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

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Chapter 3:

An Aesthetic Regime of Kurdishness

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

1. The Topography of Common Life in Kurdish

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

2. The Womanization of Kurdish Politics

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

women in the region who, via active participation at varying political levels, became liberated from traditional norms of patriarchal society -and with reference to Mojab's emphasis upon the unresolved tensions between the nationalist movements and feminism- Bengio concludes with this statement:

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

Once we characterize the topography of Kurdish common life by movement, problematizing the gender issue of Kurdish cinematography becomes a part of the history of Kurdish women's movements, which amounts to exploring the forms of mobility for Kurdish woman in audio-visual terms. Such an audio-visual regime embraces the political agency of Kurdish women through public visibility since the 1990s in Istanbul, by the Saturday Mothers protests in Taksim Square, which make the Turkish history of the Kurdish women's movement the primary focus.

The Kurdish national movement in Turkey, which emerged from among Turkish socialist movements, came about with an emphasis on Kurdish national identity with the establishment of the *Devrimci Doğu Kültür Ocakları* (*Revolutionary Cultural Hearths of the East*, DDKO) in the early 1970s. Yet, the leftist women's organization of the same

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

3. A Future of Emancipation: Poor Images of Kurdistan

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

4. Educating a Kurdish Audience

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

short film stories. Announced with an emphasis on language, as seen in the title, the Yılmaz Güney Kurdish Language Film Festival in 2011 described its aim as follows:

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

The third and fourth Yılmaz Güney Film Festival was organized while the elected mayor Necdet Atalay was imprisoned due to allegations related to *Koma Civakên Kurdistan* (Kurdistan Associations' Union, KCK). In 2014, the name of the festival, re-formulated as the 5th Yılmaz Güney Kurdish Short Film Festival, and the showings were dedicated to the Yezidî people targeted by IS in 2014. In 2015, the 6th Yılmaz Güney Kurdish Short Film Festival's theme was announced as 'People in Resistance, Cinema in Resistance' by the representatives of Batman Municipality, with an emphasis on the need for cinema's magical narrations to cope with the trauma of the land (*Yeşil Gazete,* 2015). Shut down by the trustee on 11 September 2016, the 7th Yılmaz Güney Film Festival returned in 2018 with a highlight on Yılmaz Güney's foundational possibilities for Kurdish cinema: 'We are on the *Road* with *Hope,* Overcoming *Walls*' (*Bianet,* 2018). Since the 7th festival, the competition categories have been replaced with project development and support units

[17] Translation mine.

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

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

5. Viral Kurdishness

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

> Previously, I said at my solo exhibition at Pilot Gallery, "Museum workers are immortal..." Hito deciphers and reveals—museums are the cultural spaces of the oligarchic wealth, and definitely a battlefield.
> Just like that… I was a sophomore in high-school if I'm not mistaken. The military had decided that all the students would go to the garden of the municipality where they exhibited dead guerilla bodies. It was an awful sight. There were three dead bodies underneath the alcove. The commander stood on top of a stool and told us that our end will be similar to theirs. It was written PKK, with a ball-point pen, on the woman's Mekap shoes. And there was a star. Half of her head was gone. No one cried. Who could cry anyway!? That was part of the education! (Özmen, 2018: 160).

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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