

In memory of Suphi Nejat Ağırnaslı

(by Cihan Tekay)

On 5 October 2014, we lost our friend, comrade, and colleague, the sociologist, translator, writer, and revolutionary Suphi Nejat Ağırnaslı while he was fighting with the Marxist Leninist Communist Party/Turkey and North Kurdistan (MLKP) and People's Protection Units (YPG) in Kobane. Condolences to all, and may he rest in peace.

Suphi Nejat Ağırnaslı was born on 22 September 1984. From his early years on, he lived in Germany with his family, who were in political exile from Turkey. Despite having very high scores in the university entrance exams he took in Germany, he chose to pursue his university education in Turkey. He was placed in the Sociology Department of Marmara University, where he soon had to leave because of political pressure and fascist attacks, which are ongoing in Marmara University's Göztepe campus to this day. Because of his academic achievements, he transferred to the Sociology Department of one of the most prestigious educational institutions in Turkey, Boğaziçi University. After completing his BA in Sociology at Boğaziçi, he went on to pursue his MA in the same department, writing a thesis on the work "accidents" in the shipyards of Istanbul's Tuzla district, in which hundreds of workers died. An adept graphic designer who was fluent in web design, Nejat also created posters for numerous actions organized by Boğaziçi students during his university years.

In 2011, Nejat was detained during the KCK operations; the contents of his computer's hard drive, including his course schedule and class notes, was presented as evidence for his persecution. Boğaziçi University students issued a statement denouncing his detainment, entitled "Foucault should be tried as well!" which pointed out the absurdity of Nejat's trial. Nejat spoke to the independent news network Bianet upon his release, saying:

I'm a socialist, and I'm known for this identity. I'm sensitive to the Kurdish issue, but this is not the point. What I went through delivers this message: "If you are engaged in certain social issues in Turkey, whether intellectually or politically, if you are sensitive to these issues, this is how we'll treat you." Socialists and liberals who engage intellectually or politically with the Kurds are subject to a witch hunt in Turkey.

Nejat's KCK trial is ongoing.

Nejat was also part of the labor struggle and made his living as a translator. In 2012, Nejat wrote an article for Bianet, titled "Can Freelance Workers Organize?" In this piece, he sought to draw attention to increasingly flexible and precarious work conditions. Underlining the urgency of new and diverse ways of organizing, he wrote: "Let's imagine a union which is not a union; let's imagine a cooperative/collective which is not only an economic commons; let's think of spaces that are corporations outside but our mutual wealth inside, and let them not be corporations." Nejat went on to write a manifesto for a new communism in 2013 titled "Menkıbe" ("Tales"), which can be downloaded here (in Turkish.)

He brought valuable critiques to the contemporary left in Turkey, crystallized in an article he penned in 2012 for Fraksiyon.org, "The Sins that Boil in the Witch's Brew" (in Turkish.) A rigorous critique of the left in Turkey which takes Sylvia Federici's Caliban and the Witch as its starting point, Nejat ends the piece with these words: "those who partake in the common [struggle] should not be judged for who they are but for what they contribute to it." These words have been widely shared in social media reactions in the wake of the news of Nejat's death on Sunday, which can be followed with the hashtag #SuphiNejatAğırnaslı. In addition to his writing, Nejat translated several books into Turkish, among them We Are Anonymous. Some of the publishing houses he worked for have issued their condolences via Twitter.

The press center of the YPG issued a written statement on Nejat's death on 13 October, saying:

“Comrade Paramaz Kızıldaş, who participated in the magnificent resistance in Kobane in order to build the free future of our peoples, has been immortalized in the honorable struggle against Da’esh gangs who are the enemies of our peoples.” Nejat’s party, the MLKP, also issued a statement, emphasizing the importance of Nejat’s fight against both imperialism and the oppressive states of the region, adding: “The name he chose for himself as he stepped into the barricades built by our YPG comrades speaks for itself in reflecting comrade Nejat’s thoughts and feelings. His decision to volunteer in Kobane and overcome death became the clearest expression of this.”

Some of those who knew Nejat have started commemorating him in the section under his name in ekşi sözlük, telling everyday stories and memories they shared with him. One of these eulogies speaks to the hearts and minds of many of us who knew him, whether closely or from afar: “Nejat was not less precious than any of us. On the contrary, he was miles ahead. He put his life on the line, wise and simple. He did what we could not do. Nejat gave a nod to us from Kobani, smiled; he sent us a slogan from afar with his childish voice, unable to pronounce his r’s...Nejat made us cry. Good thing we cried; he made us remember our humanity.”

As precious as Nejat was to us, he is only one of those we lost in Rojava, in Kurdistan, in Turkey, in Syria. There are many whose stories we don’t know like we do Nejat’s, those whose lives we cannot touch. Nejat’s loss opens the door to commemorating those lives that we are not familiar with, those that he touched and fought together with and in the name of, and remembering the injustice that underlies the impossibility of telling the stories of those that we will never know.

Suphi Nejat Ağırnaslı is immortal! May he rest in light and peace.