On the aesthetic regime of Kurdish cinema: the making of Kurdishness

Şimşek, B.

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

[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

[5] Emphasis original.

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

[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 20thcentury (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]

[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

[8] Emphasis original.

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.