On the aesthetic regime of Kurdish cinema: the making of Kurdishness
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Citation
Şimşek, B. (2021, May 4). *On the aesthetic regime of Kurdish cinema: the making of Kurdishness*. Retrieved from https://hdl.handle.net/1887/3161381

Cover Page

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Author: Şimşek, B.
Title: On the aesthetic regime of Kurdish cinema: the making of Kurdishness
Issue date: 2021-05-04

ON THE AESTHETIC REGIME OF KURDISH CINEMA:

The Making of Kurdishness

Bahar Şimşek

On the Aesthetic Regime of Kurdish Cinema

The Making of Kurdishness

Proefschrift

ter verkrijging van
de graad van doctor aan de Universiteit Leiden,
op gezag van rector magnificus prof.dr.ir. H. Bijl,
volgens besluit van het college voor promoties
te verdedigen op dinsdag 4 mei 2021
klokke 10:00 uur

door
Bahar Şimşek
Geboren te Pülümür in 1985

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation

to Serê,

whose beautiful smile encourages me

to believe in a world, in which

my mother tongue,

of mountains,

and rivers,

and trees,

is still spoken.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The story of this research begins in the corridors of the Communication Faculty of Ankara University, and in the exceptional cultural atmosphere of (relative) peace in Turkey, between the years of 2015 and 2017. I then had the right to be employed, to travel, and to challenge the borders recognized for Kurdish studies within the Turkish academy. I took pleasure, then, in pushing the boundaries of regnant understandings of Kurdish representations. I met with non-professional film workers, and interacted with a range of communities who had a political interest in Turkey's Kurdish issue. In this context, I would like, first and foremost, to thank the banality of evil that I have been subjected to since early 2017, which, having deprived me of the basic rights and freedoms I once enjoyed, has taught me the crucial role that democratic principles play in sustaining intellectual inquiry.

I cannot thank enough my advisors Prof. Eric Jan Zürcher and Prof. Joost Jongerden, whose research and intellectual stances have enlightened my own work. I would not have been able to finish this research without their support. It is a strange fact of history that, having been deprived of my passport, I have not had the chance to experience Leiden University's campus. Leiden has nonetheless provided an intellectual home, through which I have been able to enjoy a right to academic freedom, to feel a sense of intellectual solidarity, and to sustain a life of thinking and ethics. I owe much to the office manager

on bringing laughter in the darkest moments. Sina James Day tirelessly showed me that what matters in life is to enjoy the games. Echo and Thunder have been the best cat friends I could think of, sleeping beside me across sleepless nights.

John William Day's presence in my life, and the pleasure we share in languages, arts and cooking, brightened my mind and soul. His love and care have been the spring of all good beginnings. The final steps of my research were enchanted by Sarah Day's kicks and hiccups. I am grateful to all these characters, who have helped me in more ways than I know.

INTRODUCTION

i. Questions of Kurdish Cinema

In the winter of 2014, when I was still working as an academic for the Turkish government, I was invited to give a talk on Kurdish cinema in Diyarbakır by *Komeleya Akademiya Sînemayê ya Rojhilata Navîn* (Middle East Cinema Academy). That was the first time I had the chance to meet with Kurdish cinema students in the *de facto* Kurdish capital of Turkey, Diyarbakır. Excited to be there as a Kurdish Alevi woman researcher trying to make sense of the emergence of Kurdish films in light of discussions of national cinema, I stood before a group of Kurdish students from different backgrounds and professions: a Kurdish woman who fled Syria amid the civil war, a middle-aged man who had been working for the pro-Kurdish newspaper *Özgür Gündem* in the 1990s, a few young people who were unable to gain entry into a Turkish university, likely because of the language barrier, but who were eager to learn about the theory and practice of cinema. When I started to present the literature on national cinema and to invite students to engage with its promises and problems in the Kurdish case, I was reminded by the host of the class that this was the age of '*Türkiyelileşme*',[1] and that I should have been encouraging Kurdish film enthusiasts to make movies on trauma and reconciliation as a way of helping them to embrace the political paradigm of HDP, so as to be agents of peace-making, and to understand that the idea of an independent Kurdish state had been 'thrown into the

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[1] The term '*Türkiyelileşme*' (or "Turkey-ify", so to speak) is proposed by the imprisoned leader of the PKK (*Partiya Karkerên Kurdistan*, Kurdistan's Worker's Party) to define Turkish citizenship on the basis of shared land instead of shared language and ethnicity, as a part of his broader political project. The term has been embraced by the pro-Kurdish HDP (*Halkların Demokratik Partisi,* Peoples' Democratic Party) as a step towards solving the Kurdish issue of Turkey by democratic means.

trash bin' in the words of Hatip Dicle (*İlke Haber*, 2014). Not really heeding his words, I proceeded to discuss a wide range of approaches to national cinemas. I listened with great curiosity as one participant, the former *Özgür Gündem* journalist, said, 'I know it does not sound proper now, but I want to make a comedy in Kurdish instead of drama. I have been experiencing violence since the early 1990s but what I find worth telling is the absurdity of all the state violence surrounding Kurdish lives here' (Personal Communication, 2014).

Needless to say, I appreciated the understanding shown to me here, as a guest instructor in one of the classrooms of *Navenda Çand û Hunerê Ya Ciwanan a Cegerxwîn* (Cegerxwîn Center of Culture and Art for the Youth), established under the governance of pro-Kurdish BDP (*Barış ve Demokrasi Partisi*, Peace and Democracy Party) in 2010. And I appreciated the chance to witness, up close, some of the implications of the counter-official will of Kurdish parties within Turkish politics months before *Newroz* in 2015, a celebration of Kurdish peace, and two years before the destruction of Kurdish districts in the fall of 2016. Yet what especially struck me, in terms of my evolving interest in Kurdish cinema, was that I was being told here of certain rules—articulated here quite explicitly—for the field of aesthetics; I was witnessing the making of the politics of what can and cannot be said, what should and should not be represented in art—in a sense, a call for the formation of certain kinds of subjects around Kurdish political claims. In the following years, the more I became involved with Kurdish films and their relevant literature, the more aware I became of these rules, in both their explicit and implicit forms.

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Thus, in addition to my interest in the concept of national cinema, I began to wonder how these rules function in the Kurdish embracing of the medium of cinema, and whether or how these rules inflected the cinematic promise of Kurdish oral presence. In line with this, I grew more interested in the perplexities of discourses of national cinema for the Kurdish case, and in how the counter-hegemonic struggle of Kurdish political parties set certain limits and demands on a Kurdish aesthetics of cinema, and also took part myself in the production of knowledge on Kurdish cinematography as a Kurdish woman. Through these experiences, I began to realize that the dynamism of Kurdish cinematography was not free from the dynamism of processes that produce Kurdish subjects. Hence, my interest in questions of Kurdish cinema evolved into questions of the making of Kurdish subjects in the age of late capitalism and of technological revolutions.

As one of the most populated stateless nations in the world, Kurdish people's experience of modernism through films provides us a case through which to both embrace and challenge Benedict Anderson's concept of imagined communities (2006). Here it is crucial to underline the fact that the historical lack of a standard printed language is a key reason why audio-visual means have been the main media employed, and why they arguably have played such a major role in processes of Kurdish subjectification. Kurdish desires for national recognition solidify in Kurdish directors' diegetic use of Kurdish languages in commercial films, yet this occurs necessarily through the differing factual conditions of fragmented Kurdish realities, all of which exist within different nation states and in the shadow of the forms and demands of different printed imaginations (Turkish

or Iranian nation making and print nationalism, e.g.). Such practical differences mean that the modern category of the nation is refracted, its limits prodded and pushed, in the hands of different directors, working through a variety of audio-visual materials. Therefore, the question of a Kurdish subject is mediated by or hailed within such a gap between the desire for the totality of a national cinema (*a cinema* able to articulate *the Kurdish subject*) and grounded truth of acentric and diverging Kurdish realities through which any subject must necessarily be articulated (*cinemas* that compel us to ask, *which Kurdish subjects*).

The process of subjectification implied by the oscilliation between these two ends precisely addresses an aesthetic demarcation marked by not only the oppressive politics directed at Kurdish identity, but also by the particular ways in which Kurdish cinema workers, including academics and researchers, engage with becoming Kurdish in the name of democratic politics. In other words, once recognizing the implicit and explicit rules imposed on the very possibility and development of Kurdish cinematography, the question of Kurdishness also becomes a matter of aesthetics. My research asks, can we speak of Kurdish cinema as productive of subjects, and if so, then what are the politics of this process of subjectification? Through my investigation, I expose the multiple layers of Kurdish cinema constructed by Kurdish films and directors, by academics working on Kurdish cinema, by Kurdish institutions, and by contemporary artists. I thus aim to depict an aestheticized Kurdish identity as a response to the politics of oppression and resistance. Through this research, embracing a Rancièrian stance to determine the conditions of a specific aesthetic regime that stands for Kurdish forms of utterance and posits a common

world for the process of subjectification, I critically delve into questions of national cinema by way of the production, distribution and interpretation of Kurdish films, in order to depict the democratic demand for equality in an aesthetic regime of Kurdishness.

ii. Rancièrian Aesthetics, Body and Language

Kurdish identity is an overly politicized category, due in large part to the continuous violence to which it has been subjected, and to traumatic experiences rooted in massacres at the hands of hegemonic nation states. Because of such experiences, trauma has become one of the most common areas of focus in intellectual work on Kurdish culture. At the same time, though, defining the criteria for a community to be called Kurdish has proved to be no small problem, due to clashes between Kurdish politics and hegemonic states, as well as between agents of Kurdish political movements. In such a context, cinema—not only because it has been in the service of nationalist projects since the earliest years of the 20th century, but also, and crucially, because it exposes the formations of the modern subject—constitutes a very specific example, in the Kurdish case, on two bases. First, not having a state-based film industry, the national claims of Kurdish cinema challenge the imagined communities of modern states, even despite its ways of imaging a linguistically determined Kurdish audience. It does so in terms of its non-homogenous audience and reception, and because of the absence of the political-economic conditions of its very presence, in terms of commercial films in Kurdish languages. These factors constitute the context for the invention of a particular artistic tradition through common experiences of

violence. And secondly, Kurdish cinema's acentric and non-linear development, precisely its anachronological presence among nationally defined cinemas, coinciding with the implementation of new technologies in film theory, posits Kurdish subjects as quasi-bodies. Here, the term quasi-bodies is used in the way Rancière uses it, which departs "from any idealist conception of the body politics as analogous to a natural organism, highlighting how any social structure is always founded on the arbitrary, conventional bases of linguistic utterances whose meanings can be re-appropriated and made to re-signify' (Lane, 2020: 13). The notion of non-cinema, too, sits at the heart of Kurdish audio-visual literarity's promises for the very democratic presence of Kurdish people.

> [N]on-cinema is about non-mainstream films and their importance. In Dussel's language, non-cinema is a politically engaged 'cinema of liberation,' freeing cinema and, perhaps more particularly, our understanding of cinema from the domination of the mainstream…Non-cinema demonstrates to us that what we define as cinema is a political as much as (if not more than) an ontological question. This is not to deny the validity or indeed the potential benefits of mainstream cinema in the digital era (this is the purpose of grounding it as a supercinema before turning to non-cinema), but it is to address the issue of the hegemony that it enjoys, and the homogeneity of cinema that ensues when that which is defined as cinema excludes that which is not overtly profitable to film financiers or easily entertaining (because familiar) to film audiences (Brown, 2016).

In order to investigate these two conceptual bases—quasi-bodies and non-cinema—of my claim on Kurdish subjectification, I bring Rancière's framework on aesthetics and ethics into conversation with the literature on national cinema, the category of the un-representable in art, and the digital revolution in the age of globalization at the intersection of body, voice, and language.

Jacques Rancière, a student of Louis Althusser in *Ecole Normale Superieure* in the 1960s, is known by his theoretical trajectory tying politics to aesthetics, alongside his focus on political emancipation and radical equality theory. 'My personal interests have often drawn me to literature and cinema' says Rancière, who continues:

> What I wanted to show when I wrote *Nights of Labor* (1981) was that a so-called political and social movement was also an intellectual and aesthetic one, a way of configuring the frameworks of the visible and the thinkable. In the same way, in *Disagreement,* I tried to show how politics is an aesthetic matter, a reconfiguration of the way we share out or divide places and times, speech and silence, the visible and the invisible (Hallwars, 2003: 203).

Since the early twentieth century, Kurdish people have been geographically across four modern nation states (Turkey, Iran, Iraq and Syria), and have been under at least four nation-making projects, silencing any possibility of a common world for them (Vali, 2003; Hassanpour, 2003). Under such circumstances, Engin Sustam sees artistic production on Kurdishness in the 1990s as a form of militancy, by its claim to speak for itself (Sustam, 2014). In my research, I embrace the theoretical frame Rancière argues for in *The Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible* (*Le Partage du sensible: Esthétique et politique* [2000], 2011)*, Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics* (*Malaise dans l'esthétique* [2004], 2010), and *Aesthetics and Its Discontents* (2010) in order to explore the anachoronic and non-relational emergence of Kurdish cinematography in the name of the democratic presence of Kurdish people. Rancière's notion of literarity, which is central to his theory of subjectification, leads me to posit Kurdish audio-visual works

of art as the core of Kurdish subjectification, due, as we noted, to the lack of a standardized print language for Kurdish people. According to Rancière:

> Man is a political animal because he is a literary animal who lets himself be diverted from his 'natural' purpose by the power of words. This literarity is at once the condition and the effect of the circulation of 'actual' literary locutions. However, these locutions take hold of bodies and divert them from their end or purpose insofar as they are not bodies in the sense of organisms, but quasi-bodies, blocks of speech circulating without a legitmate father to accompany them toward their authorized addressee. Therefore they do not produce collective bodies. Instead, they introduce lines of fracture and disincorporation into imaginary collective bodies (Rancière, 2011: 39).

In a Kurdish aesthetic regime, the distribution of the sensible—which forms an ethical Kurdish community precisely through cinematic experience—asks to be realized and analyzed in terms of the variations of non-commercial Kurdish films, and with an eye to not just feature-length commercial Kurdish films, but non-cinema, too. By employing a content analysis of films in Kurdish languages, identifying Kurdish directors as agents of history making, and investigating attempts to institutionalize Kurdish cinema, I address the Kurdish presupposition of equality to act in an aesthetic regime of art. For, 'in democratic political action, people take the hiearachies of a given political and social order to be, as Rancière says, contingent rather than natural or inevitable' (May, 2010: 72). Though before we turn to cinema, at this point, it is helpful to consider more closely the use of certain concepts by Rancière.

In Rancièrian thought, aesthetics is approached as a distinct regime for identifying and reflecting on the arts, premising the idea of thought's affectivity, which leads us to the

distribution of the sensible (Rancière, 2011: 10-11). Identifying a particular cinema, Kurdish cinema, becomes, through interpretation and through such a theoretical lens, a matter of the aesthetic regime of Kurdishess in the service of the distribution of the sensible for Kurdish quasi-bodies in the name of *we*. Here, a distribution of the sensible refers to a concept describing the common world's establishment in terms of the distribution of spaces, times and forms of activity (Rancière, 2011: 12). Through a variety of tools, the film enviroment's spatial and temporal components aid in the establishment of a Kurdified common world, demonstrating and interpreting a Kurdish aesthetic presence. In order to re-conceptualize art as a form of life alongside its historical transformation, Rancière rejects the postmodern idea of rupture (Rancière, 2010b: 36). Moreover, political heterogeneity emerges as a matter of composition instead of constitution, where politics:

> (…) invents new forms of collective enunciation; it re-frames the given by inventing new ways of making sense of the sensible, new configurations between the visible and the invisible, and between the audible and the inaudible, new distributions of space and time -in short new bodily capacities. (…) Politics creates a new form, as it were, of dissensual 'commonsense' (Rancière, 2010a: 139).

A political subject is defined 'by the way in which forms of subjectivication re-configure the topography of the common', where the site for dwelling, a common world, is called as 'a polemical distribution of modes of being and 'occupations' in space of possibilities' (Rancière, 2010a: 121, 213; Rancière, 2011: 42). Cinema occupies a space of possibilities in the name of subjectification of Kurdish agents 'not from but within a democratic

movement' where 'subjectification is the process of becoming a collective subject through acting out of the presupposition of equality' (May, 2010: 78). Cinema does so thanks to certain non-cinematic elements, which resist homogenization by industry, nation and patriarchy. This echoes a sentiment, sometimes voiced by directors, that movement is something common to both cinema (as an art form of the moving image) and to Kurdish identity (as people often subjected to various forms of forced mobility, displacement, diaspora, and the like). And this sentiment is further echoed in the imperfect techniques in many of the non-commercial films I consider here—techniques markedly different from the commercial perfectness of Kurdish feature-length films.

The context of cinema, the glorified medium of modernism, has problematized the subject since its early beginnings. Sarah Kofman analyses the metaphoric embracement of the earliest cinematic tool, *camera obscura,* in the texts of Marx, Freud and Nietzsche, from the late 19th to the 20th century, while Jonathan Crary elaborates the problem of the observer in the modern age via, again, *camera obscura,* in order to examine the [modern] human subject as an observer (Kofman, 1999; Crary, 1992). Crary points to the de-familiarization of urban spaces, as well as the perceptual and temporal dislocations of railroad travel, telegraphy, industrial production, and flows of typographic and visual information, as the cause for the renovation of the subject (Crary, 1992: 10-11). However, the 20th century witnessed the inversion of the sight-dominance and hearing-dominance duality to the benefit of hearing-dominance (Ong, 2002). As a result, the re-discovery of voice has emerged in five main sites in the second half of 20th century, as laid out by

Lagaay: theories and methods of linguistic and conversation analysis; literary theory; cognitive science; psychoanalysis; and contemporary arts (theatre, performance and film) (Lagaay, 2009). Continental philosophy's other key re-discovery is the move toward the body, crucial for the argument in this research. Yet, it should be noted that those interpretations of the modern subject in visual and audial terms are strictly tied to the body of a natural organism rather than a collective body of action, which will later find its expression in the national subjects of cinema.

We begin to see the poststructuralist tendency toward the body with Michel Foucault's notion of the body, described in *Nietzsche, Genealogy, History* as 'the inscribed surface of events (traced by language and dissolved by ideas)' (Foucault, 1977: 83). Although Foucault's understanding of the body is not quite concrete, its re-interpretation has a comprehensive range (Megill, 1987: 252). The most persuasive and inspiring critique of Foucault has come from Judith Butler and her crucial work on gender (Butler, 1999). By rejecting a representational approach in favor of a performative approach, Butler posits language as a medium for something beyond just perceiving and understanding reality, beyond just language as a mirror:

> If the body signified as prior to signification is an effect of signification, then the mimetic or representational status of language, which claims that signs follow bodies as their necessary mirrors, is not mimetic at all. On the contrary, it is productive, constitutive, one might even argue performative… (Butler, 1993: 30).

Here, speaking subjects come into being through the reiteration and extension of the primary acts of differentiation and separation from the maternal body (Butler, 1993: 71). In particular, the subject is above all a speaking subject. Thus, in Butler's writing, the subject is not the producer of linguistic construction, but the product (Vasterling, 2003: 208). However, Vasterling points to the fact that 'as embodied beings we happen to be this 'thing' called a 'body,' so that 'the ontological status of human beings is not only that of speaking beings but that of embodied speaking beings' (Vasterling, 2003: 210). Film theory's embracing of the body as a natural organism becomes most evident in Dolar's account of the speaking, embodied subjects of cinema and voice.

In his most prominent work on voice, Mladen Dolar posits voice as the agent of the embodiment of the impossible division of the body into interior and exterior (Dolar, 2006: 71). Moreover, voice stands at a paradoxical and obscure site: it is the crossing point of the body and language, but it is neither part of language nor of the body (Dolar, 2006: 73). Additionally, it is precisely the voice as the bearer of all linguistic expressions that exposes persons as social beings. Only voice makes utterance and enunciation possible, as a subjectivity expressing itself and inhabiting the means of expression (Dolar, 2006: 14-15). Dolar's position on voice as the unique site of true expression and the locus that reveals the unutterable, ultimately aims to make the voice visible, as:

> […] it epitomizes something that cannot be found anywhere in the statement, in the spoken speech and its string of signifiers, nor can it be identified with their material support. In this sense the voice as the agent of enunciation sustains the signifiers and constitutes the string, as it were, that holds them together, although

it is invisible because of the beads concealing it. If signifiers form a chain, then the voice may well be what fastens them into a signifying chain. And if the process of enunciation points at the locus of subjectivity in language, then voice also sustains an intimate link with the very notion of the subject (Dolar, 2006: 23).

Dolar's analysis of the notion of subject based upon voice and language recalls Bhabha's notion of the rhetorical strategy of social reference (Bhabha, 1993). It provides a fruitful frame for an investigation of cultural identity focusing on the audio-visual surface of cinema. Dolar also points to the promise of cinema in terms of thinking about voice:

> Among the new media it is, perhaps surprisingly, the cinema which has opened a whole new realm of experiencing the uncanny nature of the acousmatic voice. Surprisingly, because the cinema is based on fitting sight to sound, bringing together both halves, re-creating the seamless flow of the visible and the audible, but in the very endeavor to make them tally it appears that, at immutable margins, they do not fit. Michel Chion's insightful book *La voix au cinéma* (1982) has made us acutely aware of this (Dolar, 2006: 65).

Although cinema has not been silent since its earliest emergence, theories of cinema have immanently involved a tendency to ignore or demote sound, at least until recently (Abel and Altman, 2001; Chion, 1994). Chion's conceptualization of the acousmatic voice, whose cause is not seen on the screen, is promising as the suture of the constitutive division of the subject (Schlichter, 2011: 46). Additionally, by rejecting the visual emphasis of theories of cinema, Chion provides the new concept of 'the audiovisual scene':

> If we can speak of an audiovisual scene, it is because the scenic space has boundaries, it is structured by the edges of the visual frame. Film sound is that which is contained or not contained *in an image;* there is no place of sounds, no

auditory scene already preexisting in the soundtrack – and therefore, properly speaking, *there is no soundtrack* (Chion, 1994: 68).[2]

The surface of this audiovisual scene refers to sensory cinema, whose components cannot be limited to sight and sound but are also 'rhythmic, dynamic, temporal, tactile, and kinetic sensations that make use of both the auditory and visual channels' (Chion, 1994: 152). This approach understands the body as a site of difference and experience, which cannot be limited to the experience of the audience but also involves the articulation of the subject(s) through the cinematic surface. Here, rather than positing sound in cinema as a threat to the metaphoric referents of body, Chion redefines the body as part of enunciation and experience while liberating it from biological determinism. The closest emphasis on collective experience on body politics comes from Mary Ann Doane, who defines three types of spaces appropriate for Chion's redefinition: the space of diegesis, the visible space of the screen as the receptor of the image, and the acoustical space of the theater or auditorium (Doane, 1980: 39).

As a site of becoming, '*the voice that holds bodies and languages together*'[3] is the main theme for a critical reading of speaking, embodied subjects in the context of Kurdish cinema, and the frame for an investigation into national cinema's discourse of standardized languages (Dolar, 2006: 60). Language, as the crossing point of voice and body, has special importance in collective terms for any attempt to deal with Spivak's

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[2] Emphasis in the original
[3] Emphasis in the original

well-known question: 'Can the subaltern speak?' (Spivak, 1988). In the search for the possible answers to that question, as a utopia, a philosophical concept, an ideological apparatus, a form of entertainment, an industry among many other things, cinema asks to be re-conceptualized as 'an art form only insofar as it is a world' (Rancière, 2012; Vila, 2013). Looking for the aesthetic experience at the heart of the democratic politics of an ethical community for Kurdish subjects, a *we*, I investigate not only Kurdish artistic emergences but also Kurdish emergence of life in the form of art to present a comprehensive understanding of a Kurdish presupposition of equality as an element of democratic movement rather than as a result of it. I claim that the bodies of viewers, actors and directors are ethnicized as agents, in contribution to imagining spatially and temporally non-fixed and non-unified Kurdishness in the name of the construction of quasi-bodies forming a *we*.

iii. Methodology

In his investigation of Rancière's theory, Todd May warns his reader about the difference between Foucaltian subjectivation and Rancièrian subjectification as follows: 'It is not the type of subjectification discussed, for example, by Michel Foucault, where the power relations around us turn us into subjects. In some sense, it is the opposite. Subjectification is the process of becoming a collective subject through acting out of the presupposition of equality' (May, 2010: 78). In this research, my aim is to investigate the Kurdish audio-visual presence in terms of its claim on democratic politics, and I pursue this aim through

qualitative research into the forming of a collective subject. Referring to a Rancièrian understading of literarity and literary animals' emergence as the transhistorical force in the process of subjectification, it is necessary to recognize the historical conditions of Kurdish cinema which determined the organization of my thesis (Lane, 2019: 11). Though some critique Rancière for his use of politics as an ahistorical or dehistoricizing notion or for his anti-scientism, in fact, Rancière's employment of the concepts of non-relation and the untimely event can be read as a critique of prior forms of historiography (Whitener, 2013). Precisely through the emergence of an untimely, anachronic event, it becomes possible for the possible to be set up a polemical space on which equality and absence meet in the name of a poetic structure of knowledge (Whitener, 2013). Kurdish cinema's improper emergence without a state-based industry and homogenized audience calls for examination as an anachronical event, rather than through a chronological account of a particular cinema to elaborate its transhistorical presence. In other words, focusing on periods and fragments instead of following a chronological and holistic order, I aim to isolate elements of Kurdish cinema as moments of subjectification and politics, without falling prey to an evolutionary understanding of Kurdish film history.

I focus on the production, distribution and reception of Kurdish films to depict a Kurdish aesthetic regime of art as a condition of an ethical Kurdish community. I employ Hoberman's definition of cinema 'to mean a form of recorded and hence repeatable moving image, and for the most part, synchronized recorded sound. Television kinescopes and TV since video-tape are cinematic; so is YouTube' (Hoberman, 2013: 3).

A further part of cinema is the audience, though here, the reader will notice the absence of festival viewers and movie theather audiences in this analysis. This is due to limitations on intellectual space afforded in Turkey since 2015. Specifially, I mean that, having been dismissed from my position and thus already on the radar of the state, and writing during a period of intensified scrutiny of academics, my ability to comfortably carry out fieldwork was, to say the least, limited. Therefore, cinema collectives and film festivals stand as mediators to depict, via the internet, the quasi-bodies for a Kurdish we, and to explore the followers and attendees of Kurdish films and Kurdish film festivals. 'As a democratic political movement begins to take hold, a *we* emerges that was not there before. A group begins to emerge where there was none before. In that sense, the social field of experience is reconfigured' (May, 2010: 78-79). In order to investigate the construction of subjectivity through a non-standardized language, my focus in particular is the space of diegesis of Kurdish films, the audio-visual forms of Kurdish languages. Through an analysis of narratives in Kurdish languages by Kurdish directors, I embrace the Rancièrian tension between un-representable trauma and the will to re-present, in order to explore the ways in which an aesthetic regime of Kurdishness becomes possible. The internet thus emerges as the host for a new experience of film audience, different than movie theaters in important ways.

Kurdish directors are central to my discussion, as bodies marked by the subjectification process through both their filmmaking and their broader engagement, as teachers and public speakers about participation in democratic politics. In order to provide a historical

account of their individual subjectification processes, I have examined interviews, panels, and academic works with and by Kurdish directors. My personal communications with Özkan Küçük, Şener Özmen, Binevşa Berivan, Kazım Öz, Zeynel Doğan and Ali Kemal Çınar also shaped the development of this research. Their search for both resources and an audience to, respectively, make and show their films speaks to the necessity of non-governmental organisations for the promise of cinema for the process of Kurdish subjectification. The settled film industry in Turkey has made Kurdish directors of Turkey central to any discussion of Kurdish cinema, starting from Yılmaz Güney. Recognizing Güney's emergence as the founding myth of Kurdish cinema, my research problematizes the search for Kurdish cinema's father by intellectuals and academics working across different narratives, directors and institutions, in their attempts to re-claim Kurdishness. In other words, despite Kurdish women's public recognition and political gains, the gender issue of Kurdish cinema primarily crystallizes in this search for a father. Moreover, Güney's colonial experience of Kurdishness at the heart of the assimiliationist Turkish film industry, and his later anti-colonial declarations in Europe function as a prism to claim for the playful use of concepts by Kurdish collective subject in the name of a pragmatically defined common world. Yet, my contribution to the literature on Kurdish cinema becomes evident through the inclusion of Kurdish contemporary art and imperfect film making techniques to address the forms and tools of an aesthetic regime of Kurdishness in the service of a social body. Due to the limited spaces recognized for commercial Kurdish films, spaces like YouTube offer a possible home for the film language of quasi-bodies in the distribution of the sensible for a Kurdish common world.

Moreover, the desire to be accessible to its audience liberates Kurdish films from the common concerns of digitalization, which Erika Balsom defines in terms of finances and the right seeing conditions, when noting that 'in contemporary moving image art, more often than not reproduction is viewed as a threat, not as a promise' (Balsom, 2016: 390).

iv. The Structure of the Research

I structure my research under three chapters, following the three artistic regimes identified by Rancière: 'A Foundation of Kurdish National Cinema', 'A Re-interpretation of Kurdish Trauma', and 'An Aesthetic Regime of Kurdishness'. Within the Western tradition, Rancière identifies three artistic regimes. The first is an ethical regime of images that finds its roots in a Platonic polemic against the simulacra (Rancière, 2011: 20-23). Here, a twofold question haunts images, in terms of their origin and their end or purpose. This first title will pave the way for a problematization of the theology of time in the catastrophic spaces of Kurdish films—a theology that claims a cinema in the service of nationalized trauma. Precisely, I mean here the ways in which the image's mode of being affects the ethos; the mode of being of individuals and communities become the object of knowledge (Rancière, 2011). In other words, what is the stance of the researcher toward his or her object of knowledge when it comes to knowing and defining Kurdish cinema? Rancière's conceptualization of the representative regime of arts, the second regime, is based on an Aristotelian articulation of the couple *poieis* and *mimesis*. *Mimemis* is the principle that organizes the distribution of ways of doing, making, seeing and judging,

such that it is not the principle of resemblance (Rancière, 2011). Accordingly, the Kurdish film universe, which speaks in the name of a witness and for the sake of a nationalized trauma, becomes a problematic to address the necessity of the ethical turn on behalf of the re-conceptualization of the form of art, including documentary. And the final regime Rancière names is the aesthetic regime of art that declares the absolute singularity of art while destroying any pragmaticism isolating such a singularity (Rancière, 2011). Accordingly, the digital revolution becomes part of a Kurdish audio-visual habitat by means of its low quality or imperfectness. While the representative regime of arts embraces the separation between the idea of fiction and of lies, and stabilizes the artistic exception, in the aesthetic regime:

> (…) The logic of descriptive and narrative arrangement in fictions becomes fundamentally indistinct from the arrangements used in the description and interpretation of the phenomena of the social and historical world. (…) The aesthetic revolution drastically disrupts things: testimony and fiction come under the same regime of meaning (Rancière, 2011: 37).

Accordingly, the defining paradox of the aesthetic regime of arts becomes 'the suspension of every determinate relation correlating the production of art forms and a specific social function' (Rancière, 2010a: 137), and art is re-positioned as a form of life that is also a form of self-education (2010a: 118-119). Therefore, the concept of art becomes a form of life to respond to questions on a shared common world by Kurdish filmmakers, Kurdish audiences, and film scholars on Kurdish cinema, through different meanings attributed to becoming Kurdish.

In the first chapter, I explore the foundations of Kurdish national cinema to reach the establishment of a theology of time in Kurdish feature-length narrative films, and to explore the discourse of Kurdish national cinema. Critically engaging with the literature on the concept of national cinema, I explore a perspective from which to posit Kurdish national claims on cinema, while exposing the Platonic structure of any taxonomic use of national cinema discussions. In line with this, I also explore a growing academic and intellectual interest in Kurdish films to problematize the very foundations of Kurdish national cinema, not only in terms of films, but also in reception and interpretation. Here the modernization of Kurdish culture in terms of the audibility of Kurdish languages presents the very political ground or the possibility of any national audio-visual regime of Kurdishness. Yılmaz Güney, the father of Kurdish cinema for many, occupies a strong position, through which one can identify Kurdish cinema in the absence of Kurdish languages, and better understand how Kurdish presence is a matter of positioning in audio-visual terms, even with the lack of a nationalized Kurdish audience in Kurdish languages (Bozarslan, 2006; Şengül, 2013b; Koçer, 2014; Çiçek, 2016b). In this manner, I argue that the celebration of Kurdish cinema in national terms is in the service of a hegemonic imposition of modern nation states, while the Kurdish community's socio-political realities diverge from the normativity of state-based definitions of national subjects.

The second chapter is structured to problematize the popular theme of victimhood in feature-length narrative films in Kurdish languages by claiming a re-interpretation of

Kurdish trauma in terms of political economy. In feature-length narrative films, where the color of Kurdishness is determined by the trauma its subjects have faced under the yoke of whichever modern nation state they exist within, trauma becomes the founder of Kurdish subjectivity, in commercial Kurdish films, as a founding past experience. In this respect, the category of the unrepresentable in art emerges as key to uncovering the necessity of a re-conceptualization of ethics for a Kurdish audio-visual regime, to re-interpret the Kurdish form of cinema. I engage with the term of 'the pedagogy of real' to pass the threshold for Kurdish cinematic presence, and propose the emergence of *Kolektîfa Sînema ya Mezopotamya* (KSM, The Mesopotamia Cinema Collective) in Istanbul, as well as the re-conceptualization of documentary films blended with fiction, as tools to establish the quasi-bodies for Kurdish ethical community (Jaguaribe, 2005). Following the refusal of an aesthetics of testimony from the homeland, Diyarbakır, I take *Gênco* (*Genco,* Ali Kemal Çınar, 2017) under my lens and question the possibility of an aesthetics embracing the digitalization and re-definition of Kurdish trauma to dismantle the prescription offered to Kurdish audiences by governing politics in the service of a legitimate imagination of Kurdishness, for an imagined hegemonic viewer.

In the last chapter of my research, I investigate the aesthetic regime of Kurdishness in terms of the topography of common life in Kurdish, taking root beyond Kurdistan. To define that Kurdish common life, I discuss a topography of the common, by the most current determinants of Kurdish identity, in terms of spatial and linguistic mobility through an analysis of *My Sweet Pepperland* (Hiner Saleem, 2013). Moreover, positing

the womanization of Kurdish politics as a mirror to reflect the gendered constitution of Kurdish cinematography, I throw into question the gender of the imagined Kurdish ethical community. Hereafter, 'poor images' of Kurdistan, captured by the German-based Japanese contemporary artist Hito Steyerl, shape the discussion. Engaging with the early embracing of the digital revolution by Kurdish artists of Turkey in the 1990s, and the lack of exhibition sites for Kurdish contemporary art, I suggest to focus on Kurdish film festivals' potential in Kurdistan, rather than outside of Kurdistan. Deprived of central institutional support and international recognition, Kurdish film festivals function on behalf of educating Kurdish audiences, in particular by re-interpreting political concepts on behalf of creating an ethically determined community through film exhibitions, panels, and workshops. Thus, the conventional imposition of Kurdish victimhood meets with the agency determined by resistance in Kurdish film festivals of short films and documentaries rather than the perfected trauma narratives in feature-length films in Kurdish. I suggest viral Kurdishness as the contemporary category for a legitimate Kurdish presence by an audio-visualization of politics through a variety of media channels, including newspapers, periodicals, and YouTube videos. Viral Kurdishness stands for the popularization of Kurdish subjects within recognized ranges by hegemonic states, as in two cases: Hacı Lokman Birlik and the Angel of Kobane.

Based on the detailed discussion, across these three chapters, of national cinema, the art of the un-representable, and digital revolution, I aim to reveal the necessity of exploring the aesthetics regime of Kurdishness in audio-visual terms, in order to articulate the

subjectification processes leading to an ethical community in the name of Rancièrian democratic politics. Kurdish languages, and oral tradition stand in as the carriers of a subjectification process that marks a Kurdified collective body. As such, this investigation also attends to the formation and content of Kurdish utterances, as part of the analysis. This in turn raises the question of Kurdish ethical community as a matter of the political presence of Kurdishness re-claiming its national foundation beyond the nation for an emergent *we*. Yet, the gap between the political recognition Kurdish women have gained and Kurdish cinema's patriarchal apperances marks this particular ethical community in a particularly gendered manner. Drawing from the concepts of body, voice and language, then, I will continue with the foundation of Kurdish national cinema as a starting point for my research on an aesthetic regime of Kurdishness.

Chapter 1:

A Foundation of Kurdish National Cinema

In order to depict the historical emergence of Kurdish cinema discourse as an anachronic event in the history of cinema, and pave the way for the new space established by the announcement of Kurdish cinema, I open the first chapter of my thesis with a review of the modern apperances of Kurdishness since the second half of 20th century. Having outlined the premises of the Kurdish audio-visual regime, I suggest a consideration of the formation of national cinema literature through the literature on nationalism, in order to develop a critical account of Kurdish national cinema discussions. Acknowledging the desire for Kurdish national cinema not only by film workers but also by intellectuals, and academics, I address Yılmaz Güney as *the* carrier of the politics of Kurdish national cinema in terms of his early account of Kurdish nationalism as a response to Turkish nationalism, at the expense of silencing his demand for equality and participation in politics. Such an analysis is necessary to liberate the artistic revolution brought about by Yılmaz Güney's subjectification from the search for a founding father myth in his name. Yılmaz Güney is one of the key reference points, in a number of different ways (as actor, as director, as writer, as militant, and more), for understanding the relation between certain aesthetic regimes and their mediation in personal, artistic and stylistic terms, in the realization of politics. Yet, before such an elaboration I close this chapter with a comparative analysis of two Kurdish commercial films, *Dengê Bavê Min* (*Voice of My Father*, Orhan Eskiköy & Zeynel Doğan, 2012) and *Klama Dayîka Min* (*Song of My Mother*, Erol Mintaş, 2014), to problematize the perfected cinema of Kurdish directors in terms of their engagement with the ruling consensus of politics and its limits for recognition, by affirming the notion of equality as something to be provided and protected

by the state. As such, it becomes evident how the perfected images of Kurdish trauma work on the behalf of affirming the inequality between Kurdish people and governing states, rather than claiming a presupposed equality between two agents as part of a democratic politics.

1. The Modern Appearances of Kurdishness

Jacques Rancière's standpoint from which he conceives of the aesthetic regime of art is based on the rejection of a historical break named as post-modernism, which was 'simply the name under whose guise certain artists, and thinkers realized what modernism had been: a desperate attempt to establish a 'distincitive feature of art' by linking it to a simple teleology of historical evolution and rupture' (Rancière, 2011: 28). Accordingly, he identifies an incoherent label, modernity, to place the aesthetic regime of art in its place and claim the future of art as the past restaged (Rancière, 2011: 24). A certain theology of time becomes immanent to the idea of modernity through an understanding of time divided by a founding event or by an event to come (Rancière, 2010a: 201). Labelled as a mechanical art, cinema announces the birth of new history according to modernity's theology of time (Rancière, 2011: 30). In this way, Rancière aims to undo the knot of the anhistorical and the teleogical in order to undermine the idea of historical rupture in relation to art's constitutive elements (Rancière, 2010a: 207-208). As he sharply expressed in an interview, 'I don't really believe in any great historical break between the modern and the postmodern. (…) Modern art was born, as we still believe, in a simple

and radical break with the realist tradition.' (Hallwars, 2003: 206). However, 'the real must be fictionalized in order to be thought', because it is fiction which covers the re-framing of the real for the sake of a dissensus (Rancière, 2011: 38; Rancière, 2010a: 141). Recognition of modernism through expanding its existence into contemporary art paves the way to address the transformation of art into a form of life under the name of an aesthetic regime of arts to set a community of affection instead of a traumatic post moment for modernity (Rancière, 2010b: 36, 37). Under this title, I frame the modern experience of Kurdishness in audio-visual terms to determine the elements of the Kurdish cinematic habitus' commericialized national characteristics.

Under attack from at least three nationalist ideologies (Turkish, Arab -Iraq and Syria- and Persian), Kurdish culture has flourished on historically Kurdish lands, and until recently has been deprived of modern tools to express its presence and desire for recognition. In his comprehensive project *Nationalism and Language in Kurdistan,* Amin Hassanpour analyzes the role of the modern appearances of Kurdish languages to claim for the emergence of the Kurdish nation, referring to the Kurdish speech area and greater Kurdistan (Hassanpour, 1992). Deprived of national print languages, Kurdish culture has traditionally been shaped by orality, especially in the form of *dengbêj* culture (Kurdish traditional oral poetry, half sung and half spoken in Kurdish by traditional singers). The voice of *dengbêj*, only audible on Radio Yerevan, was one of the few means for the imagination of Kurdishness up until the 1990s (Hassanpour, 1996). Moreover, acknowledging the determinacy of state policies on Kurdish languages, Hassanpour

elaborates the modern experience of Kurdish languages through printed publication, journalism activities, broadcasting, and education, and he signals the rarity of filmic presence of Kurdishness three decades ago (Hassanpour, 1992: 170-333). Based on the multiple standardization processes of Kurdish languages, Hassanpour raises doubts about a particular pattern of standardization for each language, as mainly seen in the hegemony of Kurmanci and Sorani languages over other Kurdish dialects. He also places Kurdish languages at the center of the transmission of Kurdishness in building the nation and nationalism (Hassanpour, 1992: 464-465). Moreover, he concludes that:

> The case of Kurdish nationalism is probably unique in that it emerged not in an urban middle-class milieu but, rather, in a predominantly rural society, characterized by feudal relations of production. (…) Summing up the Kurdish experience, it would be safe to claim that this nationalism has been one of the most persistent and suppressed movements during the twentieth century. On the language side alone, the struggle has been conducted on all fronts, ranging from linguistic and literary work at the modest mosque schools of the villages to parliamentary debated to armed struggle to debates in the League of Nations and the United Nations (Hassanpour, 1992: 468).

Nearly a decade after the first publication of *Nationalism and Language in Kurdistan,* Hassanpour announced the 'satellite footprints' of Kurdishness in his article on the challenge of the first Kurdish broadcasting TV in Europe, Med-TV, to state-centered geopolitics (Hassanpour, 1998: 53). After Radio Yerevan of the Soviet Union, the establishment of Med-TV in Europe is considered a climax for Kurdish politics and history (Ayata, 2011: 526).

Taking its name from the Medes, the ancient civilization and mythic ancestors of Kurds, *Med-TV* was founded to regenerate Kurdish languages and identity while targeting Kurdish audiences as its public (Hassanpour, 1998: 55). Recognizing the Turkish state's territorial power in blocking a journalist space for Med-TV, Hassanpour acknowledges the extensiveness of resistance in Kurdish society, here, through an insatiable hunger for televised Kurdishness in Kurdish languages (Hassanpour, 1998: 61). However, the Turkish state's continuous attacks on Kurdish broadcasting in Europe led to several changes in the channel's name. The revocation of the broadcasting license by the UK, the end of Med-Tv was announced alongside the birth of Medya-Tv, based in France, in 1999. Once France revoked Medya-Tv's broadcasting license in 2004, the next station, Roj-Tv, was founded in Denmark in the same year (Ayata, 2011: 528). Finally, in 2013, Roj-Tv's license was also revoked, and the Kurdish broadcasting tradition of Med-TV has continued through Sterk-Tv and Nuçe-Tv. As Ayata concludes, broadcasting has inseparable from Kurdish politics' embrace of transnational politics (Ayata, 2011: 531). Despite several sabotage attempts by the Turkish state directed at international broadcasting in Kurdish languages, and in coordination with several states, Med-Tv re-positioned its deterritorialized Kurdophone audience by hailing it in the name of a Kurdish state with its flag and national anthem *Ey Reqîp* (Hassanpour, 1998: 65-66). In line with this, alongside the oppression of four states, cultural production in Kurdish has involved a multilayered development, from oral tradition to media culture, through diasporic media products (Hassanpour, 1996).

Drawing on Hassanpour, Jaffer Sheyholislami problematizes the spiral of silence around the winding development of Kurdish media in order to underline the necessity of embracing the rise of internet technologies and the questionable democracies empowered by the worldwide web's existence (Sheyholislami, 2010). Positing Kurdish languages as the constitutive element and striking manifestation of Kurdish identity, he examines the unstable definition of Kurdishness through the use of Kurdish languages (Sheyholislami, 2010: 290). Following Hassanpour's rejection of a particular standardization process for every language, Sheyholislami identifies the absence of a hegemonic standardized Kurdish language and alphabet to articulate and share any discursive identity constructs that might foster a Kurdish imagined community (Sheyholislami, 2010: 292). It becomes the internet which made it possible to claim a 'logical state' or 'cyber nation' of Kurdish people, whereas the many Kurdish languages and alphabets employed by internet users address a heterogeneous discourse on Kurdishness unlike the nation-state's homogenizing nationalism (Sheyholislami, 2010: 294). Examining Kurdistan TV (KTV)'s broadcasting since 1999, Sheyholislami concludes that the use of local names against the official names given to Kurdish districts reclaims Kurdishness in territorial terms. Moreover, the internet-based data tells more about the educative manner of new media tools to promote writing, speaking and learning Kurdish languages, Kurmanci and Sorani (Sheyholislami, 2010: 299-303). Here such varieties of Kurdish as Hawrami and Zazaki, which cannot find much space for themselves in periodicals, have their own websites to support their own communicative spaces (Sheyholislami, 2010: 304). Sheyholislami's research project, published under the title of *Kurdish Identity, Discourse,*

and New Media in 2011, reveals the pedagogy of the Kurdish embracing of media channels in collective and individual terms while informing a fragmented Kurdish identity on the basis of linguistic varieties to claim for a multilingual and pluralist identity construction, acknowledging the sociocultural and sociopolitical context of media production and consumption (Sheyholislami, 2011: 183). Moreover, the different ways of imagining Kurdish nation through different media channels, due to its particular foundations, divided by borders and ideologies, helps Kevin Smets to claim for a notion of mediated nationhood for Kurdish modes of experience (Smets, 2016a).

Today, we can assert that the development of Kurdish media over the last two decades has taken place in four ways: through Turkey's EU membership process since 1999, through the Kurdish diaspora, which is both de-territorialized and de-nationalized, and through the 2003 establishment of the Kurdistan Regional Government in Iraqi Kurdistan and through the world-wide-web (Ayata 2011; Sheyholislami 2010; Çiçek 2015; Smets, 2016a). These socio-political and socio-economic surroundings are at the forefront of material conditions promoting a Kurdish national cinema discourse. Despite the fact that Kurdish languages have become more audible, and Kurdish culture more visible, talking about the film industry, whose history spans nearly a century and coincides with both the emergence of modern nation states and the rise of capitalist modes of production, it is a matter of fact that the Kurdish issue of cinema is a matter of late arrival, for both the state and the industry.

The experience of film, which is immanent to the formation of the modern national subject through its positions for identification and ways of seeing, is thus crucial to explore Kurdish experiences of modernism, alongside Kurdish national claims on cinema. It can be said that the nationalist projects of capitalist modernity have hailed a modern subject as a body of continuity and homogeneity, whereas the Kurdish subject announces itself beyond the totalities of modernism. As such, surviving under the rule of oppressive state tools, Kurdish identity is not a matter of fixing, but rather of positioning. The poly-dialectical Kurdish language gains importance at this point, where 'subjectivity and identity mark the compositions of persons in language and culture' (Barker and Galasinski 2001: 28). Linguistic action and the interaction of particularly-located speaking subjects, according to Barker and Galasinski, become the main agent of identification; they provide a relative conceptualization of self-identification and social recognition, as differentiated from and opposed to imaginative identifications with the icons and discourses of the nation-state. Strictly speaking, it turns out to be the language used (spoken, sung) that determines the subject positions from which to declare the means of becoming—say, Polish or American, in Barker and Galasinski's discussion, or here, Kurdish. The Kurdish language, which until recently was largely treated as a dialect of the ruling nation-state's official language (Hassanpour 1996), tends to sound the explosion of truth, as 'the roughness of the film surface' (Bonitzer 2007) against the official language in national (Turkish, Arab, Persian) discourse.

To delve into the common curiosity around the possibility of a national Kurdish cinema, I propose a tracing of Kurdish media's evolution as an educative tool to claim for a Kurdish speaking audience. This precise tool, moreover, realizes Kurdish agents' participation in politics through its engagement with democraticization processes. In this respect, the modern appearances of Kurdish identity transform into aestheticized Kurdish lives to constitute a mediated aesthetic regime of Kurdishness. Such an approach is important, firstly, depicts the limits of the commercial claims of Kurdish films. It also points to the blind spots of the non-commercial foundation of hegemonic national cinema discourse, which allow for a Kurdish presence only through traumatic narratives. Moreover, the limited audibility of Kurdish languages in cinema appears as a prism that clarifies the limited space of nationalized film industries for Kurdish films. The reason is that the audibility of Kurdish languages in movie theatres in historically Kurdish lands is still up to the agenda of ruling governments regarding Kurds and Kurdishness, and the spaces for the distribution of films in Kurdish languages in these national film industries is rather narrow. Approaching the national character of Kurdish films in linguistic terms, I claim that the diegetic use of Kurdish languages in movies calls for secondary identification—identification with the characters of the film (Metz, 1984: 95)—and social recognition in the service of an imagined Kurdishness, alongside attempts at theorizing Kurdish national cinema. Moreover, the audibility of Kurdish languages is the very characteristic of Kurdish national cinema discourse (Arslan, 2009; Koçer, 2015; Kılıç 2009). Yet the definition of cinema in national terms asks to be discussed alongside the literature on nationalism in the coming section.

2. A Genealogy of the Concept of National Cinema

Following the first film demonstration by the Lumière brothers in 1896, cinema was welcomed as the most accessible mass entertainment of the modern age. The discovery of the impact of this precise mass entertainment apparatus on the audience came right after its very invention (Nowell-Smith, 1997). Today, we well know that cinema is one among many ideological apparatuses able to determine the establishment of the social (Kellner and Ryan, 1997: 35-38). Under this title, I present the canonic conceptualization of national cinemas. Through a discussion of the corresponding literature on the imagination of modern nations and nationalism, I expose the theory's Platonic foundations in terms of ends and uses. I then analyze the engagement with theory of Kurdish cinema discussions. Addressing theories on the nation and nationalism, I elaborate film theory's embracing of critical theories of nationalism in the service of promoting forms of national cinema. Here three names are important in the canonical references of the literature on national cinema: Ernest Gellner, Benedict Anderson, and Anthony Smith (Higson, 1989; Crofts, 1993; Hayward, 2005; Jarvie, 2005; Hjört and MacKenzie, 2005).

On March 11, 1882, Ernest Renan was defining the core of the nation in relation to the forgetting of the conqueror in his seminar titled "*Qu'est-ce qu'une nation*?" (What is a nation?) at Sorbonne University (Renan, 1993: 11). Benedict Anderson blends Renan's seminar with Ernest Gellner's emphasis in *Nations and Nationalism* (1983) on the

invention of nation rather than the emphasis on the awakening of nations to self-consciousness. Following this thinking, he defines the nation as an imagined community formed through a national narrative in his ground-breaking book *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism,* first published in 1983 (Anderson, 2006). According to Anderson, it became possible to imagine a nation once the following three cultural conceptions lost their axiomatic grip on men's mind:

> …. The idea that a particular script-language offered privileged access to ontological truth, precisely because it was an inseparable part of that truth. (…) Second was the belief that society was naturally organized around and under high centers -monarchs who were persons apart from other human beings and who ruled by some form of cosmological (divine) dispensation. (…) Third was a conception of temporality in which cosmology and history were indistinguishable, the origins of the world and of men essentially identical (Anderson, 2006: 36).

Keeping in mind Anderson's proposition on considering nationalism within its preceding cultural systems rather than limiting our understanding to consciously held political ideologies, the definition of nationalism as a response to the increasing tone of nationalism and to the determinacy of national identity comes from Anthony D. Smith, in conversation with Anderson'a threefold conceptualization: 'A nation can therefore be defined as a named human population sharing an historic territory, common myths and historical memories, a mass, public culture, a common economy and common legal rights and duties for all members' (Anderson, 2006: 12; Smith, 1991: 14). Thus, nationalism emerges as '*an ideological movement for attaining and maintain autonomy, unity and identity on the behalf of a population deemed by some of its members to constitute an*

actual or potential 'nation',[4] where the term nationalism can be considered as 'an ideology, including a cultural doctrine of nations and the national will and prescriptions for the realization of national aspirations and the national will' (Smith, 1991: 72, 73).

To trace the fictive quality of the political concept of nation itself, Timothy Brennan explains the inseparability of the imaginative literature's forms and subjects from the rise of the modern nation-state in Europe (Brennan, 1997: 48). Here, elites emerge on the stage as the agents of portraying the nation and disseminating nationalism through all kinds of media channels that speak to a nation in the language and culture developed through the messages of myth and symbol, memory and tradition (Smith, 1991: 139). Accordingly, in one of his later writings, Smith underlines 'how the historicist vision of the nation, and its ethnic fund of myths, memories, symbols and traditions, is unfolded through an increasingly naturalistic mode of expression, and is made to carry an ever-wider range of meanings and emotions as the visual arts are opened up to a greatly enlarged national membership' (Smith, 2005: 41). To exemplify his claim, he refers to the cinematography of Eisenstein's later films that embrace 'character development, historical reconstruction, pictorial tableaux, accessories, ethnospace and the 'people'' in the name of a historical film (Smith, 2005: 46, 52). Smith's approach to the concept of national cinema in the edited volume *Cinema and Nation,* first published in 2000, is important for me to formulate the following questions: How should we explain the belated emergence of a critical account of the concept of national cinema, even while moving

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[4] Emphasis original.

images have been in the service of nation building processes of the modern states since the early 20th century? Does the elitist imperative of discussions of national cinema inform the liberating potential of art's zone, or rather oppress the presumption of equality of several agents in making politics?

Mette Hjört and Scott Mackenzie's introduction to *Cinema and Nation* announces one possible answer:

> Poststructuralism and psychoanalytic semiology have taught several generations to view literary and cinematic texts, not as works with distinctive traits expressing in some instances the intentions of creative agent, but as mere epiphenomena of language, desire, ideology, and a unified 'logophallocentric' Western metaphysic (Hjört, 1993). However, over the past ten years or so, we have seen a framatic shift from this sort of theory to what is beginning to look like a promising emphasis on the specificity of relevant cultural, social and historical context in accounts of literature, film and the other arts. (Hjört and MacKenzie, 2005: 1)

The cinema of the first half of 20th century was distinctive, marked by the very specific conditions of two world wars and fascist regimes that employed films as the main ideological apparatus for propaganda (Reeve, 1993). Under these conditions it was only Siegfried Kracauer's *From Caligari to Hitler: A Psychological History of the German Film* (1947) that could be addressed as a critical account of theoretical engagement with the concept of national cinema while embracing its social body (Hjört and Mackenzie, 2005: 2). Kracauer's claim was that films have the capacity to reflect a putative national psyche, as collective products, and as such were capable of addressing and mobilizing the masses (Kracauer, 2004). It should also be noted here Kracauer's theory of cinema is a

theory of the sensory experience of cinema, rather than of cinematic realism in its claim to film experience 'in the wake of and *beyond* historic crisis' (Hansen, 2012: 255).[5] The grand theory of the Lacanian turn in the 1970s resulted in a series of works on the manifestation of national characteristics in cinema, and this literature made it possible for film scholar Andrew Higson to problematize the concept of national cinema in 1989 (Bordwell and Carroll, 1996; Stam, 2000; Hjört and Mackenzie, 2005: 3).

Andrew Higson's article, published in the prominent journal of film studies *Screen,* identifies four approaches to the term national cinema: economy based, text based, the consumption based, and criticism-led. This classification paves the way for involving the site of films' consumption into the parameters of national cinema (Higson, 1989: 36-37). Pointing differentiation from other national cinemas in terms of meaning and identity as the determinant of any claim for a national cinema, Higson suggests that defining a national cinema is also establishing some sort of unique and self-contained identity. However, it is not enough to be nationally popular. Rather, the paradox appears in the condition that national cinemas must be international in scope in order to compete with Hollywood's mass entertainment films in the domestic markets. Here, in the fight against Hollywood, the role of the state becomes evident, in terms of determining the parameters and possibilities of a national cinema in financially and culturally motivated institutions (Higson, 1989: 38-44). Having surveyed the various embedded approaches and agents

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[5] Emphasis original.

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around the concept of national cinema, Higson closes his article by emphasizing the necessity of a national audience, which one can understood in the following context:

> Cinema never simply reflects or expresses an already fully formed and homogeneous national culture and identity, as if it were the undeniable property of all national subjects; certainly, it privileges only a limited range of subject positions which thereby become naturalised or reproduced as the only legitimate positions of the national subject. But it needs also to be seen as actively working to construct subjectivity as well as simply expressing a pre-given identity (Higson, 1989: 44).

Higson's approach also points to the demands of particular regional and ethnic cinemas to be engaged by national audiences, which found its expression in Crofts' analysis, four years after the publication of "The Concept of National Cinema":

> The nation-state itself has for a while been manifestly losing its sovereignty. (…) The multiculturalism, the cultural hybridity of the nation-state has increasingly been recognized. Recent instances of assertion of ethnicity, for instance, centre on linguistic rights and cultural protection: from the Spanish regular in public notices in American cities to people from the Iberian Peninsula who describe themselves as Basque or Catalan rather than Spanish (Crofts, 2006: 54).

The most common point of these opening essays on the concept of national cinema is their recognition of the territorial dependency of both modern nation states and their imagined national subjects. Yet here, as Rancière would point out, positing the governing state as the provider and protector of national cinema, a national cinema theorist lacks an understanding of political emancipation through the work of art. The name for Catalan cinema chosen by Marvin D'Lugo, 'something like national cinema', is cited by Stephen Crofts as the signifier of a naming crisis, for ethnic and linguistic minority cinema and its

place in film studies, in the absence of the state (Crofts, 2006). Jerry White, who aims to challenge the dependence of the national cinema concept on the modern state, suggests that a film is considered within a national cinema not because of what it does, but rather because of what it is (White, 2004: 212). In line with this, addressing the use value of the films as an element of organization rather than an element of socio-political struggle, he underlines the importance of Third Cinema in terms of its desire to de-stabilize the institution of national cinema (White, 2004: 214, 217). Therefore, it becomes possible to propose a new definition of national cinema that does not rely on the definition of nation in the name of citizens of the modern nation but instead minimizes the degree to which films themselves engage with a state's national imagination (White, 2004: 224). White's analysis is important because he clearly posits the taxonomic value of the concept of national cinema while engaging with the dynamism of the concept of nation in the context of globalization (White, 2004: 227).

The category of supra-nation is suggested by Tim Bergfelder as a means of reconsidering European film studies in relation to the geopolitical changes European countries witnessed in the 1990s. His study focuses on European cinema as a category formed by several national cinemas, as part of European art films' claims and struggles against Hollywood, through the support of film funds and film-making initiatives like Euro-Aim, the European Commission's MEDIA Programme, and the Council of Europe's production funds Eurimages (Bergfelder, 2005: 316). Painting European cinema as liminal and marginal, and bringing migration, diasporic experiences, and cultural

interaction into the discussion, Bergfelder posits supranational cinema against 'the illusion of pure and stable national cultures' (Bergfelder, 2005: 320, 321). In that sense, the concept suggests a linguistically non-homogenous film universe (Bergfelder, 2005: 324-329). Another name in European art cinema, Mattias Frey, argues for a universal film language through the Hungarian art film director Béla Balazs' propositions. Frey formulates that the universal language claim is neither universal nor technically a language (Frey, 2010: 325). As such, the use of facial expressions and gestures in art movies to claim for a universal language cannot substitute for language as '*the* ontological property of humanity, the essential, defining human characteristic' (Frey, 2010: 328-329).[6] Moreover, referring to Herder, emphasizes Frey that 'language (…) is the point of departure for an aesthetic-affective understanding of 'nation'' (Frey, 2010: 333). Frey's ontological concern for the definition of cinema in terms of the willful expression of nation, class, and humanity, in a way, speaks with White's insistence on redefining the concept of national cinema by recognizing its taxonomical value (Frey, 2010: 338; White, 2004). As such, the contributions of Higson and Hjort and MacKenzie create a dialogic space for breaking any stable consensus around the concept of national cinema (Higson, 2005: 58; Hjört and MacKenzie, 2005).

Yet, the question of the need for a national cinema cannot be escaped. Ian Christie, acknowledging the support and funds for domestic consumption of national industries, problematizes the 'essentialist' concept of national cinema, which gave rise to academic

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[6] Emphasis original.

enthusiasm for the term transnational (Christie, 2013: 22, 24). In this context, the elitism and the products of art cinema, funded by national industries and domestic consumption against the hegemony of Hollywood, are challenged by new techniques. Christie radicalizes Higson's emphasis on the absence of audience in the literature on national cinema, and suggests that the new modes of access and delivery for films -not being dependent on movie theaters and official distribution networks- present critical challenges to conventional film exhibitions (Christie, 2013: 28). Therefore, in addition to experiences of migration and diaspora, technological innovations push the limits of national cinema towards supra-national or trans-national cinemas, and technological revolution occurs as the main agent of transformation of the experience of reception and distribution (White, 2004; Higson, 2005: 61). Both Kurdish cinema workers and the related literature embrace the concept of national cinema under the circumstances of statelessness, as a resistant imposition to the cultural agendas of hegemonic states, at the expense of dismissing the impact of a collective body emerging as a new Kurdish we.

Referring to the literature on criss crossing boundaries in Virilio's writings, to Bhabha's discussion of disenfranchised minorities, and to the problematic of difference in Kristeva's writings, Susan Hayward defines two paradoxes of national cinemas. The first paradox of globalization emerges in terms of the periphery's ultimate re-invention of itself within nationalist discourses, while the second paradox of difference emerges as the underlying principles of nationalism as difference becomes reality (Hayward, 2005: 87). Embracing a Fanonic, anti-colonial stance and an awareness of gender, she:

> …refuses to historicise the nation as subject/object in and of itself but makes it a subject and object of knowledge. This (ideal) writing of a national cinema is one that is invested in (defining) national cultural discourses as anti-assimilationist, anti-integrationist and pro-integralism. It is one which delves deep into the pathologies of nationalist discourses and exposes the symbolic practices of these forms of enunciation (Hayward, 2005: 93).

Enunciation, says Rancière, is a matter of 'varying frames, scales and rhythms; and of building new relationships between reality and appearance, the individuals and the collective' (Rancière, 2010a: 141). The concept of national cinema, re-defined and re-framed by several academics in various platforms, turns out to be dependent on its use. In other words, any claim to exceed the nation becomes a new interpretation of the national in relation to the conditions that make the genre of national cinema possible, both culturally and financially. Embracing the taxonomic use of the concept of national cinema perhaps understandably finds its reflections in the literature on Kurdish cinema, yet there is also a need to see beyond totalities in the Kurdish experience of cinema. In other words, the claim of Kurdish national cinema places a barrier in front of a transhistorical force that makes subjectification possible through artistic experience.

3. In Search of a National Cinema: A Kurdish Spring

Except for the general interest in Kurdish directors at international film festivals, whereby films become labelled 'Kurdish', reference to this cinema is rare. This is not only because of a lack of territorial recognition among the league of modern nation states, but also

because of the overdetermining political conditions that lack a space for Kurdish identity's very presence. The term 'Kurdish cinema' has developed, problematically, following the international reputation of the award-winning Kurdish directors Yılmaz Güney, Bahman Ghobadi and Hiner Saleem by Kurdish film critics (Aktaş, 2009; Şengül, 2013b). Either as a transnational cinema funded by international collaborations or as an exilic cinema mostly developed by diasporas, the concept of Kurdish cinema is explored in terms of the territorial determinacy of modern national cultures (Koçer, 2014; Çiftçi 2015; Çiçek, 2016a). For Kurdophone subjects of cinema, including film scholars suffering from the internal cultural colonialism of nation-states (Turkey, Iran, Syria and Iraq), the privileged target of reception has been the audibility of Kurdish languages in movie theatres (Kılıç, 2009). However, debates on Kurdish cinema have subordinated the audio-visual promise of the diegetic use of Kurdish languages to transnational or diasporic conditions of Kurdish films' production and distribution. In other words, it has only been considered appropriate to discuss Kurdish film under the titles of transnationalism and diaspora, affirming the condition of state and national industries for its presence.

Kurdish culture has not only been deprived of government support, but has been jeopardized by governments as a 'stateless sub-culture' because of the alleged lack of a Kurdish nation in the era of modern nation-states (Vali, 2003; Kreyenbroek & Allison, 1996; Hassanpour, 2003). Yet, as Hassanpour has noted, alongside the oppression of the four states, cultural production in Kurdish languages has involved a multi-layered

development from oral tradition to media culture (Hassanpour, 1996). Deprived of the vital elements of a state-funded film industry, the aforementioned four foci of Kurdish media's development have determined the existence and development of Kurdish national cinema discourse alongside the feature-length narrative films in Kurdish languages by multinational producers; the visibility achieved by award-winning exiled Kurdish directors of Iran, Iraq and Syria, and Kurdish film festivals in European centers; and finally, the KRG's enterprises for the development of its own Kurdish films. In line with that, the discursive power of a national Kurdish cinema maintains its importance as a political tool against the denial of Kurdish identity. Thereafter, what primarily determines the characteristics of Kurdish national cinema turns out to be the employment of the diegetic use of Kurdish languages, such as it transcends the overdetermination of the political economy of the film industry for the sake of becoming Kurdish by addressing its own people and popular culture in their mother language. The films in Kurdish languages produced in Turkey, Iraq, Iran and the diaspora have limited space for public screenings -basically in film festivals- due to both the lack of a legal basis and a commercial value for the use of Kurdish languages (though unlike the KRG's film industry, which targets a Kurdish national audience through widespread public screenings as much as film festivals). The limited space for narrations in Kurdish languages limits its popular themes to certain acceptable political claims through discourses of collective trauma and victimhood, by covering such issues as statelessness, borders, and violence, in the name of a Kurdish popular imagination: see, for instance, the title of first edited

volume on Kurdish cinema: *Kurdish Cinema: Statelessness, Border and Death* (*Kürt Sineması: Yurtsuzluk, Sınır ve Ölüm*) (Arslan, 2009).

Here it is important to recognize the Kurdistan Regional Government's unique position for Kurdish national cinema discussions. The films produced through the KRG's financial support indeed deserve a separate analysis in their own right, in order to capture the developing Kurdish film industry in the land of a recognized Kurdish government. Though the KRG's attempt to fund Kurdish films speaks to a new field for Kurdish cinema, here the subject of this analysis is, by necessity, limited. Being the only internationally recognized Kurdish administrative unit, the KRG's investment in the Kurdish film industry follows the national patterns for any film industry by promoting the production of films in Kurdish languages by Kurdish directors, holding public showings of such films, and hosting its international Kurdish film festival at the capital, Duhok International Film Festival, since 2011. The KRG's institutional support for Kurdish films embodies the centrality of multiple governments' financial prohibitions on Kurdish cinema. More specifically, the lack of financial support by the Turkish and Iranian governments for projects by Kurdish directors in Kurdish languages has led either to Kurdish languages being only partially audible, or to the adaptation or translation of Kurdish narratives into projects that are ideologically harmless (mostly in terms of their linguistic homogeneity) and part of the concerned state's Kurdish policy. For example, with the most developed national film industry and the largest Kurdish population, Turkey hosts most of the feature-length movies in Kurdish languages, particularly due to

the Peace Process between the years of 2009 and 2016. The number of feature-length films in Kurdish languages by Kurdish directors in Turkey, Iraq, Iran and in exile shows the numeric impact of having an official account of the film industry for Kurdish cinema in comparison with the young KRG governance. Compared to the KRG, the financial support, by other countries and by the diaspora, for the development of Kurdish cinema has been limited, with the 65 feature-length films in Kurdish by Kurdish directors over the last three decades falling behind the KRG's production rate since its foundation (see Appendix II). This phenomenon aside, though, the claims of Kurdish national cinema under the shadow of hegemonic national film cultures remain valid.

The de-territorialized and de-nationalized Kurdish diaspora was host to many Kurdish directors across the 2000s, including Hiner Saleem, Hisham Zaman, Nuray Şahin and Jan Jonroy. Hiner Saleem, as one of the most prominent directors in Kurdish cinema with twelve feature-length films, uses the interaction of Kurdish languages with other languages (Turkish, French, Russian, and English), as much as its own dialects (Kurmanci, Sorani, Zazaki, and Gorani), to communicate Kurdish longing for homelands and collective memory. Among the Kurdish directors of the diaspora, Nuray Şahin emerges as the sole Kurdish woman director, with her feature-length film narrating a Kurdish Alevi woman's search for love in Germany, *Perre Dima So* (*Follow the Feather*, 2005). Either forcefully deported from their homeland or as migrants who sought to liberate their artistic choices from state oppression by settling in America or Europe, these Kurdish directors have mainly narrated the modern experience of being Kurdish through

an urban experience. Their films' construction of cosmopolitan city life, in which Kurdish languages are audible, posits the cities of Europe as the new homes for Kurdish becoming. Recalling Hall's emphasis on the writer's enunciation and the implication of the new subject of cinema—the place where s/he speaks and the practices of representation to the positions of enunciation (Hall, 1990: 222)—the Kurdishness of the director emerges as central to the national characteristics of Kurdish films, in ways similar to the diegetic use of Kurdish languages to assert its people and popular narratives.

On the other hand, the fetishism of political discourses and realist aesthetics, along with the epistemological effects of the construction of a Kurdish national cinematographic subject, are uttered through fragments of Kurdistan and the audibility of Kurdish languages by Kurdish directors in feature-length movies (Şimşek, 2018). Exploring the developing Kurdish film culture of Turkey in terms of how it benefited from the revival of the film industry in Turkey during 2010s, Çiftçi explores Kurdish cinema as a question of Turkish cinema, such that Kurdish narratives emerge as a part of new Turkey's film culture (Çiftçi, 2015). Çiftçi's approach aims to re-conceptualize the definition of Turkishness in line with hegemonic political discourse in Turkey. Yet it too is not able to escape from colonial ways of seeing, in not recognizing the autonomy of Kurdish films, by interpreting them as a fragment in the Turkish film history. Özgür Çiçek also problematizes how cinema is discovered and embraced by Kurdish directors to mirror the circumstances surrounding Kurdish people, contextualized in the politics of Kurdish resistance in her research (Çiçek, 2016a: 5). Being popular in the sense of their

embracement of hegemonic language on the Kurdish issue and imagining its own people through narratives of trauma and victimhood, Kurdish feature-length movies of Turkey follow the early works of Güney, which are in line with the space provided for Kurdishness by the film industry and Turkish politics. Yet it is Güney who caused a rupture in the history of Turkish cinema by his late works (Ergül, 2018: 42). As such, his aesthetic presence as a director, writer and militant aim at the multitude in a revolutionary art. However, the narratives embraced by the Kurdish directors of Turkey during the Kurdish opening of the AKP government in the first half of 2010s strategically engage with the popular political claims that had then gained partial recognition. As such, the pedagogy of the real finds its expression as 'the claim of truth telling' in the Kurdish cinema of Turkey (Çiftçi, 2015). Kurdish national cinema, then, can be claimed to be in the service of already-decoded meanings by the parties of conflict, through its commercial mode. In that sense, then, Kurdish national cinema discourse embraces the theology of time either in the form of a revolutionary moment to come or a traumatic past experience to encounter.

As one internationally renowned Kurdish director would have it, Kurdish cinema is trying to progress on the way of the sun and spring (Saleem, 2009). Even as some Kurdish directors prefer to identify their productions as 'political films by a Kurdish director' or their own situation as 'a Kurdish director with Turkish citizenship', their thematic and stylistic cinematic choices point to a discursive opening, despite the borders and the rules of the four modern states that have deprived Kurds of their most effective means for

articulating and sharing discursive identity constructs during the 20[th]century (Doğan, 2013; Mintaş, 2013; Sheylolisami, 2010: 292). Moreover, an understanding of national cinema in terms of the territorial determinacy of modern culture, and the lack of territorial recognition in the league of modern nation-states lead to a discursive resolution of the stateless cinema of Kurds as a transnational cinema. Accordingly, deprived of the vital elements of a state-funded film industry, the conditions of globalization make it possible to talk about a commercial mode of Kurdish cinema that is characterized by hybridity through production and distribution − in other words, through the exiled position of directors of Kurdish films, and worldwide distribution via international film festivals. Thus, caught in the hegemonic discourse of transnationalism, the national references and promises of Kurdish cinema for the Kurdish spectator have been blurred. The epistemic boundaries of Kurdishness, something that the conceptualization of the nation supposes to be the basis of a Kurdish national film language, are neither fixed nor closed. The very existence of Kurdish cinema under such circumstances uniquely calls attention to a broader crisis of naming. The embodied speaking (Kurdish) subjects of cinema have been muted by 'cultural diplomacy' and the 'taste-brokering functions of film festivals and film criticism' in the case of long-feature narrative films (Crofts, 2006: 54). Precisely, the fetishism of a specific political discourse and culturally specific aesthetic, along with the epistemological effects of the construction of the national cinematic subject, come into focus through the following question: shall it be the nation that determines the understanding of Kurdish cinema?

I suggest that Kurdish cinema, which has developed under the shadow of nationalist discourses in the transnational era, as discussed by Koçer, calls for an understanding beyond nationally determined cultural fields of production to claim for its own community (Koçer, 2014). In light of the unassimilable artefacts of Kurdish aesthetics, I explore here its promise for the recognition of modern Kurdish culture in audio-visual terms through non-commercial modes of production. Various Kurdish feature-length films articulate each of these components with reference to different traumatic histories, yet they nonetheless address themselves to the contemporary subjects of Kurdish culture and politics. A Kurdish national claim in cinema, with its still limited range of commercial feature-length films, stands on the threshold of the official recognition of Kurdish cultures that is jeopardized in so many contexts by state violence. Yet Kurdish cinematography itself stands for an emancipatory politics in the service of subjectification through art for active participation in the democraticization process.

Yılmaz Güney, who has no films in Kurdish, but rather echoes Kurdish lands through accents and background voices, still emerges as the legitimate father of any Kurdish national cinema discourse, due to his status as an earlier modern phenomenon for Kurdish audiences to identify with. Those who claim him as the father of Kurdish films, even with the rarity of Kurdish language in his films, in turn legitimize the Turkish nationalist politics surrounding his productions. He was not able to make movies in Kurdish, because of the Turkish state's denial of and oppression on Kurdish identity and culture, yet of necessity he came to stand for the embracing of Kurdish politics, to a certain extent, in

art. Focusing on Güney's thinking through films, and on subjectification through the politics of equality, I discuss the roots of strategic practices in the processes of Kurdish film making, while positing the event of Yılmaz Güney as a carrier of an aestheticized Kurdish identity that is a matter of positioning in terms of enunciation to be present and to survive. It is crucial to underline that Yılmaz Güney is key to my research because of the dynamic quasi-bodies shaped around his works in several platforms.

4. Yılmaz Güney as Event

As an actor, narrator and director, Yılmaz Güney may be called the 'wretched of' Turkish cinema in a Fanonian sense, having been born a Kurdish man into the highly nationalist Turkish film industry (Ergün, 1978; Dorsay, 1988; Özgüç, 1998; Karaman, 2006). As one of the most controversial characters to place in the history of Turkish cinema since the very beginning, today one can speak of a common academic interest around his name and art (Yüksel, 2006; Koçer, 2012; Furat, 2014; Varol, 2016). Hamit Bozarslan points to this situation:

> Yılmaz Güney is a character as charismatic as enigmatic. Tens of thousands of copies of his posters have been sold in Turkey for three decades. Being the writer, director or producer of numerous films, he is considered, even in a book by the Turkish Ministry of Culture, as the founding father of Turkish cinema -also in the Freudian sense of the term. It is difficult to imagine a narrative film in Turkey that does not draw its sources from Güney, whose heritage is heavy to bear (Bozarslan, 1990: 27).[7]

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[7] Translation mine.

Interestingly, some two decades after Bozarslan's essay, Yılmaz Güney would again be positioned as the founding father of Kurdish cinema (Şengül, 2013a; Çiçek, 2016a; Şimşek, 2018). Here I claim that the oscillation between Turkish Yılmaz Güney and Kurdish Yılmaz Güney enables one to expose the tension between the popular promise of cinema and politics of Kurdish subjectification within a single life span. Güney helps us, in other words, to understand both the historical premises and the future sociological possibilities of subjectification.

Today it is an established fact that cinema in Turkey has never been nationally homogenous, but has instead been haunted by the ethnic and religious identities otherized by hegemonic national discourse since the late Ottoman era (Scognamillo, 2003). In continuity with the nationalist constructions of Kemalist Turkey, the hegemonic reading of Turkish film history is based on a dismissal of its Ottoman roots, so that for nearly a century, the pioneers of this specific film culture have yet to be recognized. This situation gained publicity in the early 2010s, during discussions on reconsidering what is said to be the first film produced in Turkey: Fuat Uzkinay's (Faruk Kenç) *Ayestefanos'taki Rus Abidesinin Yıkılışı* (*The Destruction of the Russian Monument of Ayestefanos,* 1914). Yet film scholars claimed that, on the basis of citizenship, the founders of Turkish film culture couldn't be properly called Turkish, at least by Kemalist definitions of Turkishness formulated as a 'Muslim, Hanafiyyah sect, Turkish speaking person' (retrieved from Yıldız, 2004: 301). Reflecting the Ottoman Empire's cosmopolitan presence, the Manaki Brothers, Yanaki Manaki (1878–1954) and Milton Manaki (1882–1964), are seen by

some as the pioneers of Turkish cinema in the Ottoman Era (Evren, 2013). The glorious Yeşilçam Era of Turkey, which some announce Yılmaz Güney to have re-founded, is based on an ideological ground never announced as such: the Turkish film industry's ethnically and religiously non-homogeneous structure (Demirkol, 1974: 10). The popular name of low-budget Yeşilçam movies, Yılmaz Güney, a.k.a. the (Kurdish) Ugly King of Turkish cinema, was born into this history of denial and oppression.

I claim that Yılmaz Güney's persona constitutes an Event for the aesthetic regime of Kurdish cinema for at least three reasons. Being born in the era of the Kemalist Republic and being a part of the system of Turkish stars in the 1960s, first of all, he was thus an example of an acceptable Kurdish citizen for the (Kemalist) state. Since his early emergence on the silver screen, Güney's name has also been credited in scenario, direction, and production in many of the movies he took part in as the protagonist. Identified with the role of bandit (*eşkiya*) in the films of 1960s, it was he who asked for an interview with the journalist Tarık Dursun Kakınç from *Milliyet* on his then latest movie *Krallar Kralı* (*The King Among Kings*, Bilge Olgaç, 1965) (Özcan, 2019: 48-51; Özgüç, 1988). During this interview, Güney's tone, echoing from his 'kingdom', bothered Kakınç, such that the latter felt the need to remind Güney that 'the only King of Turkish cinema is Ayhan Işık', a hidden Armenian citizen of Turkey at that time (Özgüç, 1988; Kara, 2014), in response to which Güney suggested for himself the name Ugly King. This anecdote both solidifies the limits of Güney's acceptance by Turkishness, as

the wretched, and exposes Güney's refusal of the normative power of Turkishness, in playful terms, to claim recognition through agency.

Secondly, Güney's cinematic productions during the 1970s mirror the mechanisms that show how internalized colonialism is at work in certain films translating Kurdish identity and culture in Turkish. Namely, alongside *Umut* (*Hope*, Yılmaz Güney, 1970), *Arkadaş* (*Friend*, Yılmaz Güney, 1974) and *Sürü* (*The Herd*, Zeki Ökten, 1978), Güney embraces a Turkish socialist understanding of the Kurdish issue in terms of underdevelopment and backwardness, through a socialist realist depiction (even if he does not name it as such) of poor Kurdish villages and feudal Kurdish society. Tim Kennedy discusses these cinematic productions of Güney's as an extension of understanding 'the root of the Kurdish problem in class conflict' along with Turkish directors Lütfi Ö. Akad and Metin Erksan, while Müslüm Yücel calls Güney the *le regard mutilé*, echoing Dariush Shayegan (Kennedy, 2007: 115; Yücel, 2008: 127-178). This Güney embraces the fixation of Kemalist socialist ideologies of Kurdish identity and geography as a matter of underdevelopment and backwardness in financial and religious terms, which Güney himself exposes through his didactic narratives, in the colonial gaze he has internalized. In both of these Güney eras, the very signifier of Güney's cinematography emerges as masculinized resistance either under the name of bandit (*Seyyit Han*, *Bride of the Earth*, 1968), or else a mobster (*Krallar Kralı*) or a petit bourgeois (*Arkadaş*) struggling against the powerful. The Kurdish tone of this resistance signals its very presence through narratives employing Kurdish culture and geography in the language of Turkish, such that

utterance in Kurdish languages can only be audible in the names of characters such as Remo, Keje, Koçero, and Seyyit Han. These two initial eras are foundational to a visual regime enjoying the possibility of a settled national (Turkish) cinema for telling stories related of the oppressed (Kurdish) identity; the internalization of colonialism, to a certain degree, emerges as the inevitable transitional phase in a strategic move to claim a presence for Kurdish identity within the limits recognized by the state, whereas revolutionary art comes with the refusal of the state as the guarantor of equality and democracy.

The third and final pivot that makes Yılmaz Güney essential to current Kurdish cinema discourse is the cinematic opening that comes about through the *Palmé d'Or* winner *Yol* (*The Way*, Şerif Gören & Yılmaz Güney, 1981), which was filmed by Şerif Gören due to Güney's imprisonment in Turkey and eventually edited by Güney in Europe. It is generally felt that the emergence of the term 'Kurdistan' on the screen in *The Way* pointed to cinema's popular promise for the Kurdish issue. As such, Yılmaz Güney's on screen 'Kurdistan opening,' which took place just two years after the 12 September 1980 *coup d'état*, announced a claim for recognition. Yet *The Way*, which was banned for nearly two decades by the Turkish government, was categorized as the first Turkish film awarded the *Palme d'Or* at the Cannes Film Festival (Suner, 1998). Moreover, we can only speak of a feature-length film in Kurdish addressing Kurdistan in the wake of sixteen years of silence after *The Way*, by an exiled Kurdish director in France: *Vive la mariée...*

et la libération du Kurdistan (*Long Live the Bride… and Free Kurdistan,* Hiner Saleem, 1998).

Not being filmed in Kurdish languages due to Turkey's ban on Kurdish languages but including the presence of Kurdish languages in the form of an accent or stain on the Turkish language; calling the land east of Tigris River by its historical name of Kurdistan; and turning its lenses to the oscillation between feudal Kurdish tribes and modern Kurdish subjects along the journeys between the cities and the villages, *The Way* includes a wide range of tensions through which Kurdish subjectification has been shaped. As such, the reactions of Kurdish languages to the surrounding official languages have become one of the distinguishing features of Kurdish films, from Yılmaz Güney to the latest Kurdish directors in exile. Ulus Baker's positioning of *The Way* in Turkish film history as disturbing consciousness by its very form, through a state of trance in geography, alongside tribes and the earth, ends with an aesthetics of multiplicity through Bakhtinian free indirect speech (Baker, 1999: 11-23). Referring to land, language and memory in order to narrate the daily lives of Kurdish people, Yılmaz Güney's *The Way* thus became the pioneer of an interpretation of Kurdish subjectification in political-economic terms.

The critique and reception of *The Way* by Turkish intellectuals tell us about the multi-layered work of Turkish ideology in the cinematic universe, as well as its determinacy on production and distribution. *The Way*, banned in Turkey till 1999, colors the indecisive Turkishness of its Kurdish producer as a case to expose indecisive Kurdishness to the eye

of Turkish audiences. In other words, the unnamed tension between Güney as the globally recognized Turkish director and as the most possible founder of Kurdish cinema names the discursive struggle that determines the possibility of any Kurdish cinema. Turkish film scholar Asuman Suner's approach to *The Way* and to Yılmaz Güney exemplifies this well (Suner, 1998). Trying to make feminist sense of *The Way*, she calls the concepts of Otherness and political cinema into discussion for the Turkish case of national cinema. Positing Güney as a Turkish director, Suner suggests that Western interest in *The Way* is based on an Orientalist understanding of Turkey under the rule of feudal traditions and the image of subaltern Anatolian women (Suner, 1998: 283-284). Taking the Turkishness of the director and the society under his lens for granted, Suner's gender-focused analysis turns out to be itself a colonial reading, as it rejects to recognize the sociology of Kurdish society and Kurdish women's life under the shadow of feudal structures as a colonized entity under the rule of the Turkish state, as depicted in *The Way*. In other words, positing Güney's cinema as the Other, inequal of Turkish cinema, Suner develops an approach embracing a conditional recognition of the Kurdish issue that silences a Güney Other (Kurdish) than the Ugly King of (Turkish) Yeşilçam, and takes pride in *Palmé d'Or* coming with Turkish Yılmaz Güney while addressing Kurdish Yılmaz Güney as responsible for a misrepresentation of modern Turkish society in terms of backwardness. This reading of *The Way* and Yılmaz Güney crystalizes the different layers of colonial gaze that Kurdish cinema discourse has been read through in theory.

Liberating himself from a Kemalist socialist understanding of the Kurdish issue, Güney embraces realistic aesthetics to let Kurdish geography speak for itself through its native languages in *The Way*. Thus, in line with his communist background, Güney declared his Kurdish identity and support for the Kurdish movement during his exile years in Paris between the years of 1982 and 1984 (Kutschera, 1983). Kennedy names the manifestation of the Kurdish issue as something more than a matter of class conflict in the 1980s as the source of Güney's re-invention of his Kurdishness and an imagined Kurdistan (Kennedy, 2007: 115). Moreover, edited in diaspora, *The Way* announces the conditions of any Kurdish cinema under the rule of hegemonic oppression against stateless Kurdish identity: a diasporic, fragmented, and non-static presence. Following *The Way*, Güney's last project *Duvar* (*The Wall,* 1983) -echoing his multiple experiences of imprisonment in Turkey for political and non-political reasons-becomes an allegory of colonial violence from several perspectives, and of the multitude in resistance that opens a space for female agency, in addition to a Kurdish socialist awakening. Working on a number of non-visible political themes -torture, rape and execution- of 12 September films (the plenitude of films on and about the 12 September *coup d'état* led to a categorization of these films under the name of 'post-coup-d'état films' of Turkey by Colins), Güney addresses the sites of political agency in Turkey at that time through the experience of non-political prisoners subordinated by the elitisms of Turkish leftist movements, by breaking the myth of the innocent child into pieces (Colins, 2014). For instance, extracting the child lacking any agency -the weeping boy picture of post-*coup-d'état* Turkey in Nurdan Gürbilek's

analysis- from the family, Güney evades being caught by modernist constructions foundational to Turkish leftist ideologies (Gürbilek, 2004: 39).

Addressing the child as the protagonist of a narrative on violence and attributing agency to the category of child, Güney exaggerates the alienating effect on a liberated spectator from the imagined modern family and its nation. With this specific narrative, Güney opens up to social change with a shock affect - namely 'the shock of the real' (Jaguaribe, 2005). Here I propose to borrow Jaguaribe's conceptualization of the shock of the real, which she develops through realist works of cinema and literature positioned in comparison to the interpretative pedagogical effort to reveal reality (Jaguaribe, 2005: 6). Following Jaguaribe's analysis on the centrality of the shock of the real to produce meanings that are 'not readily decoded as being the usual spectacularized product of the televised media' (Jaguaribe, 2005: 6), we see that Güney's realist approach converges to a minimalist aesthetics founded on close-ups that disturb the body's unity for the sake of fragmented truth, unlike the wide-angle spatial shots in *The Way* imagining Kurdistan. The delinquents of *The Wall* neither have family nor the sympathy of society to prevent inhumane violence, but have self-awareness and a will to transform the situation. The state is manifested in its patriarchal codes by means of the bio-politics of the prison regime; in other words, the separation between the (punishing) Father-state and the (caring) Mother-state dissolves in violence under the rule of 12 September *coup d'état*. Torture, humiliation and rape are essential to this corresponding bio-politics. Wardens are present in the narration as the mediators of the state's rage against its disobedient

children. But unlike common narratives on the 12 September coup, *The Wall* does not engage with political prisoners' victimhood, but instead shows the indiscriminate violence of the state against the people, which implies the social instead of intellectuals as the site of transformation against hegemonic violence.

Accordingly, deprived of all means of well being, in the circumstances of bare life, it becomes experience itself that will shape the future instead of norms of hierarchic and homogenous communal norms. The 4th ward, as the second address of the orphan children, transcends the shock of the real via experience; resistance and the will to survive are as real as oppression and violence. Specifically, taking sexual assault into account with direct signifiers, *The Wall* posits the body as the primary source of resistance and oppression, echoing Achille Mbembe's claim that the 'body in itself has neither power nor value (…) duplicates itself and, in death, literally and metaphorically escapes the state of siege and occupation' (Mbembe 2003: 37). As much it depicts the state's intervention through violence, *The Wall* also sees the potential of the people; an orphan child's dead body lying in front of a giant portrait of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk and the Turkish flag does not prevent one from seeing the will against oppression.

Moreover, wary of the moralistic and sterile sexuality of hegemonic leftist discourse, the narrative includes sexual perversion to expose the libidinal investment of power relations. Pederasty becomes the base of the corresponding power relations. Blunt questions are aired: 'Are you fucked by Cafer (the warder)'? Defining women's subjectivity through

close-ups of the faces and wide angel shots of naked women's bodies, *The Wall* also does not allow either a nonsexual presence of women's bodies or their objectification as the *objet petit a* for the male gaze in narrative cinema (Mulvey, 1999). Nor still does it tend to a separation between the political and other women prisoners in terms of their desires. Through the presence of women's anatomy in one of the film's most spectacular scenes, *The Wall* confronts the spectator with the very moment of the vagina during birth. That scene is where the film radicalizes its means to consolidate a shock affect intended to effect transformation, where the director addresses the agent of the transformation as gendered. However, as we shall see, the gender revolution needed to wait decades to be explored in cinematic terms.

It is Atilla Dorsay who first names Yılmaz Güney as an event within Turkish cinema, in one of his interviews with the director (Dorsay, 1988: 21-26). After *Umut,* it was well recognized that the name of Yılmaz Güney indicated a turning point in Turkish film history (Ergün, 1978). However, what makes Yılmaz Güney an event for my discussion is his life experience, which announces the translation of aesthetics into a way of living (Güney, 1994). His leftist ideals merging Maoist revolution with socialist Kurdish politics, multiple imprisonments due to reasons both political and not, publications (the periodical published under his name *Güney*) and his films (which ultimately became his eyes to discover his 'own people, Kurdish people'), and thinking through the lenses of a camera equipped that life-inspring, emerging we (Bozarslan, 1990; *BBC News,* 2015). In line with this, his awakening through a travelling camera and his enlightenment through

social-realistic aesthetics echo a Rancièrian presence of artistic dwelling: 'The real must

be fictionalized in order to be thought' (Rancière, 2011: 38). Accordingly, my reference

point to name Yılmaz Güney as an Event derives from an understanding of cinema in

which:

> [c]inema is much more than reflections of a reality. Rather, it offers alternative
> ways of being in the world, opening up to the social change, modifying its
> conditions of transformations, the speed of transformations. Cinema is an Event.
> Or better, it might become so through a critical reading that releases its critical
> potential (Diken and Lausten 2008: 129).

Yılmaz Güney's early account of audio-visualizing Kurdishness and Kurdistan through

realist aesthetics is fed by his political involvement, which relies on a future moment for

revolution and accordingly embraces a particular theology of time that cuts time into two,

through the revolution to come (Bozarslan, 1990). In his life as a form of art, Güney

stands for revolution, the transformation of films, and critique to release the critical

potential of his works in the service of a politically determined communal. Meanwhile,

the feature-length narrative films that claim to be the determinants of Kurdish national

cinema discussions in the 2000s announces traumatic past experience as the founding

event that cuts time into two to claim for Kurdishness.

5. The Traumatic Claim of Kurdishness

Mostly limited to international film festivals, Kurdish cinema has been posited as either

the 'poetic account of local life' [e.g. *Zamani Barayé Masti Asbha* (*A Time for Drunken*

Horses, Bahman Ghobadi, 2000)] or the bearer of another kind of transnational hybrid cinema by means of production and consumption [e.g. *Vodka Lemon* (Hiner Saleem, 2003)] (Crofts, 2006). Both of these stem from cinema's productive promise for the subject, beyond reflecting reality—the subject being, in any case, also the 'outcome of a specific ideological operation' (Silverman, 1990: 110). Taking this approach, two feature-length narrative films made in Kurdish neighborhoods by Kurdish directors are here given a critical reading that focuses on their audio-visual diegetic space. These films posit Kurdish languages as the home for trauma, and through this, I explore the theology of time in the form of a traumatic past event immanent to Kurdish national cinema's claim. The rationale for this is that 'if the process of enunciation points at the locus of subjectivity in language, then voice also sustains an intimate link with the very notion of the subject' (Dolar, 2006: 23). Accordingly, the critical analysis of two feature-length narrative films in Kurdish languages shows how Kurdish hegemonic narratives of victimhood and trauma under the rule of at least four national projects are in the service of a founding event which targets an imagined Kurdish nation through a male protagonist's catastrophic past in his present tensions. In other words, focusing on a de-territorialized Kurdish cinematographic subject, I analyze the articulation of Kurdish subjectivity on the basis of audio-visual performance in *Voice of My Father* and *Song of My Mother*, as both films announce the founding past trauma for the sake of an imagined, modern Kurdish male subject of art—respectively, a writer and a director.

In one of her most promising texts, Marry Anne Doane, emphasizes the re-emergence of the absent voice over the body of the filmic actor, and points to the uncanny effect of silence in relation to the separation of speech and body (Doane, 1980: 33). The source of this uncanniness originates from the fact that it is the voice through which the spectator can recognize and identify with a protagonist, and it is precisely the voice of the father that serves as the agent of this separation in favor of a constitution of the voice of mother as a lost object of desire (Doane, 1980). A pioneering feature film in Kurmanci, *The Voice of My Father* clearly invokes this discussion. *The Voice of My Father* is basically a narrative feature film on the limits of separation from the maternal body in the context of collective memory and the voice of father. Here, separation from the maternal body is crucial, in that speaking subjects come into being through the reiteration and extension of the primary acts of differentiation and separation from the maternal body, but in terms of production, constitution or performance rather than mimesis, in relation to mirrors (Butler, 1993). In this sense, the disembodied voice of the father in the film can be traced as a constitutive component, a non-diegetic element of the film that acts as a key component of the suture in the audiovisual scenography, like acousmatic voices.

As conceptualized by Michel Chion, the acousmatic voice, whose cause is not seen on the screen, is promising as the suture of the constitutive division of the subject (Chion, 1994; Schlichter, 2001: 46). Rejecting the visual emphasis of theories of cinema, this approach promotes the concept of 'the audiovisual scene':

If we can speak of an audiovisual scene, it is because the scenic space has boundaries, it is structured by the edges of the visual frame. Film sound is that which is contained or not contained in an image (Chion 1994: 68).[8]

The audio-visual scene here refers to sensory cinema, whose components cannot be limited to sight and sound but are also 'rhythmic, dynamic, temporal, tactile, and kinetic sensations that make use of both the auditory and visual channels' (Chion 1994: 152). This approach understands the body as a site of difference and experience, which cannot be limited to the experience of the audience, but also involves the articulation of the subject(s) through voice, either embodied or disembodied, present or absent.

On the other hand, the renunciation of other voices and sounds of the film for the sake of the father's disembodied voice, which mostly dictates in Turkish, points to the impure production of meaning. Because, 'the investment in signification, which is manifest in a concentration on the visual aspects of physicality and on speech as pure production of meaning, entails […] the repression of voice' (Schlichter 2011: 39). Accordingly, referring to Bonitzer's argument that a voice knows only if there is someone incapable of speaking, *The Voice of My Father* articulates subject positions in silence as the sites of deep mourning, while it mutes (represses) the here-and-now voice of the mother, Basê (Asiye Doğan) via disembodied voices of past (Bonitzer, 2007). Moreover, it presents a privileged position to the spectator through the non-diegetic dialogs of disembodied voices of the father (Mustafa) and the mother (Basê). So that, the 'use of synchronous

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[8] Emphasis original.

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dialogue and the voice-off presuppose a spectator who overhears and, overhearing, is unheard and unseen himself' (Doanne, 1980: 43). The film, therefore, presents the pure capacity of seeing and hearing to the spectator. Moreover, recordings as a means of relaying the accent of Mehmet's (Zeynel Doğan, also one of the directors of the movie) mother tongue – namely, the linguistic performance of Basê – and the reproduction of both of their enunciations evidently aims at particular subjects who are capable of understanding what they heard, namely the Elbistan dialect of Kurmanci.

As organizations and institutions of various types continue efforts to standardize Kurdish, cinema provides Kurdish-speaking audiences with a comprehensive range of dialects, as we will see in *The Song of My Mother*, where even the mother and son speak two different dialects. However, the dialects and accents not only belong to a specific geography, but also to a site of meaning, period, class, or regime (Bonitzer 2007: 35). By recording the Elbistan regional dialect of Kurmanci on the film's surface, *The Voice of My Father* enfolds language for the sake of truth variations in Kurmanci and the implications of this. More specifically, by calling up such a specific linguistic memory, the film points to the micro stories (including the Maraş Massacre of Alevis in 1978) cultivated in language and to the effect of memory on language. Thus, (Kurdish Alevi) identity speaks, for the sake of its constructive past experiences, as a twist in language. While Mehmet is ultimately looking for the existence and discourse of his exilic father, the film ends with his disembodied voice accompanying wide angled shots of a worksite around a single tree under a grey sky. Through this closure, vertical axes of the disembodied voice act as the

site of the 'surplus-meaning of the voice' (Dolar 2006: 61). In the film, recording has implications not only for memory but also for the here-and-now, a present that is strictly conditioned by the disembodied voice of the past to the ruptures assembled in the becoming of a Kurdish man (father) after the Maraş Masscare. The disembodied voices of recordings, acting as sites of speech as pure production of meaning, substitute the impure production of meaning through voice.

While Hasan's voice, as the embodied, on-air sound, implies a spatial disembodiment that affirms his presence, the father's voice as the disembodied voice of memory signifies a temporal disembodiment that affirms the loss of father. Respectively addressing two separate agents, Basê and Mehmet, these voices articulate the voice of conscience, which includes not only the silence of the filmic subjects but also sounds and images of the environment. The voice of conscience is once defined as the site of the ethics of hearing and the reminder of duties (Dolar, 2006: 40-83). Accordingly, the audibility of the voicing of conscience by the cinematographic subject implies an articulation of the presence of subjectivity conditioned to an ethical positioning of the past – because 'the voice, far from being an extension of that body…displays what is inaccessible to the image, what exceeds the visible: the 'inner life' of the character' (Doane 1980: 41). The disembodied, broadcast voice of Mehmet performs an impossible dialog with the past (with the father) on behalf of the present, and in this sense demystifies alienation. On the other hand, as the father of Mori who talks to the past, he guarantees the substitute for the loss of father:

family is preserved by the disembodied voice of memory instead of family's material existence.

As a docufiction feature film rejecting the conventions of documentary, *The Voice of My Father* is far from 'letting the event speak for itself', in Bonitzer's words (retrieved from Doane 1980: 46). The uncanniness of the separation of voice from body seems to be dissolved in the body of the mother. In other words, the presence of the voice of father – and even of mother – covers the body of mother, and renouncing her voice she turns out to be the only agent of the silence of mourning. In his most prominent work on voice, Mladen Dolar posits the voice as the agent of the embodiment of the impossible division of the body between interior and exterior (Dolar, 2006: 71). Only voice makes utterance and enunciation possible, as a subjectivity expresses itself and inhabits the means of expression (Dolar, 2006: 14-15). Dolar's position on the voice as the unique site of true expression and the locus that reveals the unutterable ultimately aims to make the voice visible in theory (Dolar, 2006: 31).

Since the early days of the Republic, Istanbul, as one of the most developed cities of Turkey, has been a key destination for internal migration (Erder, 2006; Işık and Pınarcıoğlu, 2009). However, as Suner (2006) details, by the early 1990s, the public visibility of Kurdish, Alevi, Armenian and Islamic identities had entirely changed the shading of internal migration. The privileged position of Istanbul in feature films has made it a city of claustrophobic indoor spaces shorn of the mystified Istanbul of the

modern history of Turkey. For the most part, Suner's assessment is still valid. Yet, there is a crucial nuance. Erol Mintaş's first feature film, *The Song of My Mother*, is a kind of declaration of tearing at the silence of those who have always been visible but inaudible, by increasing the volume of their language. *The Song of My Mother* is the first feature film in Kurdish whose narrative is set entirely in Istanbul.

The story of *The Song of My Mother*, as its name implies, is the story of the song performed only via the memory of the mother. In 1992, the Kurdish teacher of Turkish, Ali (Feyyaz Duman)'s brother was forcibly disappeared in Doğubeyazit (in the Kurdish region in Turkey). Since then, he has lived with his mother Nîgar (Zübeyde Ronahî) in Istanbul. With the rise of urban transformation projects in Tarlabaşı (a kind of Kurdish ghetto in Istanbul, according to Pérousse), the family finds itself forcibly displaced in Istanbul, from a Kurdish neighborhood into apartments in a remote district (Pérousse, 2011). During this second removal process, Nîgar remembers the name of Seydoyê Silo, one of her father's favorite *dengbêjs*, and asks Ali about his recordings. From then on, Nîgar's persistent desire to return to their village in Doğubeyazit reflects Ali's search for the record by Seydoyê Silo. Seydoyê Silo's voice, whose absence is experienced by the filmic subjects other than Nîgar (while Nîgar and the spectator are under the pressure of its embodiment via image), makes it possible to talk about subjectivities in the film.

Recordings and oral tradition are the two main themes of *The Song of My Mother*, and their reference to social memory and collective identity is based on performance. At every

level -recording, listening or even sharing-, recordings allow us to experience the body, time and sociability for imaginative cultural narratives (Frith, 1997). Further, oral tradition, as embodied in the everyday in the form of knowledge, is the main carrier of the struggle against official languages (Ong, 2002). However, Ali's perception of the *dengbêj* tradition is articulated in the absence of Seydoyê Silo's voice, which will later be confirmed by the death of Nîgar. Yet again, though, the disembodied, broadcast voices of the *dengbêjs* points to another articulation for Nîgar, where 'a consideration of the vocal body will therefore allow us to re-open the question of the relation of the biological and the cultural, the somatic and the symbolic in the production of bodies and subjectivities' (Schlichter, 2011: 43). The few words enunciated by Nîgar in conversations with Ali all refer to homecoming. However, the articulation of Nîgar's subjectivity as a Kurdish Shafii woman is performed through the voices of *dengbêj*s and embodied by the domestic image that masks utterance by Nîgar through the performances of exclamations of lament. More precisely, windows and rectangles, framing either Istanbul or Doğubeyazit, present the assemblage of a body of images and voices in Metzian's sense, where the experience of absence and presence coexist (Metz, 1991).

As a displaced Kurdish man engaged in literature (where the pure production of meaning becomes possible via literacy), Ali is divided between modernism and tradition, situated thus as a new Kurdish subject with neither an imagination of home nor a desire to construct a new one. While postponing a journey to Doğubeyazit, he also refuses both separation from the maternal body and the agency of this separation, which is also

supposed to lead to the establishment of a new home with Zeynep (Nesrin Cavadzade) and their baby. However, as the non-diegetic voice of Seydoyê Silo as the ambient sound (territory sound) of Istanbul emerges by subjective camera, his embodiment becomes clearer. Unlike Nîgar, whose enunciation assembles images of Mount Ararat (in Doğubeyazit) and the ambiguous shadow of Seydoyê Silo over a silhouette of Istanbul, Ali's body linked to a motorcycle flows to the sounds of traffic. His masterful voice in Kurdish when he speaks to Nîgar and his embarrassed voice in Turkish when he speaks to Zeynep articulate the Kurdish man divided between tradition and modernism, oral tradition and written literature, *dengbêj* and metal music, his mother and his lover, and ultimately, the private and the public (state).

The only suture closing the gap is the fable in the Turkish school books, which Ali's elder brother performs in Kurdish to the Kurdish audience in the village. Suture is a key concept to the representation of subjectivity in film narrative, focusing on the subject's experience not only of absence but also of presence (Butte, 2008). Unlike in the dull enunciation in Turkish at the official school, the bodily performance of the Kurdish enunciation of the fable of the crow and the peacock enriches the telling, like a theatrical re-presentation. Further, the voice is also, literally, the crucial part of the fable, since the truth arises through the 'ugly' voice of crow among the 'beautiful' and 'arrogant' peacocks. Here, Istanbul lacks the ambient sound of the sea and seagulls which is one of the dominant codes of conventional narrations, but is presented by the sounds of the motorcycle carrying Nîgar as a hump on Ali's shoulders and voices of the *dengbêjs*. The old capital

Istanbul thus turns into the enclosed space of the embodied subjects of Kurdish identities for the limited spaces of enunciation.

The tension between there-and-past and here-and-now in the narrative of *Song of My Mother* also recalls Svetlana Boym's notion of nostalgia (Boym, 2001). With their respective orientations to oral culture and individual narratives focusing on detail and memory, Nîgar and Ali can be positioned as the subjects of a 'restorative nostalgia' and 'reflexive nostalgia', respectively. While restorative nostalgia focuses on rebuilding the symbols and rituals of the lost home, reflexive nostalgia inhabits, *algia*, the longing itself (Boym, 2001: 41). In addition, audiences are also embodied in this tension via an embedded listening that 'reactivates a time and space other than the space-time inhabited by the characters', while the subject's attempt to suture the visual and audial implants a non-localized voice onto a precise body as its source, which leaves a scar (Chion, 2009; Chion, 1999).

The enunciation of subject in *The Song of My Mother* crystallizes this scar on behalf of voice's potential to 'become a site where gender is naturalized and denaturalized at the same time' so that 'functioning within and through social regimes, […] the speaking voice might communicate normative ideals while also emitting the symptoms of resistance against such regimes' (Schlichter, 2011: 47). The non-localized voice of Seydoyê Silo's assemblage with Nîgar's vision (and memory) makes use of a multiplicity of genders. Instead of a drag performance, a kind of drag assemblage becomes possible through this.

Here, identification with this impure production of meaning is the site of the emancipation of spectator. It does this on behalf of the vocal body of a subjectivity ruptured by the forced disappearance of the 90s, symbolized in the film by the '*beyaz Toros*' (white Taurus) car, which aims at a specific collective trauma, and enforced migration. And it re-interprets the orality of Kurdishness as opposed to its new literate-man subjects. Thus, deprived of a body, the voice of the *dengbêj* (or, the memory of Nîgar) is addressed to the exilic Kurdish audience via a subjective camera on city space. Here, recalling Cynthia Cockburn's emphasis, we may note that belonging to a 'nation' or owning an ethnic identity does not necessarily point to a nationalism, but may indicate a non-competitive sentiment of communal identity (Cockburn, 2007). The song of Nîgar becomes the means of re-interpretation of Kurdishness through the politics of sentiments fed by memory and impossible homecoming, while the new Kurdish male subject's engagement with the new home is left open-ended.

In the context of the commercial narratives analyzed here, the cinematographic subject of Kurdish cinema oscillates between the gendered disembodied voices of the past and the embodied voices of the present for the sake of becoming a Kurdish man through assemblages of (Kurdish) voice with non-local (Turkish) images. Kurdish women, 'as the symbols and gatekeepers of uncontamined Kurdishness', enunciate either the impossible homecoming or the home itself through their memory, silence and musical presence (Aktürk, 2015). Yet, a fetishization of woman as the mother (Basê, Gulizar, Nîgar and Zeynep) for the sake of the re-construction of the family reveal the patriarchal tendencies

in Kurdish national claims in cinema while coloring the trauma of Kurdishness as the middle-aged man's separation from his mother in the reconciliation narratives recognized by the settled film industries and international film festivals' taste for gendered trauma narratives. However, non-commerical Kurdish film production and screening modes challenges commercial Kurdish trauma in terms of form and content while re-claiming Kurdishness rather than embracing the recognized spaces for Kurdishness through hegemonic discourse.

Cinematic attempts in Kurdish asking for recognition by the so-called guarantor of equality occur to embrace the national claim of Kurdish cinema alongside academic interest in the trauma of statelessness, border and death as a political imprerative. As discussed in the previous titles, the determinancy of the nation in the naming pratices of oppressed cinematic experiences affirms the state's central role in artistic production, while art stands for a new poetic structure of knowledge in Rancièrian philosophy. Accordingly, I turn now to non-commercial documentaries and short films to liberate the Kurdish cinematic presence from the nation and to introduce its quasi-bodies, circulating blocks of speech, as a transhistorical force in politics. As such, liberating Kurdish narratives from the financial determinacy of perfected audio-visual worlds, the aesthetic regime of Kurdishness is rooted in a history of politicization of Kurdish identity in the 1990s against the Kemalist state, rather than recognition through acceptable Kurdish trauma in the 2010s by the AKP government.

Chapter 2:

A Re-interpretation of Kurdish Trauma

I have structured the second chapter of this research to give a detailed account of my critique of Kurdish commercial cinema and corresponding national claims by proposing a re-interpretation of Kurdish trauma through a Rancièrian conceptualization of the un-representable. Here it is necessary to take into account the hegemonic Lacanian trauma cinema literature to both acknowledge the dialogical relation between theory and practice in film studies, and to elaborate the use of Rancière's critique of Lacanian psychoanalysis in the case of Kurdish cinema. In order to deepen my claim on the role of non-commercial film modes for an aesthetic regime of art of Kurdishness, I introduce the documentary (precisely, the *belgefilm*) as the most democratic means of subjectification for a Kurdish we. Referring to socialist Kurdish parties' cultural policies in communication with the movements of people in the 1990s across several Kurdish communities due to war conditions in Turkey and Iraq, I identify the urban trauma of impoverishment as a primary focus of political struggle, ethnicized by the audibility of Kurdish languages in cinema. Also relevant for this discussion of the 1990s are the earliest academics on Kurdish filmmaking, among whom are also producers of non-commercial and non-capitalist Kurdish films in Turkey. I address Kurdish film collectives and production units of Turkey as the carriers of the establishment of quasi bodies for Kurdish political subjects, on the basis of their direct relation with the people in comparison to the indirect relations with movie theathers. However, by the 2010s, Ali Kemal Çınar's cinema, which derives from people's lives and has access to film festivals and movie theathers, stands not only as an opposition to the aesthetics of testimony imposed by commercial films in terms of its Kurdish dailyness but also signals the democratic potential of film medium, with all

its stylistic challenges. The socio-political analysis of *Gênco* (*Genco,* Ali Kemal Çınar, 2017) allows us to re-consider form and content for Kurdish cinematography, and to re-claim its connection to democratic politics.

1. Thinking through the Un-representable

'Poetry is impossible after Auschwitz' wrote Theodor W. Adorno, which became a reference point for many to discuss re-presentation's impossibility in the name of the truth of traumatic past events, particularly the Holocaust (Rowland, 1997). However, the unrepresentable is the category that has been challenged continuously by artistic experience (Rancière, 2010a: 132). As such, the norm of modern art emerges in the idea of an anti-representative demand whose choices and means of representable subjects are limitless (Rancière, 2010a: 195-197). Consequently, the unrepresentable becomes evident as the central category of the ethical turn in aesthetic reflection for Rancière, in the name of the event of extermination that calls for a new art. Thereafter, the task becomes one of making the forbidden and impossible coincide through introducing the religious interdiction and the transformation of the surplus representation into a lack or an impossibility of representation in the representative regime of aesthetics (Rancière, 2010a: 197). As a matter of fact, Stam draws on the Frankfurt School's analysis of cinema as the emblem of capitalist mass culture to reinterpret certain trauma narratives on the Holocaust since the 1990s (2000: 68). Susannah Randstone identifies the popular themes on historical traumas and nostalgia in the films of 1990s, and posits memory as a tool to

historicize the subject of psychoanalysis, referring to Benjamin's *Erfahrung* as experience or memory recollection (Randstone, 1995: 37-39). However, four years after the publication of her article, "Cinema/Memory/History", she was challenged by the common interest in concepts like trauma, dissociation and unrepresentability in the abstracts she received for the *Frontiers of Memory Conference* in 1999. Consequently, the need for contextualizing and analyzing the popularity of trauma became necessary (Randstone, 2011: 188-189). Thus was the historical context behind the special issue of *Screen* on trauma cinema, with contributions from such established names in film theory as Thomas Elsaesser, E. Ann Kaplan, Maureen Turim and Janet Walker (Randstone, 2001). The *Screen* issue on trauma cinema is crucial for my investigation because of the extent of its discussions, which pave the way for the exposing of the hegemonic Lacanian commentary in film studies, depriving of an understanding of the category of unrepresentable central to the ethical turn in the representative regime of aesthetics.

Recognizing the dialogical relation between theory and practice in film studies, it becomes necessary to discuss the ethical turn through an identification of the hegemony of Lacanian psychoanalysis in film theory. This occurs mostly in the discussions of trauma cinema by E. Ann Kaplan and Maureen Turim in the aforementioned issue of *Screen*, both known for their research on the patriarchal foundation of the cinematic gaze (Kaplan, 1983; Kaplan, 1992; Turim 1989). Kaplan sets the private sphere of family as the home of the ultimate experience of trauma, due to its structure by male power (Kaplan, 2001: 202). In line with this, she addresses the genre of melodrama as constituent of a

traumatic cultural symptom in repetitive traumas of class and gender struggles, which also supports a critical account of narratives embracing Kurdish oral culture, which sees family as the carrier of national trauma, as analyzed previously (Kaplan, 2001: 203). Moreover, the Lacanian dictate on the impossibility of desire and pleasure leads her to categorize trauma films' positions for the subjects of cinema under four titles: comforting closure, vicariously traumatized, voyeur and witness (Kaplan, 2001: 204). Narrowing her focus to the flashbacks that carry out trauma in films, Turim also considers cinema as an instrument for its subject to cope with unresolved pains through Lacan's reconfiguration of Freud's omnipresent trauma as the *tuché* (Turim, 2001: 205-209). Yet, the solid definition of the emergent international and transnational phenomenon of trauma cinema comes from Walker, who sees the 1980s and 1990s as the possible source of the earliest films dealing with a world-shattering personal or public event:

> The stylistic and narrative modality of trauma cinema is nonrealist. Like traumatic memories that feature vivid bodily and visual sensation over 'verbal narrative and context', these films are characterized by non-linearity, fragmentation, nonsynchronous sound, repetition, rapid editing and strange angles. And they approach the past through an unusual admixture of emotional affect, metonymic symbolism and cinematic flashbacks. (Walker, 2001: 214-215)

The three contributions embracing Lacanian psychoanalysis mentioned above not only define trauma cinema, but also shape it. As such, the imperative of cinematic gaze in Lacanian film theory serves the production of subjectivity (Neil, 2010: 120). Questioning the revival of Lacanian film theory in our age of witness, Neil concludes:

Whereas unconscious lack, originating from the Freudian infant's traumatic separation from its mother, and its ensuing feelings of helplessness, demands various repositories for this anxiety, we can see in these trauma films how the conscious trauma of impotence elicited in each distressing context conjoins with this primal absence in further threatening the pleasurable plenitude that is arguably to the object-cause of male gaze and the ego's pursuits more broadly (Neil, 2010: 142).

The emergence of family as the main source of trauma, the healing potential of trauma films for the seer, and the stylistic fixation of trauma to fiction exclude the very realist film form, documentary. As seen in the encapsulation of Kurdishness by the traumatic past event as a claim for recognition in the feature-length films of movie theaters, these interpretations have their impact in feature-length narratives that imagine the nation through cinema. However, documentary becomes crucial for challenging the representative aesthetic regime of Kurdishness in the service of national reconciliation, in terms of a re-formulation and re-contextualization of the genre itself (Dawson, 2005).

The leading film critique Thomas Elsaesser is one of the rare thinkers who insist on a historical and critical reading in his work under the shadow of Lacanian Grand Theory. He has specific studies on Weimar Germany's cinematic universe, New German cinema and Hollywood, which embrace an archeological stance, digging into memory and trauma to cover the past, present and future of media studies in the most productive sense (Elsaesser, 1996; Elsaesser and Buckland, 2002; Elsaesser and Hagener, 2010). His contribution in the *Screen* issue holds a special place, due to his unique intellectual position as an agent of history making. Qualifying trauma theory's redefinition and the challenge of psychoanalysis as a hermeneutic tool and interventionist strategy for a

politics of body, he acknowledges the resistance to an orthodox Freudian theory of fantasy in order to equip a theory of the subject on the basis of memory, its gaps, its absences and traceless traces (Elsaesser, 2001: 194). Describing his aim, in Beckett's words, as 'to name the unnamable', he identifies the persistence of Holocaust debates and the emergence of trauma theory in European cinemas and international academic circles as the symptom (Elsaesser, 2001: 195). Thus, trauma not only names 'the delay between an event and its (persistent, obsessive) return, but also a reversal of affect and meaning across this gap in time' (Elsaesser, 2001: 197). Hereafter, the question becomes 'Does the recurrent, repetitive aspect of the media's treatment of (historic, public, shocking) events relate to the obsessive time of (subjective) trauma memory, or is obsessive repetition in fact the media's (and popular culture's) most 'authentic' temporality and time-regime?' (Elsaesser, 2001: 197).

Elsaesser's idea of trauma that suspends the categories of true and false, and being performative in a certain sense communicates with Rancièrian emphasis on the lack of a separation between the right and fact (Elsaesser, 2001: 199). Positing trauma as a matter of performance, Elsaesser brings the concept beyond Aristotelian catharsis and Freudian therapy:

> If trauma belongs to the category of the performative (the symptom speaks its subject's body), it is nonetheless a special case one would have to invent the category of the 'negative performance' because trauma affects the texture of experience by the apparent absences of traces. (…) What makes this account of the 'negative performative' an alternative to the 'repression model' is not only that trauma would no longer be a (version of the) return of the repressed. It would

give the traumatic event the status of a (suspended) origin in the production of a representation. A discourse or a text, bracketed or suspended because marked by the absence of traces (Elsaesser, 2001: 199).

Elsaesser's approach introduces trauma theory to modern art, where post-modernism couldn't be theorized. He concludes that, it being necessary and challenging to think through deadlocks of deconstruction, trauma theory asks us to reconsider the hermeneutics of psychoanalysis (Elsaesser, 2001: 200-201).

Rancière's analysis of the Lacanian interpretation of *Oedipus* and *Antigone* gains importance precisely because it aims to challenge the conceptualization of trauma. In Rancière's analysis, Lacan, whose Oedipus commentary promises a cure for a forgotten event through a reactivation, posits Antigone as the body of encapsulated trauma (Rancière, 2010b: 113-114). Diverging from the Lacanian canon, Rancière calls Antigone as 'the terrorist, the witness of the secret terror that underlies the social order', and terror becomes 'the name that trauma takes in political matters and is one of the catchwords of our time' (Rancière, 2010a: 187). In such a context he announces trauma as today's evil because it lies in the space of indifference between guilt and innocence, while morality implies the separation of law and fact (Rancière, 2010b: 112-114). The humanist claim of infinite justice becomes possible through a form of violence that draws on trauma to maintain the order of community. The suppression of the division between law and fact in the name of morality is what Rancière calls consensus, 'a mode of symbolic structuration of the community that evacuates the political core constituting it, namely dissensus' (Rancière, 2010a: 188). Consensus declares an agreement between a mode of

sensory presentation and a regime of meaning. However, dissensus is the very kernel of the aesthetic regime whose politics and modes of visibility re-configure the fabric of sensory experience because of the fact that the real is always a matter of construction. The Rancièrian ethical turn imposes itself as a historical necessity, because witnessing yesterday's genocide or the never-ending catastrophe of the present is immanent to the pervading discourse on the art of the unrepresentable (Rancière, 2010a: 144-201). Moreoever, the interpretation of the unrepresentable puts the concept forward as a category in the service of an indistinction between right and fact. Such that the problem of presenting genocide originates from the representablity of everything at the expense of closing the gap between fictional representation and the presentation of reality (Rancière, 2010b: 123-125).

Kurdish trauma—named through the fictional embrace of factual state violence and forced displacement in the commercial feature-length films in Kurdish languages, based on the patriarchal foundation of the family—presents a solid case of the employment of a Lacanian interpretation of trauma by film workers. Its promise, to the audience, of cure (with comforting closure), vicarious trauma, or the position of voyeur feeds the inequality between an inner Kurdish society and outer empowered communities to ask that equality and justice be provided and made real. Lacanian trauma theory functions to expose the testimony value of commercial narratives in Kurdish and their will to an imagined national reconciliation in the service of hegemonic politics. It does so by announcing an agreement between the sensory experience of film screening and the meanings to be

derived. The political is defined, in this trauma theory, in terms of reversing the contemporary 'shift from critical art to testimony art' (Rancière, 2010a: 145). Therefore, Kurdish cinematography's call for the embracing of testimony in the name of truth has an investment in creating an agreement between sensory presentation and attributed meaning in the Kurdish feature-length films of trauma and nostalgia in the 2000s. However, the non-commercial foundation of Kurdish cinematography in the 1990s stands for a critical art through its politically determined community's foundation in subjectification processes through multiple experiences. The aesthetic regime of Kurdishness is based cinematographically on the genre of documentary in such a context.

2. The Means of Documentary and *Belgefilm*

As the earliest sign of the ontological and historical tension between the categories of real and non-real in film theory, the term documentary was not in use until the late 1920s and 1930s (Musser, 1996: 86). Musser investigates the earliest roots of projected images for documentary purposes, tracing this back to mid-17th-century photography, in order to expose the investment of explorers and archeologists in the claim for the document until the end of 19th century. Accordingly, he addresses the class-based formation of documentary screening practices on behalf of middle-class cultural life in Europe and North America in this early phase, and presents the historical background of story films' popularity by the very beginning of the 20th century. The waning of documentary images in the race with popular story films or classical narratives was prevented by a newsreel

distributed weekly, *Pathé Journal,* in 1908 in France, and then in Germany and England before reaching the USA in 1911. Musser claims that documentary had been the most popular ideological tool in the service of middle-class and genteel audiences because of its functional use in industrialized nation states' colonial propaganda. We were thus able to talk about illustrated lectures instead of documentary film, which earned its distinctive use due to a cultural shift that Musser explores through *Manhatta* (Charles Sheeler and Paul Strand, 1921), *Nanook of the North* (Robert Flatherty, 1922), *Grass* (Merian C. Cooper and Ernest B. Schoedsack, 1925), and *Berlin: Symphony of a City* (Walter Ruttmann, 1927). Each of these documentaries has become the carrier of the film material's modernist construction on the behalf of a common interest in the city and civilization (Musser, 1996: 87-95).

One of the earliest film critics and directors, John Grierson, promotes the documentary in line with his idealist approach, and celebrates the capacity of documentary to bridge citizen and community, while embracing the shift brought about by modernism (Grierson, 1939: 7). Claiming both the fascist and communist embracing of film to be religious manias, he posits the documentary as *the* means for educating the emergent modern public, which was then endangered by increasing numbers of entertaining story films (Grierson, 1939: 8-9). It is important here to note that the border separating documentary from fiction, the real from the story, was quite strict, at least as defined by story films and their financial legitimacy, in terms of investment for the studios. Paul Rotha, who was then a film producer, director and critic, as well as the author of *Documentary Cinema,*

the earliest book on the matter, agrees with Grierson when he claims, 'I look upon cinema as a powerful, if not the most powerful, instrument for social influence today; and I regard the documentary method as the first real attempt to use cinema for purposes more important than cinema' (Rotha, 1939: 11). These two early accounts of the documentary are distinctive by their imposition of film as an educative tool in the service of enlightening communities in the wake of capitalist modernism. Standing strongly against the mass entertainment feature of story films and thus fiction, Rotha defines the world of documentary as 'a world of men and women, at work and leisure; of their responsibilities and commitments to the society in which they live' (Rotha, 1939: 13). Rotha's classification of documentary consists of four elements that linearly evolved in the first half of the 20th century: The naturalist tradition (the earliest use of natural and everyday surroundings of the characters), the realist tradition (the French avant-garde use of rhythmic movements of the film machine), the news-reel tradition (the raw material of the twice-a-week news-reel), and the propagandist tradition (Soviet, British, German and Italian state-funded documentaries) (Rotha, 1939: 78-111).

Under the hegemony of story films, both Grierson and Rotha were strong advocates of government's financial support for the development of the genre of documentary, acknowledging the impossibility of implementing a non-popular form without a state policy, in the shadow of highly industrializing film studios. In line with this, they were the first to focus on the educative potential of documentaries by re-defining the documentary to legitimize their demand for official support. Rotha's four categories of

documentary, which do not posit the separation between the real and fiction as the definitive principle of the genre, but rather define the blend of real and fiction, were proposed before the recognition of documentary as a genre. As such, Rotha's early contribution sets the ground for any visualization of truth embracing the technique of documentary to claim for the aesthetic value of the genre. Emphasizing the pedagogical value of documentaries, it was Grierson and Rotha who addressed the working class as agents of film history, despite a lack of interest in documentaries at the time from governments. However, the revolutionary cinema claims of the early 20th century should have been radicalized in terms of production and distribution. In 1930, Ralph Bond was also announcing the first steps of a worker's film movement in Germany and Britain through individual initiatives that gathered workers and asked them to support film exhibitions to finance the independent films of and for workers (Bond, 1998: 281-282). It is necessary here to refer to the emergence of mechanisms to produce, distribute and exhibit the films of settled national film industries for the sake of a proletarian cinema in 1920s, to explain the possibility of any non-commercial cinema in the 20th century. This particular embracing of documentary by the early 20th century repositions the cinematic form of revolutionary art that stands against capitalist and nationalist fascist regimes of Europe and America (Kepley, 1983: 7).

Contemporary debates on documentary commonly dismiss these early discussions' emphasis on class and pedagogy for society, and instead refer to the four-fold styles identified by Bill Nichols, which were created in a Lacanian era and focus on the

experiential effect of documentary (Nichols, 1985). Nichols posits Grierson as the founder of documentary style, and interprets his emphasis on education as the excessively didactic character of the Griersonian tradition. The second style in his research is the *cinema vérité* tradition, which adds to classical narrative cinema the reality effect. The third pivot in the Nichols' linear history of documentary is the interview, in the emergence of political and feminist films (Nichols, 1985: 259-260). Following these three pioneer styles, Nichols concludes by defining contemporary, self-reflexive documentaries that 'mix observational passages with interviews, the voice-over of the films-maker with intertitles, making patently clear what has been implicit along' to address the political promise of strategies of reflexivity (Nichols, 1985: 260, 272). Thus, the most contemporary definition of film emerges as:

> … a simulacrum or external trace of the production of meaning we undertake ourselves every day, every moment. We see not an image of imaginary unchanging coherence, magically represented on a screen, but the evidence of an historically rooted act of making things meaningful comparable to our own historically situated acts of comprehension (Nichols, 1985: 269).

The ambiguity of the acclaimed separation between the real and fiction, and the clarity of the crossing of reality with fiction in films and theory, mark the separation (itself fictive) of the real from the fiction. Roy Armes addresses the particular role of commercial story films in the work of leading 1970s theorists, and looks at how they ignore the diversity of filmic approaches and silence a separation between film and narrative (Armes, 1988: 2). The *Minnesota Declaration* by the prominent director Werner Herzog is a product of the need to radicalize such a stance: 'There are deeper strata of truth in cinema, and there

is such a thing as poetic, ecstatic truth. It is mysterious and elusive, and can be reached only through fabrication and imagination and stylization' (Herzog, 1999). Among many other thinkers, Herzog's declaration not only echoes Rancière's argument for the necessity of fictionalization to claim a truth, but also his presence as a director and thinker becomes the bearer of art as living for an aesthetic regime of art. Herzog, who established his cinematography through films that resist the dualism of documentary and fiction, is a historical subject of cinema in terms of re-positioning his camera to think through and beyond ideologies coming from the very home of the trauma, the Holocaust, in film studies. His claim for the ecstatic truth employs a unique description of ecstasy.

> Ecstasy in this context is something you would know if you had ever ski-jumped. (…) Ski-jumping is not just an athletic pursuit, it is something very spiritual too, a question of how to master the fear of death and isolation. It is a sport that is at least partially suicidal, and full of utter solitude. (…) And it is rarely muscular athletic men up there on the ramps; always it is young kids with deathly pale pimply complexions and an unsteady look in their eyes. They dream they can fly and want to step into this ecstasy which pushes against the laws of nature (Cronin, 2002: 96).

Herzog's playful conceptualization of truth, which liberates truth from its factual base, is an extension of his playful use of cinematic tools to let a variety of truth regimes realize themselves through a multitude of audio-visual terms. The liminal imposition of the truth in ecstatic means is here a declaration of the liminal forms of the truth to exceed the factual truths of several ideological regimes set by hegemonic art politics. Accordingly, the question of form becomes inseparable from the content of cinema to claim for an art value of truth. I suggest a blending of Elsaesser's negative performative potential of films

with Herzog's concept of ecstatic truth to problematize the absence of traumatic traces in early Kurdish documentaries, as a challenge to the hegemony of Kurdish national trauma narratives of the border-death-statelessness variety. Furthermore, the emergence of documentaries in Kurdish languages by the second half of 1990s, despite the ban on Kurdish by the Turkish state, stands at the heart of any representation of Kurdishness in audio-visual terms.

As a matter of fact, Turkey's more developed film industry in comparison to Iraq, Iran and Syria has meant that Kurdish cinema workers of Turkey have engaged with the production of films at every level since the emergence of Turkish film industry, as we explicitly see in Yılmaz Güney's case - script writer, actor, director and producer. This is announced in the very first book on Kurdish documentary, which recognizes Turkey's weight in the production and interpretation of Kurdish films in its opening sentences:

> Without doubt, this decade's most elaborated and developed documentary production in Turkey comes from Kurdistan, a name that provokes nationalist panic in Turkey, yet delineates distinct cultural, linguistic, and political boundaries, nonetheless. Documentary film production by Kurdish filmmakers of Turkey determines the major tendencies of this emergent genre of Kurdish documentary cinema (Koçer and Candan, 2016: viii).

Addressing the complications of Kurdish national cinema discourse, the editors of *Kurdish Documentary Cinema in Turkey* posit documentary as 'a particularly complex tool for the Kurdish social and political existence' in the absence of an official history and culture (Koçer and Candan, 2016: x). Four of the twelve chapters in the book include

the concept of 'truth' in their titles to explore recorded reality in Kurdish in terms of a) the emergence of witness as a political category, b) the discursive power of truth to challenge forms of Kurdish narrations, and c) the negotiation of truths in clashes between Kurdish parties and the Kurdish agenda of Turkish state (Şengül, 2016; Spence, 2016; Çiftçi, 2016; Yaşar, 2016). Yet, in these articles, the employed understanding of truth is rather based on factual reality, to emphasize the instrumentalization of the cinematic medium by Kurdish filmmakers in their engagement with the Kurdish issue of Turkey. Furthermore, this imposition of factual truth to explore and support Kurdish film production in the service of clashing ideologies embraces Kurdish trauma as the most dynamic phenomenon of cinematic presence, in the absence of traceless traces of continuous war and occupation, while dismissing the aesthetic challenge brought about by urban life and new forms of poverty as the cause of Kurdish documentaries of Turkey.

Referring to the colonial construction of a Turkish Anatolia in line with the colonization of Kurdistan, Candan surveys independent film making practices in Turkey and their blind spots on the Kurdish issue to claim for a homogenous nation and unified working class in the name of Turkish leftism (Candan, 2016: 3-4). It can be said that the Kurdification of cinema became possible through the establishment of the Mesopotamia Culture Center (*Mezapotamya Kültür Merkezi,* MKM) in Istanbul in 1991, parallel to the cultural politics of the Kurdish movement. As Can Candan discusses in detail, Mesopotamia Culture Center was founded by several Kurdish and Turkish intellectuals including Musa Anter and İsmail Beşikçi, and Mesopotamia Culture Center further owns

the Mesopotamia Cinema Collective (*Kolektîfa Sînema ya Mezopotamya*) from which Kurdish documentary cinema was derived. Listing the first Kurdish documentaries, Candan names such founder-directors of the genre of Kurdish cinema as Kazım Öz, Özkan Küçük, Hüseyin Karabey, Kadir Sözen, Zülfiye Dolu, Nure Demirbaş and Güllü Özalp, who did not work individually on a single project by Mesopotamia Cinema Collective, but who were rather implementing a collective film production culture till the 2010s (Candan, 2016: 5-7). Mesopotamia Culture Center's foundation as an extension of the Kurdish struggle in Turkey was a call for a collective body on behalf of implementing a subjectification process, a call for participation in the democraticization process for Kurdish individiuals. Mesopotamia Cinema Collective's films were not recognized by the closest settled (Turkish) film industry, and did not embrace the national mode of cinema's way of praising the nationalized (Kurdish) *auteur* as the maker of film and source of national pride. Moreover, Mesopotamia Cinema Collective functioned as an academy of sorts for emergent Kurdish directors in the late 1990s, following debates on film theory and socialist film making practices (*The Plenary Panel*, 2016). It was so because of the Marxist political paradigm of the Kurdish insurgent movement in the 1990s, which was inspired by the Turkish left, in terms of its resistance against the feudal order in Kurdistan and its views on the legitimacy of revolutionary violence (Akkaya and Jongerden, 2011). Therefore, the first documentaries in Kurdish languages, I claim, engage with the new forms of poverty originated from the common experience of forced displacement. Precisely, Kurdish languages ethnicize urban poverty while educating its audience about the norms of modern city life –such that films are in the service of a new

place for we, a refashioned Kurdish community, its constitutive elements, rather than films of (Turkish) governing politics for the recognition of oppressed (Kurdish) presence.

At this point, it is crucial to name the missing piece in the literature on Kurdish cinematography, which captured Kurdish experience in Turkey in the 1990s. The daily newspaper *Özgür Gündem,* which was founded on 30 May 1992 in Istanbul, has been circulating the news from Kurdish districts to a national and international audience. *Özgür Gündem* was the only medium to raise a voice for human rights violence toward Kurdish people and Kurdish politics before the technological revolution, due to the intense censorship in mainstream Turkish media channels, which were obedient to the Turkish hegemonic discourse on Kurdish issue (Karakaş, 2016). *Özgür Gündem,* which was closed by April 1994, was followed by *Özgür Ülke* and became the carrier of violent images of tortured bodies, the burning of villages and brutal conflicts between the Turkish state and *Partiya Karkeren Kurdistan* (the Kurdistan Workers' Party, or PKK). And operating under several names, the paper has served as a platform to narrate Kurdish-related issues since.[9] Journalists working for the newspaper faced killings, forced disappearances, and prosecution due to the Turkish government's treatment of *Özgür Gündem* as a propaganda tool for the PKK (Özgür Gündem v. Turkey, 2000). Despite the structural and physical violence *Özgür Gündem* workers faced, the newspaper became

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[9]Such as *Özgür Ülke* (April 1994-February 1995), *Yeni Politika* (April 1995-August 1995), *Demokrasi* (December 1996-May 1997), *Ülkede Gündem* (July 1997-October 1998)*, Özgür Bakış* (April 1999-April 2000), *2000'de Yeni Gündem* (April 2000-May 2001), *Yedinci Gündem* (June 2001-August 2002), *Yeniden Özgür Gündem* (September 2003-February 2004), *Toplumsal Demokrasi* (November 2006-January 2007). In April 2011, the newspaper reclaimed the name *Özgür Gündem,* and was published with that name until it was shut down by a court decision in 2016. Since then it has been published under the name *Yeni Yaşam.*

the bearer of affective materiality in the service of a politicized Kurdish community. Embracing Rancière's symbolic constitution of the social in a partition of the sensible, Sidar Bayram discusses the intervention of *Özgür Gündem*'s inscription onto bodies through the performances of paramilitary forces, such that the workers of newspaper turned into the workers of a politically defined community, as the carriers of a Kurdified sublime object of journalism (Bayram, 2011: 82). Bayram's claim on the crafting power of *Özgür Gündem* for a partition of the sensible is based on an ethnicized understanding of affective materiality, which is not solely about the state's economy of sorrow, but rather about the production of joy in the name of an ethical community. Accordingly, Bayram concludes that:

> While the stately partition of the sensible enabled legal and extra-legal measures to be taken, to prevent the circulation of Özgür Gündem, the circulation of the newspaper established cartography of the socio-political landscape. The movements of the bodies were reorganized in this topology via the production of affects, in ways that enabled the circulation of the newspaper. The sovereign order of things and bodies were challenged as the dominant chain of signifiers, since several bodies were writing down, picturing, distributing and carrying with them the quotidian signs and stories of the criminality of the state (Bayram, 2011: 70).

The news language of *Özgür Gündem* has been shaped in Turkish, due to bans on Kurdish languages in Turkey in the 1990s, yet it has nonetheless been the main communicative tool within the Kurdish political community. For example, the prominent Kurdish actor and activist Nazmi Kırık initiated his career with the announcement of the opening of Diyarbakır Mesopotamia Culture Center on 21 March 1993, in the columns of *Ülkede Gündem,* the successor of *Özgür Gündem* (Personal Communication, 2020). Diyarbakır

Mesopotamia Culture Center could only be active between the years of 1993 and 1995, and was closed after the repeated torture and imprisonment of workers and volunteers, including Kırık. Kırık's migration to Istanbul to realize a living art, due to the continuous violence and attacks he faced in Diyarbakır, solidifies the aesthetic implications of ongoing violence and forced displacement for the Kurdish community (Personal communication, 2020).

The Mesopotamia Culture Center's founding principle of promoting cultural and artistic works in Kurdish languages has been the locomotive force for the development of cinema in Kurdish until today. In line with ongoing clashes and the burning of Kurdish settlements, the forced migration of Kurdish populations to Turkish capital cities like Istanbul, İzmir and Ankara became a key social and political phenomenon of the 1990s (Jongerden, 2007; Çelik, 2005; Kurban, Yükseker, et al., 2007). Kurdish people's encounter with city life is evident for Kurdish directors, through the impoverishment of Kurdish people in financial and cultural terms. Accordingly, the first documentaries of the Mesopotamia Cinema Collective focus on the Kurdish migrants of Istanbul and their background stories, such as a burned Kurdish village in *Destên Me Wê Bibin Bask, Emê Bifirin Herin* (*Our Hands Will Become Wings, We'll Fly Away*) (Kazım Öz et al., 1996), invisible Kurdish labor in the construction sites of Istanbul in *Karkerên Avahiyan* (*Builders*, Özkan Küçük et al., 1999), and the gendered experience of forced migration in *Em Her Tim Koçberin* (*We're Always Migrants*, Zülfiye Dolu, Nure Demirbaş and Güllü Özalp, 2000). As already noted by Candan, the Kurdish term in use for documentary,

belgefilm, positions the documentary maker as the bearer of Kurdish reality in audio-visual terms, to stand for its very specific history and culture (Candan, 2016: 25). Yet, it colors the photographic heritage of Kurdish journalism as the main agents of documenting Kurdish lives in war conditions, and dismisses the possibility of a non-factual truth regime in its cinematic medium. In other words, the studies in this edited volume on Kurdish documentary in Turkey take for granted factual truth as foundational to the genre when referring to the hegemony of truth-claiming narratives in Kurdish, without fully recognizing the historical components of Kurdish documentary as a genre. As such, Kurdish documentary making becomes a matter of establishing a legitimate explanation for a certain historical context, and so, a matter of affirming the hierarchy of Turkish interpretations of Kurdish deprivation. While recognizing the socio-political context that made Kurdish documentary possible through interviews, the canonic interpretation of Kurdish documentary focuses on the unspeakable violence in Dersim, in the 1938 Masscare of the Kurdish Alevi community, or in Diyarbakır No. 5 Prison in the aftermath of the 12 September *coup d'état*. Precisely, focusing on the truth telling claim of Kurdish directors' narratives to push the limits of Turkish audiences' understanding of official history, the literature on Kurdish documentary embraces the victimhood of Kurdish people to empower their quest in the democratization of Turkey. However, the earliest films of Mesopotamia Cinema Collective have also been educative tools to define the crisis of citizenship in the modern cities of Turkey for a Kurdish audience in the name of political awakening, while also inventing its subjects for an alternative artistic habitus. In other words, the poverty that came about by forced displacement and the burning of

Kurdish settlements was documented as a result of Kurdish political subjects' common interest in urban experience, and the Kurdish employment of modern tools to implement a subjectification through lenses, and as reproducible art.

3. The Urban Trauma of Impoverishment

Kurdish director Bahman Ghobadi, who identifies as a representative of Iranian New Wave, notes in an interview that 'Kurds' history is a history of exodus. It is a history of people always on the move. In this they have something in common with the cinema, which is the art of movement' (Kılıç, 2005: 56). The historical background of this analogy explains the spatial foci of Kurdish cinema, which tend to centralize mobility due to forced displacement and exile. At the same time, such a focus exposes the violence and deprivation that Kurdish people have had to deal with for more than a century. In Kurdish lives, the formation of the subject in terms of social and political exclusion and marginalization is the norm, as it true for poverty and impoverishment, conflict in the form of both armed violence and structural violence, and migration in various forms (for economic reasons, at the hands of para-military forces). In the absence of territorial recognition, and with all the politics of displacement, dispossession, denial, and misrecognition by four nation-states, the geography of Kurdishness has often been imagined and portrayed as an in-between space, reconfiguring the spatial realities of Kurdish histories and cultures.

The city, the most impressive visual object of the modern nation-state's desire for the creation of homogeneous national space, has also been the most powerful threat to the ideals of nationalist ideologies (Bozdoğan, 2008). Migration, in particular, has been the primary agent of this threat (Chambers, 2005).[10] As the *de facto* capitals of Kurdish lands, Erbil, Diyarbakır and Istanbul have particular importance as the primary sites of in-between spaces for Kurdish cinematic subjects. In feature-length movies in Kurdish, these three capital cities have become key stages for Kurdish subjects' experiences with modernism within the borders of commanding nation-states. The audibility of Kurdish languages against the silhouette of these cities presents an assemblage capable of disrupting the visual hegemony of regnant discourses, towards a kind of semi-recognition on behalf of hegemonic power's tolerance. Unlike in Erbil, the officially recognized capital of the Kurdistan Regional Government, the free zones of Kurdish languages are based on the public-private distinction in narratives based in Diyarbakır and Istanbul, in Kurdish commercial films. In other words, the official borders of Kurdish geographies are demarcated by the flow of narratives in Kurdish languages. Kurdish languages push

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[10] Internal migration has been one of the key issues to develop a critical account of Turkish politics and history since the 1950. Eric Jan Zürcher's *Turkey, A Modern History* identifies the 1980s as the beginning of a transformation in the patterns of internal migration, differentiating this from the first wave of the 1950s, which came about as a result of villagers' search for better financial conditions in big cities—which Zürcher carries out through a threefold analysis of Turkish democracy since 1950 (Zürcher, 2014: 221-272). Precisely, by the end of the 1970s, Alevi populations lynched on 17 May 1978 in Malatya, on 3 September 1978 in Sivas, on 23-25 December 1978 in Maraş and on 27 May 1980 in Çorum were forced to leave their homelands permanently (Bruinessen, 2008; Massicard, 2007). The ethnicization of internal migration is evident in research in the 2000s on Istanbul and *gecekondu* culture (Erder, 2006; Ahıska, 2006; Işık and Pınarcıoğlu, 2009; Pérouse, 2011). Here it is crucial to address the literature on *gecekondu* neighbourhood, because of its implication of impoverished urban spaces as the homes for anarchy, chaos and terror. Pérouse challenges the interpretation of the anarchy in Gazi District with Kurdish, Alevi and leftist residents, the chaos is Ayazma with separatist Kurds, and the immorality in once Armenian and Rum neighbourhoods like Tarlabaşı with Kurds and travestites (Pérouse, 2011: 73, 107, 287).

back against the homogenous imagination of capital cities, in the name of audibility, such that the tension between modern anxiety and tradition is crystallized through Kurdish films' hybrid assemblages of audio and visual means.

Kurdish directors' use of audiovisual screen space draws on Kurdish realities to revalue the Kurdish nation through linguistic encounters, as the carrier of movement/mobility. At least four patterns emerge that Kurdish cinema embraces in a spatial sense: 1) positing cities as transit places between the village and a more cosmopolitan city, either in the form of a search for economically and politically better conditions (*Min Dît* [*Before Your Eyes,* Mîraz Bezar, 2009], *Bahoz* [*The Storm,* Kazım Öz, 2008]), or of a return to the village (to one's ostensible roots) after a traumatic encounter (mostly in terms of a person's death) that calls for collective memory (*Song of My Mother*, *Zer* [Kazım Öz, 2017], *Voice of My Father, Rêç* [*Trace,* Tayfur Aydın, 2011]); 2) positing the metropolitan city as the new home of Kurdishness (*Follow the Feather*, *Long Live the Bride… and Free Kurdistan, Derbûyîna ji Bihûştê* [*The Fall From Heaven,* Ferit Karahan, 2014]); 3) positing the village as the ultimate home of Kurdishness (*Were Dengê Min* [*Come to My Voice,* Hüseyin Karabey, 2014], *My Sweet Pepper Land* [Hiner Saleem, 2013]); and 4) positing the border as the spatial carrier of denial and violence through narratives of the road (*Lakposhtha Parvaz Mikonand Lakpos* [*Turtles Can Fly,* Bahman Ghobadi, 2004], *Jiyan* [Jano Rosebiani, 2002], *Before Snowfall* [Hisham Zaman, 2013]). This coverage enables me to rethink Kurdish urban poverty as rather a question of linguistic rights, and of the limited space and capital eligible for Kurdish subjects in

metropolitan centers. It is also crucial to note that in these films one finds not an isolated and stable Kurdishness, but instead Kurdishnesses that encounter and interact with each other and with Other(ness) in the streets, in mountains, or along borders.

The tension between modern city life and the call of tradition through collective memory is shaped through indoor shots and close-ups in Kurdish narratives of city life. Becoming Kurdish under the conditions of modernity becomes a domestic issue, based on shots concerning the rebuilding of a patched-together family, previously dissolved due to the loss of a father or son, but re-constructed through a new imagination of masculinity outside of Kurdistan (*Song of My Mother*, *Voice of My Father*). However, a vision liberated from claustrophobic indoor shots, focusing instead on the dynamism of geography and nature through village narratives, addresses both a spatial continuity engaging with linear time and women who are agents of the future inside the (mother)land (*Come to My Voice, My Sweet Pepper Land*). Border narratives develop through memories of trauma and historical victimization, with a grey scale and wide-angle shots employed to express collective trauma (*Time of Drunken Horses*, *Turtles Can Fly*). Space, more specifically, is organized through audiovisual assemblages embracing past experiences meant to speak to a here-and-now Kurdishness, and this organization is carried out in terms of a commercialized Kurdish national trauma characterized by massacres and state violence. The re-conceptualization of space in Kurdish commercial films is thus shaped by the tension between anxieties of modernity and the re-interpretation of tradition through the search for a legitimate urban form of narrating

Kurdishness. While space is articulated on a global scale to reflect and reconsider the shifting borders of community due to a variety of ethnic encounters in out-of-Kurdistan city narratives, in the case of village and border narratives, space emerges as an in-between phenomenon, addressing inner society as much as it demands attention to the historical victimization of Kurdish people. Yet, these are the technically perfect feature-length, commercial films of Kurdish cinema we are talking about.

In order to pave the way for a traceless urban trauma of Kurdishness, we can examine the short film *Qapsûl* (*The Capsule,* Yakup Tekintangaç, 2013), a technically imperfect film that has relied on alternative distribution channels through internet. *The Capsule* is a 17-minute film in Kurdish and Turkish, by a member of the Mesopotamia Cinema Collective, Yakup Tekintangaç, known for his short films. *The Capsule*'s narrational and formal challenge to the urban narratives of commercial film -in terms of their spatial choices and replacement of the facts- expands the range of the aesthetic regime of Kurdishness in the name of a militant cinematic language. This challenge further has a particular investment in a politically determined Kurdish presence. Although the conditions for the possibility of shooting *The Capsule* have very much to do with the Solution Process of the Turkish government, the film announces an Other trauma of the Kurdish issue by blending documentary images with fictive characters about a present trauma, to call for a politicization process in the name of a new Kurdish community. Being a Diyarbakır story, whose scenario was awarded by the Batman Yılmaz Güney Film Festival in 2011, *The Capsule* depicts an ongoing process of the police occupation of Kurdish city centers in

terms of dirt spreading to the periphery of the city. The film's opening scene is a black square carrying the sounds of a gas bomb moving forward in the air to hit the target. Then comes the first unclean image of urban space: a close-up shot of the feet of a boy pushing a handcart of capsules on along a train track. The boy then pushes his cart into traffic and heads to his destination until he is blocked by two brothers, who are curious to learn about the money they may earn by selling the empty capsules of gas bombs collected after street protests. Hereafter, the film becomes the story of these two brothers' experience of police occupation in Diyarbakır through street marches, and their (financially and socially) impoverished childhood. Close-ups of the feet and wheels of the handcart ask the viewer to witness the dirt covering the Kurdish capital's periphery streets and irregularities on the main roads, as a means of concretizing urban poverty through a moving camera.

The main twist in the story comes with the elder sister character, Gulê, who works for the daily newspaper *Özgür Gündem*. The audience is not given the details of a family history that might explain their poor living conditions. The father does not hold a formal job, and earns his life by selling partridges, a reference to his rural roots. Gulê's camera, which she brings with her, contrasts with the house, which preserves the traditional organization of living spaces in Kurdish villages, without no furniture but a television and a camera. There is no chair to sit in, no table to eat at, and no sofa, but there is a television to follow the news in Kurdish and Turkish, and a camera to make news. Gulê, a young woman journalist working to document Kurdish lives in occupied Diyarbakır, becomes the carrier of the political body shaped by Kurdish politics by her womanhood, in a modern outfit

liberated from tradition's expectations. Despite the traditional family she was born in, and her father's expectations from her as the main breadwinner for the family (as the oldest child), we see her sitting at her desk in *Özgür Gündem*'s bureau, surrounded by the walls carrying the pictures of such murdered or disappeared Kurdish activists and journalist as Musa Anter, Gurbetelli Ersöz and Yahya Orhan.

The contrast between the *Özgür Gündem* bureau decorated by all kinds of technological devices and furniture, and the home without any furniture exposes the politically determined Kurdish movement's embracing of the modern and traditional in line with its social and political needs. Moreover, the politically-involved modern subjects of the Kurdish movement are imagined through a woman who is made to carry the responsibility of the future and the past, as the bearer of democratic struggle. The bureau of *Özgür Gündem,* the space of Kurdish journalism, is gendered by its two young women workers, whereas men are present through the framed pictures on the walls, carrying the violence of past decades. Starting from clashes on the anniversary of the Madımak Masscare, in which Alevi intellectuals and artists burned to death in a hotel building on 2 July 1993, the film shows images from several street protests not only documenting police violence but also announcing the resistance by children and youth, the impossible right to gather in Kurdistan's narrow streets, behind the barricades. Two young brothers' discovery of a Diyarbakır of clashes after breaking Gulê's camera becomes a means of re-presenting Diyarbakır as a city of both occupation and resistance. The numeric impact of violence in democratic gatherings around memorials becomes apparent by the numbers of capsules

the brothers collected in protest zones: Sivas Massacre, 6 capsules; 14 July, 88 capsules; 15 August, 113 capsules; 17 August, 90 capsules; 22 August, 70 capsules; 30 August, 0 capsule; 31 August, 55 capsules. The brothers' discovery of the city following the calendar in Gulê's agenda, the representative of Kurdish journalism's important dates, also introduces an alternative history of Kurdish people in Turkey in terms of acts of resistance around certain key dates of memorializing. The numeric escalation of police violence in the Kurdish district through the increasing numbers of capsules in the brothers' notebook is accompanied by Turkish TV channels' interpretations of causalities and deaths due to the use of pepper gas and gas bombs by police officers during the Gezi protest. Here the voice-over functions as an attempt to suture the gap between Kurdish poor lives and street protests in Turkish capitals. Following real life images of protests in Diyarbakır streets from several sources, which disturb the continuity of points of views and the camera's stability, the film closes with a zoom-in on the steps of the youngest brother, between capsules and towards the dead body of Gulê lying on the street, covered with blood.

Created in the Gezi Era of Turkey, when voices against the mainstream media's interpretation of street protests began to be raised by Turkish intellectuals too, *The Capsule* employs the conventions of trauma films to present the documents of police occupation and continuous resistance in Diyarbakır (Karakaş, 2016). However, unlike the trauma originated from forced displacement or war conditions in Kurdish feature-length films, here the present occupation in Kurdish districts stresses an impoverished society

under continuous attack, rather than traumatized by a past catastrophic experience. Being made by the Mesopotamia Cinema Collective, *The Capsule* is a film of a certain political discourse by the Kurdish movement, which posits cinema as a medium to educate and organize its people through the use of non-commercial film. In this specific audio-visual universe claiming for truth, social assistance (largely discussed either as a strategical move by the AKP government to generate the political disorder during the Solution Process, or as carried out by NGOs standing against the politics of impoverishment (Yörük, 2012: 539-540; Day, 2008: 24-25)) is largely absent. Corresponding to this understanding, the city of Diyarbakır emerges through an aesthetic of gas bombs, tear gas, armored military vehicles, and marches, barricades, fireworks and burning tires, and characterized by deprivation in financial and political terms. Childhood is present as an agent of resistance rather than as the sacred unit of the modern family, in need of protection and care. Youth further emerges here as the primary subject of impoverishment. The urban trauma of Kurdishness announces itself in terms of Kurdistan's *de facto* capital, Diyarbakır's, non-modern urbanity, lacking clean streets for its future generations, a catastrophic city of *gecekondu*s enduring continuous clashes. These informal settlements, *gecekondu*s, recall Beatriz Jaguaribe's analysis of the representation of Brazilian informal settlements or *favelas* as the carrier of an aestheticized reality in terms of marginalized characters, violence and poverty (Jaguaribe, 2005: 70). Proposing the idea of the "shock of the real" deriving from these *favelas*, Jaguaribe claims that such aesthetics consist of counter hegemonic narratives of national characters, narratives and images (Jaguaribe, 2005: 79). In the Kurdish instantiation of

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*favela*s, resistance in the narrow cities of Diyarbakır's historical district carries the shock of the real in the service of creating a political community.

Not including Turkish in its narratives unless there is an official agent of Turkishness, *The Capsule'*s primary audience is a Kurdish-speaking subject of cinema. Turkish becomes audible in the story only when one of the brothers encounters with police forces and is yelled at because of daring to ask a question to the Turkish police. Although the film was welcomed in the most prestigious film festivals of Turkey, such as the 50th Antalya Golden Orange Film Festival, the 25th Ankara Film Festival, the 33rd Istanbul International Film Festival, and the 25th International Istanbul Short Film Festival in 2014, its main platform has been the YouTube page of the Mesopotamia Cinema Collective and the Vimeo page of the director Yakup Tekintangaç. On the Vimeo page of the director, the original film has been seen by 1,796 people since 2013, with only 638 views with Turkish and English subtitles. However, the third short film of Tekintangaç *Azad* (2015), which is funded by the Ministry of Culture and is the story of a child who is not allowed to leave home because of not knowing Turkish and living in a Turkish city with his working mother, has been viewed 800,000 times on YouTube. Having a domestic story -lacking a father- and embracing new forms of poverty in the Turkish metropolitan city, *Azad* hails a specific audience, through both its story of a victimized child, whose longing for the outdoors furthermore is meant to represent a broader longing of a domesticated modern Kurdishness for the outdoors, and through its technically perfected film, its homogenized point of view shots and camera movements. However successful

in attracting the attention of viewers and festival judges, though, this hailing silences the political history of conflict and resistance. Thus, Tekintangaç's two short films, *The Capsule* and *Azad,* financed by the Mesopotamia Cinema Collective and the Ministry of Culture of Turkey respectively, and, again respectively, as non-commercial and commercial films, allow us to see, in a single director's products, the conflicting discourses and truth regimes of Kurdish cinematography. The common point of these two films is the diegetic use of Kurdish as the main language of the protagonists, despite their differing embracing of a Kurdish urban presence. Recalling Rancière's discussion of how certain rules for a good militant organization are no longer valid, and how new forms of perception and utterance are now being defined, Kurdish languages and poverty become the determinants of Kurdishness to be uttered for the quasi-bodies of a Kurdish political community (Hallwars, 2003: 200). Yet, the cinematographic establishment of Kurdish political subjects has developed in several layers in addition to these narrative constructions, flourishing on the ground of facts.

4. Establishing Quasi-bodies for Kurdish Political Subjects

In the age of social networks and the personal cameras of smart phones, Rancière conceptualizes quasi-bodies as non-organismic bodies, defined as 'blocks of speech circulating without a legitimate father to accompany them toward their authorized addressee' while interpreting the notion of man as a literary, and so political animal (Rancière, 2011: 39). Quasi-bodies are the imaginary collective bodies developed through

the lines of fracture and disincorporations that tie Rancière's aesthetic theory to his political theory of dissensus. Accordingly, he defines the channels for political subjectification as literary disincorporation rather than imaginary identification. Rancière's threefold circulation of quasi-bodies forms uncertain communities, contributes formation of enunciative collectives, and calls into question the distribution of roles, territories and languages. Thus, the politicization of the subject emerges as a challenge to the given distribution of the sensible in the name of dissensus (Rancière, 2011: 40). Rancière's definition of dissensus as 'a conflict between a sensory presentation and a way of making sense of it, or between several sensory regimes and/or 'bodies' sits at the heart of politics' re-interpretation in the name of a 'break with the sensory self-evidence of the (…) assigned ways of being, seeing and saying' (Rancière, 2010a: 139). In this way, Rancière calls dissensus a form of continuous resistance (Rancière, 2010a: 173). In this research, I employ the concept of quasi-bodies to analyse the subjectification of Kurdish individuals in the name of democratic politics through the Mesopotamia Cinema Collective. And I discuss their specific use of cinematic tools to establish quasi-bodies for a new Kurdish we by the strategic imposition of Kurdishness on the basis of the diegetic use and audibility of Kurdish languages. And here, one must acknowledge the establishment and development of the Kurdish satellite TV channel MED TV as the historical cause of the current quasi-bodies of the Kurdish political movement.

In its earliest transmission tests in 1995, MED TV broadcast three hours a day, airing mostly music videos. As Rigoli discusses, the development of broadcasting from three-

hour-length music videos to eighteen-hour-length TV programs took three years (Rigoli, 2000: 45). Rigoli was able to identify 150 workers of MED TV at that time, some of whom were there on a voluntary basis, and whose primary motivation was linked to the construction and perpetuation of Kurdish languages; there were also employees and volunteers from the Turkish left for the revolutionary cause (Rigoli, 2000: 46). Rigoli's account of Kurdish broadcasting is important since she identifies the spatial fragmentation of Kurdish identity construction, while acknowledging the political components of the Kurdish movement. Although Kurdish broadcasting's territory of residence was located in Europe, the territory of belonging remained regional, and the territory of reference became national in order to promote the media's contribution to transnational solidarities (Rigoli, 2000: 47). Kurdish media have had a clear impact on Kurdish people's modes of mobilization, through news, documentaries and music videos. Films, plays and cultural programs, however, only made up 9 % of MED TV's schedule (Rigoli, 2000: 48). In such a historical context, since the 1990s in particular, the politicization of Kurdish individuals through cinema was, despite all pressures, nevertheless able to take place within the territory of the nation through workshops, cultural centers, festivals and production units, in addition to television-mediated activism.

As discussed above, the foundation of the Mesopotamia Cinema Collective in Istanbul was an early and central force in the establishment of Kurdish film production. Accordingly, I claim it to be the earliest cinematic apparatus to invent quasi-bodies in the

name of a Kurdish community. We can point to the Kurdish directors of Mesopotamia Cinema Collective as the primary carriers of quasi-bodies for the politicization process in the 1990s; namely, Hüseyin Karabey, Kazım Öz and Özkan Küçük. Karabey defines himself as the leftist son of a working-class family who ended up founding the cinema unit in Mesopotamia Culture Center after a year of imprisonment in the last year of his undergraduate studies on finance in Bursa (Çavuşoğlu, 2014). Describing the deprived conditions from which the Mesopotamia Cinema Collective emerged, and the forced disappearance and killings in Turkey in the 1990s, he explains what compelled those active in the collective to educate themselves through the workshops they ran in those years. In search of both an education in film theory and a means to postpone his mandatory military service, Karabey enrolled in the Cinema and Television Department of Mimar Sinan University (Çavuşoğlu, 2014). Referring to the Turkish academic universe's blind spots on the Kurdish issue and the affirmation of the *status quo* empowered by the privatization of universities in the 1990s, Karabey explains his motivation to make films in terms of his will to self-expression (Çavuşoğlu, 2014). As the director of 12 documentaries between the years of 1996 and 2012, on a range of political issues in Turkey, Karabey also produced four feature-length narrative films on the Iraqi invasion, Istanbul, F-type prisons, Kurdish rural life in a border settlement in the 1990s, and imprisonment. These are, respectively, *Gitmek: My Marlon and Brando* (*My Marlon and Brando,* Hüseyin Karabey, 2008), *Unutma Beni Istanbul* (*Don't Forget Me Istanbul*, Hany Abu-Assad, et al., 2011), *F-Tipi Film* (*F Type Film*, Ezel Akay, et all., 2012), *Come to My Voice* (Hüseyin Karabey*,* 2014), and *İçerdekiler* (*Prisoners,* Hüseyin

Karabey, 2018). Karabey's filmography and declarations represent a class-based understanding of the Kurdish issue and the film industry, which communicates with a Turkish leftist history of the Kurdish issue in order to exceed its national limits, echoing the Turkish leftist roots of the Kurdish politics, while also acknowledging the existence of Kurdish languages.

Kazım Öz, a member of the Mesopotamia Cinema Collective for more than two decades, gives a regional account of the process of political subjectification on behalf of the Kurdish Alevi people of Dersim. Starting from his first short film *Ax* (*The Land*, 1999), Öz's lenses oscillate between the rural and urban life of Kurdish people due to forced displacement, which appears in the narrative through the lonely death of Kurdish old people in their homelands (*The Land*), through an encounter between a Kurdish militant and Turkish soldier during a bus trip to Kurdish geography (*Fotoğraf, The Photograph,* 2001), through Kurdish old people's longing for their homeland in diaspora (*Dûr, Far Away,* 2005), through an undergraduate student's politicization in his university years in 1990s Istanbul (*The Storm,* 2008), and by Kurdish seasonal workers travelling from Batman to Ankara (*Hebû Tune Bû, Once Upon A Time,* 2014). *The Storm,* as a cinematographic account of the Kurdish movement's urban organization in the 1990s, announces a break in the director's thematic focus on the spaces of Dersim: *Demsala Dawî: Şewakan* (*The Last Season: Shawaks,* 2009), *Çinara Spî* (*White Sycamore,* 2016), and *Zer* (*Zer,* 2017). In order to problematize the possibility of politicization through film in the Kurdish case, Çiftçi posits Öz's films as carriers of a counter-hegemonic history

against Turkish official history and of the history of Kurdish resistance. and discusses the unofficial account of the history of Kurdish resistance (Çiftçi, 2009). In addition to the archival value of these films, it is crucial to recognize the spatial and temporal diversity they employ, due to the hybrid nature of the director's informal education. Embracing the testimonial value of documentary, Öz's camera travels between several Kurdish and Kurdified geographies to cover an unwritten, unofficial history through non-linear narratives with changing crew members and shifting formal choices. For instance, he explains the use of long sequence in one of his early films as a result of a crew member's interest in Passolini (Personal Communication, 2009). Öz himself also travels with his films to discuss the Kurdish issue and Kurdish cinema through his experience and through the products of the Mesopotamia Cinema Collective in film festivals, special showings, and campus events. In a panel organized by Boğaziçi University, he points to the impact of the Kurdish movement on the very existence of discussions about Kurdish cinema, while reproaching the belated academic interest in Kurdish cinematic production (*The Plenary Panel*, 2016: 250). Emphasizing the Kurdish movement's support for cultural productions in Kurdish languages, Öz describes the cultural centers of the Kurdish movement as spaces of film education for people interested in the Kurdish issue (*The Plenary Panel*, 2016: 254). Based on such personal accounts, I posit the cinematic achievements of the Mesopotamia Cinema Collective as a militant attempt to educate Kurdish intellectuals and youth through an audio-visualized Kurdish experience of Turkey, as a means to create quassi-bodies for an ethical Kurdish community. As discussed by Cengiz Güneş in detail, a Kurdish elite emerged in Turkish public life in the

1960s, and became more visible by the 1990s (Güneş, 2010:71). In light of Öz's call for building a Kurdish political body in Turkish to claim its autonomy, rather than relying on the settled film industries and intellectual circles, the fact that he presented *The Storm* as the final project for his MA degree is simply another facet of this construction process.

The third name of the Mesopotamia Cinema Collective, Özkan Küçük, is perhaps the least-known Kurdish director of Turkey, as he does not have a feature-length narrative film, but instead has shot a number of short films and documentaries on and in Diyarbakır, not Istanbul. As a contributor to the production of the earliest films of the Mesopotamia Cinema Collective, his main films are *Groping for Colors* (Kazım Öz, et al., 1996), *Builders* (Özkan Küçük, 1999), *Yıllar Sonra, İşte Diyar-ı Bekir* (*Years Later, Here is Diyarbekir,* Özkan Küçük, 2003), *Diyarbekir Damlarında* (*On the Roofs of Diyarbekir,* Özkan Küçük, 2005), *Mamoste Arsen* (*Master Arsen*, Özkan Küçük, 2005), *Nohutlu Pilav* (*Rice with Chickpeas,* Özkan Küçük, 2005), *Seyid, Hakikat Yolunda* (*Sheikh, On the Path to Truth,* Özkan Küçük, 2010), and *Pepuk* (Özkan Küçük, 2013). His only fictional short film, *Pepuk,* became possible so late because of a 'mistaken understanding of collectivity', according to Küçük (Bozdemir, 2014). Being from Dersim, and based in Diyarbakır, Küçük's common focus is to elaborate the class and religious conflicts within the Kurdish community by means of documentaries. Refusing the distinction between documentary and fiction in his only interview, Küçük calls the attention of journalists to the developing film production in Diyarbakır, a promising future of Kurdish cinema (Bozdemir, 2014). In addition to having worked as the producer, directory assistant,

director of photography, scriptwriter and art director of the Mesopotamia Cinema Collective's films, Küçük became the coordinator of the Diyarbakır Cinema Workshop in 2003 and 2004. During the 3rd Diyarbakır Culture and Arts Festival, the first Diyarbakır Cinema Workshop announced the *de facto* Kurdish capital's claim on cinematic production under the governance of the elected mayor of the pro-Kurdish party *Barış ve Demokrasi Partisi* (Peace and Democracy Party, BDP) in 2003.

Küçük is an important figure for my discussion also because of his graduate thesis on the cinema of Turkey in 1990s. Submitted in 2002, Küçük's research is the earliest academic piece on the emergence of Kurdish cinema in Turkey (Küçük, 2002). Employing a Marxist historical stance, Küçük critically engages with the discussion around Turkish films in the 1980s and 1990s in order to describe the emergence of Kurdish film spaces within a political-economic context. Explaining the state-based foundation of the Turkish film industry, Küçük's research announces the necessity of new film techniques and a new generation of directors in Turkey to embrace the revolution brought about by video (Küçük, 2002). 'If a film is an artefact which aspires to (and indeed on occasion becomes) art, and original television strives to become an event', writes Roy Armes, 'video is perhaps best defined as a recording material in search of a mode of production' (Armes, 1988: 127). Here it is also crucial to underline that Küçük's indirect research on Kurdish collective ways of making a film is an affirmation of Kurdish historical agency through mediated acts and participation, rather than through a cynical discourse of victimhood. Elaborating the political economy of the Turkish film industry's crisis, Küçük announces

the emergence of the first Kurdish films within Turkish cinema discourse, while also recognizing the common grounds of the Kurdish movement and Turkish leftist movements. In other words, Küçük is the representative of an era in which cinema was discussed in terms of political economy, even if this discussion took for granted a national framework. In the 1990s, then, Karabey, Öz and Küçük meet at this common to implement a quasi-body for Kurdish people in terms of class conflict as much as national conflicts.

Between the years of 2003 and 2016, the Diyarbakır Municipality, ruled by Kurdish parties, supported the foundation of such institutions as the Cegerxwîn Center of Culture and Art for the Youth and the Middle East Cinema Academy to encourage cultural awakening and artistic production in Kurdish languages, by Kurdish subjects. Having its historical roots in the Mesopotamia Culture Center's film gatherings, Diyarbakır's claim on film production has mainly been supported by the Mesopotamia Cinema Collective. In 2003, films by the participants of the Diyarbakır Cinema Workshop under the supervision of Küçük, such as *Surların İki Yakası* (*Two Ends of the Wall,* Mahmut İlyas Ünal et al., 2003) and *Çekçek* (Zeynel Doğan et al., 2003) were funded by Yapım 13, the film production company of the Mesopotamia Cinema Collective. These films are based on daily life in Diyarbakır, one on the city under the attack of modernization, through a story on the conflict between a *dengbêj* and Kurdish rappers, and the other on urban impoverishment, through a story on informal ways of earning a living for the displaced people of conflict zones. In other words, the first cinema workshop in Diyarbakır

addresses its audience with the need for confronting class conflicts immanent to traditional Kurdish society's encounter with modernity, while imagining Kurdishness through a gendered urban experience in the homeland.

In 2013, under Kazım Öz's supervision, the Diyarbakır Cinema Workshop produced six short films on informal work in Istanbul, long-term political prisoners in Turkey, children in Diyarbakır, an imprisoned Kurdish woman activist, the traditional Kurdish family formation, and the phenomenon of Hizbullah in the 1990s. These are, respectively, *Araf* (*The Purgotry,* Mehmet Amin Göl, 2013), *Pace* (*The Window,* Çiğdem Gülçiçek, 2013), *The Capsule, Ezman* (*The Sky*, Hatip Kabak, 2013), *Xal û Xwarze* (*The Uncle and the Nephew,* Zekeriya Aydoğan, 2013), and *Bihuşta Zebeştan* (*Watermelon Heaven*, Gülistan Acet, 2013). Despite their common themes on the factual situations of Kurdish lives and their shared diegetic use of Kurdish languages, the stylistic choices of these films differ in terms of their embracing of point of view shots, out-door shots, close-ups and cuts. Yet, what is significant in comparison to the earlier films under the supervision of Özkan Küçük is the discursive change in the name of the politics of the Peace Process. These films invite their audiences to confront the violent traumas of Kurdishness, which their directors assumed had been recognized at this time by the Turkish public, by speaking these out loud. This tendency continues until 2016 in *Pîyê Min Toz Şeker* (*My Father Sugar*, Sedat Barış, 2016), a story on the life of villagers under state of emergency rule (OHAL) in the 1990s. 2016 is the end of the Peace Process in Turkey and its involvement

of Kurdish parties, and the beginning of a continuous and direct occupation of Kurdish districts by means of trustees (*kayyum*), under the AKP-MHP government of Turkey.

More precisely, if across the documentaries of the 1990s, quasi-bodies a) were implemented in the shadow of the deep state's deep violence against Kurdish presence, b) made use of Kurdish languages, and c) drew, in their modes of representation, on a class-based definition of Kurdish identity, then since the 2000s, they have been shaped in relation to the ongoing solution process. In the cinema of the 1990s, it is a matter of fact that the genere of the documentary was embraced as a tool in the politicization process of the Kurdish subjects. Yet by the 2000s, fictionalizing the truth in short films and imperfect cinemas comes to be the carrier of an aesthetic regime for political Kurdishness. In two decades, between 1996 and 2016, in the absence of a settled film industry and audience, the Mesopotamia Cinema Collective's uncertain community created and circulated certain forms of enunciative Kurdish subjectivities to question the distribution of roles and territories attributed to Kurdish presence and politics in line with the Kurdish movement's political ideals. In other words, it built an alternative film environment for Kurdish filmmakers, not necessarily by targeting the settled film industries, but by building its own horizontal networks and addressing Kurdish identity -ethnicized by linguistic choices- as a category of resistance to denial, oppression, and aesthetic perfection.

The Mesopotamia Cinema Collective's last production available on its official YouTube account is *Welatek Hebû* (*There Was a Country,* Hebun Polat, 2018). A collaborative production of Yapım 13, the Mesopotamia Cinema Collective, the Middle East Cinema Academy and *Komina Film a Rojava* (Rojava Film Commune), *There Was a Country* is the Collective's only Kurdish short film to describe, in its credits, production by Turkey and Syria. The film is a fragment from the destroyed lives in the Kurdish-settled part of Syria during the civil war, through a traditionally depicted elderly Kurdish woman with a white scarf and a baby girl. This woman, whom we see carrying the baby girl to ruins, ends up by a wall that carries the pictures of her family members, under the light of an oil lamp. Despite the moving camera following the woman into these ruins, the woman is depicted as motionless, in contrast with the noise of silence in the war zone. This last film affirms the Mesopotamia Cinema Collective's foundations on the politicization of Kurdish subjects in ways that run parallel to the Kurdish movement's politics, here by involving the most contemporary spatial foci of the Kurdish movement, northern Syria, or Rojava. The film further embraces a realist stance to fictionalize its truth regime through a woman character.

Yet the Mesopoamia Cinema Collective is not the only vehicle for the production of alternative films about Kurdish life. Other agents from Diyarbakır's everyday realities have tried to radicalize the city's factual reality through narrative components as much as through production and distribution, and have done so to claim a presence beyond the

traditional spaces of the industry, once the city of resistance met with the potential and feasibility of an imperfect cinema through alternative, non-governmental institutions.

5. An Opposition to the Aesthetics of Testimony: *Gênco*

During the negotiations between the Turkish state and the Kurdish movement, a cultural space expanded, not only for the institutions of the Kurdish party, but also for such non-governmental organizations as Anadolu Kültür. Anadolu Kültür was established by Osman Kavala's initiative to promote cultural activities in Turkey and abroad by bringing the business world in touch with civil society. The aim of the foundation is precisely defined 'to build bridges between different ethnic, religious and regional groups by sharing culture and art, supporting regional initiatives, emphasizing cultural diversity and cultural rights and consolidating interregional collaboration' (*Anadolu Kültür,* 2020). Since 2002, Anadolu Kültür has been supporting projects on cultural dialogue, artistic expression and training, cultural diversity and arts, and cultural dialogue with Armenia in two metropolitan cities, Istanbul and Diyarbakır. Production in Diyarbakır was disrupted in early 2018, following the arrest of Osman Kavala on 1 November 2017, on allegations of his involvement in the Gezi Protests. Since 2003, Anadolu Kültür's Diyarbakır institution, *Diyarbakır Sanat Evi* (Diyarbakır Art House, DSM), incorporated the cinema community of *Diyarbakır Sinema Klubü* (Diyarbakır Cinema Club, DSK), in cooperation with instructors, such as the scriptwriter Hüseyin Kuzu, the film editor Çiçek Kahraman and the producer of TRT Radio 3's cinema episodes, Kurtuluş Özyazıcı.

Anadolu Kültür's emergence onto the scene, as a new source for the support of cinema culture in Diyarbakır, is crucial to understand certain shifts and new directions in the politics of Kurdish art, in line with this thesis's broader emphasis on the non-linear and heternomous development of Kurdish cinema, from the claim of un-representable trauma to the establishment of quasi-bodies of Kurdish political movement. As discussed under the previous titles, either in the search for a Kurdish national cinema or in the name of the politicization of Kurdish people, Kurdish narratives are built through either explanatory accounts of Kurdish experience as one of victimization by oppressive states (for the "outside" audiences of a would-be national cinema), or an account of the impoverishment of Kurdish dailyness blended with the Kurdish movement's agenda (for the "inside" audiences of would-be politicized subjects).[11] The Diyarbakır Cinema Club stands for the possibility of an ecstatic truth through the works of Ali Kemal Çınar, who joined the cinema workshops of the Cegerxwîn Center of Culture and Art for the Youth, once he decided, after 2010, that the language of his films would be Kurdish (Aytaç and Çiftçi, 2017: 45).

Rancière's aesthetic project posits autonomy in a playful relation with heteronomy in the service of transforming art for a new world (Rancière, 2010a: 132, 199). Avant-garde art

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[11] Here, my use of inside and outside audiences is meant as a heuristic, a deliberate simplification. In practice, of course, things are messier. The filmmakers at the heart of this study can themselves be heard wondering out loud about whom their films ideally address, and can in the same breath say that they want their films to be for Kurdish political subjects, but they also want their films to speak to something beyond an "inside". In other words, rather than clear terms with given meanings, the contents of "inside" and "outside" are matters of contention, which the agents of filmmaking themselves are aware of and actively debate. While beyond the immediate concerns of this study, I aim to take up this point in a future work.

stands at the heart of Rancière's employment of the concept of autonomy, with art's promise of emancipation. As such, avant-garde practice not only transforms the form of art, but also the practices of power and political struggle (Rancière, 2010a: 199). Accordingly, he links German Idealism with avant-garde work in the 1920s, to exemplify the transformation of thought in the sensory experience of community (Rancière, 2011: 44). Rancière's theory of aesthetics is grounded in the problematics of German Idealism, mainly through references to Schiller's thought, and through this, he attempts to elaborate the idea that the autonomy of art and the promise of politics are not exclusive powers. As such, 'the autonomy is the autonomy of the experience, not of the work of art. In other words, the art work participates in the sensorium of autonomy inasmuch as it is not a work of art' (Rancière, 2010a: 116, 117). Rancière's focus on the aestheticization of life addresses a self-educative form of life, where forms of art are to act as modes of collective education to re-arrange a new partition of the perceptible (Rancière, 2010a: 118, 119). Can one speak of a corresponding arrangement for an aesthetic regime of Kurdishness, a new partition of the perceptible, autonomous both in financial and militant terms? The work of Ali Kemal Çınar may provide the most fruitful answer to that question.

Ali Kemal Çınar is a Kurdish director who was born in Diyarbakır and has been based there since. Generally, his work embraces a nationalist claim by supposing a purely Kurdish speaking communicative space in his narratives, excluding the official representatives of Turkishness from his frame. His involvement with film production began at the Diyarbakır Cinema Club since its establishment in 2003. He produced seven

short films between 2005 and 2010: *Ev* (*Home,* 2005), *Dolap* (*The Cupboard,* 2006), *Duvar* (*The Wall,* 2007), *İnfaz* (*The Execution,* 2008), *Arınma* (*Katharsis, 2009*), *Şev* (*The Night,* 2009), and *Wenda* (*Lost,* 2010). Since his short film *The Night,* he has not used any Turkish titles in his film projects. His only documentary project *Bajar* (*The City,* 2010) was shown in several film festivals including the prestigious 14th International 1001 Documentary Film Festival and the Istanbul International Film Festival. Focusing on his short films, Övgü Gökçe praises the cinematographic opening in his films as the declaration of a new form of urban Kurdish identity in the name of the individual, the body and the social (Gökçe, 2017). His feature-length narratives announce the two central techniques of his affordable, non-commercial film production, starting from the first, *Kurte Film* (*Short Film,* 2013): Ali Kemal Çınar acting as himself with his family members taking part in the story as they are, and the recycling or repurposing of the same handful of filming locales. His radicalization of the extent of Kurdish-speaking dailyness and gender issues through narratives produced on low budgets and with technically imperfect tools -he announced the production budget of *Short Film* to be 900 Turkish Liras- has upset even the directors of critically acclaimed film festivals in Turkey (Tabak, 2016). As such, without any institutional support he declares not only the possibilities of cheap film making, but also the need for liberation from funds from the Ministy of Culture (Yusufoğlu, 2020; Akbulut, 2020). His first feature-length film is mostly in Kurdish, yet it does not silence the use of Turkish in Diyarbakır's everyday experience. *Short Film* is a narrative film on being a Kurdish male director under the shadow of two father figures: Ali Kemal Çınar's father Seyithan Çınar and Kurdish cinema's mythic father Yılmaz

Güney (Yusufoğlu, 2020). His second film *Veşartî* (*Hidden,* 2015) is a black and white queer film in which he signals the experimental use of voice overs to address incommunicative spaces of sexuality and gender in the traditional Kurdish environment of Diyarbakır. The film switches to color by the closing scene, where the audience is called to re-interpret Ehmedê Xanî's *Mem û Zîn* (*Mem and Zîn,* 1692). *Mem and Zîn* is based on the traditional Kurdish epic *Memê Alan,* and has been posited as the precursor of Kurdish nationalism (Bruinessen, 2003). Indeed, the self-defined Kurdish nationalist intellectual Nureddin Zaza, an exile of the Sheih Said Rebellion, one of the founders of the *Fondation Insitut Kurde de Paris* (Kurdish Institute of Paris) and the translator of *Mem and Zîn* to French, has even gone as far as to praise Xanî's depiction of an ideal Kurdish man, while claiming that such German philosophers as Hegel and Marx follow in the footsteps of Xanî (Zaza, 2000: 10, 23). Ali Kemal Çınar's use of *Mem and Zîn* through a queer narrative should be read both as a part of the epic's central place for Kurdish nationalism, yet also as a reclaiming of the epic to tell an unfamiliar story about contemporary Kurdishness.

Mem and Zîn follows the pattern of the modern imagination of the nation by positing Kurdishness as something weakened by not having a state, particularly in the face of Persian and Turkish nations that, according to the narrative, Kurds once dominated. The epic further defines Kurdish languages as essential to Kurdish being, and posits Muslim identity as the very carrier of ideal Kurdishness (Xanî, 2018). Yet it diverges from the patriarchal foundation of national subjects through an account of flourishing heterosexual

love in a very unique, drag setting: two Kurdish women, Zîn and Sitî, dressed as men, fell in love with two Kurdish men, Mem and Tacdîn dressed as women, at a celebration of Newroz. Ali Kemal Çınar's employment of *Mem and Zîn* is invested in this very specific scene to expose his stance for a Kurdish nationalism beyond nationalism, which both embraces Kurdish languages without any Turkish stain, and divorces nationalism from its patriarchal foundation. In his latest film *Di Navberê De* (*In Between*, 2018), Ali Kemal Çınar exposes his linguistic stance through the story of a Kurdish man (his brother, Osman Çınar), who can understand his mother language Kurdish but not Turkish, and can speak Turkish but not Kurdish, and who thus becomes the ultimate carrier of the assimilation politics of Turkish state. Here, I focus on Çınar's third feature-length film, *Genco,* to discuss its negative performative potential through an ecstatic truth that transcends the laws of nature—that is, through an imaginary super power in the hands of Kurdish men.

Genco is a film about a superhero, Genco (Ali Kemal Çınar), born Kurdish in Diyarbakır with a limited power over small things such as opening and closing doors without touching them, but not strong enough to stop the noise caused by an ill-fit manhole cover that disturbs his sleep. The idea of a superhero in a Muslim community first emerged in the work of *Süper Müslüman* (*Supermuslim,* Şener Özmen, 2011), which is a series of photographs by the Kurdish contemporary artist and novelist of himself, in his homemade Superman costume, praying on his red cape as the sajjada. Considering Özmen's increasing emphasis on Kurdish national presence as a matter of colonial occupation and

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linguistic resistance in Kurdish in his later writings in the online newspaper *Xwebûn*, any interpretation of the work of *Supermuslim*—a work about the search for a counter superhero of the Kurdish community by a Kurdish political artist—must take into account secularization in Kurdish politics and culture (Özmen, 2020). Re-positioning the work of *Supermuslim* as a self-reflection on the strength and bonds of Kurdish community in religious and political terms, I claim that the Kurdish imagination of a savior captured by tradition is first announced in photographic terms. Yet, the film *Genco* liberates its Muslim hero from such a capture by giving up the cape, and secularizes his narrative to be about a weakened Kurdish manhood amid an emergent middle-class culture in Diyarbakır, and determined by the absent traces of Turkish colonial presence.

The film opens with a couple struggling to open the door of their apartment, in a modern building with an elevator (a contrast to the *gecekondu*s common in the Diyarbakır films of the Mesopotamia Cinema Collective). As the couple fiddles with the key, Genco's blurred image approaches. We see his eyes and moustache clearly, as the couple turns to face a masked man in a purple costume. He then takes a deep breath and opens the door from where he stands. The woman remarks, 'Like Superman!'; her partner counters, 'What Superman? Does Superman do something like this?' Throughout the story, moving objects without touching them and controlling electronic devices such as the elevator on/off switch are the extent of Genco's powers. The moment at which Genco fails to call the elevator, one of two hybrid audiovisual settings appears on the screen: a speech balloon rising from the woman's head, expressing her pity for the Kurdish superman

Genco's failed attempt. Then we see the modernized urban spaces of Diyarbakır, with the flow of traffic and the countless construction sites of buildings going up. We see Ali Kemal without a costume, viewing this urban scene from his wide window that re-frames both the screen and our perception of domestic borders. The clean and well-organized urban spaces announce the hygienic middle class lives of Kurdish Diyarbakır, in harmony with Genco's clean and well-organized apartment where he cooks, waters the plants, and hosts guests in his single life. Genco, indeed, stands for the single Kurdish man living without a family of his own or his old mother, in contrast to other portraits of urban space and urban life in other Kurdish films. Yet, he is also not liberated from traditional family bonds, as we see through his father and mother's involvement in his decision-making processes, which signals, in this story, the family's foundation as the home for ultimate trauma. As such, his cinematography is defined as a cinema of continuous residence with the father (Tabak, 2016; Gökçe, 2017). Yet still, Ali Kemal Çınar's linguistically purified narrative on the possibilities of Kurdish middle class lives in *Genco* is an opposition to the aesthetics of testimony in Kurdish commercial feature-length films, documentaries and short films, by re-defining -through absurdity as much as through factual reality-urban Kurdishness in terms of debt, food, and weakened manhood, rather than of urban encounters with non-Kurdish determinants of Kurdishness.

Right before Ali Kemal's mother's first visit, a peddler rings the door to ask whether Ali Kemal needs anything for the kitchen. Ali Kemal's direct dismissal of any shopping at this threshold between a domestic interior and the outside world is intensified in the

subsequent scenes, addressing his poor finances: his partner at Gabo asks the waitress about Ali Kemal, implying he hasn't been at work lately, and his mother, Rabia Çınar, visits him with a handful of shopping bags. Ali Kemal's loose relation with money is also portrayed in the dialogues with his business partner, and with his woman friend, who offers them to invest her money in transforming Gabo to one of the most popular and profitable *cafés* in Diyarbakır. Once Ali Kemal exposes his super persona, and finds out the powers he could have, the few people surrounding him come forward with the debts they could clear if they had the power: the doorkeeper İhsan, the peddler Salih, and his parents, though not him -which makes Ali Kemal stand against the rule of the nature of money, without a costume. As such, İhsan's resistance to return to Ali Kemal the ostensible superpower he accidentally originates from his debts, and Salih's appetite to control the one holding this power is fed by his economic situation. Yet, Ali Kemal, who is supposed to have all the power, and who lives a comfortable middle-class life, has no better explanation for the use of his power than his wish to silence the manhole cover. The narrative eschews any explanation of the causes of the debts haunting several lives in Diyarbakır, while putting Ali Kemal forward as a kind of superhero who needs more power to solve anything and nothing. In one of his interviews, the director Ali Kemal Çınar explains how he decided to remove certain dialogues, including the actor Ali Kemal's questioning of the extent of his powers—could it solve the Kurdish issue, he asked—by positing the diegetic use of Kurdish as itself assertive (Yusufoğlu, 2020). He thus manifests an opposition to the hegemony of a realism—a certrain construction or presentation of what one can or should show or talk about in films, determined as much

by Kurdish parties as by other powerful determinants (the ruling national regime, e.g.) of what can and cannot be perceived—that silences or overlooks other experiences and other forms of dailyness (Yusufoğlu, 2020). The exterior threat to *Genco*'s imagined wide family of Kurdish subjects turns out to be debt as a non-ethnic and non-assimilable category. Debt here indicates a universal middle-class experience, true for Kurdish social realities as much as anywhere else. There is no grand conflict or traumatic clashes here, but rather ordinary middle-class concerns—everyday debts, apartment buildings with elevators, and a noisy pothole.

After the unsuccessful attempt of the peddler at the threshold, Ali Kemal's mother, groceries in hand, opens his door with her own keys, showing the limits of Ali Kemal's single life. While mopping the floor, Ali Kemal learns that his mother bought meat for him, despite the fact that he is a vegetarian. The mother, later sitting next to Ali Kemal, goes on to announce her discomfort with her husband's retirement days, and she openly asks Ali Kemal's help to get his father out of their apartment in the daytime. However, the dialogue between Ali Kemal and his second visitor (the woman trying to convince him to turn back to his work in the only vegetarian café in Diyarbakır, Gabo) is built through a technique of shot/reverse shot, which, in psychoanalytic film theory, is seen as suturing a narrative (Silverman, 1983). However, here the director's choice about the setting of this dialogue is rather a declaration of his place in the family triangle, differing from his communication with the rest of world. Gabo, which started to serve vegetarian and vegan dishes in Diyarbakır in 2014, becomes the carrier of a tolerable conflict

between modern and traditional Kurdish lives, the son and the father, the vegetable and the meat. Moreover, Gabo hosts a Kurdish youth different than the one shaped by impoverishment, embracing what might be called a hipster style as much as the Kurdish traditional music playing in the background. Eventually, Ali Kemal's attempt to help his mother by employing his father as a chef at Gabo ends up with his father using beef broth to prepare the supposedly vegetarian dishes on the menu. Ali Kemal's father, Seyithan Çınar, rolls his cigarette and listens indifferently to Ali Kemal's disappointment. The dialogue between son and father is portrayed in a single frame, with Ali Kemal and Seyithan sitting next to each other in the silence of evening in the café without any dramatic cause or effects. The fork between son and father is made concrete through the fork between vegetables and meat, while romanticizing the Kurdish family as a space of tolerance and togetherness despite a lack of communication, and devoid of the shadows of religion or patriarchy often portrayed in representations of Kurdish society.

Not eating meat to have red cheeks, not having enough money to be proud, and not being haunted by the desire for power, Ali Kemal's deprived factual life correlates with his deprived heroic presence, a kind of castrated manhood. Unlike Superman, he doesn't have a Lois Lane, as he watches the *Superman* on TV. In the moment in which he desperately faces with the possible final waiting for Genco, we see Ali Kemal in his shiny bathroom, which we already saw during his cleaning sequences, staring at his clothes rotating in the washing machine. In addition to his mother's sermonizing on his life, Ali Kemal's domesticized character is supported by two different women's trust and support for him

(to not lose the power completely, to not lose the chance of making money in Gabo). Womanhood—in this case, a mother and a friend—is a category divorced from any sexual references in the narration. However, the matter of gender becomes evident in the employing of a womanized manhood through domestication while presenting male community as the site of power struggles. The story is furthermore closed by Ali Kemal, following the words of women friends to not let İhsan and Salih seize power, to not give up the vegetarian and authentic foundation of Gabo. In other words, while Genco steps forward in his costume to not let two men use the super-power in the wrong way, Ali Kemal steps back without a costume to let his woman friend's capitalist understanding transform Gabo into a hot spot with bright lights and fancy decoration. Womanhood is thus posited as a force to do the right thing, in the absence of sexual tensions. The gap between the superhero Genco and the ordinary Ali Kemal establishes the grounds of the desire for an ecstatic experience in a reality determined by an emerging Kurdish middle class, despite the surrounding political circumstances. This occurs through close-up on faces, and by the use of doors and windows as the frame within a frame for an alienation effect in the absence of a non-diegetic soundtrack in the narrative.

The second and last time that we see a speech balloon is the moment when Ali Kemal is disappointed in his lack of ultimate power, immediately after being visited by the authority of that power: the silhouette of a man. Feeling sorry for himself, he cannot explain to himself why he couldn't wake up more powerful than the previous night, when he was supposed to receive the power. The invisible and ambiguous power that all the

men in the story are pursuing becomes the object of ecstatic joy that suppresses a factual reality determined by middle-class living conditions marked by debt. Accordingly, Genco becomes the persona Ali Kemal, a Kurdish middle-class citizen, desperately in need of escape from the over-determinacy of factual deprivation in financial and cultural terms. Opening the movie with Genco, the director closes the narrative with Ali Kemal, who loses all his authority over Gabo's management because of financial needs. Therefore, an imaginative Kurdish life of a linguistically homogenous society in a Kurdish city occupied by the military forces and conflicts becomes possible through a realist story handled by non-realistic means, and by excluding the non-Kurdish elements of dailyness to engage with matters of class and gender. Moreover, in such a setting, the traumatic violence of the past at the hands of the state is replaced by the traceless trauma of a gendered class structure in the present. The ultimate question then asks to be formulated in terms of the formation of ecstatic truth in unconventional uses of the camera to call for a Kurdishness beyond a national imagination, and to explore its future in terms of gender and political economy.

Ali Kemal Çınar's cinema stands for the need to re-interpret and re-present trauma's relationship to Kurdishness, through an imperfect radicalization of the tools of cinema. Announcing his motivation to make something new through cinema, as part of the Mesopotamia Culture Center's cinema collective in the 1990s, Ali Kemal Çınar represents a new place for Kurdishness to be demarcated, as a new we on the grounds of equality in ethnic and sexual terms (Personal Communication, 2020). Moreover, his

individual account of the quasi-bodies of that new we addresses the centrality of non-governmental and non-party organizations for the radicalization of a Kurdish community's demands for equality. From the low-quality images of the *belgefilm*s of the 1990s to Ali Kemal Çınar's low-budget films, the very presence of an aesthetic regime of art depends on a new partition of the sensible for Kurdish urban experience in terms of gender and class as much as ethnicity. However, gender, which is supposed to be one of the key elements of the new partition of sensible in line with the central role of Kurdish women in Kurdish politics, is held back even in the most radical works of Kurdish directors. Here it becomes crucial to re-define the topography of common life in Kurdish, not through historical Kurdish lands, but through movement itself, through diasporic presence.

Chapter 3:

An Aesthetic Regime of Kurdishness

Following the previous two chapters on the interpretation of Kurdish audio-visual emergence in relation to settled national industries, here I identify the elements of an aesthetic regime of art for Kurdishness. To this end, I open the chapter with an investigation into the topography of common life in Kurdish through an emphasis on diasporic presence and through a textual analysis of *My Sweet Pepperland.* Recognizing the role of women in contemporary Kurdish politics, I develop a discussion of Kurdish women's participation in democratic politics in relation to Kurdish women directors' struggle for emancipation from patriarchal ways of re-presenting politics and aesthetics. Following Rancière's theory of radical equality, I trace the non-Kurdish spaces of Kurdistan through two themes: poor images, which are re-circulated due to the West's interest in the Kurdish struggle, and counter-hegemonic Kurdish film festivals of the diaspora and of Kurdish cities in Turkey, which set out to educate a Kurdish audience and also end up re-defining the home(land). In light of the analytic aim in this chapter to define the non-Kurdish elements of Kurdish cinematography in terms of an extension of democratic politics, it is crucial to focus on the news' visual language and new media channels' space for the subjectification of the Kurdish political body. Viral Kurdishness functions here as a category to explore the anachronic existence of Kurdish aesthetics, as a matter of necropolitics at home, in historically Kurdish lands, and of democratic politics outside, in the diaspora. Therefore, I address works of contemporary art and alternative exhibition sites as the most possible mediators for the subjectification of Kurdish people. The invention of a polemical new space is the task for realizing the democratic force of Kurdish audio-visual literarity, a productive force for more than three decades.

1. The Topography of Common Life in Kurdish

A common interest in the separation of Kurdish people by the borders imposed by four nation states is the departure point of works on Kurdish sociology and culture, including many works belonging to the cinematic universe of Kurdish. My research on the possibilities and potentials of Kurdish cinematography also began with my reading or viewing of such works, and my engagement with their concerns and assumptions. In other words, I too have been affected by the hegemony of the national claims of Kurdish films recognized or problematized by researchers and festivals. However, the question of common life in the case of Kurdish aesthetic production, upon further study, has turned out to contain a multitude of singularities across a wide range of film making, screening, and interpretive practices, some of which were covered in the previous titles. The concept of common, in the Rancièrian sense, is established only through a distribution of the sensible in terms of spaces, times and forms of activity, enabling various individuals to participate in the common whose very presence becomes a matter of 'a polemical distribution of modes of being and occupations in a space of possibilities' (Rancière, 2011: 12, 42). Therefore, the description of a topography of common life in Kurdish becomes an investigation of the construction of the place of the common alongside the subsequent technological revolution in line with the aesthetic revolution primarily in terms of gender, as explored across this chapter. Since what defines art is also 'a matter of dwelling in a common world', an aesthetic regime of Kurdishness must be examined in terms of the components and actors of such a world (Rancière, 2010a: 121). As such,

the aesthetics of politics becomes a 'reconfiguration of the distribution of the common through political processes of subjectification' to 'not give a collective voice to the anonymous, [but] reframe(s) the world of common experience' (Rancière, 2010a: 140, 142). In other words, the political subject occurs to be 'defined by the way in which forms of subjectivication re-configure the topography of common' (Rancière, 2010a: 213). Based on the establishment of Kurdish subjects as a matter of politics, the topography of Kurdish common life calls for an investigation in terms of its modes of subjectification modes, through the Kurdish films to be mapped here.

Some of the earliest monographs on Kurds were by consuls and scholars, though by the 20th century, the Kurdish question was increasingly raised by exiled Kurdish intellectuals like the brothers Celadin and Kamuran Bedirkhan brothers, writing from outside of Kurdistan, as the representatives of Barzani's movement in Europe (Scalbert Yücel and Martin Le Ray, 2006). By the 1990s, the Kurdish issue of Turkey was raised as a national problem by a Kurdish intellectual also writing from outside of Kurdistan, in *La Question Kurde Etats et Minorités au Moyen-Orient* (Bozarslan, 1997). Scalbert Yücel and Ray address the Soviet and Russian historical impact in the construction of the field of Kurdish studies or Kurdology, in addition to the impact of later institutions established in Western centers like New York (Kurdish Heritage Foundation of America, 1981), Paris (Kurdish Institute of Paris, 1983), Washington DC (Washington Kurdish Institute, 1996), and Berlin (The Berliner Society for the Progress of Kurdology, 1999). By the 2000s, the implementation of Kurdish studies in Kurdistan has been developed in relation with these

diasporic institutions, in the universities of Iraqi Kurdistan (Scalbert Yücel and Martin Le Ray, 2006). So has the industrialization of film making, as we see in the case of Mîtos Film, which was founded in 2004 in Berlin and has mainly been co-producing films by Kurdish directors in the diaspora like Hiner Saleem, Yüksel Yavuz, Hisham Zaman, Zaynê Akyol, Shawkat Amin Korki, Soleen Yusef, and Hussein Hassan Ali. These films are mostly on and in Iraqi Kurdistan, with KRG government support, in addition to fewer films by Kurdish directors of Iran and Turkey.

The Kurdish issue has been an unthinkable, unspeakable and unspeculatable matter within the borders of the Turkish state, from the middle of the 1920 to the end of 1980s, as problematized in Mesut Yeğen's discursive analysis of the Turkish production of knowledge on Kurds and Kurdistan (Yeğen, 2009). Yet by the early 1990s the implementation of *Güneydoğu Anadolu Projesi* (or GAP, the Southeastern Anatolia Project, GAP) was empowered by scientific research and practical functions carried out by academic research, lectures and projects, which led to a relative autonomy on the information derived by researchers (Scalbert Yücel and Marie Le Ray, 2006). Eventually GAP turned out to be a central element for the Turkish state to deal with the Kurdish issue through the re-distribution of land and water (Jongerden, 2010). Despite the long-term spiral of silence on Kurds in the Turkish social sciences, the Kurdish issue of Turkey came to be discussed either in terms of forced migration or displacement, affirming the centrality of mobility/movement in defining Kurdish sociology and politics (Kurban, et al., 2006; Ayata, 2005; Jongerden, 2007).

It has been widely discussed that the multilayered development of the Kurdish movement owes its strength to the embrace of democratic tools through their attempts at institutionalization in the urban spaces of diaspora (Bruinessen, 1999; Østergaard-Nielsen, 2003; Başer, 2013). The Hollywood movie *Bridget Jones' Diary* (Sharon Maguire, 2001), based on the 1996 bestseller by Helen Fielding, is one of the few Hollywood films having a Kurdish asylum seeker from Iraqi Kurdistan. The population of Iraqi Kurdish asylum seekers was one of the largest in Europe by the late 1990s (King, 2005). Focusing on Iraqi Kurdish immigrants' experience of the West between 1991 and 2003, King interprets Iraqi Kurdish immigrants as patron seekers who 'formulate the norms of the migration process by drawing on their experience as a part of a hierarchical society structured 'primordially', encompassing a variety of roles ranging from household to tribe to state' (King, 2005: 324-325). Following the establishment of the semi-autonomous Kurdistan Government in 2003 in Iraq, there occured a wave of migration by previous asylum seekers back to their homeland. Lana Askari's ethnographic documentary *Haraka Baraka: Movement is a blessing* (2014) marks the movement between capitals (Erbil and Vienna), and languages (Kurdish, Arabic, Dutch and English) for the subjectification of Kurdish subjects of Iraq, in order to 'attest to their opportunity to live a genuine 'Kurdish life' despite the unstable situation in the region and the option to go back to Europe again' (Askari, 2015: 1999, 206). Meanwhile, following the capture of Abdullah Öcalan, the Kurdish diaspora's center of gravity evolved to be the PKK's political organizations in the 2000s, though there were in fact earlier arrivals from Iraqi

Kurdistan (Soğuk, 2008; Başer, 2013). This political clash of interest between Kurdish parties outside Kurdistan enabled Kurdish directors of exile to engage with internal conflicts as much as with the assimilationist and violent politics of the nation state, in their narratives. Being from Iraqi Kurdistan and making films in the diaspora, Hiner Saleem has addressed that intra-conflict in terms of a communication space determined by constant movement between Kurdish languages.

Hiner Saleem is among the the most well-known exilic Kurdish directors from Iraqi Kurdistan, who fled to Europe due to political oppression under the Ba'th Regime at the age of 17. During the Gulf War, after experiencing exile and Kurdish diaspora, he turned back to Iraqi Kurdistan to make his first 16 mm film *Un bout de Frontiére* (Hiner Saleem, 1991) in which he acted, alongside his brother and his father. Yet he couldn't finish filming, and had to pass to Italy with the images of the unfinished film. With the support and encouragement of Italian film producer Gillo Pontecorvo, he exhibited those images at the Venice Film Festival as *Unfinished Film* in 1992. Since then he has made twelve films on Kurdishness, in Kurdish languages, in European capitals, Armenian Kurdistan, Iraqi Kurdistan and Turkey. His films are credited for their multiple languages, a reflection of diaspora and exile, such as in *Vodka Lemon* (Kurdish, Russian, Armenian) and *Long Live the Bride… and Free Kurdistan* (Kurdish, French). Saleem's films outside Kurdistan operate as a site of contact for languages and cultures from a sociolinguistic perspective, focusing on Kurdish language's encounter with French, Russian, Armenian, and Turkish (Akın, 2012). Yet, his film in a free Kurdish land, *My Sweet Pepperland,*

marks a nuance by bringing multiple Kurdish languages (Kurmanci, Sorani and Zazaki) into conversation with each other to form a community, recalling the argument that 'a pure conscience and empathy for a language can only be possible in the conditions of the material reality of its home' (Améry, 2015: 78). *Hewler* (Erbil), the official capital of Iraqi Kurdistan and one of the historic homes of the Kurdish population, is the opening space of *My Sweet Pepperland*. Liberated from Saddam Hussein and celebrating its freedom and autonomy, the film opens with a speech in Kurdish addressing a doctor, a judge, an imam and a *pêşmerge* (Kurdish soldier), Baran, to announce the very first execution in the history of Kurdistan to punish a murderer and robber. Pride in the first implementation of the death penalty turns to a tricky exam, due to the lack of a mechanism to exercise it. The first attempt to exercise the Kurdish administration's right to execute a criminal on a box from the 2006 elections turns out to be unsuccessful. Yet, the decisiveness of a majority of the witnesses -with the national pride that comes with execution- leads to success in the second attempt. Baran's disappointment in the factual reality of Erbil becomes the first reason to move.

The protagonist of *My Sweet Land* is the Persian actress Golshifteh Farahani, or Govend in the film (referring to a Kurdish circle dance), who is an educated, young modern woman living in Iraqi Kurdistan with her family, and looking forward to bring her teaching education to Kurdish villages. Govend is accompanied by the Kurdish actor Korkmaz Baran, as Baran (referring to the rain), who is a young and loyal *pêşmerge* in search of a life liberated from political disappointments and traditional manhood. Unlike

the feature-length narratives discussed earlier, Baran is not a middle-aged man stuck in the tension between traumatic past and present consolidation. Nor is Govend a Kurdish woman fetishized or asexualized by motherhood or militancy. In the absence of occupation and a violent past act, an opposition to the patriarchal structure of the family and society and support for the bodily emancipation of the woman, and also support for musical performance, become evident through the embodied voice of Govend in Sorani, which was once a site of patriarchy, as Hassanpour has discussed in detail (2001).

Morever, it is also Govend's muted voice, in a state of anger, misery or happiness, that resembles the manner of old Kurdish mothers of exile, Basê and Nîgar, the mothers of the *Voice of My Father* and the *Song of My Mother*. But unlike the outdoor walks of Basê and the recordings of the *dengbêjs*, Govend's silence is embodied and sounded by her fingers, through a very specific percussion performance exceeding the limits of a traditional society where women have not been allowed to sing. This recalls the capacity of the speaking and the singing voice to 'transcend socio-material boundaries, join and simultaneously separate bodily interiors and exteriorities' meaning that 'the act of producing a song should not be fully detached from the messiness of the social and cultural regimes it is embodied in' (Schlichter, 2011: 34). Indeed, the body of the woman becomes a kind of vocal body echoing between mountains and borders of the Kurdish motherland through Govend's cinematic presence. Yet, the means of this vocalization of body, namely a Swiss musical instrument, the hang, frees percussion of its archaic references to traditional Kurdish music, solo singing. This also points to the resolution of

the tension between the local and the global by positing the vocal body as diegetic to the narrative. In other words, the hang performance places Govend in a specific imaginative cultural narrative, by which she directly experiences the promises of the body, time and sociability by means of close-ups on fingers, voice-over and outdoor shots. We, therefore, face a hybrid assemblage of sound with non-local images. Moreover, considering the investment of patriarchal culture in seeing rather than hearing, Govend's hang performance and the songs of the women guerrillas become a means of emancipation (Irigaray, 1985). The source of rupture is internal in the historical and social sense of Kurdishness, rather than caused by external agencies, (namely, modern nation-states). The narrative thus directly addresses what Kurdishness has become and will be in a free Kurdistan.

Govend's musically performed emancipation contrasts with Baran's enunciation in Zazaki, which performs hybridity and difference though musical experience, alongside his Alevi linguistic performance. As Chambers emphasizes, city, cinema and music all provide permanent processes of transformation that destabilize authoritarian means and meanings for the sake of musical and cultural encountering, leading to differentiated time and the becoming rhythms of subject positions (Chambers, 2012). Singing in Zazaki and listening to Bach and Elvis Presley, Baran represents a new kind of subjectivity formed by the interaction between the local and the global, as a means to claim for a modest, un-idealized, and un-romanticied existence in the present. Western songs as incidental music in the film -Western melodies accompanying American flags in Erbil- suture any possible

division introduced by American occupation. Unlike the representatives of Kurdish traditional society such as Ezîz Aga (Tarik Akreyî) in his traditional clothes, and Tajdin (Mir Murad Bedirxan), Baran wears his cowboy hat in the Qamarian village at the border of Iran, Iraq and Turkey, the crossing point of the divided Kurdistan region. His codes of dress, privileged sites for the construction and marketing of identities, in a Bayartian sense, affirms the encounter and transformation rather than asserting a resistance to the most recent occupying force in the region (Bayart, 1999). More precisely, as a feature-length film, *My Sweet Pepperland* utilizes the conventional narrative films of the Western genre without being seized by any of the elitisms of the nation state's cinemas or militant art. Embracing non-local codes to tell the story of a locale, in situ, and addressing the audience of Kurdish films as a diverse community familiar with the icons of Hollywood as much as Kurdish local icons, Saleem's film mediates migration and movement as the carrier of a common life in Kurdish.

Without the use of either the disembodied voice of recordings or the non-diegetic voice (of *dengbêj*, of a lost father), *My Sweet Pepperland* places its narrative in the here-and-now rather than the there-and-past. The film does so in the name of Kurdish subjectification processes, which are neither fixed nor stable – not only in the sense of cultural identity, but also in that of linguistic, gendered and political identity. The hang performance plays a key role here as the suture. Govend, running away from her 'Saddam-like brothers' and Baran, avoiding past conflicts between the different political agents of Kurdish identity, meet through their voices in the air, as the unification of dance

(Govend) and rain (Baran) on the acousmatic screen. Such an embodiment of voices on the visual frame breaks the oneness promised by synchronization in classical narrative films, while embracing the genre's conventions. Moreover, bringing Kurdish languages into conversation with each other to claim for a non-ideal communication space, *My Sweet Pepperland* asks its Kurdish audience to experience the necessity of mobility in linguistic terms, to place Kurdishess in its home. Bringing together Sorani, as the Kurdish language of the East Kurdistan region (Govend), and Zazaki, as the Kurdish language of the North Kurdistan region (Baran), *My Sweet Pepperland* also refers to the allegory of the very early division of the region of Kurdistan by the Ottoman-Persian border in *Mem ab Zîn* (Bruinessen, 2003). Rather than a unification, however, one can rather speak of an interaction between the disembodied voices of Govend and Baran, diegetic to the narrative, which echoes becoming Kurdish in Kurdistan when the external determinants are left behind, and the present forces of traditional tribes, a secular women's movement, and middle-class modern agents work to re-define their subjectivities through continuous movement in the language. The process of subjectification travels with the camera to establish the topography of migration and movement as the norm of common life in Kurdish films. As such, the romantization of rural life, surrounded by mountains (as in the old saying, 'no friends but mountains') for an imagined Kurdishness, in the feature-length Kurdish films is cut by the forces of migration, carried out as part of the subjectification process of Kurdish political agents in a linguistically mobile or fluid context. The very characteristic of the topography of Kurdish common life, thus, becomes its changing homes and borders, through the spatial, linguistic and temporal heterogeneity

that imposes becoming Kurdish as a matter of flexibility. *My Sweet Pepperland* challenges traditional Kurdish patriarchal limits in conflict with the women guerillas of PKK at the edge of Kurdistan, in the mountains, and so turns out to be a film about the on-going subjectification process in need of constant movement not only to run away from the past trauma or ultimate evil, but also to encounter the possibility of the present for Kurdish people.

The linguistic fluidity in *My Sweet Pepperland,* in comparison to the Kurdish films of Turkey on mobility in terms of displacement or forced migration such as *Song of My Mother* and the *Voice of My Mother,* clarifies the subject of Kurdish commercial films, a subject who has an investment in the oscillation between the disembodied voices of the past and the embodied voices of the present, for the sake of subjectification through assemblages of voice in Kurdish languages with non-local images, even at the home. And these narratives share a common understanding of Kurdish women enunciated in terms of either impossible homecoming or the home itself through memory, silence and musical performance, 'as the symbols and gatekeepers of uncontamined Kurdishness' (Aktürk, 2015). In a topography of movement through which subjectification has been realized, both the enclosure of Kurdish women in the apartments of metropolitan Turkish cities (Nîgar), or within the walls of garden houses (Basê, Gulizar) in occupied Kurdish districts, refer to a fetishization of motherhood, and to a dull womanhood in the construction of Kurdish history. Precisely, the re-construction of the family reveals the patriarchal tendencies in Kurdish commercial cinema. The future of the/a motherland,

Govend, and the women guerrillas of *My Sweet Pepperland,* however, also have a role in the cinematic movement, such as the Kurdish women's role in the establishment of an aesthetic regime of Kurdishness. Moreover, the concept of motherhood shall be seen to emerge as the most challenged concept in Kurdish politics, as we will see in the case of the subjectification process of the Saturday Mothers.

2. The Womanization of Kurdish Politics

As noted by Ofra Bengio, the history of Kurdish women is far from monolithic, due in no small part to the four different national projects of Turkey, Iran, Iraq and Syria (Bengio, 2016). In the case of today's Iraqi Kurdistan, for instance, the charismatic Kurdish woman figures are celebrated through statues and festivals, as figures of nationalism. Yet, despite the Kurdistan National Assembly's rejection of previous – and highly discriminatory – laws by the Ba'th regime in favor of laws that afforded more power and rights to women, the KRG's politics are not structured on a public understanding of women (Bengio, 2016). Although Kurdish women's participation in the political sphere was initially promoted in the former Iranian Republic of Mahabad of 1945-1946, Kurdish women in Iran are still subjected to oppression by both the Islamic Republic and traditional Kurdish society. Thus, women have played an important role in Kurdish politics (Bruinessen 2001; Mojab 2001). Under these conditions, Bengio credits gender equality as a political principle located in the paradigm developed by Abdullah Öcalan. Moreover, in claiming Syrian Kurdistan as the home of a 'revolution within a revolution' – where 75% of Kurdish

women in the region who, via active participation at varying political levels, became

liberated from traditional norms of patriarchal society -and with reference to Mojab's

emphasis upon the unresolved tensions between the nationalist movements and feminism-

Bengio concludes with this statement:

> True, many Kurdish women continue to suffer from the maltreatment of their patriarchal and traditional societies but there are strong and vibrant Kurdish women's organizations throughout Kurdistan's various regions that are active on both fronts: the feminist and the nationalist. Regarding the struggle on the nationalist front, Kurdish women's participation in military activities helps promote their feminist agenda and vice versa. Similarly, as with men, women's activities in the political and military spheres provide a ladder for social mobility (Bengio, 2016: 45-46).

Once we characterize the topography of Kurdish common life by movement,

problematizing the gender issue of Kurdish cinematography becomes a part of the history

of Kurdish women's movements, which amounts to exploring the forms of mobility for

Kurdish woman in audio-visual terms. Such an audio-visual regime embraces the political

agency of Kurdish women through public visibility since the 1990s in Istanbul, by the

Saturday Mothers protests in Taksim Square, which make the Turkish history of the

Kurdish women's movement the primary focus.

The Kurdish national movement in Turkey, which emerged from among Turkish socialist

movements, came about with an emphasis on Kurdish national identity with the

establishment of the *Devrimci Doğu Kültür Ocakları* (*Revolutionary Cultural Hearths of

the East*, DDKO) in the early 1970s. Yet, the leftist women's organization of the same

era *Devrimci Demokrat Kadınlar Derneği* (*Komeleya Jinên Şoreşger-Demokrat, Revolutionary Democrat Women's Association,* DDKD) was largely overlooked, until recently (Alakom, 2020). The period between 1974 and 1980, which saw several Kurdish political groups refer to 'national oppression', 'national liberation' and 'colonialism' in discussing the Kurdish issue in Turkey, was interrupted by the 12 September *coup d'état*. Despite the violent *coup d'état*, the PKK emerged – and survived – as the hegemonic Kurdish political party within this period and, from that point onward, posited the Kurdish issue beyond modern nation states' territorial impositions. Positioning itself as an agent of the Kurdish revolution, the feudal construction of Kurdish society emerged as central to the PKK's discourse on the colonial occupation of Kurdistan (Güneş, 2012). In other words, the Kurdish movement's two ultimate enemies were the colonial states and the feudal structure in the Kurdish region. To empower a call for resistance throughout the whole region, the myths of Kawa the Blacksmith and the struggle of Medes were embraced by the Kurdish national movement (Güneş, 2012). Unlike most national awakenings and resistance movements, the Kurdish movement's relationship with myth was transformed, after a shift in paradigm in the 1990s that positioned women as heroic figures in the ongoing struggle (Çağlayan, 2012).

Analyzing Kurdish women's dynamism within the context of black feminism by addressing the Kurdish movement's mythological embrace of the goddess Ishtar in the late-1990s, Handan Çağlayan emphasizes the new perspective of positioning women as active agents in the history-making processes (Çağlayan, 2012: 2). Instead of taking

gender issues for granted in Kurdish identity, she embraces a new construction of Kurdish identity that accepts the participation of both Kurdish men and women in their struggle against the colonizer (here, both the State and feudal powers). Çağlayan's perspective is crucial; employing imprisoned leader of the PKK Abdullah Öcalan's writings on women's identity and womanhood, she underlines how, pragmatically, the different perspectives in these writings were a result of the needs of different historical circumstances. While the discourse of 'liberating women' aimed to mobilize Kurdish society in the 1980s, Öcalan's writings at the time suggested an exchange of the woman's body freed from traditional norms, namely *namus* (honour), for the woman's body as a modern nationalist discourse's conceptualization of the motherland. Çağlayan addresses the Newroz celebrations in the first half of the 1990s as milestones for women's participation in the PKK. Zilan (real name Zeynep Kınacı), the first Kurdish woman to carry out a suicide bombing attack in 1996, emerged as the new constitutive myth in such a context (Çağlayan, 2012: 2-12).

Embracing the symbolic nature of Zilan's image on a postcard – in which she merges into the statue of Venus (the Roman Goddess of love and beauty) – Esin Düzel problematizes the 'Goddess' discourse of the Kurdish movement through a feminist reading of guerillas' diaries (Düzel, 2018). Instead of the hegemonic voice of Öcalan, the female guerillas' interpretation of Öcalan's declarations are central throughout Düzel's analysis. In other words, by crediting the agency of Kurdish women as political subjects, Düzel invites the reader to experience the narrative of these female guerilla's own histories, whilst also

recognizing their self-sacrifice and deaths as tools to overcome state violence and internal oppression. Respectively, within the history of the Kurdish national movement, Düzel chronologically categorizes the evolution of the Kurdish women's movement in terms of masculine womanhood (1984-1994), women's color (1995) and 'goddessness' (1996). Both Çağlayan's and Düzel's works claim that Kurdish women's involvement and participation in politics has not been diminished by the voice of Öcalan, but rather has had its own agenda and tools to assert its presence through pragmatic politics. Accordingly, the wearing of short hair among Kurdish female guerillas in two different historical periods presents a concrete sample of the re-conceptualization of codes and the embodiment of women's agency. As Düzel pointed out, short hair was common amongst Kurdish female guerillas in the first half of the 1990s and acted as an essential element of the idealized masculine woman (Düzel, 2018: 8). Yet, following the imprisonment of Öcalan in 1999, its status returned to being a means of expressing resistance against authority within Kurdish culture:

> A tendency emerged saying 'The leadership is imprisoned in Imrali and the women's movement is now left to our mercy, so from now on you have to get our approval for all decisions you take'. Of course, the women's movement did not accept this. There was an uprising. We made a now famous uprising. Whatever happens, no way will men make decisions about us. Our uprising was about this. All the women cut their hair. (...) It was a way to show that we did not accept [what was happening]. It created a shock: 'What's happening within the PKK movement?' This was the beginning of an insurgency. If the women do this today, other things may happen tomorrow. Everywhere we have hundreds of women fighters and we are organized. (...) Because of these actions, our male friends had to give up on what they had insisted on. (...) These actions took place in the process towards the 7th Congress, in 2000 (Quoted from Şimşek and Jongerden, 2018).

Porkur (short-haired) is a special term in Kurmanci that refers to a woman who has lost her loved ones. With roots in the Yazidi belief system, it is strictly bound to a patriarchal construction of the family. The use of short hair by Kurdish female guerillas as a symbol of resistance, rather than a sign of lament, also demonstrates the Kurdish women's movement's ability to transform such traditional norms into signs and tools of female empowerment. Here I argue that the repositioning and redefinition of such traditional concepts present one of the primary characteristics of the Kurdish women's subjectification by, firstly, distinguishing it from the founder ideology in opposition to which it was established; and, secondly, by providing further possibilities to embrace a radicalization of politics. It should also be noted that the Kurdish women's movement has claimed to be distinctly separate from Turkish feminist movements and their embrace of Kemalist tendencies during the 1990s (Yüksel, 2006).

Kurdish political parties did not run in parliamentary elections until almost ten years after the 12 September coup d'état as, until then, there was little room for leftist organizations on the political stage in Turkey. The first Kurdish political party, *Halkın Emek Partisi* (*People's Labour Party*, HEP), was established in 1990. With eighteen MPs elected to the Turkish parliament under the *Sosyal Demokrat Halkçı Parti* (*Social Democrat Populist Party*, SHP) list in the 1991 elections, the claims for recognition of Kurdish political parties were expressed in Kurmanci by Leyla Zana's oath in parliament: '*Ez vê sondê li ser ave gelê Kurd û Tirk dixwim*'.[12] A victim of violence in the Diyarbakır

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[12] 'I take this oath for brotherhood between the Turkish people and the Kurdish people'

Military Prison, Leyla Zana – who knew no Turkish until the arrest of her husband, Mehdi Zana, during the 12 September *coup d'état* – was the only woman sentenced to 15 years imprisonment, alongside Hatip Dicle, Selim Sadak and Orhan Doğan, in 1994. Throughout the history of Kurdish political parties in Turkey, their fifteen-year struggle for existence in the face of Turkish closures of pro-Kurdish political parties has resulted in the establishment of ten different political entities since the genesis of the HEP.[13] Commencing with HADEP, equal representation and the increasing participation of women in politics has very much been on the agenda of Kurdish political parties, particularly by means of a quota system. HADEP's women quota, which was initially set at 25%, increased to 35% in DEHAP, to 40 % in DTP and BDP and, lastly, to 50 % in HDP. The period of 1995, in particular, was a turning point for women's empowerment, due not only to the 40% quota, but significantly, to the implementation of a co-presidency system, which proposed gender-equal participation in leadership positions across political administrations (Taşdemir, 2013). As both Taşdemir's and Çağlayan's research suggests, Kurdish women's involvement in party politics was as subjects of transformation, not objects (Taşdemir 2013; Çağlayan 2013). Emerging at the intersection of forced migration and forced disappearances in the mid- to late-1990s, the Saturday Mothers

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[13] Chronologically, they are as follows: HEP (7 June 1990- 14 September 1993), *Özgürlük ve Demokrasi Partisi* (*Freedom and Democracy Party,* ÖZDEP, 19 October 1992- 23 November 1993), *Demokrasi Partisi* (*Party of Democracy*, DEP, 7 May 1993- 16 June 1994), *Halkın Demokrasi Partisi* (*People's Democracy Party*, HADEP, 11 May 1994-13 March 2003), *Demokratik Halk Partisi* (*Democratic People's Party*, DEHAP, 24 October 1997- 19 November 2005), *Özgür Parti* (*Free Party*, 6 June 2003- 26 June 2007), *Demokratik Toplum Partisi* (*Democratic Society Party*, DTP, 9 November 2005- 11 December 2009), *Barış ve Demokrasi Partisi* (*Peace and Democracy Party*, BDP, 2 May 2008-11 July 2014), *Halkların Demokratik Partisi* (*Peoples' Democratic Party,* HDP, 15 October 2012- Present) and *Demokratik Bölgeler Partisi* (*Democratic Regions' Party,* DBP, 11 July 2014- Present).

phenomenon became the primary public representation of wider demands for peace and reconciliation in Turkey since the 1990s (Alpkaya, 1995).[14]

Considering women's involvement in conflict, either as active militants or as mediators, feminist academics have supported several positions on reconciliation and peace. Cynthia Cockburn's feminist interpretation of war provides 'an account of the world constituted by (and constitutive of) a collective subject, a group. It is derived from life activities and achieved in struggle. It is subversive of the hegemonic account' (Cockburn, 2010: 140). Such a standpoint can be seen through the phenomenon of the Saturday Mothers, which embraces the traditional perception of 'divine motherhood' in order to empower Kurdish women's visibility in the public sphere. The language of maternal suffering has transformed the language of ethnic suffering and challenged overall power structures of gender, ethnicity and geographic location in the case of the Saturday Mothers, the Peace Mothers of former and current PKK members and the Friday Mothers of those who lost their lives in fighting against the PKK of Turkey (Karaman, 2016). In the 7 June 2015 elections, 4 out of the 11 MPs representing the pro-Kurdish HDP party in Istanbul were women. This feat was particularly symbolic in a political sense as, ten years prior, the Saturday Mothers recognized Istanbul as a Kurdish district in the grounds of Taksim

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[14] The Saturday Mothers has also become a phenomenon that solidified both Kemalist and neo-liberal Islamist ideological approaches towards Kurdish women. During the mid- to late-1990s, these women were subjected to various forms of violence at the hands of the Kemalist state in reaction to the events of the 12 September *coup d'état*. At the turn of the millennium, the continuing hostility shown against feminist political identity in the AKP era was reflected, in 2010, with the decision by then-Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan to exclude the Saturday Mothers from a meeting with other women's organizations (Coşar and Yeğenoğlu, 2011).

Square. Once positioned as the protectors of Kurdish culture and languages, Kurdish mothers' political involvement via street protests not only became a declaration against state violence and kidnappings, but also challenged the gendered construction of struggle within Kurdish politics, as can be seen in a commentary from one of the Saturday Mothers, Birsen Gülünay, on the desexualization of women as mothers:

> You work on the mothers. You ask me questions about how my life transformed with my husband's disappearance. But (…) you don't ask me if I've ever fallen in love after I lost him twenty-three years ago. I was twenty-five, you know. (…) Aren't you curious about it? (…) I know it isn't easy to ask me or a Peace Mother or a soldier's wife this question. No, it isn't easy (…) because they give us a sacred meaning. (…) I'm sure that many mothers wouldn't like it if you ask them this. But (…) you should at least think about why you can't dare to ask us this question or why this question hasn't even crossed your mind. What I'm trying to say is: Yes, the image of the mothers helped us to maintain our struggle, but it has some restrictions too (quoted from Karaman, 2016: 389).

Here I claim that the conceptualization of motherhood through an understanding of the bodies of women bearing all the traces of past experiences and traumas as the common theme of Kurdish male directors is also haunted by an ideology of the sacred. Whereas the imposition of women as the victims of a feudal order in traditional society emerges as the trauma of Kurdish women, as defined by a Kurdish woman director in *Kirase Mirinê: Hewîtî* (*A Fatal Dress: Polygamy,* Mizgin Müjde Arslan, 2009). Istanbul-based Rûken Tekeş, who founded the film production company Sarya Film in 2016, is the only Kurdish woman director announcing her autonomous art within the territory of the nation through her multi-collaborative films. Tekeş made her first short film *Hevêrk* (*The Circle,* 2016) after her career in UN human rights organizations, which specifically focused on

the establishment of film festivals on the culture of human rights in Rome, Kiev, and Venice. The spatial focus of her films has been the historical site Hasankeyf, which was one of the few remaining Ezidi lands on the Tigris River, and has been under the threat of the hydroelectric Ilısu Dam project since 2010 (Drazewska, 2018). Calling the Tigris River by its Kurdish name, *Ava Mezin* (Great Water), Sarah Elliot puts Hasankeyf in its national references in Kurdish Christian and Ezidi culture, following the national tensions and discourses embedded in *Mem and Zin,* in order to claim that Turkish state's 'heritage management processes have not only disenfranchised ICH [intangible cultural heritage] through mis-readings (non-anthropological, non-holistic) of the dam-impacted landscape, but also, as we have seen, through an official understanding of the political dimensions of, for example, oral traditions' (Elliott, 2017: 178). Producing her films with international collaborators, Tekeş's technically perfected short film *The Circle* focuses on Kurdish society's internal conflicts under the shadow of a Turkish speaking teacher at a school (*The Circle*), using Kurdish as the diegetic language. Accordingly, Turkish teacher's imposition of Turkish over Kurdish at the school becomes ordinary, even secondary, in the face of the Ezidî girl's exclusion from Kurdish society as a bewitched, evil presence by the circle drawn around her, at the hands of Kurdish children. As such, resistance to Turkish is exposed through emotional utterances in Kurdish while learning the letter 'O' of the Turkish alphabet. The Ezidi girl is thus discriminated and encircled by Kurdish Muslim boys and girls, announcing a very particular employment of Kurdish national consciousness through the lens of a woman director. Tekeş's documentary *Aether* (2019), as if exhausted by any human dialogue, puts forward nature and the

ecosystem in Hasankeyf as the carrier of a common language, in order to create a sensory experience through a non-narrative of images, rather than words. As such, *Aether*'s humans with speech impediments, legs without bodies, the children without voices reflect a post-human condition of the world, while exploring the religious and patriarchal foundations of Kurdish traditional life in rural areas, though doing so in the absence of a narrative. Announced as a documentary of Hasankeyf, *Aether*'s opening, with a gendered anxiety about the world's future through a Kurdish woman's voice-over on a black screen, turns out to be a lament on the future of Kurdish local lives. So, Tekeş's cinematography announces the first non-narrative Kurdish cinema employing an aesthetics that is not human centered, but defined by means of geographical events.

The politics of the female body has only been cinematized in the films of Kurdish exilic women directors of Turkey, such as Nuray Şahin, Rojda Şekersöz, and Binevşa Berîvan. This includes Berlin-based Nuray Şahin's feature-length film *Follow the Feather* is the sole narrative on Kurdishness that includes a lesbian love and sex scene. Again, Stockholm-based Rojda Şekersöz's feature-length *Dröm Vidare* (*Beyond Dreams,* 2017) is the only feature-length film that posits Kurdishness as one among many forms of diasporic existence, a form not determined by national trauma or militancy, but assimilated into the universal categories of adolescence and the status of immigrant. Brussel-based Binevşa Berivan is the only woman director who focuses on developing a woman's perspective on Kurdish manhood in diaspora through Kurdish women's presence in her short films. Respectively in *Phone Story* (2009) and *Sidewalks* (2011),

she fixes Kurdish men between the walls of a phone box and a basement while the women characters are occupied with movement, going about their lives in European cities. Positing Kurdish men as away from his motherland, in the search of a mother for his future family, Berivan's lens exposes the gendered construction of Kurdish culture and politics through counter stories. In *Phone Story,* a Kurdish man is portrayed in need of being liked by a woman, and does not hesitate to shave his mustache, a mark of his Kurdish manhood, based on the Kurdish woman's conservations he had been listening on a parallel line. Berivan also portrays language as the main carrier of movement in the Kurdish case by letting her characters speak and be spoken to in several languages. In *Sidewalks,* the old guerilla stuck in the basement, where he lives with his partner, becomes the representative of a crisis in a politically exhausted Kurdish manhood in the presence of women's independence, while engaging with the social life of a French-speaking city through the limits of a window, and enjoying the daytime by cooking and chatting with his mother. Unlike *Phone Story,* which is set in black and white, *Sidewalks* uses colors to embrace the contrast between the past and today, homeland and the search for mother, inside and outside, while womanizing Kurdish political identity by gendering movement. *Sidewalks* is the only Kurdish narrative with a Kurdish woman who does not want to be a mother, and who enjoys sexuality through her naked body. Yet, the body of women's struggle, which paves the way for Kurdish mothers to re-conceptualize motherhood by giving up the traditional roles ascribed to them and stepping forward to stand for politicization through street protest, could only be audio-visualized after the global recognition of Kurdish women by the January 2015 victory in Kobane against IS.

3. A Future of Emancipation: Poor Images of Kurdistan

With the sounds of military helicopters in the background, *November* (Hito Steyerl, 2004) opens with a voice-over description by Steyerl herself on the white screen: 'My best friend when I was 17 was a girl called Andrea Wolf. In 1998 she was shot as a Kurdish terrorist'. The 25-minute video *November* consists of twelve titles, including footnotes and credits. The first title, *A reconstructed witness account by a female guerrilla fighter* depicts Steyerl's friend Andrea, the protagonist of her first movie on a group of women fighting for justice with their bare hands against armed men. The next title, *Postures and Gestures*, opens with a poster of Andrea Wolf (*nom de guerre* Ronahî) in Kurdish announcing Wolf's martyrdom, in a movie theatre showing porn films. 'Her body never came back (…) What came back instead was this poster', says Steyerl's voice over. Giving a brief frame for Kurdish broadcasting through Andrea's talk on Ronahî TV, which was then the representative of the Med TV tradition, Steyerl paves the way to explore her conceptualization of the 'poor image' through Andrea's circulating image from Kurdish mountains. Steyerl, the contemporary artist and film scholar, defines the poor image as such:

> The poor image is a copy in motion. Its quality is bad, its resolution substandard. As it accelerates, it deteriorates. It is a ghost of an image, a preview, a thumbnail, an errant idea, an itinerant image distributed for free, squeezed through slow digital connections, compressed, reproduced, ripped, remixed, as well as copied and pasted into other channels of distribution (Steyerl, 2009: 32).

And she concludes that 'poor images are the contemporary Wretched of the Screen' (Steyerl 2009). Such use of Fanon's anti-colonial commentary allows for an analysis, here, of the wretched of the contemporary world through audio-visual terms.

Steyerl's investigation develops through the images of Andrea Wolf's poster in the hands of Kurdish kids in a protest in Germany shortly after 1999, when Abdullah Öcalan was captured by Turkish authorities. Under the title *Travelling Images,* her voice-over discusses how Andrea herself became an icon, copied and reproduced by printing processes, video recorders and the internet. The only other voice-overs than Steyerl in *November* belong to a former militant of the West German Urban Guerilla and a former Kurdish PKK militant. The former militant of the West German Urban Guerilla explains the impossibility of any realist aesthetics, referring to the movie *The State of Siege* (Costa Gavras, 1972). The Kurdish militant who lives in Berlin, pointing to North Kurdistan as a white spot on the map and lacking a face, announces Germany's specific place in the Kurdish issue of Turkey after the fall of Berlin Wall by trading military equipment that would be used to kill Kurdish civilians in the 1990s. Two titles on the white screen, without any poor images, successively flow on the screen to reach *Mixed Territories: 'Germany is in Kurdistan. Kurdistan is in Germany'.*

Steyerl's artistic investment in liminal experience between the real and the fictive comes to terms in Andrea's case through the circulation of Andrea's image as a 'glamorous star in a fiction' in Steyerl's first movie, then as a documentary image on Kurdish Ronahî TV,

and as a fictive unit of the video art *November*. This very precise circular history of Andrea's poor image claims to reconceptualize the truth and liberate it from a linear understanding of histories and society in the service of capitalist modernity. Here it becomes not the vertical film industry but the horizontal distribution zones of images, not factual truth but an ecstatic truth, that constructs meaning and produces the surplus value of the work of art. As such, the fetishism of high resolution so identified with technologically equipped movie theatres dissolves into ways of seeing in the service of alternative truth regimes. Moreover, as Paul Lafuente claims:

> …the soundtrack, dissociated from the images, adopts a different meaning, as do the images dissociated from their original soundtrack – perhaps because the old one is substituted by a new one, or perhaps, like the scenes from Steyerl's early B-movie that were included in November, because no sound was ever recorded? That is, the images never actually made any sound (Lafuente, 2008: 68).

Inviting the reader to question the subordination of sound in film reception, Steyerl's embrace of several poor images from documentaries, television, and popular culture, referring to Jean Luc Godard, Bruce Lee and others, basks in linguistic diversity both to pose several positions of identification and to create an alienation effect through a decentralized narrative. In her own writings, Steyerl calls us to understand the economy of poor images through the imperfect cinema of Juan García Espinosa, as a reaction to the 'technically and artistically masterful' nature of perfect cinema (Steyerl, 2009: 39; Espinosa, 1979). In the age of technical superiority and advanced images, national claims on cinema have a certain investment in perfect cinema, affirming its superiority through the fetishization of high resolutions and the hegemonic language of national arts in settled

film industries. Imperfect cinema imposes itself as a film without the condition of perfection, and instead investigates the most accessible forms, which today is the worldwide internet, to assert its political claim against the capitalist distribution of images.

Referring to the manifestos accredited to the *Third Cinema Movement*, another name, Kevin Smets, focuses on cinemas of conflict in the Kurdish case. Instead of relying on hegemonies of national film industries and national cinema discussions, Smets' fourfold categorization opens a space for films made by Kurdish militants, also, who only have internet databases, DVDs and Kurdish televisions in their distribution repertoire (Smets, 2015). Accordingly, he claims we have the culture of death (battle cinema), the culture of violence (victim cinema), the culture of negotiations (human rights cinema), and culture of indifference in the Kurdish case of cinema (Smets, 2015: 2440-2448). Positing the ongoing state of conflict in and on Kurdish identity and politics, Smets' search for a specific Kurdish cinematic environment communicates with theories against the hegemony of the myth of Total Cinema (Smets, 2015; Bazin, 2005). In a later work with Ahmet Hamdi Akkaya, Smets focuses on the guerrilla-director Halil Dağ (*nom de guerre* of Halil Uysal). Previously working as a journalist and editor for the first pro-Kurdish daily newspaper, *Özgür Gündem,* and for the first Kurdish satellite TV, MED-TV, Akkaya had the chance to meet with Dağ in 1995 (Smets and Akkaya, 2016: 82). The homeland of Andrea, Germany, emerges as the diasporic home of Halil Dağ where he discovers his Kurdishness and becomes involved in Kurdish politics. Dağ was killed in a

clash with the Turkish army ten years after Andrea's death, in 2008. Smets and Akkaya identify six projects of his, namely the documentaries *Kilamek jî bo Zagrosê* (*One Ballad for Zagros*) and *Di Jiyana Gerîla Xweza û Ajal* (*Nature and the Animal in the Life of a Guerrilla*), and the docu-fictions *Tîrej* (*Ray of Light*, 2002), *Eyna Bejnê* (*Big Mirror*, 2002), *Firmeskên Ava Zê* (*The Tears of Zap*, 2005) and his only feature-length film *Berîtan* (*Beritan*, 2006) (Smets and Akkaya, 2016: 84-85). Filmed in conflict zones by the guerilla-director Halil Dağ, each of these films is in the service of the PKK's cultural paradigm. Chalking up his inspiration to Sergei Eisentein's two main works *The Film Sense* and *The Film Form*, it is Dağ's films which brought to the fore the genre of 'mountain cinema' referring 'not only to the iconography of mountain landscapes in his films, but also to their embeddedness in the guerrilla activities in the Kurdish mountains' (Smets and Akkaya, 2016: 84, 86). Accordingly, whether on a short guerilla (*Ray of Light*), or a young guerilla who didn't have the opportunity see her whole image, lacking a mirror in the mountains (*Big Mirror*), or on the wounding of a guerilla in the mountains (*The Tears of Zap*), Dağ's cinematography embraces such topics as women, nature, and patriarchy, covering the ecological and feminist perspective of the PKK through his moving camera and amateur guerilla actors in the 2000s. Defining a Kurdistan in which mountains emerge as the home for a politically homogenous community in uniform with the acts of guerillas, Dağ's films have a documentary value as much as fictive. Furthermore, lacking the necessary conditions of any perfect cinema because of the state of conflict these films were born into, Dağ's cinema is discussed as a vernacular cinema of conflict (Smets and Akkaya, 2016).

Dağ's only feature-film *Beritan* is the first narrative on the politics of the Kurdish women's movement in the 1990s, representing the life and death of Beritan (*nom de guerre* of Gülnaz Karataş). Setting in 1992, when Gülnaz Karataş committed her act of suicide instead of being caught by the *pêşmerge* forces of Iraqi Kurdistan, *Beritan* is a propaganda film on the era of masculinized womanhood of the Kurdish movement, and made from the perspective of the era of women as goddesses, in 2006. Here I claim that the particularism evident in Dağ's films endures Steyerl's critique of the death of universalism after the fall of the Berlin Wall, and it does so through the poor images of mountains and guerrilla lives surrounded by nature. The film can be read in light of a certain process of gendered political subjectification, namely, the Kurdish women's movement. Noting Steyerl's lament on October, as she calls November the time when the 'particular, localist and almost impossible to communicate with' emerges in history, the very presence of Dağ's films invents a surplus meaning that defines the relation between the particular and the universal as a matter of re-positioning gender and geography.

The basis of Kurdish films in conflict becomes evident at the intersection of Andrea Wolf's and Halil Dağ's very reasons for being in the Kurdish cinematographic environment, namely as martyrs of Kurdish insurgent movement. At the same time that Kurdish cinema is being shaped as a discursive tool in the hands of film scholars and through popular victimhood narratives by Kurdish directors, the Kurdish insurgent movement's impact on the history of Kurdish cinematic production is present not only

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through its own media tools, institutions, and film production companies and workshops, but also by its very presence in conflict zones that have gained international attention in Syria, in the fight against Islamic State (IS). Following the January 2015 victory in Kobane against IS, Kurdish women guerrillas of the *Yekîneyên Parastine Jin* (*Women's Protection Unit*, YPJ) found themselves as the main public image, for Western Europe and the United States, of the coalition with the Kurdish movement there. The image of Kurdish women thereby earned a kind of recognition of Kurdish identity in mainstream media channels, though on the condition of silencing its political body and background (Toivanen and Başer 2016; Şimşek and Jongerden, 2018). Global interest in the defeat of IS has made the region into a focal point for journalistic accounts and documentaries, leading to a series of videos on YouTube and social media channels on Kurdish militants' daily lives and culture. Among the more popular are Vice News' *Female Fighters of Kurdistan* (2013), BBC News' *Islamic State are afraid to see women with guns* (2014), Russia Today's *Her War: Women vs. ISIS* (2015) and Günter Steinmeter's several documentaries. Focusing on Kurdish women's faces and such feminized activities as combing one's hair, spending time in front of mirrors, and cooking, ostensibly to underline the gendered nature of war, the borrowed conventions of these videos impose a Western gaze on the image of Middle Eastern women through depicting Kurdishness and Kurdistan as surrounded by weapons, while objectifying Kurdish women in the eye of a white male viewer. A consumable feminine Kurdishness under armour becomes the most popular visual material in the news, which also surfaces in cinematic works on the topic. *No Free Steps to Heaven: The Frontline Against Isıs* (Gilad Tocatly, 2014),

Gulistan, Land of Roses (Zayne Akyol, 2016), and *Les filles du soléil* (*Girls of the Sun*, Eva Husson, 2018) are respectively an Israeli documentary, a Mîtos Film documentary, and a French feature-length film starring Golshifteh Farahan—all of which have a certain investment in the global interest in Kurdish women's fight against IS. Described as a 'feminist war movie', *Girls of the Sun* had its premiere at the 71th Cannes Film Festival (Bradshaw, 2018).

Yet one would do well to recall here that the history of cinema in Syrian Kurdistan goes back to 1960, when 298 children were burnt to death in then the only movie theatre in the main capital of the Kurdish population of Syria, the city of Amûde. The *Komîna Filma Rojava* (Rojava Film Commune), founded in 2015 in northern Syria, announced its first film festival on 13 November to support its claim about reimagining society through cinema (Neon, 2019). Besides the international interest in the visual economy of war images in the Syrian Civil War, the Rojava Film Commune animates a particular film culture by implementing a cinematographic habitus mediating daily struggles and cultural sovereignty (e-flux, 2020). In other words, Kurdish cinematic products of insurgency insist on their own ways of presence by claiming an agency on the production and distribution of film pieces beyond mainstream interests in Kurdishness and Kurdistan and its conditional recognition, which tends to dismiss the whole political body. Regarding the high resolution of documentary pieces by BBC News, Vice News, and Russia Today, the poor images belonging to the Rojava film collective in the online platforms stand for an imperfect cinema of Kurdish identity that is partitioned through social networks, and

doesn't rely on industrialism, but on a multitude in cinematic communities, while re-defining the local, Kurdistan. Referring to the earlier discussion on feature-length films in Kurdish languages claiming for a national cinema in theory, and on the emergence of short films and documentaries by Kurdish institutions, the most recent non-commercial mode of production on Kurdishness and in Kurdish languages becomes the emergent element of the aesthetic regime of Kurdishness by making Kurdishness through the women's struggle, and by womanizing Kurdishness. Film festivals thus stand as the very tool claiming to establish an ethical community through a variety of Kurdish films, in the service of collective emancipation, and in the lack of museums for Kurdish history and culture.

4. Educating a Kurdish Audience

Rancière's theory of aesthetics is ultimately a theory of pedagogy through works of art, which aims at implementing dissensus by artistic means of emancipation and democracy. Positing the work of artists and artistic institutions as a modest form of micropolitics, whose focus is to 'create or re-create bonds between individuals, to give rise to new modes of confrontation and participation', he concludes that:

> …art practices displacement of film towards the spatialized forms of museum installations, contemporary forms of museum installations, contemporary forms of spatializing music, and current theatre and dance practices -all these things head in the same direction, towards a despecification of the instruments, materials and apparatuses specific to different arts, a convergence on a same idea and practice

of art as a way of occupying a place where relations between bodies, images, spaces, and times are redistributed (Rancière, 2010b: 21, 22).

Here we see rather a new formulation of museum space in the service of contemporary art works, one that embraces a hybrid and democratic base. Aesthesis thus comes to designate a mode of experience that eventually meets with social movements in the age of digital revolution, through individual engagement with the aesthetics of technology (Rancière, 2013; Vila, 2013). Art, when defined as 'a way of redisposing the objects and images that comprise the common world as it is already given, or of creating situations apt to modify our gazes and our attitudes with respect to this collective environment', becomes the necessary condition of a collective emancipation that is revoked by an ethical community deriving from the heterogenous singularity of artistic form (Rancière, 2010b: 21). 'Emancipated movement does not succeed in reintegrating the strategic patterns of causes and effects, ends and means' (Rancière, 2013: XV). Aesthetic autonomy thus emerges as the autonomy of a form of sensory experience through which an aesthetic regime of art establishes interaction between the forms of identification of art and the forms of political community by challenging the dichotomies of autonomous/heteronomous art, art for art's sake/art in the service of politics, or museum art/street art (Rancière, 2010b: 32). In such a context, the metapolitics of underground movements and the concrete energies comprising them result in the conceptualization of aesthetic education. This becomes emergent where education is formed in terms of the experience of non-possession and the imposed passivity beyond these dichotomies (Rancière, 2010b: 33-35). Tracing the commentaries of German idealist philosophers on

museums, Rancière re-positions the museum as the space for life becoming art through the exhibition's potential for the heterogenous sensible, by means of contemporary art (Rancière, 2010a: 122-124). So, in which particular ways do contemporary art and film share the same space to realize a Rancièrian emancipatory community?

In the Kurdish case, one may call the museum as the very carrier of the lack of a state, in terms of being the last-to-come apparatus for imagining Kurdishness. Museums have functioned elsewhere as somet of the earliest carriers of a national imagination, in terms of addressing audiences with the artifacts of national history and culture for modern states (Berger, 2015). Yet the first Kurdish museum, the Kurdish Textile Museum, was established in Erbil only in 2004. Being designed as a museum of textiles produced in Iraqi Kurdistan for centuries, the Kurdish Textile Museum is a conventional museum, discussed in terms of its capacity to preserve Kurdish social practices, knowledge and traditional decorative art (Deisser and Sipan, 2012).[15] However, the first permanent exhibition site of the Kurdish Publishing House SARA -which has been publishing, collecting and distributing a majority of Kurdish books, with the support of the Swedish National Council for Cultural Affairs, since 1987- was announced under the name of the Kurdish Museum in Stockholm, in 2007. The Kurdish Museum of Stockholm has been

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[15] Moreover, I suggest considering the sung home *Mala Dengbêja* (*Dengbêj* House) (which was first established in Diyarbakır in 2007and followed by other Kurdish cities of Turkey such as Van), as a living museum, in terms of the performances of Kurdish elderly male singers to invoke the historicity of Kurdishnes. Discussed through an interpretation of the Foucaultian notion of working on the self, *dengbêj* houses have been narrating a Kurdish moral community under the yoke of Turkish nationalist politics (Hamelink, 2014). However, such a discussion of the spatial connotations of the Kurdish sung home as installation sites is beyond my account of the audio-visual aesthetic regime of Kurdishness.

hosting installations by Kurdish artists of Sweden, in addition to exhibiting archival books, journals and paintings. However, the main carriers of Kurdish contemporary art - Şener Özmen, Halil Altındere and Cengiz Tekin- have been actively producing in Turkey since the 1990s. Özmen describes the art they were producing in Diyarbakır and Batman in 1990s as an art of low-resolution:

> We were the low-life, we lived low and we were repeatedly having miscarriages. It seemed like all outlets for increasing our resolution were blocked; this was how things stood politically. Life was no longer a technical problem and our works were on their way to Istanbul, cursing their fate. After some time, Diyarbakır and later Batman shelves of Garanti Platform Contemporary Art Centre[Istanbul] started to fill up with these low-resolution works and I was being held responsible for this (Öztat, and et al., 2011: 15).

Such a self-definition of Kurdish life in terms of low resolution echoes the poor images of Hito Steyerl in service of a counter-hegemonic artistic presence, as much Özmen's disappointments with early productions, haunted by elitism. Özmen has become central representative of Kurdish contemporary art, formulating the creative survival strategies of Kurdish citizens in Turkey through a certain investment in humor (Altuğ, 2011). In addition to being a writer, translator and contemporary artist, Özmen is also one of the founders of the arts house Loading, which aims at introducing young Kurdish artist to contemporary art and mentorship, in Diyarbakır with Erkan Özgen, Cengiz Tekin and Deniz Aktaş, in the second half of 2010s (Batycka, 2018). Naming the opportunity of trauma for the Kurdish artist, Özmen discusses the moving camera in low-resolution works, and later in Kurdish contemporary art in general, as the carrier of the nomadic presence of Kurdishness, which comes to terms by not being able to use a tripod in the

process of traveling and making videos, due to occupation in the Kurdish regions of Turkey (Özmen, 2016a; Özmen, 2016b). It should be noted that 'video is an independent creative medium which, as well as echoing or repeating past achivements, can be looked to for new fusions of sound, image, and performance, new ways of representing time and space' (Armes, 1988: 214). Because of the multi-layered colonial experience Özmen identifies as the cause of Kurdish art's low life in Turkey (which is typified clearly when such artists are labeled as Turkish contemporary artists in international art exhibitions), outside of Kurdistan, Washington has become the most viable space for him to realize his art alongside Kurdish artists from across Kurdistan in 2019 (Personal Communication with Özmen, 2020; Middle East Institute, 2019). In the Washington gathering *Speaking Across Mountains: Kurdish Artists in Dialogue,* there was only one Kurdish woman, Zehra Doğan, a journalist for *Özgür Gündem* who was imprisoned for more than two years on the basis of her drawings on the curfews in Kurdish districts in Turkey in 2015. Doğan gained entry to such prestigious institutions as Tate Modern with her installation *Li Dû Man* (*Left Behind*), and with the testimonial objects of state violence in 2015 (*Run Riot,* 2015). It must be noted that the works of Zehra Doğan target a non-Kurdish audience to ask for sympathy with the Kurdish cause, in the name of a certain militant art embracing the opporuntiy of trauma noted by Şener Özmen.

Another issue Özmen raises in his interviews and books is the autonomy granted by the establishment of Anadolu Kültür in Diyarbakır in 2001, as hegemonic Kurdish politics in the Kurdish region of Turkey had been in the service of certain modes of artistic

production (Özmen, 2016a). Despite the fact that Özmen's works and declarations correlate with previous discussions in my research, his production targets a public defined by curators and collectors rather than an assumed Kurdish public, which forces me to search for other spaces in the service of collective emancipation through individual confrontation and participation (Personal Communication with Özmen, 2020; Özmen, 2016b). Thus, identifying the conditions that determine the absence of an emancipatory experience of contemporary art for a Kurdish public in line with the absence of a public, in the shadow of hegemonic elitism, I embrace unsettled Kurdish film festivals as an educative tool for creating an ethical Kurdish community by implementing the necessary concepts for collective emancipation despite and beyond the so-called political hegemony of Kurdish parties upon which these festivals were built. Here it should be well noted that, as discussed by Koçer in detail, the engagement of Kurdish directors with international film festivals is also a field of struggle, such that the space, in European festivals, for Kurdish documentaries helps Kurdish directors to gain recognition back in their host country (Koçer, 2013). Yet, through my analysis, the festival is taken as an intermediary space of a Bourdiean cultural field, constructing symbolic value through cultural producers and the leverage of cultural and political capital (Burgess, 2014: 90-94). The International Duhok Film Festival of Iraqi Kurdistan, which describes itself as a national film festival, on par with other capitalist modes of film production, stands out in this discussion.

The first Kurdish film festival, the London Kurdish Film Festival (LKFF), was set up in London following film screenings in Vienna in 2001 (Gündoğdu, 2009: 72). As a member of the organization's committee in 2001, Mustafa Gündoğdu puts forwards the emergence of Kurdish film festivals in the diaspora as a historical necessity due to life experiences outside of Kurdistan. Defining diaspora as the only borderless space for Kurdish people from Turkey, Iraq, Iran and Syria, Gündoğdu posits film festivals as a tool to re-define Kurdishness in the eye of foreigners as anything but armed people (Gündoğdu, 2009: 71). Gündoğdu's account of Kurdish film festivals in continuation with the spatial organization of Newroz celebrations in the diaspora, from catastrophic places to the outdoor in time, emphasizes the communal, rather than the commercial, meaning of Kurdish film festivals (Gündoğdu, 2009: 70). The Newroz myth has, since the beginnings of 1990s, been central for the Kurdish movement to mobilize Kurds in the name of a counter-hegemonic struggle against a primarily Turkish hegemonic culture, positing resistance as a founding principle of Kurdish political subjects (Aydın, 2014). Accordingly, Kurdish film festivals occur as a new tool for counter-hegemonic struggle in the hands of new Kurdish subjects of the diaspora. In such a context, the aim of Kurdish film festivals becomes to decolonize the cinematic presence of Kurdishness while empowering a borderless Kurdishness, by claiming to be inclusive for different Kurdish political subjects, and by prioritizing the Kurdishness of the director or the language of film (Gündoğdu, 2009: 73-74).

Meanwhile, the emergence of Kurdish film festivals is discussed by Koçer as an outcome of cultures of circulation through the construction of Kurdish ethnospaces by the international reputation of Bahman Ghobadi's *Caméra d'Or*-winning film *A Time for Drunken Horses*. As such, the organization of Kurdish subjects around film festivals turns out to be an imagination of a unified Kurdish political community in the service of the Kurdish movement's symbolic sovereignty on the screen (Koçer, 2014: 477-478). Yet, I claim that the foundational challenge of Kurdish film festivals for a capitalist mode of the film festival constitutes Kurdishness as a politicization process in terms of opposition and resistance, at the same time that it tries to determine Kurdishness without borders as an inclusive category, in the search for a borderless Kurdish subjectivity rather than a unified identity. As such, 'never only or purely local, festival films nonetheless circulate, in large part, with a cachet of locally inscribed difference and globally ascribed commonality. They both attest to the uniqueness of different cultures and specific filmmakers and affirm the underlying qualities of an 'international cinema'' (Nichols, 1994: 68). Moreover, the London Kurdish Film Festival does not limit its mission to bringing together films on Kurds across the Middle East (including Iran, Iraq, Syria and Turkey); it further aims to bring together Middle Eastern and Western audiences to expand cultural dialogue between different communities in the UK (LKFF, 2020). The educative means of the film festival is realized through an individual engagement with narratives on Kurdishness, and in Kurdish languages, with an eye to creating an umbrella identity for the circulation of quasi-bodies.

Following the first Kurdish film festival organized in London in 2001, the Collective of Kurdish Filmmakers (*Le Collectif des Cinéastes et des Artistes Kurdes*/CCAK) organized a second Kurdish film festival in Paris in 2007; the third in diaspora was organized in New York in 2009 (Candan, 2016:8-16). Today, we see that several capital cities hosting Kurdish populations, such as Berlin, Hamburg, Montreal and Melbourne, have their own Kurdish film festivals, circulating, among several Kurdish communities, short movies and documentaries more than feature-length films, and in Kurdish languages and on Kurdish issues, though not necessarily by Kurdish directors. Kurdish film festivals of the diaspora educate their audiences to embrace a variety of Kurdish experience on the basis of an anti-colonial stance, while excluding certain Kurdishnesses and proposing themes to re-define Kurdishness in line with Kurdish politics in the diaspora and in Kurdish lands. For instance, Mahsum Kırmızıgül and Yılmaz Erdoğan, both of whom are making movies on the Kurdish people of Turkey, and in Kurdish districts, by employing the audibility of Kurdish languages, cannot find a place for their products in these festivals. Although the labels to define those directors and their films communicates with the focus of Kurdish film festivals, the foundation of their commercial film-making practices tends to the official ideologies of the Turkish state in their films, such as in *Ekşi Elmalar* (*Sour Apples,* Yılmaz Erdoğan, 2016) and *Mucize* (*The Miracle,* Mahsun Kırmızıgül, 2015). It is crucial to mark the fact that the commercial mode of Kurdish film-making is a matter of grey zone, with the color of Kurdish directors determined by the perfection of the image and the nation-wide distribution of film materials in certain circumstances. Having their premiere around 2015, *The Miracle* and *Sour Apples* were respectively seen by 3.737.605

and 1.237.921 people in Turkish movie theatres (BoxOffice, 2020). Both of these feature-length films construct traditional Kurdish rural life between the *coup d'état* of 27 May 1960 and 12 September 1980 as a matter of under-development and illiteracy, supporting Kemalist politics toward Kurdish populations by providing a solution: moving Kurdish young generations to the non-Kurdish cities of Turkey and giving up an imagination of Kurdish lands. Focusing on the state's privilege of building a community without any difference, Ana Maria Alonso explores the aestheticization and commodification of the ethnic heritage of low-status subjects by the state (Alonso, 1994: 396). Accordingly, the particular misplacements of Kurdish spaces by Erdoğan and Kırmızgül become the products of aestheticization and commodification of Kurdish ethnic heritage by the Turkish state. Mizgin Müjde Arslan, a Kurdish woman director and the director of the London Kurdish Film Festival for the last three years, puts *Güneşi Gördüm* (*I Saw the Sun,* 2009, Mahsun Kırmızıgül and Irmak Sueri) as an example of the official ideology's ways of caring for Kurdishness, in her edited volume on Kurdish cinema (Arslan, 2009: 319).

Among several attempts to implement festival culture in Kurdish cities, *Sinemardin Uluslararası Mardin Film Festivali* (The Sinemardin International Mardin Film Festival), *Mîhrîcana Belgefilman a Fîlmamedê* (Filmamed Documentary Film Festival) and *Festîvala Fîlman a Yılmaz Güney* (Yılmaz Güney Film Festival), which were announced respectively in 2007, in 2011, and in 2010, have been taking place, despite interruptions

due to the official approach to Kurdish cultural practices after 2015.[16] Yet, Istanbul, another *de facto* capital of the Kurdish population, could only have its own Kurdish film festival *Festîvala Fîlmên Kurd ya Stenbolê* (Istanbul Kurdish Film Festival) by 2019. Kurdish municipalities in Turkey had been supporting film workshops, as part of the empowerment of the Kurdish cultural field, until the radical shift in administrative tools at the hands of trustees after 2016. Founded by Mardin Film Ofisi and financially supported by the Ministry of Culture and Tourism, the Sinemardin International Mardin Film Festival aims to put Mardin in the league of international film festivals of Turkey, such as Antalya Golden Orange and Adana Golden Boll, rather than claiming for a Kurdish cinematographic universe. The Filmamed Documentary Film Festival, which was founded by the Cegerxwîn Center of Culture and Art for the Youth, the *Konservatuvara Aram Tigran* (Aram Tigran Conservatory) of Diyarbakır Metropolitan Municipality and Kayapınar Municipality, has been formed around the themes of addressing the actual issues in Kurdish lives, in order to collaborate for the establishment of a Kurdish film culture. Opening the first festival with *Wir sind Kurden* (*We Are Kurds,* Curd Stahn, 1982), on 18 April 2011, the 2nd Filmamed Documentary Festival dedicated the 34 films shown to the 34 Kurdish smugglers who were shot and left to die on the Turkish-Iraqi border by the Turkish army on 28 December 2011. The following year, the

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[16]*Mîhrîcana Filman a Navneteweyî ya Amedê* (The International Film Festival of Diyarbakır), which was announced in 2012 and could not survive more than two years, is the only Kurdish film festival of Turkey with a category for Kurdish national film award. The festival jury for the national film award consisted of Kurdish musician Mikail Aslan, Berlin-based Kurdish director Ayşe Polat, Kurdish directors Yüksel Yavuz and Rugeş Kırıcı and Mustafa Gündoğdu of LKFF. Centralizing film in Kurdish by Kurdish languages, the festival had few films by Turkish art movies' directors such as Zeki Demirkubuz and Seyfi Teoman. Aiming to 'create a cinematic reality responding to the people in resistance' in words of Emin Doğan, The International Film Festival of Diyarbakır is a rejection of Kurdish directors' film competition under category of Turkish national films (*Bianet*, 2012).

theme referred to the murder of three Kurdish women, Sakine Cansız, Fidan Doğan and Leyla Söylemez, in Paris in 2012, and announced 'A Free Cinema Through Women's Liberation Movement'. In the aftermath of 2015, the theme of the 4th Filmamed Documentary Festival was announced as 'Resistance Everywhere, Cinema Everywhere' and dedicated to İslam Balıkkesir who had been burned to death in the basements of Cizre the previous year. Because the trustee cut the funds supporting the Filmamed Documentary Film Festival, the festival could not take place in 2017, but was possible the following year with the collaboration of local associations and directors, and with the Middle East Cinema Academy, under the title of 'Grab Your Film and Come' (*Gazetekarınca*, 2018). In 2019, the Filmamed Documentary Festival announced its 7th screening with the main sponsorship of the European Union and such non-governmental organizations as the *Kamu Emekçileri Sendikası* (Confederation of Public Employees Trade Union, KESK) and *Türk Mühendis ve Mimar Odaları Birliği* (Union of Chambers of Turkish Engineers and Architects, TMMOB). Not having any competition category, Filmamed Documentary Film Festival has become a cinematic tool to shape public life in Diyarbakır by determining what matters cinematically for Kurdish people in their homelands. The 7th Filmamed Documentary Festival hosted 20 women directors' films among 44 films from Rojava, Europe, Latin America and the Middle East (*Gazetekarınca*, 2019).

The Yılmaz Güney Film Festival, established by the Batman Municipality in 2010, is the only film festival with a competition in the categories of short film, documentary and

short film stories. Announced with an emphasis on language, as seen in the title, the

Yılmaz Güney Kurdish Language Film Festival in 2011 described its aim as follows:

> The Batman Municipality is providing an opportunity for Kurdish young filmmakers who want to embrace the art of film, which has in fact become the most effective tool for self-expression, in order to help Kurdish people who have been muted, historically, politically, and financially. The coming generations of Kurdish filmmakers, whose productions are promising in their originality and their employment of visual intelligence in magical film language, consolidates our belief in a strong and bright future for Kurdish cinema. Today, the visual language of cinema is sitting in the place of the *dengbêj* tradition in order to narrate the Kurdish cultural reservoir and richness for the future (retrieved from Karataş, 2011).[17]

The third and fourth Yılmaz Güney Film Festival was organized while the elected mayor

Necdet Atalay was imprisoned due to allegations related to *Koma Civakên Kurdistan*

(Kurdistan Associations' Union, KCK). In 2014, the name of the festival, re-formulated

as the 5th Yılmaz Güney Kurdish Short Film Festival, and the showings were dedicated

to the Yezidî people targeted by IS in 2014. In 2015, the 6th Yılmaz Güney Kurdish Short

Film Festival's theme was announced as 'People in Resistance, Cinema in Resistance' by

the representatives of Batman Municipality, with an emphasis on the need for cinema's

magical narrations to cope with the trauma of the land (*Yeşil Gazete,* 2015). Shut down

by the trustee on 11 September 2016, the 7th Yılmaz Güney Film Festival returned in 2018

with a highlight on Yılmaz Güney's foundational possibilities for Kurdish cinema: 'We

are on the *Road* with *Hope,* Overcoming *Walls*' (*Bianet,* 2018). Since the 7th festival, the

competition categories have been replaced with project development and support units

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[17] Translation mine.

for documentaries and short films. Instead of feature-length movies, by specializing in documentaries and short films, Batman Municipality's film festival has aimed to strengthen Kurdish film making practices without being caught up in the elitism of national cinema, its *auteurs*, and its high-resolution films. Moreover, founding a whole Kurdish film festival in the name of Yılmaz Güney in Batman, the festival has stood for a Kurdish Yılmaz Güney in the face of the Turkish Yılmaz Güney of the International Golden Boll Film Festival of Adana. Deconstructing the colonial positioning of a Kurdish director, and addressing Kurdish youth as the potential carriers of Kurdish culture through film, the Yılmaz Güney Film Festival carries a specific micropolitics, encouraging an individual part or role in claiming politics. Rather than the over-determination of the quality of images in Kurdish films (an issue raised by Kurdish film festivals of the diaspora), non-diasporic film festivals, contribute to the partition of common sensory experience (Gündoğdu, 2009; LKFF, 2020). Unlike international film festivals in the service of the national imaginaries of states in financial and aesthetic terms, as discussed by Chan, the local film festivals of Kurdish films target a community to create an emancipatory artistic space for individuals (Chan, 2011). Therefore, the variable engagement of Kurdish film festivals with the function of film screenings is determined by their particular expectations from meaning aestheticized in different forms. Moreover, not staking a claim to compete with a limited number of elite film festivals, but instead welcoming local presences, Kurdish films festivals are despecified for the sake of a claim to inclusiveness, through poor images or low resolution. Embracing eclectic mediums to reproduce and synthesize the forms of differing predecessors, as video has been defined

by Armes, the very existence of Kurdish subjectification through imperfect films calls the contemporary phenomenon of digitalization into discussion (Armes, 1988: 152).

5. Viral Kurdishness

Marxist Feminist Gayatri Spivak discusses nationalism as the founding principle of imperialist and neo-colonial ideology in the multicultural present, in the case of the USA (Spivak, 2001: 179). Culture, in the age of globalism, is not only transnational matter but also a translational one, such that the re-definition of identity through the re-definition of culture becomes inevitable (Bhabha, 2001: 191). Emphasising the difference between culture as an epistemology and as a form of enunciation, Bhabha puts forward the necessity of re-conceptualizing and re-positioning the political claim of hierarchies between cultural priority and a related social act. Bhabha's interpretation of culture aims at discussing a new form of community, which embeds an ex-centric foundation of the concept of identity (Bhabha, 2001: 193-195). Accordingly, he problematizes the return of identity in terms of agency, and embraces Hannah Arendt's arguments on migration and statelessness in order to claim that identity must be understood in relation to the interpersonal construction of reality (Bhabha, 2001: 205). Exploring the concept of subject through positions of enunciation, Stuart Hall also focuses on the social aspects of cultural identity, attending to subjectification processes (Hall, 1993: 222). In line with his claim on the productivity of cultural identities, Hall names the imaginary re-discoveries of hidden histories as the grounds for today's feminist, anti-racist, and anti-colonial

movements, while positing subjectification as a matter of the future as much as the past (Hall, 1993: 225). Referring to Frantz Fanon's works, all three of these intellectuals expose their anti-colonial stance through a re-interpretation of subjectification and the social through collective identity.

> Collective identity describes imagined as well as concrete communities, involves an act of perception and construction as well as the discovery of preexisting bonds, interests, and boundaries. It is fluid and relational, emerging out of inter- actions with a number of different audiences (bystanders, allies, opponents, news media, state authorities), rather than fixed. It channels words and actions, enabling some claims and deeds but delegitimating others. It provides categories by which individuals divide up and make sense of the social world (Polletta and Jasper, 2001: 298).

The globalization of culture, indeed, embodies the globalization of homogeneity by means of advertisement, language hegemonies and clothing styles, as it realizes the repatriation of difference (Appadurai, 2001: 229). Accordingly, claims Appadurai, the imagined community of one subject is potentially the prison of another political subject, as modern nation states impose global capitalism on their own minorities. Extending the discussion of imagined community to the imagined worlds of today, he identifies five dimensions of global cultural flow: Ethnospaces, mediascapes, technospaces, financescapes, and ideoscapes (Appadurai, 2001: 220-221). Thus, he concludes:

> An important fact of the world we live in today is that many persons on the globe live in such imagined 'worlds' and not just in imagined communities, and thus are able to contest and sometimes even subvert the 'imagined worlds' of the official mind and of the entrepreneurial mentality that surround them. The suffix scape also allows us to point to the fluid, irregular shapes of these landscapes, shapes

which characterize international capital as deeply as they do international clothing styles. (Appadurai, 2001: 222)

Within this framework, the role of nation states in the distinctive global economy of contemporary culture is explained by the relation between state and nation, in terms of simultaneity and reciprocity (Appadurai, 2001). While nations are willing to have a state or state power, states simultaneously develop and monopolize nationalist ideologies for hegemonic power within their borders. Respectively, Appadurai defines two phases of the relation between state and nation. In the first phase, within the nation state, there exists a conflict between the state and will-to-state community in the ways of imagining a community, the resolution of which becomes possible in terms of either pluralism or separatism. However, in the second phase, the conflict between state and nation is under the effect of global distinctions, such that the idea of nation continuously exceeds the limits of state (Appadurai, 2001: 227). Referring to a Marxist literature, Appadurai addresses international money flows, displacing capital, and migrant workers as the carriers of emergent production and consumption fetishisms. While the fetishism of production comes about as a result of international relations of production masking social relations, the fetishism of consumption is explained through the Baudrillardian concept of simulacrum. Discussing this through the flow of capital and mediascape, Appadurai exposes how the pragmatics of the politics of difference become evident in torture and cultural genocides as much as in rebellions and migration (Appadurai, 2001: 229-230).

On 4 October 2015 the 24-year-old Kurdish activist and actor Hacı Lokman Birlik was killed by police Special Forces after they opened random fire on civilians in Şırnak, under the rule of state of siege. The police Special Forces dragged his body behind an armored police vehicle through the city of Şırnak and posted video footage of this atrocity on the internet, with the cursing and swearing of the officers audible. The devastatingly poor images went viral on social media despite a ban on the news, including the whole video. Hacı Lokman Birlik's personal story -shaped through a history of collective oppression and corresponding resistance strategies, ultimately by means of the medium of art- became the carrier of a whole body of conflict, between localized violence and the so-called universal right to live, in the Kurdish case. The short film *Bark* (*Home*, Ömer Çakan, 2015), in which Birlik is the protagonist Xacî, was shown in the 2nd Yılmaz Güney Kurdish Language Film Festival in 2012, and is now available on YouTube, with its dominant greyscale and the scenes of isolated mountains accompanied by the sounds of conflict. *Home* is a short film that embraces the conventional use of realism in Kurdish cinematography to claim its truth regime. Yet, unlike the cynic realism of popular trauma narratives, instead of pointing to the victims of the conflict as the address of identification, it focuses on the impossibility of a right to life under such conditions of conflict, in order to claim agency by muting human characters, while letting nature, the weather, and clashes be audible. William Brown suggests the concept of non-cinema to engage with the non-cinematic quality of cinema brought about by digital technology, in order to posit the human as enworlded in space (Brown, 2016: 104-105). Xaci indecisively stands at a fork between paths leading to the mountains (rural rebellion) and a paved road to the city

(urban silence) colonized by the radio broadcast of TRT announcing war policies against the Kurdish insurgent movement. *Home*, a short film on the state of war surrounding Kurdish settlements of Turkey, becomes a document of the death of its protagonist in the continuation of that war. Its technical imperfection is due to limited financial support available from the Şırnak Municipality Cudi Culture and Art Center and Şırnak Youth Working Group Association, and it solidifies how Kurdish cinematography asks to be examined in the field of conflict, as much as in the theory of settled national cinemas, and how the state of conflict determines the paths of film communities, implementing new forms of the social. Therefore, a film environment that is not reliant on capitalist modes of production and distribution pushes the discussion of the limits of Kurdish cinema from below, through audio-visual works embracing imperfectness and low resolution rather than movie theaters or art galleries. Making and demonstrating a Kurdish film thereby becomes a transhistorical force for democraticization.

Hito Steyerl, looking for the poor images of her friend Andrea Wolf in 2004, had a seat in the 13th International Istanbul Biennial with her performance titled 'Is the Museum a Battlefield?'. Şener Özmen was also supposed to be there to attend a discussion on Steyerl's performance with the curator of the Biennial, Fulya Erdemci. Yet, he instead wrote a letter to be exhibited, since Diyarbakır, the city in which he had been living, was under the smoke of clashes ignited by the devastating situation in Kobanê, surrounded by ISIS militants. Watching Steyerl's performance the next morning again, his writing evolved into a manifesto:

Previously, I said at my solo exhibition at Pilot Gallery, "Museum workers are immortal..." Hito deciphers and reveals—museums are the cultural spaces of the oligarchic wealth, and definitely a battlefield.

Just like that… I was a sophomore in high-school if I'm not mistaken. The military had decided that all the students would go to the garden of the municipality where they exhibited dead guerilla bodies. It was an awful sight. There were three dead bodies underneath the alcove. The commander stood on top of a stool and told us that our end will be similar to theirs. It was written PKK, with a ball-point pen, on the woman's Mekap shoes. And there was a star. Half of her head was gone. No one cried. Who could cry anyway!? That was part of the education! (Özmen, 2018: 160).

Positing his letter as an artistic form for Kurdish life, Özmen emphasis on the unpredictabile space of art galleries and biennials for Kurdish residents is tied to Steyerl's problematization of museums (Personal Communication with Özmen, 2020). Steyerl's 'Is the Museum a Battlefield?' is a lecture performed through videos, in English with Turkish and Kurdish subtitles next to each other on the screen, while Kurdish dialogues are only accompanied by English subtitles. She opens the discussion through the black and white images from *Oktyabr* (*October: Ten Days That Shook the World,* Grigoriy Aleksandrov and Sergei M. Eisenstein*,* 1927) demonstrating the destruction of the museum by the revolutionaries. Yet, the challenging part of her performance comes by her example of a battlefield from the mountain of Van, where her friend was caught alive and tortured to death by soldiers, according to the guide, in the Turkish capital of Istanbul. With explanatory notes on the image in the black half of the screen, Steyerl tells how Andrea and thirty more PKK guerillas were disappeared, while their belongings and clothes remained on the battlefield. Explaining the whole situation in an even voice, and supported by images of the battlefield on her iPhone, Steyerl brings an imaginary 20 mm

ammunition case fired by Cobra helicopters into her performance through an image she took from the battlefield. Steyerl then declares her aim: to follow the bullet backwards, to reach the people who used it by means of video shots. Focusing on the imaginary bullet she is holding between her thumb and index fingers, Steyerl re-conceptualizes the art works of museums as either holding a bullet or having a bullet hole. Switching between the imaginary bullet she is holding during her presentation and the 20 mm ammunition case fire she found on the ground in Van, Steyerl travels with her iPhone's camera alongside the companies financially supporting the military organizations to expose the invisible bullet travelling around art galleries and the biennials. She concludes that, in resistance to wars, public museums are the forms needed to exceed art sponsored by military organizations in the present. Using her iPhone's torch, Steyerl invites her audience to the Platonic cave in order to recognize their agency and politics that matter, to not let the bullet kill more people. Steyerl, presenting the battlefield before the Turkish audience since the beginning, through a discussion of the capitalist modes of exhibition, announces the urgency of an anti-capitalist production mode for an artist in the service of an emancipated public.

Tim Kennedy, in his comparative research on Armenian, Kurdish and Palestinian national identities in cinema, concludes that cinematic Kurdishness ends up with a 'virtual nation' of imagined Kurdistan, following a series of geopolitical events in 1980s (Kennedy, 2007: 175-178). In the second half of the 2010s, a new series of geopolitical events in northern Syria challenged both Kurdish national consciousness and the audio-visual reflections on

Kurdish identity. Kurdish women fighters of the *Yekîneyên Parastine Jin* (Women's Protection Unit, YPJ) have become the focus of attention in Western Europe and the United States following the January 2015 victory in Kobanê. YPJ women fighters made the headlines of mainstream newspapers and popular journals, and were even featured in the international, self-declared, women's life-style magazine *Marie Claire* for their remarkable efforts in the battle against the Islamic State (Griffin, 2014). The photograph of a blond-haired woman fighter of the YPJ went viral as the 'Angel of Kobane', and became a symbol of the fight against terror under these circumstances (BBC Trending, 2014). Being dragged behind an armored vehicle as the terrorist to fight, or armed with a military outfit in front of the cameras as the fighter against terror, viral Kurdishness is matter of hegemonic ways of seeing and embracing Kurdish political presence, as the object of politics rather than the agent, while having a certain investment in the opportunity of trauma. Whereas 'terror is precisely the name that trauma takes in political matters' (Rancière, 2010b: 114), and the trauma is the new name of evil with its innocent and guilty parties as the condition of ethical turn in an aesthetic regime of art (Rancière, 2010a: 186).

Kurdish cinematic presence has been shaped since the second half of the 20th century as a matter of survival under the continuous threat of nationalist state politics. And it has been problematized within national cinema discourse either with regard to Kurdish political parties' cultural politics or by an academic interest in Kurdish films. However, Kurdish cinematography has been developing not only in line with Kurdish politics but

also with Kurdish people, and with the emergent Kurdish artistic spaces inside and outside of Kurdistan—Kurdish communities that have been variously called a 'cyber nation', 'mediated nation', or a 'virtual nation' (Sheyholislami, 2010; Smets, 2017; Kennedy, 2007). Viral Kurdishness emerges as a work of the hegemonic ways of seeing of Kurdish subjects of democratic politics, unlike the nationalized categories for addressing a Kurdified peoplehood. Alongside the discursive and content analysis of this particular film universe, commercial modes of production and distribution have been the focus of a common interest in a Kurdish artistic regime. Yet, the impact of cinematic works of and on Kurdish identity asks to be examined through the most accessible distribution networks for its non-homogenous, acentric and highly political particular public, due to its embedded power in making Kurdishness. Because of the fact that:

> (…) video is not tied to the limitations of the movie theatre or domestic interior: a video tape may run as an endless loop in a gallery installation, be part of a performance situation, or require a battery of monitors and speakers for its variety of images and multiple sound sources. Video can be seen to bring a new vitality to a spread of viewing situations extending from institutional or educational contexts to gatherings of avant-garde artists and their public. While 16 mm films used in audio-visual aids contexts have tended to suffer from being seen as inferior to 'real' cinema, and avant- garde practice has habitually been marginalized in film culture, video has the potential to be a positive communal form, bringing together small but involved audiences, breaking down old barriers and fusing previously separate forms and genres (Armes, 1988: 142).

Despite the Kurdistan Regional Government's administrative autonomy and its claims to be the main agent for the conventional construction of Kurdish national cinema, a Kurdish cinematic presence imposes itself in the politically imperfect forms and videos of the digital age. Democratic politics, which relies on the presumption of equality, also depends

on equal access to making and seeing films as a mediator of subjectification in the name of an emancipated we.

CONCLUSION

My curiosity about Kurdish cinema began with the film language of an oppressed nation against hegemonic and colonial impositions. In time, this expanded into a critical exploration of the meanings attributed to that nation, and to Kurdishness. My research on Kurdish cinema has been met with doubts about the possibility of narrative in a language, Kurdish, that has not been officialy recognized until recently. Between the years of 2015 and 2020, I have been thinking, reading, talking and writing on Kurdish audio-visual presences in several platforms, addressing a variety of audiences. Turkish academics have not hesitated to express their surprise about my insistence on the necessity of knowing Kurdish languages to have any claim on the diegetic construction of Kurdish films. Kurdish male academics working on cinema, meanwhile, have questioned the political stance of my research. As a Kurdish Alevi woman from Dersim, my mother tongue was not Kurmanci and my intellectual interests were not in harmony with Kurdish national desires. In these circumstances, the questions I ask of Kurdish cinema have evolved to consider the particular modes of subjectification formed through implicit and explicit rules about what and how to claim and what and how to dismiss in and by Kurdish films. Throughout this research, I have critically engaged with questions of Kurdish cinema in order to expose clashing ideologies in this specific film universe, through not only commercial, feature-length films in Kurdish languages, but particularly through the emergence of several institutions, directors and discourses working in the non-commercial spaces of the Kurdish film universe (at least, to the extent that a rapidly evolving political climate has allowed). Having identified the limits of commercial Kurdish films for interpreting the sociology and politics of Kurdish lives and aesthetics,

I started to investigate cinematic forms in the service of an aesthetic regime of Kurdishness liberated from modern forms of imagining the nation, as well as from movie theaters, and in the service of democratic politics.

The imagination of homogeneous time has helped modern nation-states to spread a sense of territorial and linguistic sameness, with broadcasting serving as an investment in collective memory. Yet the democratization of media channels with the rise of globalization and technological development has led oppressed communities to engage with broadcasting for their identities, long denied and targeted for assimilation. Some discussions of national cinema have called attention to the limits of conceptualizing cinema through strictly territorial terms, and have exposed the nature of this situation for oppressed communities under the rule of a single nation-state. Yet in the Kurdish case, because Kurds have been subjected both to the assimilation policies of four separate nation-states, and to differentiated diasporic experiences at the hand of various host countries' immigrant policies, more than four structures of time -chronologies of trauma- and collective memory have evolved, depending on the corresponding nation-state's homogenous imagination of time for Kurdishness and Kurdish cultural workers' engagement with cinema to speak for something like a nation. Throughout my investigation, I have critically engaged with the heterogenous elements of Kurdish cinema -namely films, collectives, and festivals- to problematize the national, political and revolutionary claims of Kurdish aesthetics by directors, academics, and possible virtual publics, in the name of making Kurdishness.

In the first chapter, recognizing Turkey's settled film industry's opportunities for Kurdish filmmaking practices, and Yılmaz Güney's centrality to Kurdish cinema's claims, I posit his performative identity as a Kurdish citizen, director, writer and actor of Turkey as a prism through which to see the colonial presence of Kurdish cinematography alongside the emancipatory potential of art as living. As an original account of Kurdish cinematography demands a horizontal understanding that attempts to close the gap between theory and practice in the name of Kurdishness, Güney's varied performances throughout his career as an activist demonstrate the strategic positionings through which making Kurdishess becomes possible in audio-visual terms, despite widespread dependence on settled film industries. Although Güney's cinematography announces the medium of film as the carrier of truth for Kurdish people through its international reputation, it is also Güney's persona that challenges realist aesthetics to go beyond already-there meanings attributed to Kurdishness by the then- governing ideology, Kemalism, through the shock of the real. Accordingly, Güney's cinematography can be thought of a set of moving pieces, each of which investigates several Kurdishnesses, oscillating between voluntarily assimilation and continuous resistance in the service of an a-centric and a-chronological Kurdishification in audio-visual terms. Güney's more recent popularity, blended with the aesthetics of the shock of the real, contrasts with the popular address of feature-length movies in Kurdish languages, as his popularity emphasizes the agency of history's victimized people under the yoke of neo-liberal Islamist ideology of the AKP government in the 2010s. However, the desire of a

commercial mode of cinema for national totalities is valid in the Kurdish case, through a pedagogy of the real, to place traumatized Kurdishness in a passive victimhood discourse in the name of the recognition of Kurdish languages, and to claim its own popular narratives within the limits defined by hegemonic powers—i.e., the officially recognized space for narrations of Kurdishness, and Kurdish languages in movie theatres. Kurdish feature-length films, as the carriers of Kurdish cinema discussions, have employed unsynchronized time as a means for processing collective memories that both carry and project the fractured, traumatic pasts of differentiated Kurdish lives through their multilingual perspective on fluid spaces. The fluxes of time are independent of each other, but all depend on denial and violence, albeit from different sources. Particularly, in the case of industrially produced, technically perfected feature-length films, while the Kurdish directors of Turkey engage with the aftermath of the 12 September *coup d'état* and the political environment of Kurdish society characterized by forced migration, disappearance, and torture in the 1990s (*Voice of My Father, Song of My Mother, Come to My Voice, The Trace*), Kurdish directors of Iran engage with life on the border, mostly focusing on a narrative of smuggling and a desire to exceed the border, which is the real condition for Kurdish society within the borders of Iran (*Turtles Can Fly, A Time for Drunken Horses, Hezar-o Yek Siv* [*1001 Apples,* Taha Karimi, 2013]). The Kurdish directors of Iraq, meanwhile, focus either on the internal conflicts of Kurdish communities after independence, or the trauma of the Anfal Genocide in 1988 (*Bîranînen li ser Kevirî* [*Memories on the Stone,* Shawkat Amin Korki, 2014]*, Dol* (*Dol: The Valley of Tambourines*, Hiner Saleem, 2007), *Welatê Efsane* (*Land of Legend,* Rahim Zahibi,

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2008). Each Kurdish community, whether in Turkey, Iraq, or Iran, thus has been represented within its particular political and historical existence. Different directors address their own common experience of time in terms of different collective traumas and rely on commercial feature-length films to put forward different claims to legitimately represent Kurdish history. And how Kurdish directors discuss the significance of their own films, similarly, shifts according to different political and historical contexts. Thus, Kurdish directors during Turkey's Peace Process prefer to identify their productions as 'political films by a Kurdish director' or their own situation as a 'Kurdish director with Turkish citizenship' (Doğan, 2013; Mintaş, 2013). Such identification, it bears stressing, is not the same as 'trying to progress on the way of the sun and spring,' in the words of exilic Kurdish director Hineer Saleem from Iraq, as noted in Chapter I (Saleem, 2009). Based on the pragmatic engagement of Kurdish male directors with factual politics in order to access the technical equipment for perfected commercial films in Kurdish lands, exilic Saleem's framing of Kurdish cinema demands its radicalization in light of industry, identity, and resistance.

Furthermore, the limited popular audience of Kurdish feature-length films is also flagged in film scholars' interpretations of Kurdish cinema, as is the taste and room for such films in international film festivals. Within such a historical and political context, which frames Kurdish cinematography as a discursive tool within capitalist film modes, a claim for truth telling emerges as the domestication of non-linear and non-smooth conflict zones in favor of a consumable/digestible form of Kurdish culture. Affirming the hierarchies of

nationalist theories by addressing its audience either as a homogenous totality or as festival goers, the perfection of feature-length movies and documentaries in Kurdish languages, and a technically perfect Kurdish national film culture, are tied to a representative regime of art embracing Kurdishness as trauma, as determined by various modern nation-states. However, encountering and engaging not only with hegemonic nation-states, but also with the cultures and everyday experiences of the countries and cities to which Kurds have migrated, Kurdish engagement with the medium of film has taken on movement as the common topography of any Kurdish cinematographic habitus. It has done so in conditions marked by the impossibility of a unified collective memory and standardized language. This exposes the politics of Kurdish audio-visual aesthetics through an embracing of movement not only in terms of internal migration, forced migration, and exile, but also in reference to unstable subject positions operating in dynamic languages and non-standard communicative spaces.

The focus of the second chapter is the Mesopotamia Cinema Collective, which was founded to empower Kurdish culture and support the use of Kurdish languages in urban spaces. The reason for this focus has to do with the Collective's investment in creation of a new we for Kurdish people via artistic mediation, in addition to being one of the earliest carriers of a technical revolution brought about by video to make claims for Kurdish modes of movement. As Armes emphasizes 'film and video use different recording substances and therefore inevitably have different qualities and potentials' (Armes, 1988: 117). Focusing on collective film making practices in Istanbul and Diyarbakır since 1996,

I explore how the Mesopotamia Cinema Collective employs the genres of documentary and short films in order to invent and equip its political community through cinematic productivity, in addition to other cultural activities. Mesopotamia Culture Center stands for the foundation of a non-commercial mode of Kurdish film making since the 1990s. Having its own workshops and production company, the Collective constitutes the central social body representing a democratic politics in coordination with the culture centers of Kurdish municipalities in Kurdish districts like Diyarbakır and Batman, to claim for an ethical community of individual participation through the common sensory experience of being a Kurd in urbanized times. Unlike the feature-length Kurdish narratives of founding traumatic past experiences in the 2010s, the films of the Mesopotamia Cinema Collective point to the gap that Kurdish communities are trying to fill as they are subjected to violence and impoverishment, as part of ongoing struggles in capital cities. And therefore, such filmmaking posits a factual reality as the condition of Kurdish cinematic presence in the name of Kurdish politics' evaluation of truth regimes. The realist tendency in these particular Kurdish filmmaking practices, I claim, is the result of the politics of an agreement between cinematic presentation and a regime of meaning, and is therefore the carrier of a militant art by quasi-bodies for Kurdishnesses.

It is crucial to recognize the will to challenge the factual foundation of the real in feature-length Kurdish films and the Collective's documentaries and short films, by means of digital technologies and lowbudgets. Kurdish cinema's canonical interpretation focuses on statelessness, border, and death. And through Kurdish films' relations to settled

national film histories, such interpretations acknowledge the industrial filmic mode of production and the elitism of perfect cinemas, which amounts to recognizing Kurdish aesthetics within limits determined by hegemonic aesthetic cultures. However, an aesthetic regime of Kurdishness pushes the limits of a representative regime of Kurdish art from below, through non-commercial film production and screening practices from the new space of a we. The emergence of super heroes and un-realistic conditions of urban life in middle class lives in Diyarbakır, amount to a declaration of the limits of a representative regime of Kurdishness. Cinema in this way becomes the primary site for an emancipation of Kurdish audiences from the over-determination of hegemonic political categories to claim politics in itself with its low-resolution images and differing narrations of Kurdishness on the basis of internal conflicts in the name of class, gender and Other, rather than conflicting Kurdish parties. Giving a historical account of the claim for a national cinema and identifying the limits of the promise of a representative regime for the reassertion of community and art in the first two chapters, in the third, I define the means of the Kurdish cultural field's ethical transformation in the name of a Kurdish subjectification process. This, I claim, is emancipated from a negotiation with hegemonic modern nation states and with politics shaped in the name of counter hegemonic struggle, and holds on to the diegetic use of Kurdish languages to color its audience. Accordingly, the geopolitical re-discovery of Kurdish women through an internationally recognized military victory and an ethnicized gender politics, and the de-specification of film through public film festivals and internet platforms, have become two main characteristics of the contemporary aesthetic regime of Kurdishness in the service of making Kurdishness.

Tracing the genealogy of his non-cinema concept, William Brown names Eisenstein and Vertov's revolutionary cinema, Italian neo-realism, Peter Wollen's 'counter-cinema', Julia Garcia Espinosa's 'imperfect cinema', Glauber Rocha's 'aesthetics of hunger', Fernando Solanas and Octavio Gettino's Third Cinema, Jean-François Lyotard's 'acinema' and Deleuze's 'minor cinema' as expressions of a will to oppose the mainstream forms and contents of cinema (Brown, 2016: 116). I claim that the Kurdish film universe's references to this particular tendency make it possible to posit the future of Kurdish non-cinema as the carrier of a linguistically determined we in the service of a re-definition of aesthetics through video. From Yılmaz Güney's references to the Soviet cinema of revolution, and from the re-interpretation of Italian neo-realism in his groundbreaking 1970 film *Hope*, Kurdish cinematic presence has positioned itself against the mainstream by employing techniques of collective production and reinterpretations of realism (the Mesopotamia Cinema Collective), Third Cinema (Halil Dağ) or imperfect cinema through poor images (Hito Steyerl). Brown's analysis specifically develops through an emphasis on the politics of cinema as much as the ontology of cinema.

> The cinematic equivalent of the peripheral, the barbarian, and the wretched of the earth are the films that are: similarly, peripheral -in terms both of what I shall call the periphery without and the periphery within; films that are similarly 'barbaric' -in form if not in content; and films that are similarly impoverished, or 'wretched'. As the peripheral, the barbarian and the wretched are consigned to 'non-being', so might such films be considered 'non-cinema' (Brown, 2016: 108-109).

Aesthetic experience, says Rancière, bears both a new art of living of individuals and community, and the promise of a new humanity (Rancière, 2010a: 176). Accordingly, the radical use of cinematographic instruments as we see in the circulated videos from Tahrir Square or Taksim Square pushes the question of 'the rehabilitation of images against the so-called critical tradition' in the name of a new common bet on the anonymous people's union and in the power of images (Vila, 2013: 16). Kurdish commercial feature-length films—in the sense both of the 'cinema of the Kurds' and 'cinema in Kurdish'—articulate a cinematographic subject via an oscillation between a gendered past and an ongoing present due to rupture and becoming, rather than any imagined homogenous time or unified collective memory as a stabilizing icon of the nation. Moreover, the temporal construction of commercial narratives cuts through the multilingual and floating in-between spaces by way of the nostalgia-laden narratives of women's bodies. While 'restorative nostalgia' focuses on rebuilding the symbols and rituals of a lost home, 'reflexive nostalgia' inhabits algia longing itself (Boym, 2001: 41). Yet, Kurdish presence as the peripheric (underdeveloped), barbaric (armed), or wretched (stateless) of modern nation states is still a matter of living through continuous politicization and agency in terms of political and social transformation rather than a matter of a traumatic past to encounter. The factual realism of Kurdish films exposes itself in the tension between algia and the embodied pleasure of subject positions articulated with linguistic preferences, that most concrete of ties to an impossible home, Kurdistan. Accordingly, the aesthetic regime of Kurdishness has been formed by the oral roots of Kurdish culture to re-present contemporary everyday life in the modes of reception as the 'guardian of popular

memory' to build shared experiences in the present (Gabriel, 2020 [1989]). Here it is crucial to note that trauma narratives on Kurdish films are attempts to encounter with the violence of the Kemalist state, whereas Kurdish cinema has been developing in the neo-liberal Islamist era in 2010s. This also means that the violence toward Kurdish identity and politics by the governing rule since 2015 has yet to find expression in Kurdish narratives. As yet, we only see certain forms of counter-Kemalist stance in commercial Kurdish narratives.

The common reference of the *dengbêj* figure in commercial and non-commercial Kurdish films has been another issue in this research. Addressing the roots of Kurdish culture through diegetic or non-diegetic recordings or in protagonists' developing characters to encourage a collective memory and identity, Kurdish commercial films embrace the work of Kurdish oral traditions in narrating trauma. Oral tradition, as embodied in the everyday through forms of knowledge, is the main carrier of the struggle against official languages and histories. Recalling that, at every level (recording, listening or even sharing), recordings let us experience the body, time and sociability of imagined cultural narratives, recordings in Kurdish languages cover linguistic and spatial heterogeneity on behalf of the once-there community freed from the determinacy of territory. Therefore, Kurdish directors' reinterpretation of the figure of *dengbêj* either as representatives of endangered memory (*Song of My Mother*, *Zer*), or as the forerunners of social problems (*Nîwemang* [*Half Moon*, Bahman Ghobadi, 2006] *Vodka Lemon*, *Come to My Voice*), serve as attempts to reevaluate Kurds' collective memory while paving the way for the recognition

of the unstable and fluid here-and-now reality of Kurdish culture. Yet, unlike the *griot* filmmakers of African cinema, whom Papaionannou describes as 'subtle educators and agents who negotiate the story with their audiences at the crossroads of cultural reality and fiction, historical past and fastasmatic future, rathen than strictly between African tradition and westernized modernism' (2009: 143), Kurdish directors of commercial films instrumentalize the *dengbêj* to invite authentic Kurdish subjects to negotiate modern subject positions. Therefore, having its roots in oral tradition, Kurdish culture's engagement with cinema is haunted by the director's colonial positions in between traumatized nationhood and Westernized modernity, while liberating itself from an essentialist reconstitution of Kurdish identity through 'a pre-colonial ideological and cultural revival of the past', as in African cinemas (Papaioannou, 2009: 154). Yet, an investigation into the contextual references and the appereances of *dengbêj* culture in the Kurdish cinema is beyond the scope of this research. In her research on the impacts of *dengbêj* culture on Kurdish theather, Duygu Çelik problematizes the emergence of actors as *dengbêj* or actual *dengbêj* playing dramatic roles in addition to her investigation of the textual impact of Kurdish oral tradition (Çelik, 2017). The question of Kurdish cinema in relation to Kurdish oral history calls for further work. My research rather attempts to expose the roots of Kurdish films in journalistic activities, as a carrier of truth for a horizontally defined Kurdish public, rather than a public determined by the hegemonic politics of an era.

Focusing on activist aesthetics and critical spectatorship, Teshoma Gabriel concludes his elaboration of the Third Aesthetics as follows:

> The 'wretched of the earth', who still inhabit the ghettos and the barrios, the shanty towns and the medinas, the factories and working districts are both the subjects and the critics of Third Cinema. They have always '[smelled] history in the wind'. Third Cinema, as guardian of popular memory, is an account and record of their visual poetics, their contemporary folklore and mythology, and above all their testimony of existence and struggle. Third Cinema, therefore, serves not only to rescue memories, but rather, and more significantly, to give history a push and popular memory a future (Gabriel, 2020).

The state of siege as the norm of late modern colonial occupation (Mbembe, 2003) has recently been one of the key concepts of contemporary politics in Turkey. The devastating image of the 57-year-old mother of 11, Taybet İnan, shot dead by security forces and left lying on a street in Silopi for a week, has been iconic of the violence in besieged Kurdish districts. Kurdish women have, across the same period, gained international recognition after their armed struggle in Syria in 2016. The gap between these two images referring to Kurdish identity in the same era crystallizes the tensions embedded in any art claiming to represent a univocal Kurdish sense of community without recognizing its politics of inequality. The tension between the traumatic there-and-past and the fractured here-and-now in commercial narratives addresses Kurdish subjects in terms of either a restorative or reflexive nostalgia for identification by positing the body of women as the mediator of the will to nation. The gender issue of the Kurdish subjectification process sits, then, at the heart of present experience through the politicization of Kurdish women, and through the womanization of Kurdish politics. Despite the paucity of Kurdish woman directors

and the limited spaces recognized for a womanhood which hasn't been demarcated by either sacred motherhood or armed militancy, Kurdish women's lives manifest the patriarchal foundation of Kurdish cinematography and Kurdish languages through mediated channels. Based on my analysis of commercial film modes' patriarchal codes, the radicalization of cinematography in terms of gender needs a post-human aesthetics shaped through 'featuring techno-mythologies, cyborg embodiments and rhizomatic bodily performativity' by digital means and social media (Ferrando, 2016: 2). Thus, this becomes either a contemporary art, or video project, or internet footage one not haunted by the elitisms of art galleries and consumption culture, which will meet the aesthetic regime of Kurdishness with its very public, we.

Therefore, I conclude that the presence of non-commercial Kurdish film festivals in Kurdish settlements or in exile as an account of an aesthetic regime beyond testimonial art, and not haunted by the elitism of international film festivals or the representative, claims of feature-length trauma narratives. Relying neither on technologically developed perfect cinemas nor on popular narratives, nor still on competitions, Kurdish film festivals are a call for Kurdish audiences to participate in the foundation of a new common world for an ethical community conditioned to a democratic politics of equality in the name of peace and freedom. The future of Kurdish cinematography, I conclude, depends on an ethical community that does not transcend, but reclaims Kurdishness in its new place. Such a cinema depends on the embracing of digitalization to realize itself by individual participation in a common world, due to the necessity of an anti-capitalist stance against

the commercialization of art through conflicting interests, parties and states. This imposes itself as the condition of a liberated artistic regime for the anachronic presence of Kurdish cinema.

Kurdish lives, which have been under the rule of sovereign violence since the early 20th century, are the carriers of an aesthetic regime of Kurdishness by their ways of surviving in the face of structural and physical violence. Achille Mbembe detects the expression of sovereignty in 'the power and the capacity to dictate who may live and who must die', such that 'becoming subject therefore supposes upholding the work of death' (Mbembe, 2003: 11, 14). He addresses the power of speech and thought in terms of the communicative act, while developing a body politics of death against siege and occupation (Mbembe, 2003). I posit cinema as a home for the communicative act that will empower speech and thought for the Kurdish social body by its capacity to fold the future into the present through an aesthetic regime of imperfect, nomadic audio-visual assemblages, and through the most accessible of platforms, the internet, to make its people. Efforts to promote publications in Kurdish languages notwithstanding, a re-distribution of the sensible for Kurdish community essentially becomes possible through audio-visual literarity. For, people engage in democratic politics on the basis of equality in terms of a literarity they can access when the lack of a standardized language encourages other forms for democratic presence.

APPENDIX I: Films Referred to, Listed Alphabetically

- **Director, Year, Original Title, English Title**

- Abus-Assas, Hany et al., 2011, *Unutma Beni İstanbul*, *Don't Forget Me Istanbul*

- Acet, Gülistan, 2013, *Bihuşta Zebeştan*, *Watermelon Heaven*

- Akay, Ezel et al., 2012, *F-Tipi Film*, *F Type Film*

- Akyol, Zayne, 2016, *Land of Roses*, *Land of Roses*

- Aleksandrov, Grigoriy & Eisentein, Sergei M., 1927, *Oktyabr*, *October: Ten Days That Shook the World*

- Arslan, Mizgin Müjde, 2009, *Kirasê Mirinê: Hewîtî*, *A Fatal Dress: Polygamy*

- Askari, Lana, 2014, *Haraka Baraka: Movement is a Blessing*, *Haraka Baraka: Movement is a Blessing*

- Aydın, Tayfur, 2011, *Rêç*, *Trace*

- Aydoğan, Zekeriya, 2013, *Xal û Xwarze*, *The Uncle and the Nephew*

- Barış, Sedat, 2016, *Pîyê Min Toz Şeker*, *My Father Sugar*

- BBC News, 2014, *Islamic State are afraid to see women with guns*, *Islamic State are afraid to see women with guns*

- Berivan, Binevşa, 2009, *Phone Story*, *Phone Story*

- Berivan, Binevşa, 2011, *Sidewalks*, *Sidewalks*

- Bezar, Mîraz, 2009, *Min Dît*, *Before Your Eyes*

- Cooper, Merian C. & Shoedsack, Ernest B., 1925, *Grass*, *Grass*

- Çakan, Ömer, 2015, *Bark*, *Home*

- Çınar, Ali Kemal, 2017, *Gênco*, *Genco*

- Çınar, Ali Kemal, 2005, *Ev*, *Home*

- Çınar, Ali Kemal, 2006, *Dolap*, *The Cupboard*

- Çınar, Ali Kemal, 2007, *Duvar*, *The Wall*

- Çınar, Ali Kemal, 2008, *İnfaz*, *The Execution*

- Çınar, Ali Kemal, 2009, *Arınma*, *Katharsis*

- Çınar, Ali Kemal, 2009, *Şev*, *The Night*

- Çınar, Ali Kemal, 2010, *Wenda*, *Lost*

- Çınar, Ali Kemal, 2010, *Bajar*, *The City*

- Çınar, Ali Kemal, 2013, *Kurte Film*, *Short Film*

- Çınar, Ali Kemal, 2017, *Veşarti*, *Hidden*

- Çınar, Ali Kemal, 2018, *Di Navberê De, In Between*

- Dağ, Halil, -, *Klamek jî bo Zagrosê*, *One Ballad for Zagros*

- Dağ, Halil, -, *Di Jiyana Gerîla Xweza û Ajal, Nature and the Animal in the Life of a Guerilla*

- Dağ, Halil, 2002, *Tîrej*, *Ray of Light*

- Dağ, Halil, 2002, *Eyna Bejnê*, *Big Mirror*

- Dağ, Halil, 2005, *Firmeskên Ava Zê*, *The Tears of Zap*

- Dağ, Halil, 2006, *Berîtan*, *Beritan*

- Doğan, Zeynel, 2003, *Çekçek*, *Çekçek*

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- Dolu, Zülfiye, Demirbaş, Nura & Özalp, Güllü, 2000, *Em Her Tim Koçberin*, *We're Always Migrants*

- Erdoğan, Yılmaz, 2016, *Ekşi Elmalar*, *Sour Apples*

- Eskiköy, Orhan & Doğan, Zeynel, 2012, *Dengê Bavê Min*, *Voice of My Father*

- Flatherty, Robert, 1922, *Nanook of the North*, *Nanook of the North*

- Gavras, Costa, 1972, *The State of Siege*, *The State of Siege*

- Ghobadi, Bahman, 2000, *Zamani Barayé Masti Asbha*, *A Time for Druken Horses*

- Ghobadi, Bahman, 2004, *Lakposhtha Parvaz Mikonand Lakpos*, *Turtles Can Fly*

- Ghobadi, Bahman, 2006, *Niwemang*, *Half Moon*

- Göl, Mehmet Amin, 2013, *Araf*, *The Purgotry*

- Gören, Şerif & Güney, Yılmaz, 1981, *Yol*, *The Way*

- Gülçiçek, Çiğdem, 2013, *Pace*, *The Window*

- Güney, Yılmaz, 1970, *Umut*, *Hope*

- Güney, Yılmaz, 1974, *Arkadaş*, *Friend*

- Güney, Yılmaz, 1968, *Seyyit Han*, *Bride of the Earth*

- Güney, Yılmaz, 1983, *Duvar*, *The Wall*

- Husson, Eva, 2018, *Les Filles du Soleil*, *Girls of the Sun*

- Kabak, Hatip, 2013, *Ezman*, *The Sky*

- Karabey, Hüseyin, 2014, *Were Dengê Min*, *Come to My Voice*

- Karabey, Hüseyin, 2008, *Gitmek: My Marlon and Brando*, *My Marlon and Brando*

- Karabey, Hüseyin, 2018, *İçerdekiler*, *Prisoners*

- Karahan, Ferit, 2014, *Dervûyîna ji Bihûştê*, *The Fall From Heaven*

- Karimi, Taha, 2013, *Hezar-o Yek Siv*, *1001 Apples*

- Kırmızıgül, Mahsun, 2015, *Mucize*, *The Miracle*

- Kırmızıgül, Mahsun, 2009, *Güneşi Gördüm*, *I Saw the Sun*

- Korki, Shawhat Amin, 2014, *Bîranînen li ser Kevirî*, *Memories on the Stone*

- Küçük, Özkan, 2003, *Yıllar Sonra İşte Diyar-ı Bekir*, *Years Later, here is Diyarbekir*

- Küçük, Özkan, 2005, *Diyarbekir Damlarında*, *On the Roofs of Diyarbekir*

- Küçük, Özkan, 2005, *Mamoste Arsen*, *Master Arsen*

- Küçük, Özkan, 2005, *Nohutlu Pilav*, *Rice with Chickpeas*

- Küçük, Özkan, 2010, *Seyit, Hakikat Yolunda*, *Sheikh, On the Path to Truth*

- Küçük, Özkan, 2013, *Pepuk*, *Pepuk*

- Küçük, Özkan et al., 1999, *Karkerên Avahiyan*, *Builders*

- Maguire, Sharon, 2001, *Bridget's Jones' Diary*, *Bridget's Jones' Diary*

- Mintaş, Erol, 2014, *Klama Dayîka Min*, *Song of My Mother*

- Olgaç, Bilge, 1965, *Krallar Kralı*, *The King Among the Kings*

- Ökten, Zeki, 1978, *Sürü*, *The Herd*

- Öz, Kazım, 2008, *Bahoz*, *The Storm*

- Öz, Kazım, 2017, *Zer*, *Zer*

- Öz, Kazım, 1999, *Ax*, *The Land*

- Öz, Kazım, 2001, *Fotoğraf*, *The Photography*

- Öz, Kazım, 2005, *Dûr*, *Far Away*

- Öz, Kazım, 2014, *Hebû Tune Bû*, *Once Upon A Time*

- Öz, Kazım, 2008, *Demsala Dawî Şewaxan*, *The Last Season: Shawaks*

- Öz, Kazım, 2016, *Çinara Spî*, *White Scyamore*

- Öz, Kazım et al., 1996, *Destên Me Wê Bibin Bask, Emê Bifirin Herin*, *Our Hands Will Become Wings, We'll Fly Away*

- Öz, Kazım et al., 1996, *Rengên bi Keda Destan*, *Groping for Colors*

- Polat, Hebun, 2018, *Welatek Hebû*, *There Was a Country*

- Rosebiani, Jano, 2002, *Jiyan*, *Jiyan*

- Russia Today, 2015, *Her War: Women vs. ISIS*, *Her War: Women vs. ISIS*

- Ruttmann, Walter, 1927, *Berlin: Symphony of a City*, *Berlin: Symphony of a City*

- Saleem, Hiner, 2013, *My Sweet Pepperland*, *My Sweet Pepperland*

- Saleem, Hiner, 1998, *Vive la mariée... et la libération du Kurdistan*, *Long Live the Bride… and Free Kurdistan*

- Saleem, Hiner, 2003, *Vodka Lemon*, *Vodka Lemon*

- Saleem, Hiner, 1992, *Unfinished Film*, *Unfinished Film*

- Saleem, Hiner, 2007, *Dol*, *Dol: The Valley of Tambourines*

- Sheeler, Charles & Strand, Paul, 1921, *Manhatta*, *Manhatta*

- Stahn, Curd, 1982, *Wir sind Kurden*, *We Are Kurds*

- Steyerl, Hito, 2002, *November*, *November*

- Şahin, Nuray, 2005, *Perre Dima So*, *Follow the Feather*

- Şekersöz, Rojda 2017, *Dröm Vidare*, *Beyond Dreams*

- Tekeş, Ruken, 2016, *Hevêrk*, *The Circle*

- Tekintangaç, Yakup, 2013, *Qapsûl*, *The Capsule*

- Tekintangaç, Yakup, 2015, *Azad*, *Azad*

- Tocatly, Gilad, 2014, *No Free Steps to Heaven: The Frontline Against ISIS*, *No Free Steps to Heaven: The Frontline Against ISIS*

- Uzkinay, Faruk, 1913, *Ayestefenos'taki Rus Abidesinin Yıkılışı*, *The Destruction of the Russian Monument of Ayestefanos*

- Ünal, Mahmut İlyas et al., 2003, *Surların İki Yakası*, *Two Ends of the Wall*

- Vice News, 2013, *Female Fighters of Kurdistan*, *Female Fighters of Kurdistan*

- Zahibi, Rahim, 2008, *Welatê Efsane*, *Land of Legend*

- Zaman, Hisham 2013, *Before Snowfall*, *Before Snowfall*

APPENDIX II: A Chronological List of Commercial Films by Kurdish Producers (1982-2019)

Turkey, Iraq, Iran, Diaspora (1982-2019)

- **Director, Year, Original Title, English Title, Producer**

- Gören Şerif, & Güney, Yılmaz, 1982, *Yol*, *The Way*, Turkey-Switzerland-France

- Güney, Yılmaz, 1983, *Duvar*, *The Wall,* Turkey-France

- Arıç, Nizamettin, 1992, *Kilamek ji bo Beko*, *A Song for Beko*, Armenia-Germany

- Saleem, Hiner, 1998, *Vive la mariée... et la libération du Kurdistan*, *Long Live the Bride… and Free Kurdistan*, France

- Ghobadi, Bahman, 2000, *Zamani Barayé Masti Asbha*, *A Time for Drunken Horses*, Iran

- Ghobadi, Bahman, 2002, *Gomgashtei dar Aragh*, *Marooned in Iraq*, Iran

- Rosebiani, Jano, 2002, *Jiyan*, *Jiyan*, Iraq-USA

- Saleem, Hiner 2003, *Vodka Lemon*, *Vodka Lemon*, France-Italy-Switzerland-Armenia

- Şahin, Nuray, 2004, *Perre Dima So*, *Follow the Feather*, Germany

- Ghobadi, Bahman, 2004, *Lakposhtha Parvaz Mikonand*, *Turtles Can Fly*, Iran-France-Iraq

- Saleem, Hiner, 2005, Kilomtere Zéro, Kilometre Zero, France-Iraq-Finland

- Rostami, Jamil, 2005, *Marsiyeh Barf*, *Requiem of Snow*, Iran-Iraq

- Salih, Masoud Arif & Hassan, Hussein, 2006, *Û Nergiz Biskivîn*, *Narcissus Blossom*, Iraq-France

- Ghobadi, Bahman, 2006, *Niwemang*, *Half Moon*, Austria-Iran-Iraq-France

- Saleem, Hiner 2007, *Dol*, *Dol*, Germany-Iraq-France

- Zaman, Hisham, 2007, *Vinterland*, *Winterland*, Norwey

- Öz, Kazım, 2008, *Bahoz*, *The Storm*, Turkey

- Zabihi, Rahim 2008, *Welatê Efsane*, *Land of Legend*, Iran-Germany

- Saleem, Hiner, 2009, *Après la chute*, *After the Downfall*, Germany-France

- Bezar, Mîraz, 2009, *Min Dît, Before Your Eyes*, Germany-Turkey

- Saeedi, Ebrahim, 2010, *Mandoo*, *Mandoo*, Iraq

- Saleem, Hiner, 2011, *Si tu meurs, je te tue*, *If You Die, I Will Kill You*, France

- Hozatlı, Umur, 2011, *Azadiya Wenda*, *Lost Freedom*, Turkey

- Abdi, Shiar, 2011, *Meş*, *Walking*, Turkey

- Aydın, M. Tayfur, 2011, *Rêç*, *The Trace*, Turkey

- Maslakhi, Shahram, 2012, *Helana Sotawakan*, *Burning Nestes*, Iran

- Ghobadi, Bahman, 2012, *Fasle Kargadan*, *Rhio Season*, Iraq-Turkey

- Eskiköy, Orhan & Doğan, Zeynel, 2012, *Dengê Bavê Min*, *Voice of My Father*, Turkey

- Kader, Karzan, 2012, *Bekas*, *Bekas*, Sweden-Iraq-Finland

- Nasiry, Jalal, 2013, *Kani Pari*, *Fairy Spring*, Iran

- Salavati, Salem, 2013, *Zemestane Akhar*, *The Last Winter*, Iran

- Saleem, Hiner, 2013, *My Sweet Pepperland*, *My Sweet Pepper Land*, Iraq-France-Germany

- Zaman, Hisham, 2013, *Before Snowfall*, *Before Snowfall*, Norway-Germany - Iraq

- Zaman, Hisham, 2014, *Letter to the King*, *Letter to the King*, Norway-United Arap Emirates

- Öz, Kazım, 2014, *Hebû Tunê Bû*, *Once Upon A Time*, Turkey

- Mintaş, Erol, 2014, *Klama Dayîka Min*, *Annemin Şarkısı*, Turkey-France-Germany

- Karabey, Hüseyin, 2014, *Were Dengê Min*, *Come to My Voice*, Turkey-France-Germany

- Kahraman, Ferit, 2014, *Derbûyîna Ji Binustê*, *The Fall from Heaven*, Turkey-Italy

- Aminnejad, Hiwa, 2015, *Malawa Analog*, *Farewell Analog*, Iran

- Çınar, Ali Kemal, 2015, *Veşartî*, *Hidden*, Turkey

- Ali, Hassan, 2016, *Behind the Clouds: Salute to Peshmerga*, *Behind the Clouds: Salute to Peshmerga*, Iraq

- Yusef, Soleen, 2016, *Haus Ohne Dach*, *House without Roof*, Germany-Iraq-Qatar

- Hassan, Hussein, 2016, *Reseba*, *Reseba – The Dark Wind*, Germany-Iraq-Qatar

- Khalil, Mano, 2016, *Die Schwalbe*, *The Swallow*, Switzerland

- Baroshi, Fekri, 2017, *A Dream Before Dying*, *A Dream Before Dying*, Iraq

- Özkahraman, Ender, 2017, *Biryarekê Zor*, *Ugly Duckling*, Turkey

- Ott, Peter, 2017, *The Milan-Protocol*, *The Milan-Protocol*, Germany

- Mafakheri, Jamil, 2017, *I Had Seeded Pomegranted for You*, *I Had Seeded Pomegranted for You*, Iran

- Aydemir, Hasim, 2017, *14 Tirmeh*, *14 July*, Turkey

- Korkmaz, Amed, 2017, *Leyla*, *Leyla*, Turkey

- Öztürk, Bülent, 2017, *Mavi Sessizlik*, *Blue Silence*, Belgium-Turkey

- Öz, Kazım, 2017, *Zer*, *Zer*, Germany-Turkey-USA

- Çınar, Ali Kemal, 2017, *Gênco*, *Genco*, Turkey

- Konar, Mehmet Ali, 2017, *Hewno Bêreng*, *Colorless*, Turkey

- Kalifa, Sahim Omar, 2017, *Zagros*, *Zagros*, Belgium-Netherlands

- Demir, Mehmet Salih, 2017, *Cano*, *Cano*, Turkey

- Şekersöz, Rojda, 2017, *Dröm Vidare*, *Beyond Dreams*, Sweden

- Çınar, Ali Kemal, 2018, *Di Navberê De*, *The Between*, Turkey

- Mohamadian, Alireza, 2018, *Towards Salvation*, *Towards Salvation*, Iran

- Partovi, Kambozia, 2018, *Camion*, *Camion*, Iran

- Nooranipour, Behrouz, 2018, *Dayan*, *Dayan*, Iran

- Mermer, Sami & Benchekroun, Hind, 2018, *Xalko*, *Xalko*, Turkey

- Salavati, Salem, 2019, *Dame Sobh*, *At Dawn*, Iran

- Tekeş, Ruken, 2019, *Aether*, *Aeter*, Turkey-Italy

- Kazemipour, Parnia, 2019, *Borva*, *Believe*, Iran

- Karaaslan, Serhat, 2019, *Görülmüştür*, *Passed by Censor*, Turkey

KRG (Kurdistan Regional Government) (2009-2018)

- **Director, Year, Original Title, English Title, Producer**

- Korki, Shawhat Amin, 2009, *Kick off Kirkuk*, *Kick of Kirkuk*, KRG-Japan

- Mayi, Viyan, 2010, *Doz*, *Doz*, KRG

- Ali, Hassan, 2010, *The Quarter of the Scarecrows*, *The Quarter of the Scarecrows*, KRG

- Arif, Masoud, 2011, *Shadow of A Bullet*, *Shadow of a Bullet*, KRG

- Nerwayi, Hushyar Z., 2012, *Ka Waar*, *Where is the Land*, KRG

- Baroshi, Fekri, 2012, *Le Heşargey Sêrda*, *In the Lion's Den*,KRG

- Osman, Adnan, 2012, *Sêguşey Merg*, *Death Tranglee*, KRG

- Rosebiani, Jano, 2012, *Êk Momik Du Momik*, *One Candle Two Candle*, KRG

- Aziz, Ako, 2012, *10 Çirke*, *10 Seconds*, KRG

- Ali, Hassan, 2012, *Şirîn*, *Shirin*, KRG, France

- Ali, Awat Osman, 2013, *Leave to Stay*, *Leave to Stay*, KRG

- Jano, Mohammed, 2013, *Semyan*, *Samyan*, KRG

- Kerkuky, Aziz, 2013, *Frmeski Paykarakan*, *Sculptures' Tears*, KRG

- Sewdin, Hussein, 2013, *Mizhoey wen*, *Lost History*, KRG

- Korki, Shawkat Amin, 2014, *Bîranînên li ser Kevirî*, *Memories on the Stone*, Germany-KRG

- Taher, Welid M., 2015, *Pako*, *Pako*, KRG

- Khalil, Sardar, 2015, *Semay Aspekan*, *The Dance of Horses*, KRG

- Doski, Kordo, 2015, *Mikael*, *Mikael*, KRG-USA-UAE

- Baroshi, Fekri, 2017, *Xewna Pêş Merg*, *A Dream Before Dying*, KRG

- Bamami, Jowan, 2018, *Hero of the Century*, *Hero of the Century*, KRG

- Hussein, Rizgar, 2018, *Qurbani*, *Sacrifice*, KRG

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Summary of the Doctoral Dissertation "On the Aesthetic Regime of Kurdish Cinema: The Making of Kurdishness''

Kurdish cinema's emergence without a state-based industry and homogenized audience is an anachronical event that raises questions about the making of Kurdish subjects in the age of late capitalism and of technological revolutions. In this thesis, the question of a Kurdish subject is mediated by or hailed within a gap between the desire for the totality of a national cinema (*a cinema* able to articulate *the Kurdish subject*) and the grounded truth of acentric and diverging Kurdish realities, through which any subject must necessarily be articulated (*cinemas* that compel us to ask, *which Kurdish subjects*). The process of subjectification implied by the oscillation between these two ends precisely addresses an aesthetic demarcation marked by not only the oppressive politics directed at Kurdish identity, but also by the particular ways in which Kurdish cinema workers, including academics and researchers, engage with becoming Kurdish in the name of democratic politics. In other words, once recognizing the implicit and explicit rules imposed on the very possibility and development of Kurdish cinematography, the question of Kurdishness also becomes a matter of aesthetics. My research asks, can we speak of Kurdish cinema as productive of subjects, and if so, then what are the politics of this process of subjectification?

Through my investigation, I expose the multiple layers of Kurdish cinema constructed by Kurdish films and directors, by academics working on Kurdish cinema, by Kurdish institutions, and by contemporary artists. By employing a content analysis of films in

Kurdish languages, identifying Kurdish directors as agents of history making, and investigating attempts to institutionalize Kurdish cinema, I address the Kurdish presupposition of equality to act in an aesthetic regime of art. I structure my research under three chapters: 'A Foundation of Kurdish National Cinema', 'A Re-interpretation of Kurdish Trauma', and 'An Aesthetic Regime of Kurdishness'. In the first chapter, I explore the foundations of Kurdish national cinema to reach the establishment of a theology of time in Kurdish feature-length narrative films, and to explore the discourse of Kurdish national cinema. Here the modernization of Kurdish culture in terms of the audibility of Kurdish languages presents the very political ground or the possibility of any national audio-visual regime of Kurdishness. The second chapter is structured to problematize the popular theme of victimhood in feature-length narrative films in Kurdish languages by claiming a re-interpretation of Kurdish trauma in terms of political economy. In feature-length narrative films, where the color of Kurdishness is determined by the trauma its subjects have faced under the yoke of whichever modern nation state they exist within, trauma becomes the founder of Kurdish subjectivity, in commercial Kurdish films, as a founding past experience. In this respect, the category of the unrepresentable in art emerges as key to uncovering the necessity of a re-conceptualization of ethics for a Kurdish audio-visual regime, to re-interpret the Kurdish form of cinema. In the last chapter of my research, I investigate the aesthetic regime of Kurdishness in terms of the topography of common life in Kurdish, taking root beyond Kurdistan. Hereafter, the conventional imposition of Kurdish victimhood meets with the agency determined by resistance in Kurdish film festivals of short films and

documentaries rather than the perfected trauma narratives in feature-length films in Kurdish.

Based on the detailed discussion, across these three chapters, of national cinema, the art of the un-representable, and digital revolution, I aim to reveal the necessity of exploring the aesthetics regime of Kurdishness in audio-visual terms, in order to articulate the subjectification processes leading to an ethical community in the name of Rancièrian democratic politics. Kurdish languages, and oral tradition stand in as the carriers of a subjectification process that marks a Kurdified collective body. As such, this investigation also attends to the formation and content of Kurdish utterances, as part of the analysis. This in turn raises the question of Kurdish ethical community as a matter of the political presence of Kurdishness re-claiming its national foundation beyond the nation for an emergent *we*. Yet, the gap between the political recognition Kurdish women have gained and Kurdish cinema's patriarchal appearances marks this particular ethical community in a particularly gendered manner. I posit cinema as a home for the communicative act that will empower speech and thought for the Kurdish social body. It does so by folding the future into the present through an aesthetic regime of imperfect, mobile audio-visual assemblages. Kurdish cinema thus makes its people through the most accessible of platforms, the internet. The future of Kurdish cinematography, I conclude, depends on an ethical community that does not transcend, but reclaims Kurdishness in its new place.

Keywords: Aesthetics, Kurdish, Subjectification, Politics, Trauma, Democraticization

Samenvatting van de Doctoraalscriptie 'Over het esthetische regime van de Koerdische Cinema: De vorming van het Koerdische subject'

De opkomst van de Koerdische cinema heeft plaats gevonden zonder staatsindustrie en een gehomogeniseerd publiek. Dit vorm een anachronische gebeurtenis, die vragen oproept over de vorming van het Koerdische subject in het tijdperk van het late kapitalisme en van digitale revoluties. In deze thesis wordt betoogt dat de vorming van een Koerdisch subject plaats vindt tussen het verlangen naar de totaliteit van een nationale cinema (een cinema die in staat is om het Koerdische subject te articuleren) en de realiteit van a-centrische en uiteenlopende Koerdische realiteiten, waardoor elk subject noodzakelijkerwijs moet worden gearticuleerd (de cinema die ons dwingt om te vragen, welke Koerdische subjecten). Het proces van subjectivering, dat ontstaat door de beweging tussen deze twee uiteinden, de idee van en nationale cinema en uiteenlopende realiteiten, richt zich op een esthetische afbakening. Deze afbakening wordt gekenmerkt door de onderdrukkende politiek van de Koerdische identiteit en de uiteenlopend manieren waarop werkers in de Koerdische cinema, waaronder academici en onderzoekers, zich engageren om Koerdisch te worden in de naam van de democratische politiek. Met andere woorden, wanneer men eenmaal de impliciete en expliciete regels erkent die aan de mogelijkheid en de ontwikkeling van de Koerdische cinematografie worden opgelegd, wordt de kwestie van het Koerdisch ook een kwestie van esthetiek. Mijn onderzoek vraagt zich af of we kunnen spreken van Koerdische cinema als subject-vormend, en zo ja, wat is dan de politiek van dit proces van subjectivering?

Door mijn onderzoek leg ik de verschillende lagen van de Koerdische cinema bloot die door Koerdische films en regisseurs, door academici die aan de Koerdische cinema werken, door Koerdische instituten en door hedendaagse kunstenaars worden geconstrueerd. Door een inhoudelijke analyse van films in Koerdische talen, het identificeren van Koerdische regisseurs als agenten van het maken van geschiedenis, en het onderzoeken van pogingen om de Koerdische cinema te institutionaliseren, richt ik me op de Koerdische vooronderstelling van gelijkheid om te handelen in een esthetisch regime van kunst. Drie hoofdstukken vormen de kern van mijn onderzoek: 'Een Stichting van de Koerdische Nationale Film', 'Een Herinterpretatie van het Koerdische Trauma', en 'Een Esthetisch Regime van het Koerdisch'. In het eerste hoofdstuk onderzoek ik de fundamenten van de Koerdische nationale cinema om te komen tot een tijdstheologie in Koerdische speelfilms, en om het discours van de Koerdische nationale cinema te verkennen. De modernisering van de Koerdische cultuur in termen van de hoorbaarheid van de Koerdische talen vormt hier het politieke terrein - de mogelijkheid - van een Koerdisch nationaal audiovisueel regime. Het tweede hoofdstuk is gestructureerd om het populaire thema van slachtofferschap in speelfilms te problematiseren door een politiek-economische herinterpretatie van het Koerdische trauma. In speelfilms, waar de kleur van het Koerdisch wordt bepaald door het trauma dat subjecten onder het juk van welke moderne natiestaat ondergaan, wordt het trauma, als stichtende collectieve ervaring uit het verleden, de grondlegger van de Koerdische subjectiviteit in commerciële Koerdische films. Deze categorie van het niet-representeerbare in de kunst komt naar voren als de

sleutel tot een nieuwe ethiek voor een Koerdisch audiovisueel regime. In het laatste hoofdstuk van mijn onderzoek, bestudeer ik het esthetische regime van het Koerdische in termen van de topografie van het gewone leven dat buiten Koerdistan wortel schiet. Hierbij ontmoet het conventionele idee van het Koerdische slachtofferschap de agency van het verzet in de Koerdische filmfestivals van korte films en documentaires in plaats van de geperfectioneerde traumaverhalen in speelfilms in het Koerdisch.

Op basis van een gedetailleerde discussie in deze drie hoofdstukken over nationale cinema, de kunst van de niet-representeerbare en digitale revoluties, onthul ik de noodzaak om het esthetische regime van het Koerdische in audiovisuele termen te onderzoeken, om de subjectificatie-processen die leiden tot een ethische gemeenschap in de naam van de Rancièrische democratische politiek te articuleren. Koerdische talen en mondelinge overlevering zijn de dragers van een subjectificatie-proces dat een Koerdisch collectief lichaam markeert. Als zodanig is dit onderzoek ook gericht op de vorming en de inhoud van Koerdische 'uitspraken', als onderdeel van de analyse. Dit roept op zijn beurt de vraag op of de Koerdische ethische gemeenschap een kwestie is van de politieke aanwezigheid van de Koerdische gemeenschap, die haar nationale basis buiten de natie om opeist voor een zich vormend wij? Maar de kloof tussen de politieke erkenning die Koerdische vrouwen hebben gekregen en het patriarchale optreden van de Koerdische cinema markeert deze bijzondere ethische gemeenschap op een bijzondere wijze. Ik stel de cinema voor als een huis voor communicatief handelen en het vermogen om de toekomst in het heden te ontvouwen. De toekomst van de Koerdische cinematografie, zo

concludeer ik, hangt af van een ethische gemeenschap die het Koerdische niet overstijgt, maar het op een nieuwe wijze claimt.

Sleutelwoorden: Esthetiek, Koerdisch, Subjectificatie, Politiek, Trauma, Democratisering

Curriculum Vitae

Bahar Şimşek was born in Tunceli, Turkey in 1985. In 2008, she graduated from the department of Mathematics at Middle East Technical University. Shortly thereafter, she received her MA from Ankara University, based on research on ethnic encounters in Turkish films. Between the years of 2009 and 2017, she worked as a research assistant in the Department of Radio, Television and Cinema at Ankara University. As one of the Academics for Peace in Turkey, she was dismissed from Ankara University by decree number 679 on January 6, 2017, after which she continued her research in Area Studies at Leiden. Her PhD research explores the political histories within which Kurdish cinema has taken shape, and offers a political-theoretical framework for making sense of contemporary forms of aesthetic experimentation in Kurdish film. In 2017 and 2020, she helped to organize the International Flying Broom Women's Film Festival, and in 2021, she organized the first International Conference of Academic Freedom as a Human Right.