure the system of repression known as ‘disappearance.’’[[34]](#endnote-34) From secret detention centers to unrecorded torture locations to random mass burial sites, what makes up the system of enforced disappearance is its improbability, where the possibility of corroborating information is blocked at each and every step, and even when it is corroborated and concrete, it doesn’t become any less difficult to ‘believe.’ Not understanding, in many of these cases, can remain even when the relatives learn minor or major aspects of the whereabouts of the disappeared. For example, the relatives of victims in *Newala Qaseba*, some of whom were told at some point that the remains of their loved ones are there in the pile of trash, report waking up some mornings utterly convinced that the whole thing “was a dream and nothing more,” and still can’t believe that it is true.[[35]](#endnote-35)

The last necro-epistemic method targets memory altogether and makes the even unmemorable, where the event or the possibility of the event is taken away, where those who remain are left with blocks of absences in the epistemological web. In terms of local information distribution, this involves erasing not only the disappearance, but also the person themselves, from public records, and from local news. As Antonious Robben states, “the anonymous burial of the executed and the disappeared entailed their physical, social, political, legal and spiritual eradication.”[[36]](#endnote-36) In most of the cases of disappearance, there are no records of the person disappeared: no records of death or funeral, but also no record of detention, court orders, and in many cases, no records of birth, either. The name of the disappeared may become a forbidden subject, where uttering the name in public might put the speaker at risk of detention.[[37]](#endnote-37) Erasure involves the eradication of the possibility of remembering, where those who remember can also disappear.[[38]](#endnote-38) In the absence of records, there is no person, no body, no one to disappear in the first place; in the absence of utterances, there is no loss, nothing to grieve, and nothing to remember. Banu Bargu calls this process “invisibilization,” which “renders bodies, history, and violence invisible.”[[39]](#endnote-39) This invisibilization erases not only the person disappeared, but also the world in which the possibility of this person existed, and the world to which the person has disappeared.

Rendering invisible is inseparable from rendering unmemorable: the collective oblivion of necropolitics is the effect of such an act of rendering unmemorable. During the curfews when İnan died, Ahmet Davutoğlu, the Prime Minister at the time, gave multiple speeches where he argued that there is “not a single dead civilian” in the towns with curfews.[[40]](#endnote-40) In the case of enforced disappearances, many were attributed by the mainstream news to counter-guerilla activity.[[41]](#endnote-41) The families of *Newala Qaseba,* on the other hand, were repeatedly told that there are only animal bones and random clothes there, because it is a trash disposal area after all, and the things they see there are trash, and nothing more.

María del Rosaria Acosta refers to “oblivion in collective memory,” where the traces of violence can be erased in such a way that the remainders of memory do not make sense beyond inducing horror.[[42]](#endnote-42) Similarly, the cases of enforced disappearances, unburied bodies left on the street during long curfews, and trash disposal areas where dogs dig up human bones become, in the oblivion of collective memory, tales that are told with little to no evidence to support them, beyond instances of women who were told their husbands purposefully left them without any logical rationale for their supposed ‘actions,’ people who disappear while looking for their disappeared relatives, and images of dead bodies that are hard to imagine in the first place. What these tales leave behind, as Gordon says, is “a society filled with ghosts,” inundated with uncorroborated memories, illogical statements, disappeared people who have never existed, and disjointed temporalities consisting of official and non-official moments.[[43]](#endnote-43)

**III. Nightmare Knowledges and Epistemic Resistance**

As Foucault says, ‘Where there is power, there is resistance.’[[44]](#endnote-44) There is no method of power that works only in a unilateral form, in the mode of domination. Instead, power permeates life and death, and so does resistance. In *Starve and Immolate*, Bargu refers to the ways in which life and death emerge in contemporary politics not only as objects of power, but also as objects of resistance.[[45]](#endnote-45) Insofar as the biopolitical infusion of life is inseparable from the necropolitical work of death, resistances that work in the name of life are also coupled with those that weaponise life. Bargu refers to this form of resistance as “necro-resistance,” which “negates life and turns death against the power regime.”[[46]](#endnote-46) Just as life and death are not solid categories that are separate from the field of power relations, so are they intimately linked in practices of resistance: if power can work on death, so too can death be politicised against power.

Necropolitics, however, is not only a mechanism of power that works to produce and regulate death. It rather is a power/knowledge assemblage, where the production and regulation of knowledge constitute a fundamental aspect of its work. As such, it is necessary to see not only death itself, but also the knowledge of and on death as a possible site of resistance. An analysis of how death is both produced as an object of politics and marks a contested category thus requires us to pay attention to resistant knowledge production practices that are played out around death.

How can the knowledge of death can be taken up and politicised in order to challenge necro-epistemic methods? Such resistance depends on what I will call “nightmare knowledges,” knowledges that are born out of necro-epistemic techniques and yet work to politicise the knowledge of death in response to these techniques. If necro-epistemic methods target the coherence and continuity of memory, nightmare-knowledges demonstrate modes of epistemic resistance precisely because they work to mobilise perplexity by underlying the incoherence born out of these methods, and making space for counter-memories that challenge the official discourse.

José Medina states that epistemologies of resistance are built on the premise that the subjects of epistemic injustice are not solely subjected to injustice but rather are endowed with the epistemic capacity to survive, build relations, and resist in the context of such injustice.[[47]](#endnote-47) Insofar as power is not only exercised from a single locus of domination, resistance does not only mean opposition. ‘Points of resistance are everywhere in the power network…producing cleavages in a society that shifts about, fracturing unities and effecting regroupings, furrowing across individuals themselves, cutting them up and remolding them, marking off irreducible regions in them.’[[48]](#endnote-48) Resistance takes on multiple shapes in forming subjects and knowledge while destabilising and fracturing relations of power. In resistant epistemologies, locating resistance requires investigating those cuts, molds, and cleavages, in individuals and collectives, memories and forgettings.

Indeed, Medina asserts, one way that epistemic resistance can be experienced is “perplexity,” where, instead of a directly oppositional movement, resistance is experienced ‘more like being pulled in different directions from the inside,’ or ‘like feeling a rupture.’[[49]](#endnote-49) This rupture consists of the experience that there is no singular discourse that encompasses the totality of truth. The knower is perplexed insofar as their experiential memory is in a disjoint from the dominant discourse, and yet the dominant discourse itself does not constitute a coherent whole. Mobilising perplexity as epistemic resistance entails two aspects: first, it involves challenging the dominant discourse by pointing to the incoherencies of the official discourse. Second, it involves claiming experiential memory in order to reveal the ways in which the official discourse is no more credible. In necropolitical spaces, such perplexity is produced precisely by necro-epistemic methods, which target the temporal and rational coherence of memory through discrediting the agents, and erasing their experiences. Nightmare knowledges, on the other hand, mobilise precisely this perplexity by pointing to the incoherencies of the official discourse and challenging the boundaries of necropolitical rationalities, such as the boundaries between dream and reality, memory and imagination, or reason and unreason.

Many of the Saturday Mothers, when asked to explain their experiences for the last 30 years, describe these years as a series of dreams. One of them describes a particularly repetitive one: *‘*I see him in my sleep. ‘Ayşe,’ he calls out to me, I look up, and I see my deceased son next to him, too. He asks me, ‘Ayşe, do your eyes still see?’ and ‘Yes,’ I reply. ‘Do you see the white rock over there?’ he asks me, ‘Yes, I do,’ I reply. ‘Go there, you will find my clothes,’ he says. There is a hill, a very high hill.’[[50]](#endnote-50)As much as this is a repetitive dream for her, it does not belong singularly to her. Many of the Mothers have similar dreams, dreams where they find the person, dreams where they go through cadavers trying to dig out the one that is theirs, or dreams, where they come to the verge of finding the clue to the disappearance of the person. Some describe the last time they saw the person as the repetitive dream that they have, where they put the person “in a white car and leave.”[[51]](#endnote-51) The white car that they see is a white “Toros,” a station wagon Renault, the type of car that was used by the Gendarmerie Intelligence and the pro-state militia throughout 1980s and 1990s.[[52]](#endnote-52) Many of them describe the experience of Berfo Kırbayır, where the disappeared person comes and sits with them and looks at them, long and hard. All too often, the person who comes and sits with the mothers is wearing pajamas, as they did when they were taken away.[[53]](#endnote-53)

In the consistent repetition of these dreams, or in Berfo Kırbayır’s conviction to not lock her doors or windows, the perplexities involved in the experience of disappearance becomes clear: the perplexity regarding the unknown fate of the disappeared person, which is all too often simply death, but even more than that, the perplexity that comes out of questioning whether a person can actually vanish in the first place. As one of the Mothers says, a person is *not* a bird to fly away; after all, they cannot just disappear into the abyss. Amnesty International states “disappearance is a misnomer. Many prisoners who have ‘disappeared’ may well, at worst, have ceased to be. None, however, is lost or vanished. Living or dead, each is in a very real place.”[[54]](#endnote-54) Mobilising this perplexity by referring to dreams, while continuously asking works to reveal that a world in which people vanish into thin air is no less unbelievable or fantastic as it stands than the dreams that they have. Indeed, the dreams of the pajamas or the white car all too often continue to haunt those who remain, as a reminder that what is real and not a dream is in itself hanging on a thin thread that ties together nothing other than unbelievable facts. As Gordon says, ‘Spiraling between unbelievable facts and potent fictions, the knowledge of disappearance cannot but be bound up with the bewitching and brutal breaks and armature of disappearance itself.’[[55]](#endnote-55) Nightmare knowledges mobilise perplexity by reminding that what is official is not any more realistic than dreams, and no more credible than memories. .

Perplexity, moreover, is not an impasse, nor is it an end point in itself. All too often, perplexity is accompanied by a certain lucidity regarding not only incredulity towards the official discourse, but also lucidity regarding the event itself and the cognitive attitudes that underlie necro-epistemic methods. Medina calls such lucidity “meta-lucidity,” which “involves not just lucidity about the social world, but about the cognitive attitudes, cognitive structures, and cognitive repertoires of those who navigate the social world.”[[56]](#endnote-56) This is the kind of lucidity that arises from a ‘double consciousness,’ from looking inward and outward at the same time. It looks inwards “insofar as it recognizes, through the internal friction of the perspectives available to itself, the limitations and obstacles of cognitive elements.”[[57]](#endnote-57) In this sense, nightmare knowledges emerge out of ‘looking inwards,’ as much as they refer to a certain knowledge that understands the limitations of the accounts offered in the official discourse because they can have access to both the official discourse and the experiential and collective memory. People in *Newala Qaseba* know, for example, that the bones that they see are not actually animal bones, or İnan’s family knows that there have been calls to report her body on the street, that what is nightmarish about what is real lies precisely in that blank space between the said and unsaid. At the same time, nightmare knowledges are products of ‘looking outwards,’ insofar as they come with the realization that what is taking place is not singularly their experience, or that necro-epistemic methods work not only on particular subjects, but rather on groups, on entire parts of the population. If dreams take up such a space in their accounts, it is precisely because they know that these dreams are not products of singular psychic processes, but rather, of collective experiences. Nightmare knowledges look outwards, in this sense, insofar as they mobilise this knowledge to continuously remember and remind that nightmarish gap between uncorroborated memories and unbelievable facts.

Meta-lucidity ensures that resistance of nightmare-knowledges is not born only in oppositional terms, but rather in perplexities that work to mobilise the gap between dream and reality, memory and forgetting. Nightmare-knowledges are results of what Medina calls ‘guerrilla pluralisms,’ insofar as they work to multiply both the sources and methods of knowledge through shifting the space of credible knowledge from written word to memory. ‘Resistance is not simply something that happens to us, but rather is something we do (or fail to do)’; resistance is, indeed, a product of active remembering, mobilising memory, and mobilising the perplexity of the divide between the real and the surreal.[[58]](#endnote-58)

Gordon states, ‘Disappearance is an exemplary instance in which the boundaries of rational and irrational, fact and fiction, subjectivity and objectivity, person and system, conscious and unconscious, knowing and unknowing, are constitutively unstable.’[[59]](#endnote-59) As much as these divides become unstable, so does the distinction between complete and incomplete memories, corroborated and uncorroborated remembrances: one of the ways in which resistant memories function is to remember and to remind others that what took place is impossible to remember. The insistence of the Saturday Mothers and the relatives of *Newala Qaseba* in remembering the details, the color of the pajamas that the person was wearing, the exact words that they said, the white car that took them, is a work of making memory from its absence. The impact of remembering when there are no corroborating memories is a collective act of mobilising memory as a resistance mechanism. Take the emphasis on the uniqueness of each individual: virtually every relative discusses the person lost as a ‘wonderful person,’ as a ‘person that everyone loved,’ as a person “who had never even hurt an ant in their lives.’[[60]](#endnote-60) In the absence of dead bodies or disappeared persons, this emphasis functions to weave a person out of memory, in order to produce another frame than that of official discourse. As Acosta states, ‘memory can make history precisely by erasing it.’[[61]](#endnote-61) Collective memory practices in *Newala Qaseba* and of the Saturday Mothers attest to such a work of actively erasing the official history by producing frames that challenge this discourse through the ‘unresolvable excess’ that emerges in the death-worlds of necropolitics.[[62]](#endnote-62)

Prolonged grief, on the other hand, works to mobilise memory in order to disrupt necro-epistemic temporalities: it functions as a method of claiming another temporal regime than the fractured one of necropolitical time. One of the mothers of *Newala Qaseba* says she turned her home into a ‘funeral house’ thirty years ago, even though her son never had a funeral. As funeral houses are houses of grief, her house never leaves the state of mourning, she has been ‘crying for thirty years,’ and she will do so, until she dies.[[63]](#endnote-63) Many of the Saturday Mothers recall being told to ‘move on,’ some, being told to find a new husband, some, to devote themselves to their children.[[64]](#endnote-64) Instead, they all declare their commitment to not stop grieving, no matter how much time passes, and state that they will ‘never forget,’ no matter how much time passes. Active remembering reminds us that grief is not simply a personal process, but a collective one, that is shared in funeral houses where there are no bodies or in weekly activist meetings that are regularly disrupted by the police. The insistence on collective prolonged grief reveals itself as a method of politicising grief by disrupting the necropolitical temporal order. If the collective oblivion of necropolitics proposes a temporality that is composed of fractured moments and replaced memories, prolonged grief opens up counter-temporalities that extend over time, which work through adding together ruptured memories, through ceaselessly remembering and sharing what is meant to be forgotten long time ago.

Nightmare-knowledges denote modes of political-epistemic agency, which can produce modes of coherence out of the absence of temporal consistency. Such agency can also produce memories within the impossibility of remembering as such and work to create ‘counter-discourses’ that are not only in opposition to necro-epistemic discourses but also revealing of the incoherence that is rooted in these discourses. The world of necropolitics is “filled with ghosts,” as Gordon says, the work of nightmare-knowledges is to ‘recognise the world that the ghost conjures up.’[[65]](#endnote-65) Such conjuring requires a kind of resistance that Medina calls “guerrilla pluralism,” which consists in developing counter-discourses, weaving words out of silences and memories out of forgettings. Nightmare-knowledges comprise precisely of such a work, a collective epistemic agency that is born out of the weavings of dreams and reality, told and untold statements, uncorroborated memories. The work of nightmare-knowledges is a work of conjuring up ghosts, insofar as these apparitions present the possibility of another kind of discourse, another kind of memory.

**IV. Nightmare-Knowledges: Necropolitics of Knowledge**

Power, as Foucault says, does not function without relation to knowledge: instead, it works to infiltrate knowledge, mold and bend it, work in and through it. If necropolitics is a kind of power that works to subsume life and the living under the overwhelming presence of death, such work does not take place without thoroughly investing itself in epistemic methods. These ‘necro-epistemic methods’ transform the knowledge of death itself into an object of power. They work on the political and epistemic agency of the subjects by targeting their agency as knowers through methods of epistemic injustice.

The experience of mass graves and enforced disappearances point us to such a work of epistemic injustice, where disappearance shows itself in the destabilization of temporal coherence, testimonial injustice through gendered hysterisisation, and erasure of memory. These methods imply both testimonial and hermeneutical injustice, insofar as they both rely on the erasure of credible epistemic agents and the targeting of their memories. Necro-epistemic methods work on the knowledge of death, knowledge consisting not only in what is known of death, but also what is knowable and what is thinkable in relation to such death.

On the other hand, methods of power do not exist in the absence of resistance. Just as death is an object not only of power but also of resistance, so is the knowledge of death, which is contested and politicised. Necro-epistemic methods do not work as a unilateral vector without obstruction: instead, they open up cleavages of memory and forgetting, gaps between dreams and concrete reality, a world where living is not simply subsumed under death but is rather haunted by the dead. What emerges in and through necro-epistemic methods are nightmare-knowledges, knowledges that do not fit within the proposed rationalities of death and dying.

Nightmare-knowledges are products of epistemic resistance, which challenge the proposed lucidity of the official discourse through mobilising perplexities, blurring the distinction between dreams and reality in order to reveal what is not realistic in official knowledge. If necropolitics works through the production of an official knowledge that is shaped by oblivion, by rendering testimonies incredible and experiences incomprehensible, nightmare-knowledges work precisely to mobilise perplexity. In Berfo Kırbayır’s insistence on not locking her doors, the families of *Newala Qaseba* visiting the trash disposal area in order to talk to the river, and İnan’s family’s worry that birds may have landed on her body when she remained on the street, what is at stake is the production of another discourse: a counter-discourse that consists of weaving together unsaid statements, incomplete moments, and memories that reveal an arsenal of nightmare-knowledges that attest to the possibility of epistemic agency in the death-worlds of necropolitics.

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4. *7 Roj 7 Sev*. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. Unlike many others mentioned in this chapter, Taybet Inan was given a burial, even though her family was not allowed in the funeral, and she has an official burial site. [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. Göral, Işık, Kaya, *Unspoken Truth,* p. 96. [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. Ibid. [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. This information is taken from <http://www.ihddiyarbakir.org/Map.aspx>., on March 11th, 2017. The website provided a complete map of reported mass graves in Turkey and their specifics. However, it is no longer functional, as a number of the organizers have been arrested since. For information on the map, see Bozarslan and Sunar, 2014, and Oral, 2014. [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
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51. *Holding Up The Photograph* [↑](#endnote-ref-51)
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