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****Research Article****

*Tracing State Violence, Resistance and Memory in Kurdish Cinema**

Tebessüm Yılmaz**

Abstract

Kurdish cinema provides a multitude of narrative contexts for social inquiry. This article focuses on the interlocking role of Kurdish cinema in constituting and bearing Kurdish cultural and collective memories. By focusing on three films, *Bêdengî / Silence (2010), Future Lasts Forever (2011),* and *Dengê Bavê Min / My Father's Voice (2012),* I explore how state violence and resistance are depicted, represented, and reflected on in the Kurdish filmmaking scenes. I argue that Kurdish cinema makes 'non-existing' and 'invisible' Kurdish bodies visible and commits them to collective memories. Through a multi-layered analysis of these films, I showcase how the Kurdish experiences and memories of gendered state violence are visually recorded, preserved, and transmitted beyond spatial and temporal boundaries and how different subject positions and subjectivities are produced and represented. By highlighting the multidirectional and multilayered aspects of memory, I portray the entangled practices of state violence. Finally, this article shows that Kurdish cinema provides victims, survivors, and witnesses a space to vocalize their demands and needs by making storytelling possible. At the same time, it implicates the 'silent audience' and reminds it of its ethical and political responsibilities in the historical continuity of state violence.

Keywords: Cinema, memory, resistance, state violence, narrative.

* Geliş Tarihi: 05/06/2022. Kabul tarihi: 23/07/2022
** Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, Department of Diversity and Social Conflict,
Orcid no: 0000-0002-6388-9754, tebessumyilmaz@gmail.com

****Araştırma Makalesi****

Kürt Sineması'nda Devlet Şiddeti, Direniş ve Hafızanın İzini Sürmek[*]

Tebessüm Yılmaz[**]

Öz

Kürt Sineması, toplumsal araştırmalar için birçok anlatı bağlamı sunuyor. Bu makale, Kürt Sinemasının, Kürt kültürel ve kolektif hafızasının hem kurucu öznelerinden biri hem de taşıyıcısı olması bağlamındaki kesişen rollerine odaklanıyor. Ayrıca, *Bêdengî* / *Sessizlik* (2010), *Gelecek Uzun Sürer* (2011) ve *Dengê Bavê Min* / *Babamın Sesi* (2012) filmlerine odaklanarak devlet şiddeti ve direnişin Kürt film çevrelerinde nasıl düşünüldüğüne, nasıl tasvir ve temsil edildiğine eğiliyor. Makalede Kürt Sinemasının "var olmayan" ve "görünmez" olan Kürt bedenlerini görünür kılıp kolektif hafızayla ilişkili hale getirildiği savunuluyor. Filmler çok boyutlu bir analize tabi tutularak bir yandan Kürtlerin cinsiyetlendirilmiş devlet şiddetine ilişkin deneyimlerinin ve hafızalarının görsel olarak nasıl kaydedilip muhafaza edildiği, mekansal ve zamansal sınırları aşarak nasıl başka kuşaklara aktarıldığı gösteriliyor, diğer yandan da farklı özne konumlarının ve öznelliklerin nasıl üretilip temsil edildiği aktarılıyor. Film anlatıları yoluyla hafızanın çok yönlülüğü ve çok boyutluluğuna vurgu yapılarak, birbirinden farklı görünüm arz eden devlet şiddeti pratiklerinin nasıl da iç içe geçmiş olduğu gösteriliyor. Son olarak, bu makalede bir yandan Kürt Sinemasının hikâye anlatıcılığı marifetiyle mağdurlara, hayatta kalanlara ve tanıklara, taleplerini ve ihtiyaçlarını ifade edebilecekleri bir alan açtığı ortaya konulurken, diğer yandan da "sessiz bir seyirciye", devlet şiddetinin tarihsel sürekliliğinde taşıdığı etik ve politik sorumluluğu hatırlattığı ileri sürülüyor.

Anahtar Sözcükler: Sinema, hafıza, direniş, devlet şiddeti, anlatı.

[*] Geliş Tarihi: 05/06/2022. Kabul tarihi: 23/07/2022

[**] Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, Department of Diversity and Social Conflict, Orcid no: 0000-0002-6388-9754, tebessumyilmaz@gmail.com

Tracing State Violence, Resistance, and Memory in Kurdish Cinema

Introduction

During the 1980s but particularly in the 1990s Bakur (Northern Kurdistan) and Turkey witnessed large-scale, institutionalized violations of human rights. Through the efforts of human rights organizations, activists, pro-Kurdish rights scholars, and politicians, impunity and the 'right to truth' have become key concepts in contemporary debates regarding the Kurdish Question and the democratization process in Turkey. Klaas Dykmann (2007: 45) defines the 'right to truth' simply as *"the right to learn about what had occurred under past repressive rule"*. Patricia Naftali (2017: 70, 71), on the other hand, draws attention to the sociopolitical context of Latin America where the term originated and links it to the 'duty to remember' by making a clear connection between memory and law. Under the shadow of forced disappearances, the 'right to truth' describes the rights of the victims' relatives to know their whereabouts and learn their fate. Like in the Latin American context, Nesrin Uçarlar (2015: 56) also addresses the link between the 'right to truth' and (collective) memory. However, the 'right to truth' is often considered in transitioning societies in the context of transitional justice. In the absence of such processes, alternative platforms can play a crucial role for victims, survivors, and witnesses of state violence for their 'right to truth' to be acknowledged. Creating and enabling different outlets for their voices to be heard and their agencies to be acknowledged is therefore vital.

Studies have shown that cultural outlets (Rush & Simic, 2014, Abdrabo, 2021; Bastos & Soares, 2021), for instance, cinema, can act as a platform that perceives past or ongoing violence from a point of view that privilege demands for truth and justice to combat state denial and societal oblivion. In the absence of official mechanisms for transitional justice, cinema can be mobilized and utilized to register the violent past into the collective memory of the 'silent public' by narrating the stories, experiences, and memories of the victims, survivors, and witnesses.

A close examination of Kurdish cinema reveals that it plays such a role not only in the remembrance of the past but also while registering it to the national domain. Drawing on a multilayered conceptualization of Kurdish cinema in relation to memory, this article explores the ways how Kurdish films mediate contemporary claims for truth and justice, mobilize those claims to face history, and demand accountability for the past, by focusing on the potential of storytelling as resistance to injustice. I suggest that Kurdish cinema presents opportunities for collective solidarity by acknowledging and registering the stories that would have gone unnoticed otherwise. Given the sociopolitical conditions in which Kurdish cinema was born, it causes fractures in the memory regime just by its mere existence. While the regime dictates a ban on remembering for Kurdish citizens, Kurdish cinema appears as cultural resistance[1] by showing Kurdish experiences of 'unspoken wars' and 'public secrets'.

To understand how Kurdish films navigate the aforementioned claims, I propose a discussion based on two assumptions suggested by Lucia Elena Arantes Ferreira Bastos and Inês Virgínia Prado Soares (2021, 143): on the one hand cinema can be mobilized to foster accountability and on the other, it can serve as a restorative space for victims, survivors, and witnesses to tell their stories and to reflect on their embodied experiences of violence. To enter this discussion, I will begin with questions concerning confronting the past, memory, and remembrance (i.e., how the is past remembered, what is remembered as the past, how remembering takes place, through which narratives or visual strategies the past is confronted, etc.) to understand the link among these claims for truth and justice, memory, resistance, and the colonial-gendered trajectories of state violence.

[1] Stephen Duncombe defines (2002: 5) culture as a thing, as set of norms, behaviors, and ways to make sense of the world, and as a process. The author highlights the elasticity and dynamicity of culture. Expanding on his conceptualization, cultural resistance can be many things at the same time as well; a collective of things, consciously or unconsciously, effectively, or ineffectively resist and/or change the dominant structures. To Duncombe cultural resistance does not have to born or to create itself as opposed to something. It can be constituent with its own agenda which enables agency. I argue that the Kurdish cinema should not be read only as opposing but rather as an actor, a repertoire of various things, subjectivities, voices, images, aesthetics, and identities.

Methodological and Theoretical Landscapes

As a source for social inquiry, I will employ *Bêdengî/Silence* (2010), directed by Aziz Çapkurt, *Future Lasts Forever (2011),* directed by Özcan Alper, and *My Father's Voice (2012),* directed by Orhan Eskiköy and Zeynel Doğan. However, I do not solely focus on representations of experiences of state violence or how the past is remembered, but I also highlight the role of Kurdish cinema as a catalyst for a sociocultural understanding of the past and present (Rigney, 2021) while bridging into the future.

The films in question are chosen through purposive sampling, which is informed by pre-identified themes from the literature review. These themes include the concepts of the right to truth, mourning, witnessing, and storytelling. Witnessing and storytelling serve another function to approach Kurdish films. Filmmakers' claims to 'truth' and 'truth-telling' play a crucial role (Çiçek 2016; Çiftçi 2016; Şengül 2016) in facing the past and how they negotiate diverse demands, needs, and expectations concerning accountability for the past and reconciliation. Their films reflect on their individual stories, as much as they reflect on their communities. They draw on different subject positions as filmmakers, survivors, witnesses, activists, and 'truth tellers'.

My work comprises textual, contextual, and narrative analyses with an intersectional feminist lens. I use textual analysis to identify and interpret the portrayals of state violence and resistance, while the contextual analysis not only highlights the sociopolitical contexts but also takes the films as contexts themselves. (Visual) narrative analysis is employed to convey Kurdish perspectives concerning state violence, everyday experiences of it, as well as disruptions of daily life (Murray, 2018: 266).

Theoretical Framework

Collective memory is an arena of political struggle – the violence-laden societies of Turkey are no exception to that. It is therefore essential to think about the official state discourse, its practices, and memory regime that marginalizes, criminalizes, and dehumanizes Kurds, together with counter-memory practices that upset this discourse, question it, and endanger its power.

The theoretical framework, therefore, is primarily grounded in Memory Studies. In particular, it relies on a strand of literature that adopts a feminist lens and contributes to feminist memory work within the scope of cultural memory literature. Drawing from this body of work, this article deploys an intersectional feminist perspective that does not understand feminist analysis and feminist knowledge production simply as accessing women's knowledge for women (Erdoğan & Gündoğdu, 2020: 25). Intersectionality, as this article understands, is beyond being a theoretical framework but rather a methodological tool to analyze different kinds of power relations, structures, discourses, etc. at play (Lykke, 2010) and it also requires constant questioning, problematizing and revealing the power relations behind the visible (Holland & Ramazanoğlu 2002: 9; Harding & Norberg, 2005). Rosemarie Buikema and Marta Zarzycka (2011) emphasize the significance of being aware of visual codes and traditions, learning about the gendered structures of those codes and traditions, and being attentive to gendered and racialized issues in the process of (self-)representation. In particular, when it comes to the portrayal of violence and the construction of public memory (or post-memory) of gendered violence, feminist interventions have posed significant challenges to image production ethics (Karaca, 2016: 181). Gendered violence and its aftermath, instances of violence, and their institutionalization are shown in literary and visual narratives that pay attention not just to what is said, written, and shown, but also to what is suppressed, left out, and disguised (Karaca, 2016: 181).

An intersectional feminist approach is therefore concerned with whose stories do not get to be told, who is silenced or simply ignored, as well as what type of information is disseminated by the concerned films, and which narratives dominate these films. Yet it is critical to note that the selected films are directed by male directors. Despite the power of the Kurdish Women's Movement, the Kurdish film industry, like the global film industry, is male-dominated and women's experiences of war and violence are often depicted, represented, and mediated by men (Yılmaz, 2021). However, it does not constitute an obstacle to adopting a feminist lens, rather it is a necessity to study the whole range of subjects that this article is interested in. Re-reading the violence and oppression of the Turkish state against the Kurds through these power dynamics means

that it is fundamental to focus on the experiences, emotions, and daily life strategies of the Kurdish people[2].

Facing History, Accounting for the Past, but How?

The act of 'accounting for the past' involves the act of working through the past (Adorno, 1998; Sancar, 2015; Uçarlar/DISA, 2015). Working through the past starts with several steps in which past abuses, right violations and mass atrocities, structures and mechanisms that enabled these wrongdoings, and finally the perpetrators of these crimes must be recognized. In short, it starts with the recognition of the right to truth and the obligation to discover and reveal the truth. Thus, it also requires the recognition of the victims and survivors of those crimes, as well as their pain and suffering so that the survivors could have closure and could continue with their lives as honorable members of society (Sancar, 2014: 99). Araceli Esparza (2013) argues that a victim/survivor-centered approach would not only reveal the complexities of past abuses and justice but that it would also go beyond mere judicial implementations. By doing so the state would no longer be the sole arbiter of justice and by decentering state institutions and transcending the legal conceptualizations of punishment and reparations, we would enable a community-centered approach that prioritizes collective action, accountability, advocacy, agency, consciousness-raising, and healing (Esparza, 2013: 2, 3).

The question is what happens if the 'past' is not quite a past yet? As Theodor W. Adorno writes (1998: 98), when *"the objective conditions of society that engendered fascism continue to exist",* the 'working through of the past' is deemed unsuccessful. Considering, that the state violence against Kurds has never stopped – the effects of the intensified violence in the 1990s still resonate today – and that the violence continued even during the peace negotiations[3], how can we talk about a 'working through of the

[2] Adopting a feminist lens and exploring feminist ways of knowing also means taking a step towards being held responsible and accountable for each and every word uttered in this paper. While my analysis of Kurdish films is directly impacted by my ally position, I have discussed and shared my chosen research methods, findings, and shortcomings with the filmmakers and Kurdish scholars who work in this field, and I have taken their critiques and feedback into account. I am especially thankful to Aziz Çapkurt, the director of *Bêdengî/Silence* (2010); for giving me the permission to use their work and sharing his opinion and criticism with me.

[3] For instance, the Turkish state continued with the construction of *Kalekol* in Bakur or carried out the KCK trials.

past'?[4] What would be the conditions, tools, and platforms to talk about the 90s? Through which mechanisms would it be possible to encourage society to engage in a conversation concerning the Turkish state violence and the society's complicity in it?

This article proposes that Kurdish cinema can serve as a platform to confront and account for the past, as it opens a space that enables conditions for confronting the official state discourse, by recording, showing, (re)presenting, remembering, and reflecting Kurdish experiences of violence, oppression, and discrimination. Moreover, along with enabling or initiating a dialogue about how to face history[5], it suggests the actors that should take part in peacebuilding and reconciliation processes. Finally, through the personal recollections and narrations of these actors, on the one hand, the films in question indicate the role of witnessing and storytelling in the act of working through the past, and on the other, they reveal the complexity of witnessing and storytelling. Understanding these complexities aids us in acknowledging various subject positions and subjectivities invoked by the dissemination of memories in these films.[6]

Kurdish Cinema as a Cultural Memory Space

Cultural memory is defined in this article as the ways in which the past is discussed and recognized in the present moment through the creation and consumption of cultural artifacts. Paul Connerton, Marianne Hirsch, and Valerie Smith define cultural memory as an "act of transfer", emphasizing that remediation is an essential component of cultural memory practices. Cultural memories are socially, culturally, and medially produced, and how they are transmitted has a direct impact on how they are formed (Chidgey, 2014, p. 88). As Erll and Rigney elaborate (2009, p. 4 as cited in Chidgey, 2014, p. 88) "just as

[4] Until the Turkish state ended the peace negotiations with the PKK, there was a vivid debate regarding the Kurdish/Kurdistan Question and how to deal with the 90s (Toplum ve Kuram 2014: 14). Some of those debates considered a complete ceasefire a condition. However, given that the PKK had already agreed to a unilateral ceasefire, it is critical to acknowledge that there are more actors involved both in the execution and prolongation of the systematic violence against Kurds.

[5] Sevcan Sönmez (2015:15) uses the term "films for confronting the past".

[6] Any debate that does not acknowledge the complexity and diversity of Kurdish subject positions and subjectivities is condemned to fail. Feminist interventions to justice-making suggest (Esparza, 2013: 2, 3): "[To] seek equity across multiple co-constituted subjectivities - race, class, gender, sexuality, religion- while simultaneously acknowledging that parity is not enough for achieving justice when attempting to address past injuries. Thus restoration, regeneration, and healing for those who have been wronged are crucial to feminist justice-making."

there is no cultural memory prior to mediation there is no mediation without remediation: all representations of the past draw on available media technologies, on existing media products, on patterns of representation and media aesthetics". As cultural memory is a dynamic and fluid sphere, it is a politicized and contested space where personal and public intersect, intertwine, and interlace. Emotions, feelings, ideas, words, traumas, and unspeakable things about us and others oscillate, allowing for interpretation and various representations in this sphere. These frames of interpretation and representation are passed down as narrations as part of an "act of transfer". This act of transmission is gendered (Hirsch & Smith, 2002, p. 7) as it occurs in socially and politically charged contexts. As conventions, myths, and narrations are established in just these contexts, they are embedded in the gendered everyday reality and practices.

Kurdish cinema stands at the juncture where the 'individual' and the 'social' come together. I suggest rethinking Kurdish cinema as a space of cultural memory, in which heterogeneity and complexity are intertwined and individual stories stand up against hegemonic official discourses in the forms of visual oral history, narrativization, fiction, short and feature films, performance, etc., which Hirsch and Smith (Hirsch & Smith, 2002, p. 7) refer to as *counter-memory*[7].

Kurdish cinema, inventing, documenting, and crystallizing the history of Kurdish resistance against its oppressors, attempts to construct historical continuity. This continuity leads from the past through the present into the future, (re)presenting traumatic events as something that is both present and absent. It opens a window into a 'past' whose existence is denied by a significant majority of the society and the Turkish state. The depiction of this contested past (sometimes referred to as the 'forgotten past') does not replace the image of the present. The 'forgotten past' (or the past that is forced to be forgotten but not) is rather a lens through which the present can be seen, allowing one to express trauma (Gertz & Khleifi 2008: 3). Narratives of official discourse have a role in unifying society into a monolith by ignoring and erasing controversies and differences and thus creating a unified history revolving around a single memory shared

[7] Although there is no consensus on how to define counter memory, Hirsch and Smith (2002) use the term as memory that is against the official memory imposed upon us. I use the term interchangeably as 'other' memories. I approach counter-memory and its representations not as an alternative to state memory, but as its founding other.

by all. On the other hand, film narratives that I want to focus on, provide the chance to see the heterogeneity and diversity of society and the chance to unveil patriarchal codes and blurred differences between genders by representing different trauma narratives and memory. Furthermore, feminist memory studies may contribute to establishing policies we need for reconciliation, recovery (reparation), justice, and transformation (Petö & Phoenix, 2019, p. 243). The transfer of what happened in Bakur during the 1990s to film can be seen as an invitation to confront the past and reconcile oneself with it. Thus, Kurdish film narratives raise their voice against a single unified story or official discourse of the state.

Given that Kurdish filmmakers use memory practices and cultural repertoires as a means of meeting specific political goals regarding exposing state violence, reconciliation, and peacebuilding, memory activism plays a key role in this paper. Yifat Gutman defines (2017: 1, 2) memory activism as *"the strategic commemoration of a contested past outside state channels to influence public debate and policy."* Archiving what they have experienced both as survivors and witnesses, preserving the experiences, emotions, and memories of mass state atrocities as a practice of cultural resistance and a strategy to cope with the trauma, they use what is available to them[8] to raise consciousness (Gutman, 2017: 83), and awareness against state-violence, public secrets, and the Turkish state's impunity regime. Moreover, their interest in finding authentic ways to capture, witness, and document the history of Kurdish resistance against its oppressors, through their films they create a repertoire to showcase how acts of civil resistance are culturally remembered (Rigney, 2018).

[8] It is important to note that the Turkish state constantly attempts to undermine the efforts of the filmmakers through lack of financial support and other means. Although the use of censorship is rather an old phenomenon in Turkey, marginalization, and criminalization are often used against Kurdish filmmakers. While the banning of screenings, intimidating the filmmakers and audiences through the use of police force, putting the filmmakers on trial on grounds of spreading terrorist propaganda, etc. are deployed as means of state oppression and violence, these strategies reinforce the political stance of the filmmakers as 'truth-tellers'. For the censorship at the film festivals see Altyazı (2014). For an extensive landscape of the censorship in the arts in Turkey visit www.siyahbant.org. For an intersectional and comparative analysis of state violence, nation-making, and dispossession in relation to memory politics see Karaca (2019 & 2021).

Unmourned Losses: *Future Lasts Forever*

> Some lives are grievable, and others are not; the differential allocation of grievability that decides what kind of subject is and must be grieved, and which kind of subject must not, operates to produce and maintain certain exclusionary conceptions of who is normatively human: what counts as a livable life and grievable death? (Butler, 2020: XIV).

In the 90s Kurdish lives and bodies were marked as "*monsters to be quarantined and individuals to be corrected"* (Puar & Rai, 2002, 121), *maimable* (Puar, 2017), and deemed *ungrievable* (Butler, 2020). Kurds were constantly exposed to punishment, execution, and annihilation (Göral, 2016: 115; Çelik, 2016: 91).[9] Forced disappearance, although not unique to Turkey[10], was systematically used against Kurds during the 90s. Forced disappearances, deployed by state-fostered counter-guerilla forces like the Turkish Hezbollah[11] or JITEM[12], played a major role in the gendering and marking of Kurdish bodies.[13] Provided that a great number of those who disappeared at the hands of the state were men, the ones who were left behind, the witnesses and survivors were women. The absolute annihilation of lives and complete eradication of the bodies, thus become hyper-gendered practices of state violence.

[9] Similar to the US and Israeli states' discourses and practices, the Turkish state's so-called war on terrorism discourse continues to make Kurdish bodies available to be killed and destroyed through racialized, sexualized, class-based and gendered set of discourses. While the cultural-political imagination of Kurdish bodies as monstrous and abject reinforces the dehumanization of Kurdish lives, it also signals their resilience and unmanageability as Marco Pinfari argues (2019). Almost until the early 90s, the PKK fighters were condescendingly referred to as "a group of marauders". However, as the years passed and the PKK gained more and more support among Kurds, the state's war paradigm has shifted from total war to a low-intensity conflict based on field dominance, as proof of their failure in the 'management' of the Kurds. Thus, killing their bodies meant gaining control over Kurdish bodies.

[10] Forced disappearance is a widely used method to 'eliminate' enemies of a state/regime, used especially by the military juntas in the Latin Americas, or counter-guerilla forces against anti-colonial movements. Similarly, following the 1980 military coup in Turkey, forced disappearances were widely used against left-wing groups. However, the systematization of it came in the 90s.

[11] The Hizbollah is a Sunni Islamist militant organization active in Turkish Kurdistan. The organization is also, referred to as Kurdish or Turkish Hezbollah and has been supported by the Turkish state and its security forces during its conflict with the PKK (Göral, Işık & Kaya 2013: 23).

[12]JITEM (Jandarma İstihbarat ve Terörle Mücadele, in English Gendarmerie Intelligence and Counterterrorism) is an intelligence agency under the command of the Turkish Gendarmerie. The agency was unofficially involved in the Turkish-Kurdish conflict and its existence was denied by Turkish authorities until 2005 when the organization was renamed to JİT and reorganized (Göral, Işık & Kaya 2013: 22).

[13] Özgür Sevgi Göral notes (2016:127) that the forced disappearances do not constitute a unique moment in life but rather they need to be understood within the wider scope of state violence prior to the moment of the disappearance and its aftermath. This strategy is often combined with or followed by other strategies of state violence like torture in custody, house raids, etc.

With the eradication of bodies, the Turkish state did not only change the lives of the victims but also irrevocably changed the lives of their loved ones. They are denied their right to know the truth, to hold a funeral, to have a decent burial, and to have a grave to visit. This kind of 'erasure' also damages the capacity of bearing witness against violence (Göral, 2016: 129). If our capacity to bear witness is harmed, how does it impact our relationship to ethics, the responsibility, and the burden of survival? Can cinema and cinematic testimonials be mediums that flout the Turkish state's 'ban on mourning'? Can visual narrations offer a platform for those lives that are 'ungrievable' in the absence of the (dead) bodies? I will address these questions by examining *Future Lasts Forever*.

Özcan Alper's award-winning *Future Lasts Forever* was released in 2011. The story follows Sumru, one of the main protagonists, on her journey to Diyarbakır to gather elegies for her research. Sumru meets with Ahmet who will support her on this journey. As the story unfolds, we learn that Sumru's boyfriend Harun joined the PKK guerilla a while ago and that she has not heard from him since then. One of the main motivations for Sumru to take on this journey is to find Harun, or at least his grave. *Future Lasts Forever* offers us an alternative reading of the political conflict and the state violence against different ethnic and religious minorities through entanglements. Michael Rothberg notes (2009: 313) that *"memories are mobile; histories are implicated in each other. Thus, finally, understanding political conflict entails understanding the interlacing of memories in the force field of public space. The only way forward is through their entanglement."*

Sumru's personal story intersects and gets entangled with the collective stories of state violence. Historical streets of Diyarbakır's Sur district, the sound of the military jets in the background is combined with the voices of the children playing on the street, Surp Giragos Armenian Church, the Four-Legged Minaret expose the genealogy of the state violence in Turkey and that it needs to be understood in this broader context. While strolling Sumru sees the Surp Giragos Armenian Church (The Church of St. Giragos)[14],

[14]Surp Giragos is an Armenian Apostolic church in Diyarbakır, Bakur. The church went under a major renovation and reopened for service in 2011. The film shows the church almost as a haunted-like space before the renovations took place. Although the renovations were considered as a sign of reconciliation

knocks on the door and soon she is let in by the warden, Antranik. She asks him questions about the church and the community, and he replies that he is all by himself. His words are a clear reference to the Armenian Genocide (1915). Neither the Genocide nor its traumatic aftermath has been acknowledged by the Turkish state. Like the Kurdish experiences, the traumatic memories of the Armenian Genocide are also not registered in the state's memory regime.[15]

Antranik wonders whether Sumru is Armenian as well. Sumru reveals her ethnic identity for the first time. She is a Hemshin[16] woman who can barely speak the Homshetsi, a dialect of West Armenian. A few spoken words in her mother-tongue showcase how the cultural rights of minority groups are forced into oblivion. Sumru's disappearing language is accompanied by the now-destructed streets of Sur[17]. Revisiting *Future Lasts Forever* not only allows us to trace the entanglements but also to approach films as a dynamic place, a medium of collective and cultural memory that illuminates not past but present events, thereby encoding future memory (Erll, 2011: 139).

From this perspective, the film is like an audiovisual hub for mnemospaces, memory sites, and co-existing memories highlighting the multidirectional aspects of memory. However, Özcan Alper successfully creates a hybrid mode of (re)presenting

with the Christian community, the church was confiscated by the state, and it was heavily damaged by the Turkish armed forces during the curfews in 2016.

[15] There is a strand that links the Armenian experiences of collective, and systematic state violence to the Kurdish ones through memory work. One of the major causes, why this is a somewhat recent development, is the extreme state violence forced on the Kurds and the fact that it has, consequently, not been completely acknowledged by both the authorities and the Turkish communities, therefore remaining exempt from punishment (Atılgan and Işık 2011). See Çelik and Dinç (2015), Çelik and Öpengin (2016). Regarding the rise of memory work in Turkey, see Yılmaz (2018) and Karaca (2019).

[16] The Hemshin people also known as Hemshinli or Hamshens (Hemşinliler in Turkish), are an islamized diverse group of peoples who in the past or present have been affiliated with the Hemşin and Çamlıhemşin districts in the province of Rize, Turkey. They are Armenian in origin and were originally Christian and members of the Armenian Apostolic Church (Ishkhanyan, 2012).

[17] Along with the Surp Giragos Church, the rest of the historic district of Sur, Diyarbakır was heavily destructed during the 2015–2016-armed clashes. Some neighborhoods that are seen on the film are destroyed, and not existing anymore. Another cornerstone in the collective memories of generations and different nations, the Four-Legged Minaret appears in the background as Sumru strolls through the streets of Sur. This cultural heritage site that we see a couple of times throughout the film is another place that was heavily destructed in the same period. Moreover, the president of the Diyarbakır Bar Association was shot to death during a press statement concerning the curfews and human right violations in 2015 in front of the Four-Legged Minaret.

and (re)telling by combining fictive places and actors with existing ones and giving space to real survivors/witnesses. For instance, Sumru gets in touch with the Mesopotamia Assistance and Solidarity for Families with Lost Relatives (MEYA-DER) network and through Ahmet with the Musa Anter Visual and Audio Memory Center. Sumru and Ahmet conduct interviews and have meetings with people who have lost their loved ones. MEYA-DER was founded by the families of the PKK guerillas who were killed by the Turkish state's security forces during the operations in 2007 (Aydın, 2018: 14). Although it was officially banned with a decree-law following the attempted military coup in 2016, the association continues to operate. MEYA-DER has two aims: The first one is to support and be in solidarity with the families who have lost their loved ones. Its second aim is to identify, verify and archive the identity details of the guerillas who were killed (Aydın, 2018: 14). On the other hand, Musa Anter Visual and Audio Memory Center is a fictive institution that can be seen as a reflection of the need of and demands for reconciliation.

Alper does not revisualize the performances of violence directly, but he enables the filmic medium to narrate the trauma. Both the elegies and the witness accounts we hear in the film are original (Sönmez, 2014: 31). Alper's strategy to transform Sumru through facing the past by hearing witness accounts also creates a twin-witnessing process for the audience: Witnessing the changes in Sumru and witnessing the traumas that are told in the film. However, it is important to note that it is not only Sumru who changes but Ahmet as well. Although the story seems to focus more on Sumru than Ahmet, I argue that Özcan Alper exposes the audience to the Kurdish experiences of war, and slowly prepares the audience to be transformed for it to 'deserve' hearing Ahmet's own experiences. Following Eve Tuck and Wayne K. Yang's proposal (2014: 232), I argue that the (Turkish) audience *"has not yet proven itself responsible enough to hear"* his story and needs to "do the work" (Pillow, 2019: 126) to prove itself. Doing the work here implies that the audience has to be receptive and willing to engage with what they are hearing/seeing/witnessing through cinema. The audience must be open enough to take ethical and political responsibility and seek ways for solidarity. Given that storytelling[18] is

[18] Healing Through Remembering defines (2005: 12) storytelling as "anything that is told or recounted, normally in the form of a causally linked set of events or happenings, whether true or fictitious. Stories are

not apolitical (Hackett & Rolston, 2009: 357), and for many survivors, it is not only about personal healing but rather about political change, their agency must be acknowledged. Therefore, for any storytelling or recounts of witnessing, the presence of an empathetic and receptive audience is critical (Landsberg, 2004; Hackett & Rolston, 2009). From this perspective, it can be said that Ahmet is not ready to tell his story until the end because the empathetic hearing has not been established yet. Other survivor accounts we witness in the film can be interpreted as an ongoing dialogue and an invitation to the audience to become more and more receptive; to allow themselves to be affected by what they are hearing and to explore what they can do with those accounts and to not only approach them as a collection of pain narratives.

The Unbearable Heaviness of Surviving, the Burden of Storytelling

Storytelling is primarily a complex process; particularly if the witness/survivor/storyteller claims agency. As is noted by Hackett and Rolston (2009: 360, 361), when witnesses speak in a broader political context and raise claims and demands regarding the restoration of justice rather than only talking about their suffering and pain, they remind society of its responsibilities for societal change. Resisting being reduced to their suffering, they mobilize storytelling as victim-led resistance (Gokal, 2006 as cited in Hackett & Rolston, 2009: 360). Given that their accounts often reveal the spatial registers of violence like schools, military barracks, etc., the enormity of the military operations, whose structures and actors are involved in their victimization. The lies that they are told, smear campaigns conducted by the state and media, denial, and impunity are challenged and contested by their storytelling. Some accounts also reveal the ways that the villagers were forced to be complicit[19] in the state's crimes and how in the case

a medium for sharing and a vehicle for assessing and interpreting events, experiences, and concepts to an audience. Through stories we explain how things are, why they are, and our role and purpose within them. They are the building blocks of knowledge and can be viewed as the foundation of memory and learning. Stories link past, present, and future and telling stories is an intrinsic and essential part of the human experience. Stories can be told in a wide variety of ways, which can be broadly categorized as oral, written and visual, and are so all-pervasive in our everyday lives that we are not always aware of their role as a tool of communication in all societies".

[19] Village guard system functions as a paramilitary organization that is established by the Turkish state. Although it has a long history, the system I am referring here consists of appointing and arming civilians living in Bakur to protect their villages against the PKK but more importantly to cut off the support to PKK. Mostly the villagers who disapproved PKK were chosen for becoming guards. Some villagers were forced but resisted anyways were severely punished with burning down their villages. The village guard system

of refusal the mechanisms of biopolitics and necropolitics take over to control and manage the 'unmanageable monsters' by violently eradicating them. Moreover, these accounts also show what they must endure as the families of the victims. For instance, one of the witnesses that Sumru and Ahmet interview recounts their experience:

> Take up arms or clear out the village. After the villages were pressured like these two or three times and if they still resisted taken up arms, they were forced to leave the village. Nobody wanted to become village guards. In the fifth month of 1994 on the morning of the 27th, soldiers came. Approximately 1000 or 1500 soldiers surrounded the village. The soldiers started to raid the houses. They took my father and uncle along with six other villagers. There is a Boarding Regional Command in Lice which is actually a boarding school. A school that co-exists with military presence. That's where they were taken to. I believe it was after three or four days that we received the news two men had been thrown out of the helicopter over Bingöl mountain. Everyone thought it was my father and uncle. So, naturally, we went there with the villagers, but it wasn't them. A week later we saw two bodies. Their hands were tied, and they were blindfolded. They were shot in the head with one bullet. That's what we saw. After a week, we were told that two bodies were found in the well that's just outside our village. So, we went there, too. We saw again that the bodies were tied and blindfolded. They weren't my father and uncle. (5th survivor account).

As the survivors tell their stories of what had happened to them, the changes in Sumru are represented by the change in aesthetics and styles. Shadows and fading colors start to fill Sumru's room in the center of Diyarbakır's Sur district. She writes and listens to the recordings and spends more and more time in this room. The change in her mood is made visible by the lighting and sounds. Almost a loop in time, a black hole that sucks Sumru in. Every encounter changes and prepares her finally to face what happened to Harun and to find his grave. Her presence in Diyarbakır for gathering and collecting elegies transforms into a position informed by her witnessing and learning more about the survivor's experiences (Koçer & Göztepe, 2017: 63). A witness asks Sumru: *"You look at those pictures every day. And who are you looking for?"* as if she

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did not operate under any law until 2000 and resulting in the guards gaining uncontrollable power and have become one of the main perpetrators of the state crimes like evacuation of villages, setting villages on fire, unsolved murders, etc. especially in the 90s. Özar, Uçarlar, and Aytar also note (2013: 9, 10) that many village guards were employed in state sponsored JITEM. For an in-depth analysis on the village guard system in Turkey please see: Özar, et al. (2013), Balta Paker and Akça (2013), Gürcan (2014), and Önder (2015).

had to go through the pictures of all the disappeared until she gets to know where Harun is.

The film gives the narrators ultimate control over their own stories through first-hand narratives. While the survivors/witnesses practice their agency, their storytelling humanizes the Kurdish lives and bodies that are deemed unworthy and ungrievable. Moreover, such accounts also tell us a story about the emotional impacts of losing their loved ones.

> I'd see someone coming down the street or hear a voice and I'd run to the window thinking that someone got some news for me. That dream kept me alive. That dream made life bearable. But it never happened. I want him to have a grave. I already know they killed him, burned him, threw him away but I still want his bones. I want to be able to tell my daughter where her father lies Holidays come and go. Everyone visits the cemetery. *This is a human being, a missing person.*

The survivor statement above eloquently exemplifies the ambiguous limbo that they are put in. Given that forced disappearances do not only target the victims who are killed by the state but also their loved ones, the emotional and mental toll on the survivors is undeniable. While *Future Lasts Forever* gently deals with forced disappearances by centering first-hand survivor/witness accounts, it also takes a great step to make guerilla lives and bodies publicly visible by visually deconstructing the Turkish state's "hierarchy of grief". Finding Harun's grave is a statement that makes 'non-existing' and 'invisible' bodies visible and commits them into collective memories.

Family Heirloom: Trauma and Acts of Remembering in *Dengê Bavê Min*

> The past lives in the present, and traumatic past still throb and ache. This is often true for individuals and societies, as memories of war, displacement, genocide and other forms of "social suffering" are not easily stored away. Their painful marks defy oblivion and post traumatic situations shape and erupt in present circumstances. Many of these memories are culturally mobilized and transmitted through oral and written narratives, ceremonial rituals, and political performances. They can also become embodied memories that inhabit the lives of both individuals directly affected by traumatic events and those who belong to the same mnemonic community. At stake are not only the lifewords of people who experienced unbearable loss

> and *unspeakable* suffering, but also broader society's ability to learn, rebuild and change (Sutton, 2018: 1).

The above-cited excerpt from Barbara Sutton's *Surviving State Terror* highlights the fact that the traumatic events of the past continue to live in the present and points to the importance of paying attention to survivors' accounts. *Dengê Bavê Min / My Father's Voice (2012),* another film from this paper's selection, lingers between these lifewords of a strong, surviving mother, Basê, and her selective and strategic silence while debating the role of remembrance in a society dominated by collective evil, a culture of fear and collective traumas.

Dengê Bavê Min was directed by Orhan Eskiköy and Zeynel Doğan and released in 2012. According to the box office numbers, it reached a wide audience and was screened at various national and international film festivals. The film is based on Zeynel Doğan's personal history and he plays one of the lead characters, Mehmet.

Mehmet, a young Kurdish-Alevi man, and his journey through his family's past are at the center of Dengê Bavê Min. He lives in Diyarbakır with his partner, who is expecting a child. While they are moving into a new house, Mehmet finds some of the cassette tapes that he and his family were sending to his father Mustafa, who was a guest worker in Europe, when Mehmet was a child. Mehmet then visits his mother Basê, who lives in Elbistan. During his stay, Mehmet keeps asking questions about their past and the rest of the cassettes. In those tapes, the voice of Basê's other son, Hasan, can be heard as well. Hasan and Mustafa's physical absence in the film is filled with their voices. As the story unfolds, we learn that the family had survived the Maraş Massacre and that the father, as we learn from the cassettes, constantly urges Basê to keep the traumatic memories of the massacre to herself and advises her to keep the painful memories away from the children: *"Don't let him be angered by the things he remembers. Don't talk about the bad times in front of the kids"*.

Although it appears that Mustafa's warnings are about their children's safety, they need to be understood in a broader sociopolitical context. According to Herman, talking about traumas or being able to do so requires a safe space in which victims and survivors feel safe enough to open up and can be sure that the violent events will not repeat following the retelling of their traumas (cited in Sönmez, 2014: 27). Hackett and

Rolston also address (2009: 6) the fear of *"the consequences of speaking out while the conflict still rages".* From this perspective, it is clear that Basê does not have such an environment either for herself or her children. Hevi[20] (2022) rightfully points out that the recognition of the Maraş Massacre has never taken place. Turkish state discourse, media, and society persistently refer to the Massacre as an 'incident'. Considering the lack of recognition, the violence against Alevis-Kurds continues to be diminished and normalized.

Despite Mustafa's concerns, Hasan remembers what happened to their family. Moreover, through the cassette tapes, we learn how he experienced the ban on his mother tongue and discrimination at school and that later on, he joined the PKK guerillas. His decision to join the guerillas is a reflection of the continuity of violence against Kurds. It is a way of saying that the Maraş Massacre is only a chapter in the State's book.

Although the film title presents the story as Mehmet's, in the end, his father's voice and Mother Basê are the main protagonists. She (re)presents an extraordinarily strong character: A mother who protects her children even if it means being silent about her traumatic memories. Even though she remembers, Basê resists transmitting the traumatic events to her younger child Mehmet to protect him from state violence. Although her character seems like that of a quiet person, the directors make the audience witness how she occupies different subject positions throughout the film.

Basê's silence must not be seen as weakness or a traditional patriarchal representation of women or mothers, rather it is a resistance strategy to survive and to protect her children from a similar fate. Moreover, since one of her sons is a guerilla, she often faces police harassment and oppression. Because of her religious beliefs, she endured a massacre and as her husband was working abroad, she had to take care of her children all by herself. Basê's political voice defies the silence in the 'silent phone calls' she receives from Hasan. The calls are silent most probably because of state surveillance and their phone calls being wiretapped to find out his whereabouts. In those calls, she strategically exercises her voice in two ways: survival mode and speaking in

[20] I respect the author's wish for using her self-chosen (Kurdish) name Hevî, rather than using the state-given name Nimet Gatar.

her all-present banned mother tongue Kurdish. As Mehmet tells her that Hasan wants a list of Kurdish words and idioms, because he is probably missing home, Basê explains a new word or phrase on the phone. Basê represents the mother tongue, belonging, and home for Hasan. Although it is not stated in the film from whom she receives the phone calls, the audience should understand that it's Hasan calling to hear his mother's voice and let her know that he is still alive. Many families whose children joined the guerillas, consider their children 'dead' as soon as they step out of the door, it puts them into the ambiguity of constant mourning and hope. While Basê's dark clothes represent loss and mourning, her going up the hill and sitting there represents the waiting and expectation of Hasan's return. As it is also stated in the film, the families acknowledge the agency of their children and respect their decision. Yet, the words that Basê chooses to explain herself during the silent phone calls are a manifestation of the affective aftermath of Hasan's decision:

> Basê: Alo? Hasan?
>
> Phone: (Silence)
>
> Basê: Do you know what 'pasârî' means? Someone who keeps their distance from other people. It's also a plant you find near snow. It needs meltwater to grow. It's a beautiful plant, but a bit bitter. That's a pasârî. Plus, you call someone who runs away from their mother 'pasârî'.

> Basê: Alo? Hasan?
>
> Phone: (silence)
>
> Basê: Shall I tell you what 'lâlijîn' means? It's the word you use if a baby cries when it's left on its own in the cradle. Also, if old folk cry when their kids have left and they're on their own. And you say 'lâlijîn' if a mother cries for a child like you who never returns.

How Basê exercises her voice in these phone calls operates in different political layers. First of all, she showcases what a rich language Kurdish is despite the Turkish state's and society's denial of even the existence of the Kurdish language. The Kurdish language, as the memory and bearer of Kurdish culture, is preferred as a cinem atic language as well as used as a reference system pointing towards Kurdish culture –

a culture that relies primarily on oral culture due to prohibitions and oppression (Yılmaz, 2018: 29).

Second, by talking to her guerilla son on the phone she bridges the so-called 'domestic' and 'private' sphere, home, to the public sphere by making guerillas visible, and finally as the bearer and transmitter of collective memory. Given that she willingly takes this upon her as her duty, she refuses to transmit the transgenerational trauma of the Maraş Massacre. As the directors combine the narration of the massacre with original newspapers and newspaper clips that Basê keeps in the basement of her house, the state-fostered collective malignity in the society is revealed on an intertextual level. Throughout the scenes in which Basê stays in the dark, we can only see her face and hear the narration of the Massacre, we witness a time loop that sucks the audience in. The darkness in the film can be seen as a reference to the darkness in society – as the darkness grows, the time-space expands and occupies the room and her world.

Although her subject position as a mother is socially ascribed to her, her experiences and perspectives are not limited to that. Words or silence, both are political for Basê – not only does she speak or remain silent about political issues, but her everyday life practices also inform her perspective. For instance, in one of the cassette tapes, her husband Mustafa criticizes and blames Basê for the disrespectful behavior of their children towards him. He says that he was offended by and angry at their attitude. However, Basê is aware of her husband's fragile masculinity and the anxiety over not being in charge or the fear of losing control over his family caused by his physical absence as a father and calls out on him:

> Hasan decided to join the guerillas. He left saying not to expect him back. You will get angry now and blame me. But it's not my fault. While you earn money, I look after the kids and your parents. OK, you're earning but you leave me with all the problems. Come back and do what you like with the kids. I have done nothing wrong. Don't blame me for everything. Come and look after the family.

While Basê's stance shatters the traditional-patriarchal codes of a male-dominated system, as is shown in this article, she has important things to say beyond victimization (Sutton, 2018: 5).

Silence That Shattered the Glass: *Bêdengî*

Aziz Çapkurt's 14 minutes long short film Bêdengî / Silence was produced by MKM[21] and released in 2010. Ilker Kızmaz and Saadet Çaçan play the leading roles. The film tells the story of the encounter between a former soldier and a mother whose son was disappeared by the state. Çapkurt dedicated (Eroğlu, 2010) his film to the *Saturday Mothers* who have been politically active since 1995, starting with their first vigil to ask for the whereabouts of their children or husbands and other relatives who were disappeared at the hands of the Turkish state and its security forces (Karaman, 2016). Bêdengî was granted several national and international film awards, screened widely in film festivals, and gained public attention.

In an interview, Çapkurt stated that the title Bêdengî/Silence is both a reaction against and criticism of the silence regarding the decades-lasting war in Bakur but at the same time it is also a reference to the *Saturday Mothers*' silent protests at their weekly vigils (*GazeteKars*, 2010). Another critical point to mention here is that the female lead Saadet Çaçan is a Saturday Mother. Çapkurt's choice regarding one of the main characters in the story bridges reality and (re)presentation as do many other Kurdish directors. Kurdish filmmakers claim, negotiate, and mediate their own 'truth' and reality through filmic mediums: 'What you are seeing is not just a movie but a lived, and living experience of Kurds in Turkey'.

The film starts with a young man at a glassmaker's store that soon leaves for delivery. While he is gone, a woman with a child comes into the store where he works to replace the broken glass of a picture frame. When the young man comes back and sees the picture in the frame he freezes. Then he leaves the store and goes home, lying in his bed in a fetal position. His body language and mimics tell the audience that his encounter with the picture triggered something absent or unspoken in the film until then. This ambiguous moment as he stares at the picture – the man on the picture stares right

[21] The Mesopotamia Cultural Center (MKM), a landmark in the history of Kurdish resistance and Kurdish memory, was founded in Istanbul in 1991 and suddenly became a social center for many young Kurds (Candan, 2016: 5). A group of Kurds within the MKM came together and founded the Mesopotamia Cinema Collective in 1996 (Candan, 2016: 6). Those young filmmakers who trained there started to record, visualize and visually archive Kurdish experiences of war and resistance through their documentaries play a major role in the forming and re-shaping of the Kurdish cultural memory. All three of the filmmakers that are mentioned in this paper were trained in the MKM.

back at him – signals a trauma that is about to unfold. The 'Turkish gaze' that the audience is used to, backfires with this scene – all the above described "symptoms' signal and represent a trauma that is about to be revealed. As the story unfolds, we see the young man in a military uniform, taking a man into custody from a village house, and a woman trying to save the man. From the faded colors we understand that it is a flashback. With this flashback, Çapkurt turns the audience into witnesses of multi-layered state violence and the production of nation-space (Şengül, 2012: 6). Then, the young man follows the woman who came to the store to pick up the picture frame. At this moment, the audience is pulled back from the village house to the streets of Istanbul, specifically to the streets of Tarlabaşı. The woman enters the office of the Human Rights Association (IHD), still holding the child by her hand, and later leaves with other women who hold carnations and picture frames in their hands. With their clothes and body language, the women look very similar to each other. The young apprentice continues to follow them to Galatasaray Square where the Saturday Mothers hold their weekly vigils. Zooming in, Bêdengî reveals:

> [The] multi-layered and multi-dimensional Kurdish/Kurdistan Question. With its more than a-hundred-year-old past that is filled with (armed) conflict, war, and resistance, it operates across time and space and within the borders of the sovereign state (even enforces those borders), and creates social, historical, economic, and political consequences and configures bodies, subjectivities, identities, emotions, and thoughts of those who were born in it. (Şen, 2022: 19).

Now, it is essential to focus on these different but highly intersected and entangled layers. The first layer I would like to focus on is the twin representation of trauma. The survivor's or witness' trauma has been central throughout this paper, however, Bêdengî focuses on the entangled aspects of trauma by zooming in on the 'perpetrator's trauma' as well. Çapkurt shifts the analysis away from the victim/survivor's testimonial to that of the perpetrator's trauma and his 'unconfessed' confession. This critical and important approach in Bêdengî overcomes a great obstacle given that even the notion or the possibility of perpetrator's trauma was denied for decades in the field of Trauma Studies (Karam, 2019: 73). Scholars' hesitation or even resistance to focus on the perpetrator is mainly grounded in seeing perpetrators of mass atrocities and crimes against humanity, like the Holocaust, as 'pure evil' and 'monsters' (Karam, 2019: 74). However, as Arendt

pointed out in her prominent work *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* (2006) the 'evil' is not a perverted 'monster' or a sadist but rather mostly someone who is 'terribly normal'. Someone who may be sitting next to us on public transport, someone who caresses their children's hair while telling them a bedtime story[22], or a soldier performing his compulsory military service.

As important as it is to make space for the victims' voice, in the last couple of years Critical Trauma Studies has also shown some interest in the collective and individual traumas of persons who are responsible for or who committed atrocities against humanity. In the sociopolitical context of Turkey, it becomes even more important to also uncover the perpetrator's trauma given that they and the survivors live together. Karam notes:

> Understanding, and the willingness to comprehend and acknowledge perpetrator trauma, requires a cognitive paradigm shift. The perpetrator's presence is a profound challenge to the society in which s/he co-exists (Rwanda and South Africa are only two such examples). S/he is also a signifier of the society which precipitated his/her perpetration, and it is this dynamic (perpetrator/society) that is at the center of this paradigmatic shift. The perpetrator cannot be extricated from the context in which the crimes against humanity existed, or where the atrocities were carried out. (Karam, 2019: 74).

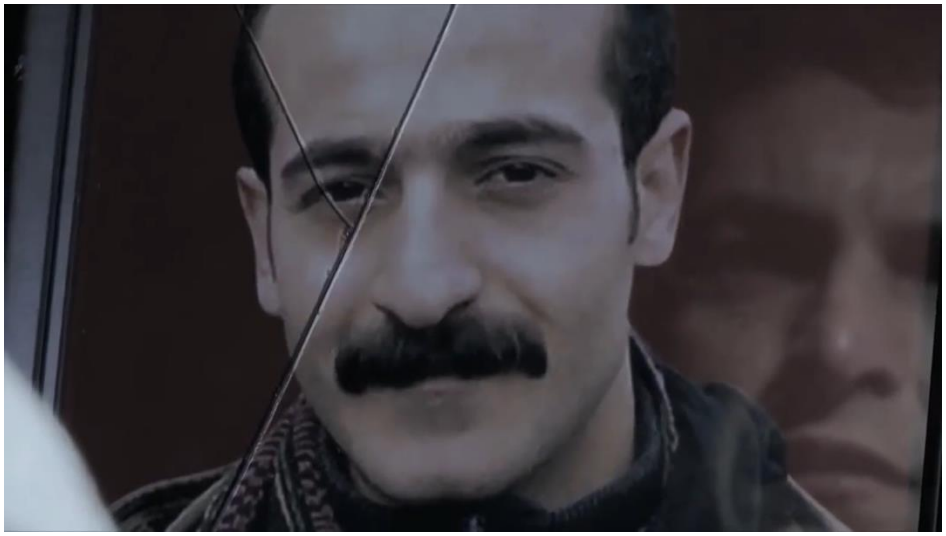
This shift means that society must acknowledge its role and complicity in collective violence. Therefore, it must acknowledge that it must be held accountable and accept responsibility. This is *the* challenge for a society seeking reconciliation, forgiveness, and progress toward an integrated, fully functional, and (ideally) democratic social order. As a result, understanding and interrogating perpetrator trauma is critical for promoting peacebuilding – society will not be able to heal if it denies its complicity (Karam, 2019: 75).

[22] The JITEM officer in Miraz Bezar's *Min Dît: The Children of Diyarbakır – Before Your Eyes* (2009) represents a character like this. Similarly, in Volkan Güney Eker's documentary film project *Hear Their Heartbeat* (2019), Besna Tosun recounts her witnessing her fathers' kidnapping by JITEM followed by his disappearance. Tosun says: "There was a white car in front of our garden. Four men stood next to it. It was dark. From a distance, I couldn't see who they were. We were walking home. Then I realized, one of them was my dad. They saw us getting closer. Two of the men pulled my father and jumped into the garden. One of them remained by the car. He lingered as if he was getting something from the trunk. Then he came to the car. *We looked each other in the eye, and he smiled at me. So, I smiled back.* I ran home and said to my mom, 'My dad's friends are here!' Informing my mom, people were coming over." (The emphasis is done by the author).

On a different note, Hackett and Rolston (2009) write about the "choiceless choices" as some of the actors/perpetrators were stripped of the context of knowing "how to act rationally". Military service is compulsory in Turkey and conscientious objectors are not only legally punished for refusing to exercise military service, but they are also often socially marginalized, publicly shamed, and exposed to militarist-patriarchal-masculinist oppression and discrimination based on the refusal. Some soldiers who conducted their compulsory service in Bakur expressed this societal pressure as well as that they feared for their lives in case, they refused to execute the orders. Therefore, while discussing the perpetrators' trauma, these conditions also need to be taken into consideration. With a reference to Langer, Hackett & Rolston notes:

> Survival in such circumstances becomes a form of curse. In the abstract it may be possible to accept that 'once the impulse to stay alive begins to operate, the luxury of moral constraint temporarily disappears'" But that is little consolation for those who have lived that experience. They look back on their activities and inactivity then with a moral judgment that was unavailable to them then. 'They inhabit two worlds simultaneously: the one of "choiceless choice" *then*; the other of moral evaluation *now*' (Langer, 1991: 83) [sic!]. The end result is unspeakability, 'the difficulty of narrating, from the context of normality *now*, the nature of the abnormality *then*' (Langer, 1991: 22) [sic!]. (2009: 359).

The second layer I will be analyzing is the use of space in the film. The glassmaker's store is in Istanbul's Taksim district, a highly popular and crowded location. The store is where the first encounter takes place. It is the place where the young apprentice's traumas are triggered, and his mood is shattered like the frame that he is holding. As he looks at the smiling face of the man in the picture, his face's color fades away. With this twin gaze, not only the young apprentice but also the society, which is silent about what has been happening in Bakur, is marked.



Picture 1: *Bêdengî* (Courtesy of the director)

The reflection of the young apprentice's face on the broken glass is a clear reference to different subject positions. Society has not only been silent about the war in Bakur and the Turkish state's atrocities, but it is also silent about the traumas of the young soldiers who were sent to Bakur during their compulsory military service.[23] Çapkurt's Bêdengî in this regard shows that this multidimensional silence needs to be shattered like glass. Moreover, it implicates the audience and reflects on our responsibilities in the ongoing war. By doing so it opens a space to discuss in which ways the Turkish society contributes to, inhabits, inherits, or benefits from regimes of domination (Rothberg, 2019: 1). This approach enables us, the implicated subjects (Rothberg, 2019), to go beyond the binary categorizations of victim/perpetrator positions. By acknowledging indirect or belated actions and inactions, it encourages us to confront our own contributions and reminds us of our responsibilities, as well as opens a space for solidarity.

A second space relevant to this discussion is Tarlabaşı, well-known for its Kurdish immigrant population since the 1990s, with a cross-reference to the village that is seen in the faded-color flashback. Kurdish villages in Bakur have grown in importance to the

[23] Soldiers' or ex-military persons traumatic experiences and their experiences as witnesses to state atrocities are still a taboo in Turkey. Academic research on the matter is highly limited. For two critical accounts of burning down the villages, evacuations of the villages, and the entangled relationships between the security forces, institutions, and the Turkish state, see Yağız, et al. (2014: 342-392).

Turkish nation-state since the 1980s (Şengül, 2012: 181). The state considered Kurdish villages to be critical sites in the fight against the PKK since they provided guerilla personnel and accommodation for the PKK. The village guard system, implemented in the mid-1980s, was one of the official responses to the way these villages operated; the other was depopulating the villages in the region (Şengül, 2012: 81). The audience encounters the village in the apprentice's flashback saying that their village probably had a similar fate to thousands of other Kurdish villages that were set on fire and evacuated in the 90s. The evacuation of the villages dispossessed millions of Kurds and caused their forced migration and resettlement to the metropoles in Western Turkey.[24] Millions of Kurdish forced immigrants experienced systematic state violence, oppression, poverty, discrimination, and exclusion in their new settlements. However, these places also have become a site for empowerment, especially for Kurdish women (Açık, 2013; Kılıçaslan, 2015; Göksel, 2018). They have overcome the loss of community, culture, and language, creating a different kind of belonging, a community where they can feel safe and can live their political life. As is depicted in the film, its closeness to the Istanbul branch of the Human Rights Association (IHD) is an enforcing element of its political importance for Kurds, in particular for Kurdish women.

Picture 2: *Bêdengî* (Courtesy of the director)

While the village represents the forced disappearance at the hands of the state and its security forces, Tarlabaşı and Galatasaray Square represent resistance, rights claiming, a quest for holding the state accountable for its crimes, a memory site, a mnemospace, and finally a site where implicated subjects are born.

[24] According to human rights organizations (GÖÇİZDER, 2019) report that between 2 to 4 million people were forcibly displaced in those years (Tepe Doğan, et al. 2011), and official numbers state that 3,448 Kurdish rural settlements were evacuated.

Bêdengî successfully reflects on the implicated subjects who must confront their positions and take responsibility to break the silence. The film also clearly shows that the state and its security forces are the perpetrators, as well as whose experiences must be taken into account for reconciliation processes. A great majority of existing literature on gendered experiences of war and trauma conceptualizes women as a 'particularly vulnerable social group' and ignores their political subjectivities (Fiddian-Qasmideh 2014). From a feminist point of view, it is critical to acknowledge the complexities of women's war experiences, embodiments of loss and grief, and in this regard how affect can be a motivation or inspiration for their political activism. Bêdengî also demonstrates that soldiers' accounts of war and trauma need to be considered as well. As militarist-nationalist discourses have been playing a great role in the legitimization of violence against Kurds and of Turkey's 'war on terrorism'[25], including the experiences and voices of those who are forced to perform compulsory military service can be crucial in the de-militarization of society and its reconciliation processes.

Conclusion

Kurdish cinema embodies important clues about the contemporary political conjuncture of Turkey and Kurdistan (Çiftçi 2015; Koçer & Göztepe, 2017). Throughout this paper, it becomes clear that Kurdish cinema, by being at the intersection of the quest for justice, right to truth, and peace, provides a multitude of narrative contexts for social inquiry. Kurdish cinema's role in constituting and bearing Kurdish cultural and collective memories is crucial to learning about the remembrance culture in Turkey and Kurdistan if we can speak about one. Kurdish films bear the potential to transform society against oblivion by being a platform that erodes the Turkish state's regime of truth. Through taking a special interest in the 'Kurdish people's struggle for the right to truth and justice, I have explored different subject positions and subjectivities in the selected films. While cinema itself manifests its agency as a constituent to the Kurdish collective and cultural memories, it also clearly shows who right-claiming and resisting subjects are.

[25] For detailed analysis of militarism and militarist discourses in Turkey, see Açıksöz (2013), Aykaç (2013), Üstündağ (2013) and Değirmencioğlu (2014).

By focusing on different films, I showcase how filmmaking and cinema can record, preserve, and transmit the Kurdish experiences and memories beyond spatial and temporal boundaries. For instance, the analysis of Özcan Alper's *Future Lasts Forever* links the multidirectional and multilayered aspects of memory to portray how different conflicts are entangled. Moreover, all three cases reflected on the gendered characteristics of state violence and its aftermath by focusing on how Kurdish cinema makes these 'non-existing' and 'invisible' bodies visible and commits them to collective memories. The analysis of the witness accounts and testimonials in the films reveals in which ways the lives of Kurdish women are impacted by state violence. Together with the gendered division of (especially) domestic labor, women, whose husbands, sons, or loved ones are disappeared at the hands of the state carry the burden of witnessing, surviving, remembering, reminding, mourning, and making Kurdish deaths publicly visible as well as fighting against the impunity regime. Given that women's experiences of war are mostly approached as a collection of pain narratives, their struggles for rights and contributions to real politics are often ignored, overlooked, or go unnoticed (Üstündağ, 2014). *Bêdengî, Dengê Bavê Min,* and *Future Lasts Forever* portray and represent women's human rights struggles from different ethnic and religious backgrounds from within the marginalized and criminalized groups. While Kurdish cinema provides women a space to vocalize their demands and needs by making storytelling possible, it also implicates the 'silent audience' and reminds it of its ethical and political responsibilities in the historical continuity of state violence.

Finally, through implication processes Kurdish films encourage us to exercise "small acts of repair" and collective solidarity: *"These small, qualitative changes occur at the intimate scale of reading and viewing – in the eyes, ears, and bodies of people who are – literally – moved by what they see. Remaking collective memory begins with the disruption of old habits in the micropolitics* of reading, viewing, and reacting, with repeated small movements gradually acquiring larger-scale consequences*"* (Rigney, 2021: 18).

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