



Universiteit  
Leiden  
The Netherlands

**On the aesthetic regime of Kurdish cinema: the making of Kurdishness**  
Şimşek, B.

**Citation**

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

Version: Publisher's Version

License: [Licence agreement concerning inclusion of doctoral thesis in the Institutional Repository of the University of Leiden](#)

Downloaded from: <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/3161381>

**Note:** To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).

Cover Page



Universiteit Leiden



The handle <http://hdl.handle.net/1887/3161381> holds various files of this Leiden University dissertation.

**Author:** Şimşek, B.

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

**Issue date:** 2021-05-04

## **Summary of the Doctoral Dissertation “On the Aesthetic Regime of Kurdish Cinema: The Making of Kurdishness”**

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

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

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

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

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

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