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On the aesthetic regime of Kurdish cinema: the making of Kurdishness
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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 *belgefîlm*) 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

[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,

belgefîlm, 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

[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

*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

[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

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.