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Suncem Koçer

KURDISH CINEMA AS A TRANSNATIONAL DISCOURSE GENRE: CINEMATIC VISIBILITY, CULTURAL RESILIENCE, AND POLITICAL AGENCY

Abstract

Within the last few years, “Kurdish cinema” has emerged as a unique discursive subject in Turkey. Subsequent to and in line with efforts to unify Kurdish cultural production in diaspora, Kurdish intellectuals have endeavored to define and frame the substance of Kurdish cinema as an orienting framework for the production and reception of films by and about Kurds. In this article, my argument is threefold. First, Kurdish cinema has emerged as a national cinema in transnational space. Second, like all media texts, Kurdish films are nationalized in discourse. Third, the communicative strategies used to nationalize Kurdish cinema must be viewed both in the context of the historical forces of Turkish nationalism and against a backdrop of contemporary politics in Turkey, specifically the Turkish government’s discourses and policies related to the Kurds. The empirical data for this article derive from ethnographic research in Turkey and Europe conducted between 2009 and 2012.

Within the last few years, “Kurdish cinema” has emerged as a unique discursive subject in Turkey. Kurdish films and filmmakers have come to occupy an increasingly large space in national festivals and have attracted significant attention in Turkish cinema panels, film festivals, and television shows. There were a few interrelated triggers to the development of such discursive currency. The most immediate was the “Kurdish Opening” (Kürt Açılımı), a project established by the Justice and Development Party (AKP) in 2009 for the ostensible purpose of promoting the cultural rights of Kurds.¹ Kurdish issues, including the Turkish government’s new positioning toward the Kurds, are of growing interest in popular culture, including in films by and about Kurds, which have in turn provoked discussions around a possibly distinct “Kurdish cinema.”

Kurdish films, even before their amplified national presence, were already gaining greater international circulation and visibility, especially since the early 2000s. For instance, Bahman Ghobadi, an Iranian Kurd, won the prestigious Camera d’Or award at the Cannes Film Festival for his 2000 film *A Time for Drunken Horses* (Zamani Barayé Masti Asbha). In 2001, electrified by Ghobadi’s international success, Kurdish immigrants from Turkey living in Britain organized the first Kurdish Film Festival. The

Suncem Koçer is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Public Relations and Information, Kadir Has University, Istanbul, Turkey; e-mail: suncem.kocer@khas.edu.tr

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London Kurdish Film Festival served as a model for several other Kurdish diaspora groups in European, American, and Australian cities in the following years.²

Subsequent to and in line with these efforts to nationalize Kurdish films in diaspora, Kurdish cultural producers in Turkey have endeavored to define and frame the substance of “Kurdish cinema.” In 2009, a collection of essays edited by Kurdish writer and filmmaker Müjde Arslan appeared under the title *Kurdish Cinema: Homelessness, Borders, and Death*.³ Shortly after the release of this book, the first on the subject to be published in Turkey, the metropolitan municipality of Diyarbakir, a Kurdish city often considered the symbolic capital of the Kurdish political movement, organized a conference on Kurdish cinema. In November 2010, the municipality of Batman, also in the Kurdish region, sponsored a Kurdish film festival, another first in Turkey. These efforts helped create a Kurdish cinema culture and further encouraged young people to engage in film and video production in and outside of Turkey. The events functioned as discursive sites in which media producers and consumers, intellectuals, and academics debated the norms of Kurdish cinema. Within this transnational discourse, Kurdish cinema crystallized into a distinct genre, a prism through which films were either subsumed or refracted.

Sociopolitical forces circumscribe, enable, and complicate not only the practices of Kurdish filmmaking but also how agents characterize Kurdish films discursively, seek to nationalize them, and calibrate links and gaps between them.⁴ In this article, my argument is threefold. First, Kurdish cinema has emerged as a national cinema in transnational space. As an example, I explore how the London Kurdish Film Festival, organized by Kurdish intellectuals in Britain, worked to nationalize Kurdish films at the intersections of specific transnational cultures. Second, like all media texts, Kurdish films are nationalized in discourse. As Susan Hayward writes, “in defining/framing a national cinema, or is it *the* national of a cinema, what is instructive are the discourses mobilized . . . what they include and exclude; *how* they choose to frame matters; the assumptions and presuppositions they make.”⁵ An example I use to explore this process is the 1926 film *Zaré*, which is often characterized as the first film in Kurdish national cinema, even though it was produced by an Armenian director. Third, the communicative strategies used to nationalize Kurdish cinema must be viewed both in the context of the historical forces of Turkish nationalism and against a backdrop of contemporary politics in Turkey, specifically the AKP government’s discourses and policies related to the Kurds. I analyze how and to what end films are recentered within the scope of a Kurdish cinema genre. Kurdish activists’ ongoing urge to pinpoint Kurds in visual history critically informs the discourse they use to nationalize films. In that discourse, the Kurdish language as the diegetic language of contemporary films appears as a manifestation of historical visibility, political agency, and cultural resilience.

The empirical data for this article derive from more than three years of ethnographic research. I conducted participant observation at film festivals, cinema panels, and screenings in Istanbul, Diyarbakir, Batman, and London between 2009 and 2012. I also conducted over fifty in-depth, semistructured, and recorded interviews with filmmakers, festival-goers, festival organizers, public intellectuals, and Kurdish municipal leaders. In the following sections I explore the transnational nature of Kurdish cultural production, discuss how *Zaré* came to be identified as the first Kurdish film in history, and conclude with an analysis of the discourse around Kurdish cinema as a reflection of the current tensions regarding identity politics in Turkey.

IMAGINING THE NATION IN TRANSNATIONAL SPACE

Deprived of their political rights as a distinct collective being in a homeland transected by the boundaries of recognized nation-states, Kurds have declared themselves a unified nation mostly through cultural production in diaspora. The conditions for the imagining of a unified nationhood in diaspora over the past few decades are a product of the augmented malleability of nation-state boundaries, the increasing circulation of media, and the decreasing monopoly of autonomous states over the ways in which subjectivities are imagined. Starting in the second half of the 20th century, transnational mobility and electronic mass media opened up new imaginary spaces for individuals, through which they have been able to challenge and contest the discursive boundaries imposed by nation-states. As Arjun Appadurai has noted, the loosening of the bonds between people and national territories helped transform the basis of cultural reproduction from nation-state projects to transnational imaginings.⁶ Unraveling this expanded vocabulary of imagination, Appadurai notes that “electronic mediation and mass migration mark the world of the present not as technically new forces but as ones that seem to impel (and sometimes compel) the work of imagination. Together, they create specific irregularities because both viewers and images [and producers] are in simultaneous circulation.”⁷ However, new political spaces generated through transnational imaginations cannot be assessed independently of nations, nation-states, and nationalisms. As Mike Featherstone writes, “It is misleading to conceive a global culture as necessarily entailing a weakening of the sovereignty of nation-states which will necessarily become absorbed into larger units and eventually a world state which produces cultural homogeneity and integration.”⁸ An informed theory of the transnational world takes into account the ways in which “the hyphen between [the nation and the state] has become reconfigured by capital mobility and migration” rather than directly assuming that mobility and migration negate the validity of nations as organizing principles of collectivities.⁹

Kurdish cultural production in European diaspora exemplifies transnational imaginations informed by the existing discourses of the nation. Kurdish media produced in Europe have constituted productive avenues through which certain imaginings of political collectivity have arisen and been transmitted via satellite across borders to the Middle East. MED-TV, a Kurdish television channel established by a group of Kurdish immigrants in Britain in 1994, is a palpable example of this.¹⁰ Disseminating media content to most of Europe and the Middle East via satellite between 1994 and 1997, the programming of MED-TV sought to create cultural and linguistic unification among Kurds and to simulate the sovereignty of an imaginary Kurdish nation-state, albeit in transnational space. Amir Hassanpour coins the phrase “sovereignty in the sky” to describe the channel’s efforts to erect Kurdish nationhood via satellite in the absence of an official Kurdish state: the “presence of the Kurdish national flag and anthem [on the screen] means that MED-TV has the power to treat Kurds not as audiences but as citizens of a Kurdish state.”¹¹ After MED TV lost its broadcasting license in Britain due to diplomatic pressure from Turkey, the channel renamed itself MEDYA TV and started broadcasting from studios in Belgium. After MEDYA TV, too, was forced to shut down, there followed the launch of ROJ TV, located this time in Denmark. Despite Turkey’s diplomatic pressure on European states to eliminate Kurdish broadcasting from Europe, diaspora organizations continued to launch new stations, which have been significant

building blocks for the Kurdish public space, transcending national borders in the various centers of the diaspora.¹²

Kurdish film festivals in Europe are another stark example of the productive irregularities that have impelled imaginations of a Kurdish nation in transnational space. Just like MED-TV and its successors, Kurdish film festivals¹³ (first in London and later in other diaspora cities, including Hamburg, Vienna, and Paris) arose as an outcome of both the deterritorialization and the transnationalization of Kurdishness. A group of Kurdish immigrants from Turkey launched the first run of the London Kurdish Film Festival, with major funding from a government-sponsored community center in London. When I asked the London Kurdish Film Festival's founder and director Mustafa Gündoğdu about how the film festival came into being, he noted the ways in which diasporic life figured in materializing the project. He said, "when I moved to England in 2000, I realized that there were endless opportunities here. That was a time when [Kurdish] people, especially in Europe, were conscious and sensitive about their identity and language."¹⁴ By the "endless opportunities" in London, relative to those in Turkey, Gündoğdu referred to the cultural spaces and the material resources, provided by the British government, that promoted multiculturalist policies and integrationist agendas for immigrant communities. The particular citizenship model the British state employed in relation to immigrants, as Christian Joppke notes, required the government to promote policies that left large room for immigrant communities to organize cultural activities through which they come to participate in the fabric of British society.¹⁵ Kurdish immigrants in the United Kingdom organized in cultural and community centers sponsored largely by the British government in line with its official policies of multiculturalism.¹⁶

The idea of a film festival, however, was not an inevitable outcome of access to the resources the British government provided to promote its own multiculturalist agendas. For the Kurdish community in London, an enlarged cultural space created room for a strongly political function because it was harnessed by the already politicized Kurdish community to nationalize Kurdish culture and language. Substantial Kurdish migration to the United Kingdom started in the late 1980s and continued through the 1990s.¹⁷ Following the 1980 coup in Turkey, and due to the intensified war in the east of the country, many Kurds arriving in the United Kingdom were highly politicized asylum seekers and thought of diaspora as a sphere to promote their political cause. For many Kurdish activists, the cultural has been political, and vice versa. Gündoğdu explained this as follows: "I am not saying that diaspora has meant merely good things for Kurds. What I am saying is that Kurds were able to render themselves visible via cultural activities in diaspora." Cultural activity in diaspora, according to Gündoğdu, was "part of the larger Kurdish political struggle."¹⁸

The London Kurdish Film Festival arose from the unique relationship between two "cultures of circulation."¹⁹ In Lee and LiPuma's use, this term explains circulation as "a cultural process with its own forms of abstraction, evaluation, and constraint, which are created by the interactions between specific types of circulating forms and the interpretive communities built around them."²⁰ Lee and LiPuma draw particular attention to the performative nature of circulation. Cultures of circulation "are created and animated by the cultural forms that circulate through them."²¹ The intersection of two different cultures of circulation engendered the idea of the London Kurdish Film Festival. One of these brought Mustafa Gündoğdu from Turkey to Europe. After leaving his homeland

in Dersim in Turkish Kurdistan, Gündoğdu relocated to Istanbul in the 1990s and then to London as an immigrant. To characterize similar processes of people's mobility and circulation across malleable state borders in a transnational world, Appadurai coined the term *ethnoscapes*. An ethnoscape is "the landscape of persons who constitute the shifting world in which we live: tourists, immigrants, refugees, exiles, guest workers, and other moving groups and individuals constitute an essential feature of the world and appear to affect the politics of (and between) nations to a hitherto unprecedented degree."²² Gündoğdu's route from a small Kurdish town to London affected the ways in which he imagined and experienced his belonging to a Kurdish collectivity, which materialized in divergent ways in Kurdistan, Istanbul, and London.

In addition to his personal experience of the Kurdish *ethnoscape*, another transnational cultural occurrence figured in the ways in which Gündoğdu and his friends began imagining a Kurdish nation: the screening of the film *A Time for Drunken Horses* by Bahman Ghobadi at the Cannes Film Festival in 2000. Gündoğdu stated: "That year, Bahman Ghobadi had won an award at the Cannes Film Festival. We came together with a few friends and started talking about what we could do. The idea of a Kurdish film festival came out."²³ Ghobadi is a Kurdish filmmaker and a citizen of Iran. In 2000, his debut film received the Camera d'Or prize at Cannes, perhaps the most prestigious and most scrutinized film event in Europe. The film narrates the tragic story of Kurdish children who struggle to earn their lives by smuggling goods across the border of Iran and Iraq. Attending several other festivals that year, Ghobadi became well known in international film circles.²⁴ Appadurai calls this culture of circulation, which in this case intersected with a uniquely articulated Kurdish ethnoscapes that stimulated Kurdish cinema discourse, a *mediascape*. International film festivals, as mediascapes,²⁵ create circuits of production, distribution, dissemination, and consumption, enabling the transnational mobility of images.

As Goankar and Povinelli note, cultural circulation is not "simply a movement of people, commodities, ideas, and images from one place to another,"²⁶ but a process that transcends objects moving through space and time. Ghobadi's prize at Cannes, and subsequent laurels, established his film's artistic worth and facilitated its appearance at more than forty international festivals. Ghobadi's own discourse about ethnic identity in these events helped inspire Kurdish youth to organize around a cinema culture based on identity politics. He frequently highlights his Kurdish identity and the existence of the Kurds as a disjointed, oppressed people whose political status has borne tragic stories, while framing filmmaking as the most suitable and effective means of representing these stories. As he explains: "Kurds are always on the move. They have something in common with cinema, which is the art of movement."²⁷ Characterizing his filmmaking as a means to pinpoint the transient existence of Kurds within a politically charged geography, Ghobadi has contributed to the institutionalization of the discursive parameters of Kurdish cinema and established himself as a central figure in this emerging genre.

Cultures of circulation both create and are created by particular opportunities, rules, and constraints. Transnational migration and electronic media have intersected and provided many subaltern groups, including the Kurds, with "new resources and new disciplines for the construction of imagined selves and imagined worlds."²⁸ Gündoğdu explained in my interview with him: "in a way, the Kurds recognized their cultural wealth by virtue of the activities organized in diaspora. It was only in diaspora we got to

know each other without borders between us.”²⁹ He believes that cinema has a peculiar capacity to bring the Kurdish nation together; when a Kurd from Iraq sits in a European movie theater next to a Kurd from Turkey and watches a film narrating a Kurdish funeral or wedding in Iran, that experience becomes effective in healing the ruptures of time and history in cultural knowledge, historical memory, and identity.³⁰ Uprooted from their homeland and swept to diasporic metropolises as either labor migrants or political refugees, Kurds organized around activities such as film festivals, which became public sites for the imagining of a unified political community and constituted a sense of symbolic sovereignty on a silver screen.³¹

It was in this context that Gündoğdu transformed *Zaré* (1926), an Armenian-produced film about Kurdish village life, into part of the Kurdish cultural heritage. When Gündoğdu and his colleagues planned the London Kurdish Film Festival in 2001, they sought, in addition to erasing borders that fragment a people, to render Kurds visible both by encouraging new cinematic production and by reclaiming films that “belonged to Kurds.” In explaining this, Gündoğdu said, “we wanted to give Kurdish films their identity.” The festival was, in his words, “designed as a response to cultural imperialism that systematically attempted to eradicate Kurdish heritage from the cultural landscape.” Most films by and about Kurds, like other Kurdish cultural productions, were created under the proprietorship of the nation-states of which their producers were citizens, such as Turkey, Iran, Iraq, Syria, and the former USSR. Bringing these films together in a “Kurdish” film festival, according to the organizers of the event, was “part of the larger Kurdish struggle to exist and become visible.”³² They conducted research on films about and/or by Kurds with the aim of reclaiming them as part of a Kurdish cultural legacy. After encountering a reference to *Zaré* in an online article, Gündoğdu contacted Armenian officials to inquire about the film. In 2006, after tedious bureaucratic maneuvering with the Armenian government, he finally managed to salvage a print of the film from the Armenian national archives. At a well-publicized screening at the fourth London Kurdish Film Festival, viewers saw what was billed as the first film ever produced about the Kurds. Retrieving *Zaré* from Armenian national archives, according to Gündoğdu, proved that the London Kurdish Film Festival had achieved its founding mission: to make Kurds visible within the pages of history. Launching a national cinema in transnational space, the festival formed a significant platform on which Kurdish cinema as a discursive formation was crystallized. *Zaré* came to occupy a prominent place in this genre.

ZARÉ: FROM THE ARMENIAN ARCHIVE TO THE ROOTS OF KURDISH CINEMA

In 2011, the Istanbul Independent Film Festival (!f Istanbul), a festival that embraces independent productions from both within and outside Turkey, hosted a panel on Kurdish cinema. In cooperation with Gündoğdu, the festival committee selected four feature and documentary films by or about Kurds. Alluding to the conflicts in eastern Turkey, the organizers highlighted “the ones in the mountains” as a common leitmotif in the chosen films. In all four, “mountains” had a significant thematic presence.

The titles selected for this special festival section included the 1926 *Zaré*, a love story set in an Êzîdî Kurdish mountain village in Soviet Armenia that revolves around the

frustrated love affair between the beautiful village girl *Zaré* and the shepherd Seydo. With a satiric overtone, the film portrays an “authentic” Kurdish life permeated by poverty, feudal values, and traditionalism against the backdrop of World War I. Set in a beautiful landscape, in Mustafa Gündoğdu’s words, “*Zaré* is a unique and silent gift from Hayastan to Kurdistan . . . celebrating its 85th birthday in Istanbul.”

On a cold Saturday evening, moments before the screening of *Zaré* began, a diverse crowd that included artists, film critics, journalists, and students filled the foyer of the movie theater in downtown Istanbul. *Zaré* garnered far more attention than the other films in the selection. Gündoğdu introduced it, proclaiming its retrieval from the Armenian archives as an important event for Kurds everywhere. Shot eighty-five years ago, he said, *Zaré* had sown the earliest seeds of Kurdish cinema. As the foundation of a visual history of the Kurds, *Zaré* possessed a special significance.

Despite the pro-Kurdish motives behind the revival, the special status Gündoğdu assigned to *Zaré* in Istanbul seems to contradict the critical norms of Kurdish cinema that have been established in debates among Kurdish filmmakers and film critics. In these debates, several of which I observed during my fieldwork between 2009 and 2012,³³ interlocutors almost always employ three criteria when judging and ranking Kurdish films. One is whether, and to what extent, the language in the film is Kurdish. The other is the ethnic identity of the filmmaker, and whether or not he or she embraces or dismisses his or her Kurdishness. The third is the subject matter of the film, and in particular the ways in which it portrays Kurds. In employing these criteria, interlocutors often highlight the need to counter the existing images of Kurds in Turkish, Persian, and Arabic films and popular imaginations, which often portray Kurds as backward, ignorant, feudal, and folkloric. These criteria are by no means clear-cut and they often create disagreement rather than consensus. Nonetheless, critics utilize at least one, and often a combination, of them as a prism through which to evaluate and rank specific films vis-à-vis their “Kurdishness.”

According to these established criteria, *Zaré* seems to fall notably outside the scope of the Kurdish cinema genre. The film is a silent feature with intertitles originally in Armenian. Its writer and director, Hamo Beknazaryan, an ethnic Armenian celebrated as the founder of Armenian cinema, was not of Kurdish descent.³⁴ Moreover, *Zaré*, like other early Armenian films that documented the lives of Kurds, originally functioned as a tool for the nationalization of folk culture in Soviet Armenia. In *Zaré*, Kurds are signified as noble savages, identified by their traditional regalia and a rural lifestyle governed by feudal patriarchy. As historian Rohat Alakom notes, in interviews Beknazaryan frequently described Kurds as ignorant, violent, and childlike, characteristics reflected in their depiction in his film. *Zaré* reflected the Soviet policies of its time, which sought to tame and absorb an undifferentiated, so-called primitive folk into Stalin’s orbit.³⁵

How and to what end does *Zaré* attain its status as the foundation of Kurdish cinema? Bill Nichols writes that an “image represents the visible event, not the motivation. Subjectivity eludes its grasp.”³⁶ The recontextualization of *Zaré* within Kurdish cinematic discourse provides an example of how subjectivity makes multiple interpretations of an image inevitable. A media text obtains its national character in discourse. Discourse that recenters a text as “national” reveals the governing principles of a political collectivity that is contingent on historical experiences and social constructions.³⁷ Images “do not simply represent or express the stable features of a national culture, but are

themselves one of the loci of debates about a nation's governing principles, goals, heritage, and history."³⁸ Thus, the important point to explore is not what the texts themselves potentially express about a people's collectivity but how and why certain texts come to constitute their "national" identities, particularly in historical and cinematic contexts. Similarly, when Kurdish intellectuals, cultural activists, and media producers and consumers historicize Kurdish cinema, such history, created selectively in the present, reflects longstanding collective anxieties as well as present-day agendas.

Discourse that prominently recenters *Zaré* in Kurdish cinema is indicative of two sociopolitical processes. *Zaré* consummates perhaps the most significant capacity of images for Kurds: their capacity to carry an imagining of collectivity into the realm of existence, the state of visibility, by virtue of documentation. Against a backdrop of nonrecognition and invisibility within sovereign nation-states, visual media have proved especially conducive for Kurds in imagining a political community of their own. *Zaré* accomplishes a significant social and political end by objectifying Kurds as a people. Such objectification dragged Kurds into existence at a time when they were being diligently eradicated as a distinct people within the preeminent national imaginings. The film signifies a collective existence for Kurds and constitutes *lieux de mémoire* (sites of memory)³⁹ by footnoting the official histories with a counter-imagining. Pierre Nora writes that *lieux de mémoire* are alternatives to official histories and sites where memory crystallizes and secretes itself. *Zaré* is an example of such a site of memory that is in dialectical opposition to a history that tends to suppress and eradicate memory. At the intersection of multiple regimes of knowledge, *Zaré* is also an example of intercultural cinema, to borrow Laura Marks' formulation of diasporic films, as it effectively "[s]orts through the rubble created by cultural dislocation and reads significance in what official history overlooks."⁴⁰ By visually marking Kurdish existence in the 1920s, *Zaré*, regardless of its content, becomes an iconic reflection of the Kurds and sets a milestone for the visual representation of the Kurds as a people. Telescoping a visual history, *Zaré* underlines the subsequent omission of Kurds from the social landscape and the cultural imagination of the respective nation-states they inhabit. The film thus helps shed light on the prolific film production based on identity politics today.

NATIONALIZING ZARÉ IN DISCOURSE

Kurdish film production in Turkey has proliferated mostly in and through spaces reclaimed by the Kurdish political movement within the last two decades. The cinema unit of the Mesopotamia Culture Center (MKM), a community center with central offices in Istanbul, is a case in point. Launched in 1992 by a group of intellectuals, the center modeled itself after the Paris Kurdish Institute. It soon branched into different units that were delineated by specific artistic media, such as music, theater, and cinema, and in which participants organized workshops, seminars, and performance events. The cinema unit documented these activities with its limited equipment and capacity. İbrahim Gürbüz, one of the founders of MKM, noted in my interview with him that during the 1990s the amateur filmmaking efforts at MKM were similar to the national cinema movements of any other colonized and poor people.⁴¹ Such national cinemas, he emphasized, "often started in tents." Even though MKM's filmmaking efforts began

with shoddy equipment and an amateur spirit, by producing several films and videos and offering cinema workshops to a new generation of Kurdish youth, MKM's cinema unit helped initiate a national Kurdish cinema. Directors such as Kazim Öz and Hüseyin Karabey, whose names appear regularly in discussions of Kurdish cinema, emerged out of MKM's cinema unit during the 1990s.⁴²

Kurdish cinema activists emphasize the proliferation of Kurdish film production as a reflection of the collectivity and political agency created by the institutions of the Kurdish movement, against the backdrop of the Turkish government's current and historical policies toward the Kurds. Müjde Arslan's analysis of the presentation of Kurdish cinema illustrates the ways in which longstanding and contemporary anxieties of Kurdish cultural activists circumscribe Kurdish cinema, and how the strategic intertextuality employed by the interlocutors of Kurdish cinema discourse restructures this genre. A vocal Kurdish filmmaker and film critic, Arslan has sat on several panels and written numerous articles on Kurdish cinema.⁴³ Her most recent documentary film narrates her personal story of searching for the grave of her father, a guerilla fighter, in the Qandil Mountains.⁴⁴

Arslan was a guest speaker at a series of lectures on contemporary cinema organized by a culture center in downtown Istanbul in December 2010. During an hour-long presentation titled "Kurdish Cinema: A People's Desire to Become Visible," she positioned *Zaré* within the scope of Kurdish nationalist film, assigning it special significance in rendering Kurds visible. Arslan attached to filmmaking a political import and a performative mission. She posited that filmmaking was a tool capable of making visible: a tool that, in the case of *Zaré*, dragged Kurds from (political) nonexistence into the realm of recognition by virtue of sight. The discursive strategies she employed positioned Kurdish cinema within a genre of political and "revolutionary" filmmaking and the Kurdish political movement as the agent of this field of cultural production.

Arslan opened her talk, which she delivered in Turkish, by posing a set of questions to her audience: "Is there a Kurdish cinema? And if there is one, what are its dynamics?" To an audience waiting to hear Arslan talk about "Kurdish cinema," the question of whether Kurdish cinema existed was not merely a rhetorical one, with the metadiscursive function of signifying the absence of a Kurdish nation-state warranting a national cinema. Rather, by reconfiguring Kurdish cinema as she calibrated discursive links between different national cinema traditions, Arslan chose to make explicit a certain feature of the cinematic medium: the capacity to drag Kurds into visibility. For instance, she referred to Palestinian cinema as a platform through which Palestinian existence in an occupied homeland becomes visible.

Arslan's next question was a metapragmatic device: "What has happened up to now, let's say until this panel in 2010, in the history of Kurdish cinema?" Before elaborating on what has happened to mark "the now" of Kurdish cinema, she offered a chronology of Kurdish film, beginning with *Zaré*. Presenting PowerPoint slides of stills from the film, she established the cinematic history of the Kurds and presented the art of cinema as meaningful in relation to a people's desire to become visible. Here, *Zaré* metapragmatically came to underline the decades-long oversight of the Kurds in the countries that have been a homeland to them. For several decades after 1926, Kurds were unseen on the cinematic landscape.⁴⁵ In relation to such invisibility, Arslan asserted sarcastically that "if *Zaré* is the first film about Kurds, then a whole people [the Kurds] must have

fallen into the cracks of the earth after *Zaré*! Well, that is not the case. Rather, the lack of films about Kurds indicates the oppression and assimilation they faced during those decades.” *Zaré* as “the first Kurdish film” implies both the omission of the Kurds from the cinematic landscape for several decades following its production in 1926 and, in stark contrast, the prolific state of current Kurdish film production.

Arslan argued in her talk that the reappearance of Kurds on the silver screen in the 1990s was contingent on the Kurdish political movement. Underlining the significance of two Kurdish cultural institutions, she connected Kurdish cinema and the visual culture renescent in the 1990s with the larger Kurdish movement.

In the nineties, we see a significant turning point: the launch of MED-TV [Kurdish TV broadcasting from Europe]. MED-TV made Kurds seen and Kurdish heard. The same year, in 1995, the first cinema workshop was held in the Mesopotamia Culture Center [the first Kurdish culture center in Istanbul] . . . In 1999, *Ax*, the first film completely in Kurdish,⁴⁶ was produced by Kazim Öz and Mesopotamia Cinema. This is very important.

The remainder of her presentation discussed the current state of Kurdish cinema, posing an overarching question of who is entitled to (visually) represent the Kurds, that is, whose films are within the boundaries of Kurdish cinema. By encapsulating Kurdish cinema as crystallized through the institutions of the political movement, she brought into her presentation new criteria for evaluating films. The Kurdish language, for instance, became a significant parameter in calibrating intertextual links within the genre after her discussion of *Zaré*, which signified Kurdish cultural resilience through the omission of Kurds from cinematic landscape following the film’s production in 1926.

Arslan utilized a media text to reconfigure the larger discursive genre of Kurdish cinema, and the recontextualization of *Zaré* functioned to legitimize the conventions asserted in evaluating films produced today. As Briggs and Bauman note, “genres are not road maps to particular texts. Invocations of genre rather entail the (re)construction of classes of texts . . . By choosing to make certain features explicit (and particularly by foregrounding some elements through repetition and metapragmatic framing), producers of discourse actively (re)construct and reconfigure genres.”⁴⁷ Following this logic, Arslan’s construction of *Zaré* as the first Kurdish film was a successful strategy. Historical anxieties about the visibility of Kurds inform the ways in which *Zaré* is recentered in Kurdish cinematic discourse. This recentering of *Zaré* as foundational to Kurdish cinematic discourse works as a strategy that helps Arslan legitimize the criteria she proposes to evaluate the Kurdishness of contemporary films, which are based primarily on the degree to which a film renders Kurds “visible.”

THE KURDISH LANGUAGE AS A SIGN OF CULTURAL RESILIENCE AND POLITICAL AGENCY

In 2009, another event that sought to institutionalize Kurdish cinema took place, this time in Diyarbakır. The Diyarbakır Metropolitan Municipality organized the First International Kurdish Cinema Conference between 4 and 13 December. With significant sponsorship from the Swedish consulate, a country with a large Kurdish diasporic community, the conference hosted guests including filmmakers, academics, and journalists. After a week of film screenings, audiences filled the conference hall of

the municipality building for two consecutive days to attend panels and discussions on Kurdish cinema. These symposia sought to frame an emergent national cinema with such questions as “What is Kurdish cinema?,” “What defines a Kurdish film?,” and “What unifies it?”

During the coffee break that followed the conference’s first morning session, Hasan, a Kurdish media producer in his late thirties, who seemed animated by the discussions and somewhat irritated by the ineffective answers offered by the panels of filmmakers, writers, and academics, volunteered his own answers to me:

They are missing the most important point. It is not the theme or the characters that give a film its identity. Are we then going to call *Midnight Express* a Turkish film, just because the story is set in Turkey and there are Turkish characters in it? . . . What determines the nationality of a film is nothing else but the language of that film.

Even if the American director of *Midnight Express* (1978), Alan Parker, had been Turkish, according to Hasan, the language of this film would have determined the national cinema under which it would need to be classified. According to Hasan, language gave a film, and a nation, its “true character.” If a film was not in Kurdish, no matter what, it could not be considered part of Kurdish cinema. In calling a film “authentically Kurdish,” Hasan posited the Kurdish language as an emblem according to the semiotic process of *iconization*, through which certain features that index social groups or activities “appear to be iconic representations of them, as if a linguistic feature somehow depicted or displayed a social group’s inherent nature or essence.”⁴⁸ Hasan favored one particular feature over others in categorizing films, delimiting the nationality of a film by virtue of the spoken language in its diegetic world, thus choosing this index as an emblematic icon of Kurdishness.

In addition to being an iconized index of the nationality of films, the Kurdish language and the discussion of language transpire in several ways within Kurdish cinema discourse. First, discussions of Kurdish cinema are almost always held in Turkish. The Kurdish language, by virtue of its absence, metalinguistically frames the discourse about Kurdish cinema. For instance, Kemal Yıldız, the moderator of a panel in Diyarbakır, opened the dialogue by stating the following in Turkish: “I am very happy to welcome you to the first international Kurdish cinema conference. Unfortunately, I cannot welcome you in my own language, Kurdish.”⁴⁹ Almost all of the panelists on that panel, in one form or another, underlined the lack of the Kurdish language in their utterances. These metalinguistic assertions centered the respective discourse and its subject matter on issues of language and identity, and signified the ruptures in the speakers’ national imagination produced by nation-state policies and official histories.

Second, interlocutors pinpointed the Kurdish language issue in films in order to index the cultural resilience of the Kurds despite those ruptures. In many utterances, the Kurdish language was portrayed as having an inherent potential to survive the ruptures it had experienced. Commentators noted the importance of the cultural spaces created and enlarged by the Kurdish political movement in fostering the resilient nature of the Kurdish language.

There have been numerous examples of the role of Kurdish cultural spaces in fostering the resilience of the language, and the role of the resilience of the Kurdish language in promulgating Kurdish political and cultural advances against state oppression. One

such example occurred shortly after the Diyarbakır conference, at the opening night ceremonies of a municipal Kurdish film festival held in the small Kurdish town of Batman. As these events are sponsored by local municipalities, it is customary for the municipal leader to give a short speech during the opening reception to welcome guests. Batman's municipal leader, Nejdet Atalay, was unable to perform this custom as he had been arrested earlier in the year during a crackdown against the Union of Communities in Kurdistan (Koma Ciwakén Kurdistan or KCK).⁵⁰ Instead, Atalay sent a letter from prison to be read in his absence:

This festival is a serious challenge for young Kurdish cinema producers at a time when the Kurdish language is humiliated as “an unknown language”⁵¹ . . . I believe that transcending all boundaries and despite all the humiliation and denial it has faced, the Kurdish language will find its much deserved place in cinema just like it will in every other area.

Even though the institutions of the Turkish state continued to disparage and dismiss Kurdish, Atalay wrote, holding a Kurdish film festival in and of itself signified Kurdish resilience and the enduring capacity of the Kurdish language. In addition to highlighting its resilient nature, Atalay's message posited the Kurdish language as both a battlefield and a weapon Kurds might use to gain further visibility and recognition.

The linguistic dimensions of genres should be seen “in terms of ideologically mediated connections with social groups and ‘spheres of human activity’ in historical perspective.”⁵² Linguistic ethnonationalism circumscribes the fields of Kurdish cultural production, hence the references to language in Kurdish cinematic discourse. Stanley Tambiah explains linguistic ethnonationalism as a political process of the 20th century in particular that attests to the existence of a “consubstantial identity between a collectivity of people and the language they speak and transmit.”

Linguistic ethnonationalism, a strong motivator and advocate of claims of collective entitlements and preferential policies in nineteenth and twentieth century worldwide politics, has a weighty bearing on the double question of how a language relates to the world (to reality) and also how it relates to its speakers, the relation between words and things and between words and human beings.⁵³

According to Tambiah, linguistic ethnonationalism occurs as a reaction to nation-state projects that subsume ethnic identities in favor of one normative identity and creates in people “a strong sense that their language and their oral and literary productions—poetry, myths, folklore, epics, and philosophical, religious/historical/scientific texts—are intimately, integrally, and essentially connected with them as owners, creators, and sharers of that legacy.”⁵⁴ From a historical perspective, the construction of Kurdish language as an icon of the nation is subsequent to the forces of Turkish nationalism. During the early years of the republic, parallel to the myth of the Turks as a superior race, a myth about the Kurds was created. Within the official narrative, Kurds were considered to be Turks but in a deviant and degenerate form. Gunter summarizes the official narrative:

Isolated in their mountain fastness, the Kurds had simply forgotten their mother tongue [Turkish]. ‘Kurdish’ supposedly contained fewer than some eight hundred words and thus was not a real language. Indeed, the very word ‘Kurd’ was said to be nothing more than a corruption of the

crunching sound (kirt, kart, or kurt) one made while walking through the snow-covered mountains in the south-east.⁵⁵

Mesut Yeğen notes that the young Turkish state perceived Kurds as prospective Turks and worked to civilize its Kurdish population into Turkishness through a constellation of state policies, from resettlement to the ban on the Kurdish language.⁵⁶ The immediate political context of the festival, marked by the KCK trials and peace talks with the leader of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), on the other hand, circumscribed the evocations of consubstantial language as a sign of both cultural resilience and political agency. Claiming the Kurdish language becomes an arena of resilience and agency, manifesting in diverse areas of cultural politics and crystallizing in courtrooms or through film.

CONCLUSION

In the last few years, "Kurdish cinema" has achieved discursive currency in the cinematic circles of Turkey. As the government's self-repositioning vis-à-vis Kurds has dominated Turkish political discussions, Kurds, the Kurdish language, and Kurdish culture have become topics of interest in popular culture. As films by and about Kurds have presented entry points to the Kurdish issue, the increased visibility of Kurdish films and filmmakers has stimulated discourse among Kurdish cultural activists about a distinct Kurdish cinema. While Kurdish films and filmmakers came to occupy increasing space in national film festivals and attracted attention within liberal Turkish cinema circles, Kurdish intellectuals and media producers undertook efforts to define, frame, and institutionalize Kurdish cinema.

Even though Kurdish cinema discourse has arisen within the last few years in Turkey, it was subsequent to and in line with efforts to nationalize Kurdish films in diaspora during the early 2000s. Kurdish cinema as a discursive space has always been transnational by nature, in the absence of an official state that creates and regulates a national cinema industry to enable film production. In addition to working within the Turkish, Iranian, and Iraqi film industries, Kurdish filmmakers have navigated means of global production and distribution to engage in their media practices. In fact, transnational circumstances have, in part, generated the conditions for the nationalization of Kurdish culture, language, and art. The London Kurdish Film Festival, a significant site of Kurdish cinematic discourse in transnational space, illustrates this. The ways in which Kurdish intellectuals in London organized themselves around a cinematic culture and brought *Zaré* from the Armenian national archives to become the bedrock of Kurdish cinema reveal the role of transnational conditions in the nationalization of Kurdish films at the intersections of different cultures of circulation.

Kurdish intellectuals, cultural activists, and media producers and consumers who actively participate in the current discussions on Kurdish cinema endeavor to historicize Kurdish cinema. Created selectively in the present, such history reflects longstanding collective anxieties as well as current contestations. *Zaré* is considered to establish the beginning of Kurdish cinema. The discourse that nationalizes *Zaré* points to the significant capacity of visual media in rendering Kurds "visible," highlights the gap between the 1920s and the 1990s, and in turn signifies the inherent political agency involved in returning Kurds to the visual landscape in the 1990s. As they seek out origins,

Kurdish cinema activists reclaim certain films as Kurdish, interlink them with one other, and craft a Kurdish cinema by defining conventions, setting boundaries, and ordaining inclusions and exclusions. The Kurdish language, for instance, transpires as a significant criterion to determine the Kurdishness of a film. While language is an immediate point of reference to signify a media text as Kurdish, the diegetic world of Kurdish films that often emanate from Kurdish experience frequently accommodates languages in addition to Kurdish. Regardless, historical anxieties as well as the immediate political context point to the Kurdish language as a significant aspect of the genre.

“Kurdish cinema” emerges as a genre, an orienting framework for the production and reception of films by and about Kurds, and the discourse that generates this genre simultaneously unifies and fragments it, as discursive agreements and disagreements about the past and present of Kurdish cinema materialize.⁵⁷ During these discussions, interlocutors recontextualize films and establish and manage relationships between them. Discursive agents’ calibration of links in connecting particular texts to a broader genre structures and (re)constructs the genre under discussion. These strategies of recontextualization, which agents employ in producing discourse about Kurdish films, help engender an emergent genre, encapsulate the rules of discursive formation in Kurdish cinema, and reveal what is at stake in the confluences and conflicts that ensue in such discourse.

NOTES

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¹The “Opening” project included establishing Kurdish language departments in public universities, re-assigning Kurdish villages their names in Kurdish, and launching a state-run Kurdish television channel, TRT 6. See *Demokratik Açılım: Soruları ve Cevaplarıyla Demokratik Açılım Süreci* (AKP Tanıtım ve Medya Başkanlığı, 2010), <http://www.demokratikacilimkitabi.com/> (accessed 20 September 2010). Many Kurdish political activists harshly criticized the Kurdish Opening because of the government’s disregard for the institutions of the Kurdish nationalist movement, including the pro-Kurdish political party in parliament, while it lays the groundwork of the new political reality. Criticisms have escalated with the arrest of numerous Kurdish politicians, intellectuals, and journalists for alleged membership in the KCK (Koma Ciwakén Kurdistan-the Union of Communities in Kurdistan), considered to be the urban wing of the PKK. Because of such contradictory political behavior on the part of the AKP-led government, the Kurdish Opening is often seen as an attempt by the state to co-opt the Kurds.

²For a list of Kurdish film festivals in Europe and North America, see “Kurdish Film Festivals across the World,” <http://www.kurdishcinema.com/Festivals.html> (accessed 25 March 2014).

³Müjde Arslan, ed., *Kürt Sineması: Yurtsuzluk, Sınır ve Ölüm* [Kurdish Cinema: Homelessness, Borders, and Death] (Istanbul: Agora Kitaplığı, 2009).

⁴Charles L. Briggs and Richard Bauman, “Genre, Intertextuality, and Social Power,” *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology* 2 (1992): 149.

⁵Susan Hayward, “Framing National Cinemas,” in *Cinema and Nation*, ed. Mette Hjort and Scott MacKenzie (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), 91.

⁶Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis, Minn.: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 49.

⁷*Ibid.*, 4.

⁸Michael Featherstone, ed., *Global Culture: Nationalism, Globalization, and Modernity* (London: Sage, 1990), 1.

⁹Aiwa Ong, *Flexible Citizenship: Cultural Logic of Transnationality* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1999), 11.

¹⁰Bilgin Ayata, "Kurdish Transnational Politics and Turkey's Changing Kurdish Policy: The Journey of Kurdish Broadcasting from Europe to Turkey," *Journal of Contemporary European Studies* 19 (2011): 526.

¹¹Amir Hassanpour, "Satellite Footprints as National Borders: MED-TV and the Extraterritoriality of State Sovereignty," *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs* 18 (1998): 58.

¹²*Ibid.*, 530.

¹³Hamid Naficy's analysis of transnational ethnic film festivals applies to Kurdish film festivals in Europe. Naficy writes that "by showing a number of films to insider and outsider audiences over a short time, and by bringing together filmmakers, producers, financiers, and media critics, [ethnic film festivals] make a claim on public consciousness, facilitate collective identity formation, and enable the kind of discursive and financial networking that encourages further productions." Hamid Naficy, *An Accented Cinema: Exilic and Diasporic Filmmaking* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2001), 65.

¹⁴Mustafa Gündoğdu, interview, 13 December 2009, Diyarbakır.

¹⁵Christian Joppke, "Multiculturalism and Immigration: A Comparison of the United States, Germany, and Great Britain," *Theory and Society* 25 (1996): 449–500.

¹⁶For a detailed account of Kurdish organizations in the United Kingdom, see Bahar Baser, "Kurdish Diaspora Political Activism in Europe with a Particular Focus on Great Britain," in *Diaspora Dialogues for Development and Peace*, Berghof Peace Support and Center for Just Peace and Democracy (Berlin: Berghof Peace Support, 2011).

¹⁷*Ibid.*, 19.

¹⁸Gündoğdu, interview, Diyarbakır.

¹⁹Benjamin Lee and Edward LiPuma, "Cultures of Circulation: The Imaginations of Modernity," *Public Culture* 14 (2002): 191–213.

²⁰*Ibid.*, 192.

²¹*Ibid.*

²²Appadurai, *Modernity at Large*, 33.

²³Mustafa Gündoğdu, interview, 5 November 2009, London.

²⁴For a discussion of Ghobadi's film production at the interstices of national and global cinema industries, see Asuman Suner, "Outside In: 'Accented Cinema' at Large," *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* 7 (2006): 363–82.

²⁵Appadurai, *Modernity at Large*, 35.

²⁶Dilip Parameshwar Goankar and Elizabeth A. Povinelli, "Technologies of Public Forms: Circulation, Transfiguration, Recognition," *Public Culture* 15 (2003): 391.

²⁷Quoted in Chris Kutschera, "Iran Kurdistan: Bahman Ghobadi and the Pain of Giving Birth to Kurdish Cinema," *Kutschera 30 Years of Journalism* (2003), http://www.chris-kutschera.com/A/bahman_ghobadi.htm (accessed 15 August 2012).

²⁸Appadurai, *Modernity at Large*, 3.

²⁹Gündoğdu, interview, London.

³⁰Faye Ginsburg discusses such social and political functions of cinema in relation to the Aboriginal communities in Australia. See Faye Ginsburg, "Indigenous Media: Faustian Contract or Global Village?," *Cultural Anthropology* 6 (1991): 104; and idem, "Embedded Aesthetics: Creating a Discursive Space for Indigenous Media," *Cultural Anthropology* 9 (1994): 365–82.

³¹Amir Hassanpour, "Satellite Footprints as National Borders: MED-TV and the Extraterritoriality of State Sovereignty," *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs* 18 (1998): 53–72.

³²Mustafa Gündoğdu, interview, 20 April 2012, Istanbul.

³³These sites of observation include the Diyarbakır Kurdish Cinema Conference in 2009, the Batman Yılmaz Güney Kurdish Short Film Festival in 2010, the Dersim Human Rights Film Festival in 2011, the London Kurdish Film Festival in 2009, cinema workshops in Mesopotamia Cinema in 2010 and 2011, and other film screenings, informal panels, and talks on Kurdish cinema between 2009 and 2012.

³⁴Arstvi Bakchinyan, "Ermenistan Sinemasında Kürt Renkleri," in *Kürt Sineması: Yurtsuzluk, Sınır ve Ölüm*, ed. Müjde Arslan (Istanbul: Agora Kitaplığı 2009), 43.

³⁵Rohat Alakom, "Kürtleri Anlatan İlk Film Zaré," *Kürt Sineması: Yurtsuzluk, Sınır ve Ölüm*, ed. Müjde Arslan (Istanbul: Agora Kitaplığı, 2009).

³⁶Bill Nichols, *Representing Reality* (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1991), 153.

³⁷Hayward, "Framing National Cinemas," 91.

³⁸Mette Hjort and Scott MacKenzie, "Introduction," in Hjort and MacKenzie, *Cinema and Nation*, 4.

³⁹Pierre Nora, "Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Memoire," *Representations* 26 (1989): 7–24.

⁴⁰Laura Marks, *The Skin of the Film: Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment, and the Senses* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2000), 28.

⁴¹Ibrahim Gürbüz, interviews, January 2009 and June 2010, Istanbul.

⁴²Scholarship on Kurdish cinema remains limited. However, Tim Kennedy discusses Kurdish cinema from a historical and comparative perspective, in “Cinema Regarding Nations: Re-imagining Armenian, Kurdish, and Palestinian National Identity in Film” (PhD diss., University of Reading, 2007). For analyses of common thematic and aesthetic tendencies in Kurdish films, see, for example, Özgür Çiçek, “The Fictive Archive: Kurdish Filmmaking in Turkey,” *Alphaville: Journal of Film and Screen Media* (2011); and Ayça Çiftçi, “Tahakkümden İktidara: Türkiye’de Kürt Sinemasının Doğumu” (master’s thesis, Istanbul Bilgi University, 2008).

⁴³For example, Müjde Arslan, *Kürt Sineması: Yurtsuzluk, Sınır ve Ölüm* [Kurdish Cinema: Homelessness, Borders, and Death] (Istanbul: Agora Kitaplığı, 2009); and idem, “Kürt Sinemasının Cesur Kadınları” [The Brave Women of Kurdish Cinema], *Yeni Özgür Politika* (2013), <http://yeniozgurpolitika.org/index.php?rupel=nuce&id=25261> (accessed 27 March 2014).

⁴⁴Müjde Arslan, *Ez Fırıyam Tu Ma Li Cih* (Istanbul: Asi Film, 2012).

⁴⁵Müslüm Yücel discusses how, since the 1950s, Kurds were seen in Turkish cinema, including in legendary Kurdish director Yılmaz Güney’s films, not as Kurds but as feudal, rural subjects. See Müslüm Yücel, *Türk Sinemasında Kürtler* (Istanbul: Agora Kitaplığı, 2008).

⁴⁶*Ax* (*The Land*) is a twenty-seven-minute film about the forced evacuations of Kurdish villages by the Turkish military, and revolves around an old man who refuses to leave his Kurdish village. Kazım Öz, *Ax* (Istanbul: Yapım 13, 1999).

⁴⁷Charles L. Briggs and Richard Bauman, “Genre, Intertextuality, and Social Power,” *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology* 2 (1992): 148.

⁴⁸Judith Irvine and Susan Gal, “Language Ideology and Linguistic Differentiation,” in *Regimes of Language: Ideologies, Politics, and Identities*, ed. Paul V. Kroskrity (Santa Fe, N.Mex.: School of American Research Press, 2000), 37.

⁴⁹Kemal Yıldız, 5 December 2009, Diyarbakır.

⁵⁰Earlier in 2009, accused of involvement with the KCK, known as the PKK’s urban organization, several Kurdish municipal leaders were arrested. These politicians had declared that they would not testify in court unless they were allowed to do so in their native Kurdish language. Even though the original charges against them were not about the use of Kurdish language per se, many believed that they were arrested because of their involvement in institutions of the Kurdish movement that sought to legitimize the Kurdish language. Through such acts of civil disobedience as refusing to testify in Turkish, the Kurdish language became once again both a symbolic battlefield for the Kurdish movement and the means of producing Kurdish political agency.

⁵¹During the course of the KCK trials, when the detainees refused to testify in Turkish and spoke in Kurdish in court, the court minutes noted their utterances as “an unknown language.” Recent legislation has somewhat alleviated the crisis of Kurdish in the courtroom, as the detainee can now testify in her native language if she hires a translator to be present. “KCK davasında ‘bilinmeyen dil’ krizi” [Unknown Language Crisis in the KCK Suit], *Radikal*, 4 November 2010, <http://www.radikal.com.tr/Radikal.aspx?aType=RadikalDetayV3&ArticleID=1027417&CategoryID=77> (accessed 15 August 2012).

⁵²Briggs and Bauman, “Genre, Intertextuality, and Social Power,” 145.

⁵³Stanley Tambiah, “The Nation-State in Crisis and the Rise of Ethnonationalism,” in *Politics of Difference*, ed. Wilmsen and Patrick McAllister (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001 [1996]), 131.

⁵⁴*Ibid.*, 132.

⁵⁵Michael M. Gunter, *The Kurds and the Future of Turkey* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1997), 6.

⁵⁶Mesut Yeğen, “Prospective-Turks or Pseudo-Citizens: Kurds in Turkey,” *Middle East Journal* 63 (2009): 599.

⁵⁷See Briggs and Bauman, “Genre, Intertextuality, and Social Power”; and especially Jane E. Goodman, “Writing Empire, Underwriting Nation: Discursive Histories of Kabyle Berber Oral Texts,” *American Ethnologist* 29 (2002): 86–122.