

**Transformation of the Kurdish Theater Field  
in Turkey between 1991 and 2017**

by

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A Thesis Submitted to the  
Graduate School of Social Sciences in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of

Master of Arts

in

Comparative Studies in History and Society

Koç University

Istanbul, Turkey

June, 2018

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Koc University

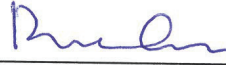
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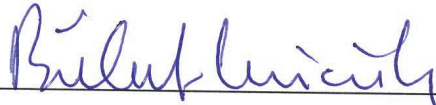
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Date: 25.06.2018

## ABSTRACT

**THESIS TITLE:** Transformation of the Kurdish Theater Field in Turkey between 1991 and 2017

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This thesis analyzes the social, economic, and political dynamics of the transformation in the Kurdish Theater field between 1991 and 2017. After the repeal of the Kurdish language ban in 1991 in Turkey, Kurdish theater became gradually institutionalized under the roof of cultural centers. This thesis explores the history of the institutional Kurdish theater under two periods: the emergence, development, and institutionalization of the Kurdish theater (1991-2002), and its expansion and emergence as an art field in the 2000s (2002-2017). The second period is analyzed under two sub-periods: the period of struggle for autonomy from the mainstream Kurdish political movement (2002-2013), and the Kurdish theater as part of the alternative theater field in Turkey (2013-2017).

In its examination of external sanctions and internal conflicts in the Kurdish theater field after the institutionalization, the thesis draws on Antonio Gramsci's concept of hegemony and Pierre Bourdieu's field theory. Specifically, I first investigate the relation between the state and Kurdish theater field. Second, economic conditions and political relations in the Kurdish theater field are taken into consideration. Finally, I examine individual and artistic conflicts and hierarchical struggles within theater groups.

**Keywords:** Kurdish theater, alternative theater, counter-hegemony, hegemony, field analysis

## ÖZ

**TEZ BAŞLIĞI:** 1991-2017 Yılları Arasında Türkiye’de Kürt Tiyatrosu Alanının Dönüşümü

Bilal Akar

Bu tez, 1991-2017 yılları arasında Kürt tiyatrosu alanının dönüşümünün sosyal, ekonomik ve politik dinamiklerini incelemektedir. 1991 yılında Kürtçe dil yasağının kalkmasından sonra, Kürt tiyatrosu, kültür merkezlerinin çatısı altında kurumsallaşmaya başlamıştır. Bu tez, kurumsal Kürt Tiyatrosu’nun tarihini iki temel döneme ayırmaktadır: 1991-2002 arası ilk dönem Kürt Tiyatrosu’nun ortaya çıkışı, gelişmesi ve kurumsallaşması başlığını taşımaktadır. 2002-2013 yılları arasındaki ikinci dönem, Kürt tiyatrosunun genişlemesi ve bir sanat alanı olarak ortaya çıkışını ele alır. İkinci dönem, Kürt tiyatrosunun ana akım Kürt politik hareketinden özerkleşme mücadelesi (2002-2013) ve alternatif tiyatrolar alanının bir parçası olarak Kürt Tiyatrosu (2013-2017) olmak üzere iki ayrı başlıkta incelenmektedir.

Bu çalışma Kürt tiyatrosu alanının kurumsallaşması ve dönüşümde rol oynayan dış etmenlere ve iç çatışmalara Antonio Gramsci’nin hegemonya teorisi ve Pierre Bourdieu’nün alan analizi üzerinden odaklanmaktadır. Bu çalışmanın üç temel analiz alanı bulunmaktadır: İlk olarak, devlet ve Kürt tiyatrosu alanı arasındaki ilişkiler, ikinci olarak Kürt tiyatrosu alanını belirleyen ekonomik koşullar ve politik ilişkiler ele alınmaktadır. Üçüncü bölüm ise bireylerin tiyatro grupları içerisindeki bireysel ve sanatsal çatışmalarına ve hiyerarşik mücadelelerine odaklanmaktadır.

**Anahtar Sözcükler:** Kürt tiyatrosu, alternatif tiyatro, hegemonya, karşı hegemonya, alan analizi

*dedicated to the memory of Helîn Başak Kanat*

The truth is rarely pure and never simple.

**Oscar Wilde**

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I thank everyone who helped, supported, encouraged and inspired me for this thesis.

Foremost, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my advisor Başak Can for her continuous support, patience, and effort to my study and research. Without her help, this thesis could not manage to see the light of day.

I would like to thank Bülent Küçük and Burak Gürel, for sharing their valuable time and knowledge. I am also grateful to all researchers who contribute to the Kurdish cultural and political studies.

I am profoundly indebted to all of my interviewees. They kindly reserved their time to help me with my study to develop a deeper understanding of the subject by sharing their documents, opinions, and comments.

During the writing of this thesis, as T.S. Elliot says that I have measured out my life with coffee spoons. Therefore, I would like to thank my family and dearest friends who have always been beside me and supported me during my stressful times. I also appreciate the help of all Koç University laborers to create a suitable environment for me to finish my study.

Lastly, I would like to apologize to everyone whose support, help and sharing I forgot to mention.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>ABSTRACT</b> .....	i
<b>ÖZ</b> .....	ii
<b>DEDICATION</b> .....	iii
<b>ACKNOWLEDGMENTS</b> .....	iv
<b>TABLE OF CONTENTS</b> .....	v
<b>Chapter 1: Introduction</b> .....	1
1_A: Literature Review.....	4
1_B: Theoretical Approach.....	18
1_C: Research Field.....	22
1_D: Methodology.....	24
1_E: Studying under the Conditions of the State of Emergency .....	26
<b>Chapter 2: Kurdish Theater before 1991 and the Effects of the Language Ban on the Kurdish Theater Field</b> .....	30
2_A: A Brief History of the Kurdish Language Ban.....	30
2_B_ Kurdish Theater during the Language Ban Period .....	39
2_C_ Effects of Language Ban on the Development of Kurdish Theater.....	49
<b>Chapter 3: Chapter 3: The Emergence, Development, and Institutionalization of the Kurdish Theater between 1991 and 2002</b> .....	58
3_A_ Kurdish Theater as a Political Tool in the Period of 1991-2002.....	59
3_A_1_ Mesopotamian Cultural Center: The Core Cultural Organization of the Kurdish Movement.....	64
3_A_2_ Conflicts between the Kurdish Political Field and Theater Field.....	70
3_A_2_1_ Period of Crisis in Kurdish Theater Field between 1998 and 2001.....	79
<b>Chapter 4: The Kurdish Theater Field in the 2000s</b> .....	85

4_A_The Period of Struggle for Autonomy from Mainstream Kurdish Political Movement between 2002 and 2013.....	87
4_A_1_ New Power Balances in the Kurdish Theater Field.....	96
4_A_1_1_State Intervention in the Kurdish Theater between 2002 and 2013.....	97
4_A_1_2_ Economic Problems, Political Embargo, and the Internal Conflicts in the Kurdish Theater Field.....	101
4_A_2_Deadlock: Failure of Reconciliation in the Kurdish Theater Field.....	113
4_B_ Hybridization and the Kurdish Theater as Part of the Alternative Theater Field between 2013 and 2017.....	121
4_B_1_The Kurdish Theater Field during the State of Emergency Period.....	127
<b>Chapter 5: Conclusion.....</b>	<b>136</b>
<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY.....</b>	<b>141</b>



## Chapter 1: Introduction

Art is a contextualized and political practice and a dynamic state of production and reproduction. Accordingly, theater as a medium of mass communication is a representation of the socio-political structure of society. The theater has also the power to affect the social systems. The relation between theater and politics in different ages, countries, contexts were studied since the birth of Western theater form in Ancient Greece. The use of theater as a political tool has been discussed since its birth. The first example of this discussion was the conflict between Plato's antitheatricality approach in his book *The State* and Aristoteles's counter-arguments on the use of theater as a political tool in his book *Poetics*. For Plato, the theater must be controlled by the state because it encourages false sentiment and feeds irrational emotions of audiences. He proposes banning of the former Greek classics in the ideal state. According to him, "The only poetry that should be allowed in a state is hymns to the gods and paeans in praise of good men."<sup>1</sup> On the other hand, Aristoteles defends the use of theater as an apparatus to take people's emotions and radical feelings under control through catharsis. According to Aristoteles, the audience is "accomplishing by means of pity and fear the cleansing [catharsis] of these [negative] states and feelings."<sup>2</sup> These two approaches were based on the use value of the theater as a hegemonic apparatus. Since theater has always been interconnected with social, political, economic, moral, religious, philosophical spheres of human culture, the relationship between politics and theater has analyzed from many different perspectives. For example, the theater series' editors of Palgrave Publishing, Jen Harvie and Dan Rebellato states that:

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<sup>1</sup> Plato, "Poets Banned from the Ideal State," from *The Republic*, trans. Desmond Lee, 204

<sup>2</sup> Aristotle, *Poetics*, ch. 6, trans. Joe Sachs (Newburyport: Focus Publishing, 2006), 26.

Theatre has taken its place within a broad spectrum of performance, connecting it with the wider forces of ritual and revolt that thread so many spheres of human culture. In turn, this has helped make connections across disciplines; over the past fifty years, theater and performance have been deployed as key metaphors and practices with which to rethink gender, economics, war, language, the fine arts, culture and one's sense of self.<sup>3</sup>

Inspired by sociological debates on the nation, identity, art and the role of theater in political struggles, my study analyzes the Kurdish theater field in Turkey between 1991 and 2017.

The first written Kurdish theater play is *Memê Alan* by Evdirehîm Rehmîyê Hekarî in 1919. *Memê Alan* is accepted as the starting point of Kurdish theater in western theater form. Since then, many theater plays were written and staged in different countries such as Iraq, Iran, Syria, Armenia, Georgia, Soviet Russia and Turkey. However, the Kurdish theater in Turkey could not develop because of the Kurdish language ban since the foundation of the Republic of Turkey. Between 1919 and 1991, only a few Kurdish theater plays were written and staged. Those theater practices were not continuous and institutionalized until the repeal of the language ban in 1991. By the repeal of language ban in 1991, the Kurdish theater started to develop systematically and institutionally in Turkey.

I divide the history of institutional Kurdish theater into two periods such as the emergence and development of the Kurdish Theater in Turkey (1991-2002), the Kurdish Theater field in the 2000s (2002-2017). The second period is further divided into two sub-periods: the period of struggle for Autonomy from main stream Kurdish political movement (2002-2013) and hybridization and the emergence of the Kurdish theater as part of the alternative theater field (2013-2017). The first period focuses on the emergence and

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<sup>3</sup> Joe Kelleher. *Theater and Politics*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009, Preface

development of the Kurdish theater in Turkey for the first time and the use of art as a political tool in Kurdish theater field. During the post-2002 period, the transformations of the Kurdish theater field were shaped by political and artistic contradictions and debates between various Kurdish theater groups as well as the struggles between Kurdish theater groups and the state. Specifically, I focus on factors such as the political transformations in the Kurdish issue, the proliferation of the Kurdish theater groups, and their relationships with the Kurdish political movement, as well as their positions in the 'alternative' theater<sup>4</sup> the field in Turkey.

I examine the emergence, development, and transformation of the Kurdish theater in Turkey by analyzing the history of Kurdish theater in Turkey since 1919 within the context of the Kurdish issue, the effects of language ban on the Kurdish art branches, and finally the conflicts and power struggles among the Turkish state, Kurdish political organizations and Kurdish cultural organizations. This thesis concerns the structural transformation of the Kurdish theater field so I do not focus on the content of the Kurdish art productions. The plays' textual contents, theatrical forms, dramaturgical approaches, avant-garde experiments are going to be taken into consideration as long as they are related to the artistic distinctive specialties of the different Kurdish theater groups.

In the following, I will first review previous studies on the Kurdish theater in Turkey. Then I will explain the limits of my research, specifically the reasons for choosing the period 1991-2017. Finally, I will discuss my theoretical and methodological approaches in the study.

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<sup>4</sup> Alternative Theater: A term that gained currency in Britain in the late 1960s and 1970s as a loose movement of individuals, groups, and venues grew around a set of theatrical ideas opposed to the mainstream, which by then included the subsidized theatre that had once been the alternative to the commercial theatre. Fringe was seen as marginal and defined in relation to the mainstream rather than countering it. Generally, the term is applied to any theatrical practice that offers values in opposition to those of the predominant drama. Usually politically as well as aesthetically inspired, it often embraced an ensemble ideal.

Colin Chambers, *The Continuum Companion to Twentieth Century Theatre* London: Continuum, 2002, p.19-20.

## 1\_A: The Literature Review

The Kurdish Theater field in Turkey is not studied from a sociological perspective focusing on political and economic transformations concerning the Kurdish issue in Turkey. There are more studies on Kurdish literature and music than the Kurdish theater. I will first briefly evaluate studies on various Kurdish art branches in Turkey such as Kurdish music, cinema, and literature to explore various theoretical and methodological approaches to the study of Kurdish art. B. Siyem Ezgi Saritaş's article "Articulation of Kurdish Identity through Politicized Music of KOMS"<sup>5</sup> analyzes the politicization of music and articulation of Kurdish identity. She investigates the role of the politicized music of Kurdish koms<sup>6</sup> that emerged in the 1990s in the construction of Kurdish identity. Wendelmoet Hamelink, Alev Kuruoğlu and Hanifi Barış focus the development of the Kurdish music production, its politicization, the relationship of culture and national identity, and the state policies on the Kurdish art in Turkey in their mutual and individual studies.<sup>7</sup> Joanna Bocheńska investigates the dynamic process of the development of Kurdish identity in the 20th century, focusing on the culture of this nation

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<sup>5</sup> Bünyem Siyem Ezgi Saritaş, "Articulation of Kurdish Identity through Politicized Music of Koms." (MA Thesis Middle East Technical University, 2010), iv

<sup>6</sup> Kom means the group in Kurdish. Koms is the plural version.

<sup>7</sup> Alev Kuruoğlu and Wendelmoet Hamelink. "Sounds of Resistance: Performing the Political in the Kurdish Music Scene" in *The Politics of Culture in Turkey, Greece and Cyprus*, ed. By Leonidas Karakatsanis and Nikolas Papadogiannis, Newyork: Routledge, 2017

Wendelmoet Hamelink. *The Sung Home. Narrative, Morality, and Kurdish Nation*, Leiden: Brill, 2016.

Wendelmoet Hamelink and Hanifi Barış. "Dengbêjs on Borderlands. Borders and State as Seen through the Eyes of Kurdish Singers-Poets". *Kurdish Studies Journal 2*, (2014): 34-60

Alev Kuruoğlu. (2013-08-02). The Kurdish Music Industry: History and Politics. Ottoman History Podcast, Episode #116, by Chris Gratien. MP3, duration 1:10:34. Retrieved 14.10 2013, from <http://www.ottomanhistoricalpodcast.com/search/label/Alev%20Kuruo%C4%9Flu>

and especially on its literary achievements.<sup>8</sup> Serhat Resul Çaçan's study "Dengbêjî Tradition among Kurdish-Kurmanj Communities: Narrative and Performance during Late Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries"<sup>9</sup> explores the dengbêjî tradition and kilams, the musical storytelling of Kurdish-Kurmanji minstrels, mainly in Eastern and Southeastern Turkey, and Western Armenia. He argues that *kilams* have three essential components which mark them. They all speak of a historical event, which can be a riot, a family/tribal conflict or a true love story. They are also an outcome of a purely oral tradition, functioning as an oral transmitter of the knowledge of the past, and kept in memory through performances, through which they are adapted and continuously reproduced. He also argues that a *dengbêjî* tradition is a performative form of transmitting history through a local voice. The study focuses on local history and local language in the afore-mentioned Kurmanji speaking communities. Talat Balca Arda's thesis "Politics and Art: The Transformation of Kurdish Oppositional Music in Turkey"<sup>10</sup> examines the question concerning the formation of the Kurdish political identity through the works of art and the transformation of "the Kurdish Resistance" in Turkey. He investigates several Kurdish oppositional music groups that are popular in Turkey and worldwide. By focusing on the activities of the Mesopotamian Cultural Center (*Mezopotamya Kültür Merkezi / Navenda Çanda Mezopotamya*) and its members composed of the Kurdish musicians, managers, and administrators, he tries to show the current dynamics in the formation of the Kurdish resistance through the works of art. The thesis particularly focuses on the transformation of the representation of the Kurdish political movement through music and art by comparing its evolution vis-à-vis the recent liberal approach of the government party the Justice and

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<sup>8</sup> Joanna Bocheńska, *Between Darkness and Light. About Kurdish Identity and Literature*, Kraków: Księgarnia Akademicka Publishing House, 2011.

<sup>9</sup> SERHAT RESUL ÇAÇAN, "Dengbêjî Tradition among Kurdish-Kurmanj Communities: Narrative and Performance during Late Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries." (MA Thesis, Boğaziçi University, 2013), iii

<sup>10</sup> Talat Balca Arda, "Politics and Art: The Transformation of Kurdish Oppositional Music in Turkey." (MA Thesis, Boğaziçi University, 2010), iii

Development Party (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi –AKP) to the Kurdish question that is popularly called as the “Democratic Opening Policy” or shortly “the Democratic Opening” which is firstly declared to public as Kurdish Opening in mid-2009. Sustam’s article *Mahlul Öznenen Maduna: Kürt Kültürel Çalışmaları ve Bellek*<sup>11</sup> is based on a field research in İstanbul and Diyarbakır between 2002 and 2007. Sustam examines his field data in the concept of politically forced migration, cultural studies, social trauma, and identity crisis. The article focuses on Kurdish society’s collective memory in the 2000s. Sustam analyzes the Kurdish art in Turkey by discussing the concepts of national culture, late modernity, counter-culture, micro-nationalism, migration and collective memory. Sustam’s study follows the results of the sociopolitical changes in the Kurdish literature and music. With the increasing, the number of Kurdish movies, the studies on the Kurdish cinema opened a space for itself in recent decades. For instance, Ayça Çiftçi’s Ph.D. dissertation titled “The Politics of Text and Context: Kurdish Films in Turkey in a Period of Political Transformation”<sup>12</sup> Ayça Çiftçi examines the Kurdish films in Turkey with a particular focus on understanding the political dynamics of the nation in the realm of cinema, and investigates the relationships between ‘cinema and the nation’, ‘film and politics’, and more specifically ‘socio-political conflicts and film’, by exploring the issues and questions regarding these fields generated by the recent rise of Kurdish films and the birth of the concept of Kurdish cinema in Turkey during a period of political transformation.<sup>13</sup>

All these studies focus on the relation between Kurdish identity and politics in Turkey, however, most of the studies on the Kurdish art limited themselves with sociological and political analyses. They do not explore the content of the production from an artistic and

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<sup>11</sup>Engin Sustam, "Mahlul Öznenen Maduna: Kürt Kültürel Çalışmaları Ve Bellek." In *Türkiye'nin Demokratikleşmesi Etnik-Dini Kesimler Üzerinden Değişimin Analizi*, edited by Hakan and Zelal Kızıllan Kısacık Samur, 149-223. Konya: Çizgi Kitabevi, 2014.

<sup>12</sup> Ayça Çiftçi, "The Politics of Text and Context: Kurdish Films in Turkey in a Period of Political Transformation." (Ph.D. Thesis, Royal Holloway University of London, 2015), 4

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

aesthetic perspective. Moreover, none of them, except Sarıtaş's study, investigates the role of institutions in the art production process because that kind of analysis requires a comprehensive field research. In my study, I benefit from these studies to analyze the relationships between political field and cultural field, but I specifically focus on the role of political relations in the Kurdish art field within the broader context of the transformation of artistic concerns in the Kurdish cultural field.

The Kurdish theater is the least studied among other branches because the theater plays are staged at most 3-4-year-long, the researchers can only reach the video records of the productions through personal archives of the artists. In addition to that, because of the economic and political conditions in Turkey, only a few Kurdish theater groups could sustain their theater practices. Therefore, the former researches on the Kurdish theater were very limited. Except for the interviews in theater portals or magazines, the studies on the Kurdish theater field in Turkey are divided into two categories: archive studies and the short articles that explore the history of Kurdish theater in Turkey and the relation between theater and politics. There are three books which exemplify archive studies on the Kurdish theater. These are *Kürt Tiyatrosu* (Kurdish Theater)<sup>14</sup> by Aydın Orak, *Kürt Tiyatro Tarihi* (Kurdish Theater History)<sup>15</sup> by Yavuz Akkuzu and Çetoyê Zêdo and *Jêrzemîn*(Underground)<sup>16</sup> by Mirza Metin and. The first book by Aydın Orak is a compilation of different interviews, newspaper articles, and online papers without any references to the original sources. Aydın Orak's book is just a summary of the *Boğaziçi Gösteri Sanatları Topluluğu* (BGST-Boğaziçi Performance Arts Ensemble)'s interviews with Kurdish actors and directors<sup>17</sup>, Çetoyê Zêdo's writings in his online theater blog<sup>18</sup>, Mirza Metin's

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<sup>14</sup> Aydın Orak, *Kürt Tiyatrosu*. İstanbul: Doruk Yayınları, 2016.

<sup>15</sup> Çetoyê Zêdo, Yavuz Akkuzu. *Kürt Tiyatro Tarihi*. İstanbul: Evrensel Basım Yayın, 2016.

<sup>16</sup> Mîrza Metîn, *Jêrzemîn*. Diyarbakır: Diyarbakır Metropolitan Municipality Publishing, 2014.

<sup>17</sup> Boğaziçi Gösteri Sanatları Topluluğu, "Kürt Tiyatrosu Üzerine Söyleşiler."

<http://www.eski.bgst.org/tb/egitim/>, (Accessed on 16.01.2015)

<sup>18</sup> <https://cetoyezedo.blogspot.com.tr>

Jêrzemîn.<sup>19</sup> The only valid academic writing in the Orak's book is Cafer Sarıkaya's "Kürt Tiyatrosu 1893 Şikago Dünya Fuarında" (The Kurdish Theater in 1893 Chicago World Fair)<sup>20</sup>.

Akkuzu and Zêdo's book *Kürt Tiyatro Tarihi* is a good example of the history of Kurdish theater in Iraq, Syria, Iran, Soviet Republics and Turkey. There are different articles on the Kurdish theater in the book, however, the book does not consist any articles in the Kurdish theater in Turkey. Only related part is the Kurdish theater text chronology which consists the theater texts in the Kurdish language in Turkey until 1991. Mirza Metin's *Jêrzemîn* is a compilation of Kurdish theater groups' historical information and their plays' brochures and posters between 1991 and 2013.

There are few academic studies on the Kurdish theater in Turkey such as Renata Kurpiewska-Korbut's article "Modern Kurdish Theater in Turkey: Between Political and Non-Political Nature"<sup>21</sup> and Elif Baş's article "The Rise of Kurdish Theater in İstanbul"<sup>22</sup>. In addition to these two articles, Duygu Çelik wrote a Ph.D. dissertation "Dengbêjî Tradition and Its Effects on Kurdish Theatre in Turkey"<sup>23</sup>. Renata Kurpiewska-Korbut's article "Modern Kurdish Theater in Turkey: Between Political and Non-Political Nature" examines the political background of the Kurdish art after 1991 and artistic approaches of the Kurdish theater

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<sup>19</sup> Çetoyê Zêdo who is a dramaturgist and researcher gives a detailed list of the original sources that was used in Aydın Orak's book. According to Zêdo, the book is just paraphrasing and summarizing former studies. <https://cetoyezedo.blogspot.com/2016/06/aydn-orak-portresinden-kurt-tiyatrosuna.html>

<sup>20</sup> Cafer Sarıkaya, "Kürt Tiyatrosu 1893 Şikago Dünya Fuarında." In *Kürt Tiyatrosu*, edited by Aydın Orak. İstanbul: Doruk Yayınları, 2016, p. 45-56.

This article was published at first in the journal *Kürt Tarihi Dergisi* Volume:2, August-September 2012, p. 47

<sup>21</sup> Renata Kurpiewska-Korbut, "Modern Kurdish Theater in Turkey: Between Political and Non-Political Nature." *Fritillaria Kurdica: Bulletin of Kurdish Studies*, no. 13-14 (09/ 2016): 93-102.

<sup>22</sup> Elif Baş, "The Rise of Kurdish Theater in İstanbul." *American Society for Theatre Research Theatre Survey*, no. 56:3 (2015): 314-35.

<sup>23</sup> Duygu Çelik, "Dengbêjî Tradition and Its Effects on Kurdish Theatre in Turkey." (Ph.D. Thesis, İstanbul University, 2017)



companies in Turkey. The writer does not define what is political or non-political. The description of political theater for the writer is that political theater means agitation-propaganda alliance.<sup>24</sup> Kurpiewska-Korbut follows the political changes about Kurdish issue through policies of the governments of Turkey. She does not take the ideological and institutional transformation of the Kurdish movement into consideration. According to Kurpiewska-Korbut, there are two historical turning points for Kurdish movement and art institutions. In 1991, the government legalized using the Kurdish language in art productions and publications 2009 was the year of the Kurdish Opening which is a democratization project for the Kurdish issue. Therefore, her analysis of the emerging new independent Kurdish theater groups claims that all changes in the field are driven by the state policies. She ignores the dialectical relation between the Kurdish movement and the Turkish state. Elif Baş gives a more detailed historical background than Renata Kurpiewska-Korbut. She starts with the establishment period of the Turkish Republic in the 1920s and gives Kurdish rebellion examples in 1920s and 1930s. This historical approach ignores the relation between Turkish nationalism in the late Ottoman Empire period and Kurdish movement. Moreover, she focuses on the Kurdish movement in Turkey without making any connection with other parts of Kurdish region in the Middle East. However, without understanding the Kurdish movement in the north of Syria, French colonial policies in Syria and Xoybun Foundation, all critiques on Sheikh Said rebellion of 1925 and the Mount Ararat Revolt of 1927-31 are superficial. Elif Baş follows the same path with Renata Kurpiewska-Korbut about the political history of Kurdish movement, but Baş gives a significant importance the foundation of PKK. Despite more detailed political background provided by Elif Baş, the main determinants of the political field are still limited to the Turkish state policies.

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<sup>24</sup> Renata Kurpiewska-Korbut, "Modern Kurdish Theater in Turkey: Between Political and Non-Political Nature." *Fritillaria Kurdica: Bulletin of Kurdish Studies*, no. 13-14 (09/ 2016): 99

There are two other significant problems in Kurpiewska-Korbut's article. First, the writer draws on mainstream media articles and argues that "Mesopotamian Cultural Centers were the trademark of PKK".<sup>25</sup> For the new independent theater groups, she says that "the core of their work is an apolitical stance and a desire to achieve independent status resulting in, among others, an effort to free themselves from the tutelage of a political trademark of PKK"<sup>26</sup>. In order to make this claim, she quotes from Yaşam Kaya's (a Turkish theater critique) essay "Kurdish Theater: Politics Leave the Stage"<sup>27</sup>. Labeling any legal institution as a trademark of an illegal institution is just ignoring all other political, legal and sociological concerns.<sup>28</sup> The second and more important problem is misinformation and lack of information about the Kurdish theater field in Turkey. For instance, Kurpiewska-Korbut gives names of some Kurdish theater groups like such as *Jiyana Nû* Theater, *Seyri Mesel* Theater, *Avesta* Theater, *Bakur* Theater, *Destar* Theater, *Şermola Performans*, *Mezopotamya* Theater, *Arsen Poladov* Theater, Metropolitan Diyarbakır Theater, Metropolitan Sur Theater or Nusaybin Council Theater without proper understandings of their differences and relations.<sup>29</sup> For example, there is not a theater group titled Mezopotamya Theater. Jiyana Nû Theater (*Teatra Jiyana Nû*) is the theater unit of İstanbul *Mezopotamya Kültür Merkezi* (Mesopotamian Culture Center). She is confused about this separation. Moreover, *Şermola Performans* was the name of *Destar* Theater's stage.<sup>30</sup> She evaluates the foundation of the municipal theaters in the Kurdish region as "the process of rebirth of Kurdish theater in Kurdish regions" in the mid-2000s.<sup>31</sup> However, this statement

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid. 97

<sup>26</sup> Ibid. 97

<sup>27</sup> Yaşam Kaya, "Kurdish Theater: Politics Leaves the Stage." *Turkish Review*, no. Jan-Feb (2012): 16-21.

<sup>28</sup> I am going to analyze the position of the cultural centers including Mesopotamian Culture Center in the Chapter 3.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid. 94

<sup>30</sup> In 2017, - after her article which is published in September 2016 - Destar Theater gave up its name and started to use the name of Şermola Performans.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid. 96

ignores all former Kurdish theater groups in the Kurdish regions. For example, between 1991 and 2013, there were 29 Kurdish theater groups in Turkey, and at least 15 of them were founded under the roof of different culture centers in the Kurdish regions.<sup>32</sup> She further claims that *Şermola Performans* is considered the first modern Kurdish theater in Turkey.<sup>33</sup> However, by 2016, *Şermola Performans* was no different from other independent theater groups in İstanbul like *Seyr-î Mesel* (the processor of *Destar Theater-Şermola Performans*) and *Teatra Avesta*, *Teatra Arzela*, *Roja Avesta*.

Kurpiewska-Korbut discusses two plays of *Destar* such as *Reşê Şevê* and *Buka Lekî*.<sup>34</sup> She does not cover *Destar Theater's* confrontation plays (*Disko 5 Nolu*, *Gor*, *Antigone 2012*, *Aç Köpekler*) or language trilogy (*Merhêba*, *Dil Kuşu*) and Gezi protest play (*Gezerken*). The confrontation plays of *Destar Theater* was based on the collective consciousness of the Kurdish people. *Disko 5 Nolu* is the story of the torture in Diyarbakır Prison after the 1980 coup d'état. *Antigone 2012* is based on the unidentified murders of the JİTEM<sup>35</sup> and enforced disappearances. The language plays *Merhêba* and *Dil Kuşu* are the stories of linguistic and language struggle. Even though she claims the contrary, the plays of *Destar theatre* are extremely political. Kurpiewska-Korbut randomly selects some theater groups and some plays to prove her claim that the newly emerged Kurdish theater is not political.

The second academic study on Kurdish theater field is Elif Başı's *The Rise of Kurdish Theater in İstanbul*. She states her concerns as:

This study provides an overview of the origins of Kurdish theater and its further development in İstanbul in the new millennium. I have chosen two Kurdish theaters,

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<sup>32</sup> Mîrza Metîn, *Jêrzemîn*. Diyarbakır: Diyarbakır Metropolitan Municipality Publishing, 2014: 12

<sup>33</sup> Renata Kurpiewska-Korbut, "Modern Kurdish Theater in Turkey: Between Political and Non-Political Nature." *Fritillaria Kurdica: Bulletin of Kurdish Studies*, no. 13-14 (09/ 2016): 97

<sup>35</sup> Jandarma İstihbarat ve Terörle Mücadele - Gendarmerie Intelligence and Counter-Terrorism

*Destar* Tiyatro (Theater) and Tiyatro (Theater) *Avesta*, to epitomize the issues facing Kurdish theater and the attitudes of the authorities. A close analysis of two plays, *Disko 5 No'lu* (Disco Number 5) and *Daf* (Trap), is included to reflect the artistic and political commitments of this new theater.<sup>36</sup>

As seen, Elif Bař limits her study by the story of two theater groups (*Destar* and *Avesta*) and their two plays (*Disko 5nolu* and *Daf/Kapan*). In spite of this limitation, the title of the article is “The Rise of Kurdish Theater in İstanbul”. This kind of limited research is not enough to understand the contemporary Kurdish theater field. She analyzes the concept of authority as the state institutions so the power struggles between different agents in the political fields are not visible in her study. There are several ungrounded statements in the article. For example, she argues that:

The earlier productions of *Teatra Jiyana Nû* in the 1990s were also politically inspired. It is possible to discern three crucial phases in its repertoire. The first is defined by the plays of Hüseyin Kaytan, including *Daweya Generalê* (The Case of the Tin Plate General), *Ta/Sê Ewrên Dûr* (Ta,/ Three Distant Clouds), *Govenda Hilo* (The Dance of the Eagle), *Mirin û Jiyân* (Death and Life), and *Jinên Bîndest* (Oppressed Women).<sup>37</sup>

The play *Govenda Hilo* (The Dance of the Eagle) was not a production of *Teatra Jiyana Nû* but of *Teatra Evîna Welat*. After Hüseyin Kaytan was suspended from *Teatra Jiyana Nû* in 1994, he staged the play with *Teatra Evîna Welat* under the roof of KAYY-DER<sup>38</sup> association.

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<sup>36</sup> Elif Bař, “The Rise of Kurdish Theater in İstanbul.” *American Society for Theatre Research Theatre Survey*, no. 56:3 (2015): 315

<sup>37</sup> Elif Bař, “The Rise of Kurdish Theater in İstanbul.” *American Society for Theatre Research Theatre Survey*, no. 56:3 (2015): 320

<sup>38</sup> KAYYDER is a solidarity association which was founded by the Kurdish people who lived in İstanbul after their migration from the Kurdish region. KAYY-DER (Kiğı – Karakoçan – Adaklı – Yayladere – Yedisu Sosyal Yardımlaşma, Kalkındırma ve Kültür Derneğı, Kiğı – Karakoçan – Adaklı – Yayladere – Yedisu Social Solidarity, Development and Culture Association)

Baş's article makes very broad generalizations regarding the Kurdish theater based on interviewees' narratives without any discourse/narrative analysis and confirmation of information from different sources. In spite of her limited research, the writer claims that there are concrete and direct connections between dengbêj tradition<sup>39</sup> and modern Kurdish theater. Baş gives a description about the origins of the Kurdish theater and dengbêj form:

It is not easy to elucidate the specific origins of Kurdish theatre, as Kurdish written literature is rudimentary, and oral tradition has long been officially prohibited in Turkey through the language ban. Nevertheless, in general, Kurdish theatre can be traced back to the dengbêj tradition... Thus, dengbêjs were the first practitioners of Kurdish narrative theatre.<sup>40</sup>

The narratives on the dengbêj tradition and modern Kurdish theater relationship must be analyzed through concrete examples and artistic literature because the discussions on the origins of the Kurdish theater are not independent of the invention of tradition concept in the nation-building processes. In the article "The Invention of a Tradition: Diyarbakır's Dengbêj Project", Clémence Scalbert-Yücel argues that:

... a specific 'object' is distinguished, constructed as protected, and transmitted as one of the main carriers of the Kurdish culture, we can also characterize this 'invention of a tradition' as a patrimonialisation process. The paper argues, most generally, that the dengbêj 'tradition' as it exists today is the result of a several-decades-long process of

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<sup>39</sup> It is not easy to elucidate the specific origins of Kurdish theatre, as Kurdish written literature is rudimentary and oral tradition has long been officially prohibited in Turkey through the language ban. Nevertheless, in general, Kurdish theatre can be traced back to the dengbêj tradition... Thus, dengbêjs were the first practitioners of Kurdish narrative theatre.

Clémence Scalbert-Yücel, "The Invention of a Tradition: Diyarbakır's Dengbêj Project", *European Journal of Turkish Studies* [En ligne], 10 | 2009, last update 04.01.2010, (accessed 19.05.2017): p.4 <http://ejts.revues.org/4055>

<sup>40</sup> Elif Baş, "The Rise of Kurdish Theater in İstanbul." *American Society for Theatre Research Theatre Survey*, no. 56:3 (2015): 317-318

negotiation between individual and collective actors within Kurdish society as well as between these Kurdish actors and representatives of the state.<sup>41</sup>

Elif Baş however never discusses the reformation of dengbêj tradition from a sociological perspective. Moreover, she does not make any specific connections between dengbêj tradition and Kurdish theater from an artistic perspective (textual, performative, dramaturgical analysis). She basically relies on the narratives of her interviewee actor/director Aydın Orak. Aydın Orak in his book connects dengbêj tradition and Kurdish theater by comparing the birth of Ancient Greek tragedy. The tragedy as a theatrical form of origin from the tragos (festival songs) but this statement is not valid for the origin of Kurdish theater.<sup>42</sup> The modern Kurdish theater started as a local example of Western theater forms not evolved from dengbêj tradition. However, when Baş analyzes the *Teatra Avesta*'s play *Daf*, she claims that:

Storytelling, and hence the dengbêj tradition, constitutes a significant part of the play, and colorful techniques are used in recounting the stories. For instance, Orak uses the story of a mouse and a mousetrap. In the story, the mouse sees the owner of the house bring a trap into the house. The mouse asks help from the chicken, the pig, and the cow to get rid of the trap, but none of them will help. That night a snake is caught in the mousetrap. The snake bites the farmer's wife, and she gets a fever. The farmer kills the chicken to make soup to help her get better. Neighbors and friends come to visit her, so the farmer kills the pig to feed them. The farmer's wife dies. For the funeral meal, the farmer slaughters the cow. Everyone eventually gets eaten but the farmer and the mouse. Orak uses shadow play to tell this story with a political point. The lights fade out as Orak goes behind a white screen and uses animal figures to tell the story in an amusing

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<sup>41</sup> Clémence Scalbert-Yücel, "The Invention of a Tradition: Diyarbakır's Dengbêj Project", *European Journal of Turkish Studies* [En ligne], 10 | 2009, last update 04.01.2010, (accessed 19.05.2017): p.3 <http://ejts.revues.org/4055>

<sup>42</sup> Interview with Süleyman, 27.04.2013, Diyarbakır Kurdish Theater Panel

way. This story foreshadows the tragic ending of the play by pointing to the fact that the traps we set for others may spell our own doom. Another scene in which Orak (Miran) performs two characters, as in the dengbêj tradition, is when Miran makes a “puppet Apol” out of his sock because Apol refuses to talk to him.<sup>43</sup>

I watched the play *Daf* at Boğaziçi University Demir Demirgil Theater Stage in 2012. As an actor and playwright, I can say that the play description of Elif Baş was not related with dengbêj tradition. Aydın Orak’s narration on the stage was an example of Western epic theater form. Moreover, the narration of the actor did not have any relation to dengbêj ‘kilam’s.<sup>44</sup> Elif Baş is not the only person who tries to connect dengbêj tradition and Kurdish theater. Since the beginning of the western form of Kurdish theater, the dengbêj tradition has been used just as a folkloric object in the plays or an acting tool in rehearsals to discover different narrator forms.

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<sup>43</sup> Elif Baş, “The Rise of Kurdish Theater in İstanbul.” *American Society for Theatre Research Theatre Survey*, no. 56:3 (2015): 329

<sup>44</sup> Clémence Scalbert-Yücel describes kilam as in the footnote 54:

Christine Allison, after fieldwork in Kurdish region in Iraq, distinguishes the stran from the beyt or destan. Stran is the generic term for ‘song’ with musical accompaniment. She also mentions that there is a wide range of stran: historical, love, dances, etc, songs. Beyt or destan ‘is heroic and long narrative songs, often with some prose sections, performed without musical accompaniment’ (2001: 64-66). In my fieldwork in Diyarbakır, the term kilam was used to refer to the generic ‘song’ more than the term stran. Some of the dengbêj then distinguished between three types of kilam: The song for dancing [kilamê govendê]; the song of gathering, about the wars, the combats and the tribes [kilamê cemaatan, a ser şeran, ser aşîret]; and the love song [kilamê li ser dila]. The songs of the dengbêjs were the kilamê cemaatan. For the dengbêjs I met, however, the term kilam mainly referred to the dengbêj songs, whereas the term stran mainly referred to other songs (for weddings, for instance, and with musical accompaniment). However, it is impossible to generalize because the term stran is also used by some of them. The terms destan or beyt are not used to refer to the dengbêj’s songs. Beyt, however, is used in order to refer to a coherent part in an epic. The expression ‘strana dengbêj’ has become widespread. Celadet Ali Bedirxan does not distinguish the stranbêj from the dengbêj, who according to him both tell tales and epics. Stran is according to him an exclusively musical; epics and tales being both sung and narrated (alternating verses and rhythm prose). *Hawar* 3, June 1932: 72 (reedited by Nûdem, Stockholm, 1998, vol. 1). But the situation today is different from the 1930s, music creation having at a lot and the ‘invention of the tradition’ brings a redefinition of all these genres.

Clémence Scalbert-Yücel, “The Invention of a Tradition: Diyarbakır’s Dengbêj Project “, *European Journal of Turkish Studies* [En ligne], 10 | 2009, last update 04.01.2010, (accessed 19.05.2017): p.24 <http://ejts.revues.org/4055>

For example, the first western form theater text in Kurdish theater *Memê Alan* which was written by Evdirehîm Rehmîyê Hekarî includes a dengbêj kîlam in the final scene. However, using dengbêj culture as an object does not mean that dengbêj culture is the origin of Kurdish theater. In the Kurdish Theater Panel held in 2013 in Diyarbakır, two directors refuse the claim that the dengbêj tradition is the source of the modern Kurdish theater. Süleyman (male, actor/director, old generation) says that:

We should not try to invent a tradition or a root. If we try harder, we can find some connections between dengbêj tradition and Kurdish theater because the concept of culture feeds from several sources.... If a former play used the dengbêj tradition, this does not mean that dengbêj tradition is the source of Kurdish theater. It shows the artistic tendencies of the writer or director of the play. The dengbêj tradition as a theatrical form did not create a continuity, tradition or artistic form in the Kurdish theater. I am one of the founders of the Kurdish theater in the 1990s, we trained ourselves in Western theater forms like epic, dramatic. We worked on the Western scholars' theatrical forms like Brecht, Grotowski etc. We all searched the dengbêj tradition or other traditional forms like village plays 10-15 years after we found the Kurdish theater institutions. I prepared a play which was based on a Kurdish tale, but this theater play was not a traditional Kurdish dramatic play.<sup>45</sup>

In the same panel, Heja (female, actress/playwright/director, middle generation) says that:

We do what all theater groups in the world which are benefiting from the traditional stories. However, there is not any cultural heritage which shaped the Kurdish theater.

For instance, Italian traditional theater affected the modern Italian theater in sense of

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<sup>45</sup> Interview with Süleyman, 27.04.2013, Diyarbakır Kurdish Theater Panel



acting and staging. Looking for a root in the traditional Kurdish culture is not a scientific way to describe the modern Kurdish theater.<sup>46</sup>

As seen, to claim that the dengbêj tradition is the source of the modern Kurdish theater, there must be a continuity in sense of acting, staging form or any other artistic perspective. On this point, Mesut (male, director) who is a director and critic proposes another perspective on the national Kurdish theater:

The modern Kurdish theater is a projection of modern Turkish theater which is the projection of Western theater form. Both Turkish and Kurdish theater failed to create its enthusiastic theatrical forms which are based on traditional theater forms. None of them experienced the adventure of the Irish theater. You can look at the Cevat Çapan's books on the Irish theater. The Irish theater founds its way in its culture. To create a national theater, your dramatic fiction, form, theater language, acting style must be enthusiastic. We can say that modern Indian or Japan theater is a national theater in sense of the artistic perspective. The claim that the dengbêj tradition is the root of modern Kurdish theater is an academic nonsense. This kind of approach is used by the researchers to open a space for themselves in the academic field.<sup>47</sup>

About the relation between dengbêj tradition and the Kurdish theater, Duygu Çelik's Ph.D. dissertation "Dengbêjî Tradition and Its Effects on Kurdish Theatre in Turkey" has more humble claims than Baş's article. Çelik questions the influence of the tradition of the dengbêj, a traditional form of one-person narration, on the Kurdish theatre through various selected plays.<sup>48</sup> Moreover, Çelik discusses the dynamics of the privileges dengbêj tradition obtains in

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<sup>46</sup> Interview with Heja, 27.04.2013, Diyarbakır Kurdish Theater Panel

<sup>47</sup> Interview with Mesut, 03.11.2017

<sup>48</sup> Duygu Çelik, "Dengbêjî Tradition and Its Effects on Kurdish Theatre in Turkey." (Ph.D. Thesis, Istanbul University, 2017): 4

“returning to the sources” discussions held in Kurdish theatre<sup>49</sup> and does not take dengbêj tradition as the origin of modern Kurdish theater.

Drawing upon existing literature on the Kurdish theatre, I aim to analyze the Kurdish theater field from a comprehensive theoretical perspective with the help of my field research. My study does not develop an artistic critique of Kurdish theater plays. I rather analyze the artistic forms of theater groups in accordance with their positions in the field. I aim to analyze the transformation of Kurdish theater field from a sociological perspective benefiting from artistic analysis of theater productions.

### **1\_B: Theoretical Approach**

To analyze the transformation of the Kurdish theater, I benefit from Antonio Gramsci’s conceptualization of counter-hegemony and Pierre Bourdieu’s approach to the cultural studies. In this chapter, I will explain the basic theoretical approaches of both scholars. In the next chapters, I will analyze my research findings by using these theories.

Gramsci examines the capitalist state as being made up of two overlapping spheres, a ‘political society’ (which rules through force) and a ‘civil society’ (which rules through consent). The domination in the political society is executed through coercion, and the armed struggle in the political society is called as the war of maneuver. Gramsci sees civil society as the public sphere where trade unions and political parties gained concessions from the bourgeois state, and the sphere in which ideas and beliefs were shaped, where bourgeois ‘hegemony’ was reproduced in cultural life through the media, universities and religious institutions to

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

'manufacture consent' and legitimacy.<sup>50</sup> As a Marxist scholar, Gramsci accepts civil society as a superstructure which is determined by the infrastructures (mode of production). However, Gramsci analyzes the cultural realm as an autonomous realm. The coercion in the political society does not directly shape the civil society. The dominant class ensures its hegemony in the civil society through the manufacturing of consent mechanism. According to Gramsci, the war of maneuver to control the production tools could only succeed with a prior 'war of position' in the form of struggle over ideas and beliefs, to create a new hegemony.<sup>51</sup> The war of position aims to create a counter-hegemony against the dominant class and mobilize the masses (proletariat). In the war of positions, the intellectuals have great importance for the counter-hegemony. For Gramsci, there are two types of intellectuals such as traditional and organic:

In the first place, there are the "traditional" professional intellectuals, literary, scientific and so on, whose position in the interstices of society has a certain inter-class aura about it but derives ultimately from the past and present class relations and conceals an attachment to various historical class formations. Secondly, there are the "organic" intellectuals, the thinking and organizing element of a particular fundamental social class. These intellectuals are distinguished less by their profession, which may be any job characteristic of their class, than by their function in directing the ideas and aspirations of the class to which they organically belong.<sup>52</sup>

The Kurdish movement in Turkey reemerged in the late 1960s as a left-wing opposition. The emergence of PKK (a Marxist-Leninist party) in the 1980s as the dominant organization in the

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<sup>50</sup> Heywood, Andrew. *Political Ideas and Concepts: An Introduction*. London: Macmillan, 1994, 100-101

<sup>51</sup> Gramsci, Antonio. *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*. Translated and Edited by Q. Hoare and G. N. Smith. New York: International Publishers, 1971, 35

<sup>52</sup> Gramsci, Antonio. "The Intellectuals", in *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*. Translated and Edited by Q. Hoare and G. N. Smith. New York: International Publishers, 1971, 3

Kurdish movement, the Marxist critiques highly affected the Kurdish movement. Moreover, the rise of Kurdish cultural field in the 1990s was shaped in accordance with Gramsci's concept of war of positions and counter-hegemony.

In spite of the fact that Gramsci's analysis on the civil society - specifically cultural realm – gives a theoretical guideline to analyze the Kurdish movement's war of position and counter-hegemony attempts in the cultural field, I enlarge my theoretical approach by using Pierre Bourdieu's field analysis. Gramsci examines the war of positions as the dichotomy of economic classes. However, to understand the power relations, dynamics, the position-takings of the agents and power struggles in the Kurdish theater field, Pierre Bourdieu's field analysis proves useful because the analysis of the Kurdish theater field cannot be explained by the dichotomy of the nation state and subaltern group resistance. Bourdieu states that:

In analytic terms, a field may be defined as a network, or a configuration, of objective relations between positions. These positions are objectively defined, in their existence and in the determinations they impose upon their occupants, agents or institutions, by their present and potential situation (*situs*) in the structure of the distribution of species of power (or capital) whose possession commands access to the specific profits that are at stake in the field, as well as by their objective relation to other positions (domination, subordination, homology, etc.).<sup>53</sup>

A field has its own rules, logic, institutions, and agents. A field is a dynamic site which consists of social and economic structures, institutions, agents. In a field, the agents and their social positions have specific locations. The positions of the agents are determined by the structural rules of the field as well as agents' habitus and their economic and cultural capital. In

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<sup>53</sup> Pierre Bourdieu and Loic J.D: Wacquat, *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992, 97

my research, I am going to look for an answer if there are specific rules and logic in the Kurdish art environment to define the Kurdish theater field. I am going to follow Bourdieu's conceptualization field analysis. Bourdieu marks that:

An analysis in terms of field involves three necessary and internally connected moments (Bourdieu 1971d). First, one must analyze the position of the field vis-a-vis the field of power... Second, one must map out the objective structure of the relations between the positions occupied by the agents or institutions who compete for the legitimate form of the specific authority of which this field on the site. And, third, one must analyze the habitus of agents, the different systems of dispositions they have acquired by internalizing a determinate type of social and economic condition, and which find in a definite trajectory within the field under consideration a more or less favorable opportunity to become actualized.<sup>54</sup>

By taking those analytical tools of Bourdieu, I am going to focus the power struggles in the Kurdish theater field as the transformative dynamics of the field. I am going to follow two analytical lines, namely first examination of the power relations (domination, subordination etc.) between political field and cultural field, and second analysis of Kurdish theater field's dynamics and conflicts. These two lines also overlap because a field is always interconnected with different fields. These interconnections appear as hierarchical relations among fields so any field has to be studied through its relationships with other fields. Bourdieu gives a description of the dynamics of a cultural field in his book *The Field of Cultural Production*:

The space of literary or artistic position-takings, i.e. the structured set of the manifestations of the social agents involved in' the field -- literary or artistic works, of

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<sup>54</sup> Pierre Bourdieu and Loic J.D: Wacquat, *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology*, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992), 104-105

course, but also political acts or pronouncements, manifestos or polemics, etc. -- is inseparable from the space of literary or artistic positions defined by possession of a determinate quantity of specific capital (recognition) and, at the same time, by the occupation of a determinate position in the structure of the distribution of this specific capital. The literary or artistic field is a field of forces, but it is also a field of struggles tending to transform or conserve this field of forces.<sup>55</sup>

All in all, I am going to analyze the emergence period of the Kurdish theater in the 1990s in accordance with the Gramsci's war of positions approach. Analyzing the transformation of the Kurdish theater field between 1991 and 2017 requires a more comprehensive theoretical approach. I aim to explore the relationships and functions of agents, internal struggles, and external sanctions in the Kurdish theater field. To analyze these points, I focus on the hierarchical relations among the fields (economic, political, and cultural), agents' positions and capitals within diverse fields. Bourdieu's theoretical approach offers a comprehensive analysis method to study the Kurdish theater field.

### **1\_C: Research Field**

The theater as a performance art has several roots like religious performances, rites, cultural ceremonies, storytelling tradition and so on in different cultures.<sup>56</sup> It is hard to define what theater is and what is not. Since the birth of the Western form of theater in Ancient Greece, we see the reinterpretation of the concept of theater, the denial of the Ancient Greek theater forms, the emergence of numerous forms of epic theater and performing arts, renovation of

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<sup>55</sup> Bourdieu, Pierre. *The Field of Cultural Production*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1993, 30

<sup>56</sup> Şener, Sevda. *Dünden Bugüne Tiyatro Düşüncesi*. İstanbul: Dost Kitabevi, 2006, 11

local performance forms and so on. Moreover, except the Western theater forms, there are local traditional theater forms like Japanese Kabuki Theater, Indian theater stream Nataka and Prakarana, Orta Oyunu and so on. However, the artistic line which started with the emergence of Ancient Greek Theater continues to be the most dominant theatrical form in the contemporary world. Undoubtedly, this Eurocentric claim for the contemporary theater is not independent of the political and economic superiority of the Western culture.

To define my research field, I use some basic limitations such as institutionalization and period. I focus on the period of the Kurdish theater after the repeal of the Kurdish language ban in 1991. Therefore, I do not cover traditional village plays which are played at some festivals. Drawing on Pierre Bourdieu's conceptualization of the "field," I use the term "Kurdish Theater Field" to cover a diverse set of art institutions and productions in Kurdish language including the theater institutions run by Kurdish writers, directors, actors and actresses, the multilingual theater plays which consist Kurdish language, performances inspired from the collective consciousness of Kurdish people in Turkey.

Until the foundation of Mesopotamian Culture Center (Navenda Çanda Mezopotamya – Mezopotamya Kültür Merkezi – MCC) in 1991, there was no institution where theater plays were regularly produced and played because of the Kurdish language ban.<sup>57</sup> After my preliminary research, I decided to focus on the following cultural institutions: MCC in İstanbul, MCC's branches in different cities such as Diyarbakır, Batman, Urfa, Mersin, Van and İzmir as well as MCC's subgroups such as *Teatra Jiyana Nû* (TJN), *Sarya Halk Sahnesi* (Sarya Public Stage), *Şanoya Helîn* (Theater Helîn), *Tunceliler Derneği* (Tunceli Fellow Countrymen Association), *Fatih Halk Sahnesi* (Fatih Public Stage), *Kiğı – Karakoçan – Adaklı – Yayladere*

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<sup>57</sup> Use of the Kurdish language in art productions or publications had been banned by different law regulations since the foundation of the Republic in Turkey. By the repealing of law 2932 in 1991, the use of Kurdish language became legalized.

– *Yedisu Sosyal Yardımlaşma, Kalkındırma ve Kültür Derneği* (Kiğı – Karakoçan – Adaklı – Yayladere – Yedisu Social Solidarity, Development and Culture Association - KAYY-DER), *Halk Kültür Derneği* (People's Culture Association - HKD), *Seyr-i Mesel, Şermola Performans* (formerly known as *Destar*), *Teatra Avesta, Teatra Sî, Şanoya Şarederiya Amedê* (Diyarbakır Municipality Theater- *Diyarbakır Belediyesi Şehir Tiyatrosu*), *Şanoya Bajêr a Amede* (Amed City Theater - *Amed Şehir Tiyatrosu*). These are primary agents in the Kurdish Theater field. In addition to these theater institutions and groups, I also include some other theater groups which produced a few Kurdish theaters plays in different cities and several İstanbul based theater groups which produce at least one play in the Kurdish language or use the Kurdish language as a performative tool in their plays.

## **1\_D: Methodology**

As I stated above, there is not a comprehensive research on the Kurdish theater in Turkey to compare my findings and analyses. The lack of written academic sources on the Kurdish theater in Turkey requires to collect data through various sources including books and articles on the Kurdish theater in Turkey, newspaper articles and published interviews with actors, actresses, directors, playwrights and managers of the Kurdish theater groups, voice records of Kurdish Theater panels in Diyarbakır. To enrich the data about the Kurdish theater and qualify my analysis, I made a comprehensive ethnographic research by making interviews with actors in the field, seeing plays, visiting theater stages, participating theater panels.

To prepare my interview questions, I benefited from the former interviews with same people, their articles in newspapers and online media. I asked questions about the relationship between the state and the Kurdish theater groups, the power struggles within the Kurdish



movement and their reflections on the Kurdish theater field, artistic and personal conflicts among agents in the field, their knowledge on Kurdish language and dialects and how social, cultural, economic capital of the individuals in the Kurdish theater influenced their approach to theater in general, Kurdish theater in particular.

The position of researcher in ethnographic studies has been questioned to clarify the relationship between the collected data and its interpretation. My engagement with the Kurdish theater was not limited to my thesis research. As an actor, a playwright and a former critic, I have been in the theater field of İstanbul since 2009. I have watched most of the the Kurdish theater plays, visited rehearsals of the groups, participated workshops with some Kurdish actors and actresses, wrote some critiques on the plays, made interviews on the plays for the Mimesis Performing Arts Portal between 2009 and 2018.<sup>58</sup> Therefore, I had the opportunity to analyze and interpret the narratives of my interviewees from an insider perspective. As I am familiar with the political, economic, cultural and personal dynamics of the theater field, I had the chance to understand what my interviewees hesitate to tell, how they tell the relations in the field, which topics are not wanted to be discussed.

In the ethnographical studies, analyzing what and how the interviewees say depends on their relationship with the researcher. Being related to the field that I studied has advantages and disadvantages for the study. I could evaluate the narratives of my interviewees by checking from different sources and analyze their discourse in accordance with their positions in the field. On the other hand, my relations with the actors of the field could have affected my analysis. However, I do not have any relation which caused any conflict of interest.

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<sup>58</sup> Mimesis Sahne Sanatları Portalı, Authors: Bilal Akar  
<http://www.mimesis-dergi.org/author/bilal-akar/>, retrieved 20.01.2017

During interviews, I have encountered difficulties as I learned about the intimate details of the conflicts among groups. Gossiping, on the one hand, creates a mutual trust between researcher and interviewer. But on the other hand, it is the source of ambiguity and unease for the researcher. In my interviews, especially after I turned off the recorder, many internal conflicts between and within group rose to the surface through gossiping. Given the ideologically and personally loaded nature of the topics, many interviewees did prefer not to answer some of the questions. In such cases, I interpreted their reluctance to answer as a clue to their position in the field.

Before I started my MA education, I had started to make preliminary interviews with Kurdish actors, actresses and directors in İstanbul in 2015. In my thesis research, I conducted 16 semi-structured interviews<sup>59</sup> which lasted 2 to 3-hours between April 2016 and January 2018. I selected my interviewees from different Kurdish theater groups which I defined as primary institutions above. In this thesis, I used nicknames for them to keep them anonymous. I classified the interviewees into three groups such as the “old generation”, “middle generation” and “young generation”. The old generation consists of people who were born before 1975 and participated the Kurdish theater groups in the founding period between 1991 and 1995 and have continued theater since then. The middle generation consists of people who were born between 1975-1990 participated in the Kurdish theater groups just after the founding period. The young generation consists of people who were born after 1990 and participated the Kurdish theater groups after the 2000s. In other words, the groups can be called as the founders, successors and new generation of the Kurdish theater field. I examine the roles of different generations in the Kurdish theater in the following chapters. I tried to reach at least two different generations of

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<sup>59</sup> 11 male and 5 female interviewees.

the same theater groups because I aimed to compare the differences of different generations to analyze their positions in the Kurdish theater field.

### **1\_E: Studying under the Conditions of the State of Emergency**

Finally, I would like to state how the existing political atmosphere in Turkey shaped my field study as well as my position during my encounters with interviewees. I started to follow the Kurdish theater groups in 2008. I went to plays, participated in several workshops and panels on multi-cultural theater practices. My first systematic research started in the first months of 2015. At that time, the Kurdish issue was discussed in relation to the "Kurdish Opening Process".<sup>60</sup> On 7 June 2015 general elections, AKP, the ruling party of Turkey- lost its majority in the National Assembly. After that, the government declared that the opening process is ended. The armed clashes between Turkish arm and PKK started again. After the election, none of the parties could establish the government so another general election was organized on 1 November 2015. Between two elections, the armed clashes and police operations against Kurdish political organizations increased. AKP government gained the majority in the second election. The following year, on 15 July 2016, a coup d'état was attempted in Turkey against state institutions, including the government and the President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan.<sup>61</sup> On 20 July 2016, the government declared a three-month state of emergency invoking Article 120 of the Constitution of Turkey ("Declaration of state of emergency because of widespread acts of

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<sup>60</sup> The Kurdish Opening Process is a project titled Democratic Initiative Project which aimed to improve standards of democracy, freedoms, and respect for human rights. The main focus on the project is the solution of the Kurdish problem through meetings with the political pro-Kurdish party, NGOs, intellectuals and most importantly Kurdish armed organization PKK.

<sup>61</sup> Kinney, Drew H. "Civilian Actors in the Turkish Military Drama of July 2016." *Eastern Mediterranean Policy Note* 10 (2016): 1-10.

violence and serious deterioration of public order").<sup>62</sup> After the declaration of the state of emergency, the government started to rule the country through statutory decrees. I completed my field study under the state of emergency conditions. In this period, many Kurdish organizations (political, cultural organizations as well as NGOs) were banned by different statutory decrees.<sup>63</sup>

The second aspect of the effects of the state of emergency on my study is related to my interviews. I could reach my interviewees through my connections – actors, directors, and dramaturgs of alternative theater groups- in the theater field. None of my interviewee candidates whom I do not have any direct or indirect relation responded my calls, e-mails or visits to their offices. Even some of my interviewees that I could reach were not willing to frankly respond to my questions in the first meeting. There were two main reasons for this situation. For the first reason, they did not want to jeopardize any person or institution including themselves. For the second reason, some of them did not want to talk about the internal conflicts of the Kurdish theater field under the current conditions. However, there is a clear difference in my interviewees' attitude regarding whether to talk about the internal conflicts in the Kurdish theater field. The old generation and middle generation who decided to stay in the cultural institutions related to the Kurdish political movement avoided mentioning the conflicts and power struggles in the field. The ones who chose to leave and found their independent theater groups seemed more willing to discuss those topics. They argued that the unspoken conflicts harmed the development and independence of Kurdish theater. The young generation of the

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<sup>62</sup> Updated Situation Report- State of Emergency in Turkey 21 July 2016 – 20 March 2018, p 4 <http://www.ihop.org.tr/en/2018/04/25/updated-situation-report-state-of-emergency-in-turkey-21-july-2016-20-march-2018/>, retrieved 201.05.2018

<sup>63</sup> During my field study and writing process of thesis, I had to change the statistics on the bans and arrestments weekly basis. For the detailed information, see State of Emergency Reports of the Human Rights Joint Platform. The reports are regularly updated. <http://www.ihop.org.tr/en/2018/04/25/updated-situation-report-state-of-emergency-in-turkey-21-july-2016-20-march-2018/>, retrieved 201.05.2018

Kurdish theater field stated that the conflicts among Kurdish theater groups prevent the development of the Kurdish theater, so they did not want to talk about the problems that they were not part of. The main interest area for the young generation is not the problems among different groups but the development of the Kurdish theater as an art branch. In short, I continued my field research to reach the individuals from all sides.

The first question of my interviewees was that why I chose this topic to study. I answered that there was not any comprehensive academic study on the topic, and the existed ones are fraught with misinformation on the Kurdish theater in Turkey. To show my business card of Koç University Comparative Studies in History and Society Department created a good effect in this sense. I also informed them that I do not share the voice records, use their real names. I did not mention the names interviewees to each other. I made interviews at desolate cafes because I had to get voice records. The average duration of my interviews was 2-3-hour-long. In every interview, they asked me to turn off the voice records before talking about the internal conflicts among Kurdish political and cultural organizations in detail. It is interesting that they accepted to use the off-the-record information except for one case, but they asked me not to use any details that expose them. It was understandable because the number of Kurdish theater groups, actors, actresses, writers and directors is not many. I could figure that all interviewees somehow knew each other.

Under those conditions, I found myself in a strange position. As a researcher, I aimed to prepare a reference study. Moreover, some of my interviewees put me into the position of the carrier of the unspoken conflicts and power struggles in the field. During the writing process of my thesis, I often thought about the power relations and the politics of knowledge production. I read the articles about the oppressed groups' art movements, decolonization of academic knowledge discussions and the position of the researcher in an ethnographic study. Moreover, I discussed with several professors who studied the Kurdish issue in Turkey about the problem

of knowledge production. All in all, I aimed to write this thesis without manipulating knowledge. However, as a researcher, I am not free from social structures and current political conditions. Human Rights Watch states that the self-censorship of academicians increased under the state of emergency conditions.<sup>64</sup> In future, the other researchers' critiques on this study are going to show that in what rate I could succeed to make a comprehensive, analytic and uncensored study.

All in all, in this chapter, I analyzed the former researches on the Kurdish theater in Turkey, explained the limits of my research, the reasons for choosing the period 1991-2017. I also discussed the theoretical and methodological approach of my study. Finally, I questioned my position as a researcher in the field under the current political conditions and draw a general picture of my knowledge production process.

## **Chapter 2: Kurdish Theater before 1991 and the Effects of the Language Ban on the Kurdish Theater Field**

In this chapter, I will state the brief history of the Kurdish language ban in Turkey. After that, I will discuss the two aspects of the Kurdish language ban before 1991. The first one is the history of Kurdish theater practices until the repealing of Law No 2932 in 1991. The second one concerns the effects of the language ban on the human source in the Kurdish theater field. The language ban affected not only Kurdish art productions but also learning and use of the language by all generations from 1923 to 1991 creating a serious human source problem for the Kurdish theater groups faced.

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<sup>64</sup> Human Rights Watch Report, Turkey: Government Targeting Academics , (14.05.2018)  
<https://www.hrw.org/news/2018/05/14/turkey-government-targeting-academics>,  
retrieved 26.05.2018

## **2\_A: A Brief History of the Kurdish Language Ban**

The relation between the emergence of the Kurdish theater and the ban on the Kurdish language has a crucial importance to understand the creation of Kurdish identity and the historical development of the Kurdish theater. In this part, I am going to look at the history of Kurdish language bans related to the nation-building policies from the rise of Turkish nationalism in the Ottoman Empire to now. I am going to look at the juridical regulations on the language policies and the interpretation of the laws by the state institutions. In other words, I examine the coherence and conflicts between de facto and de jure situations related to the language ban. I will provide a very general overview of the history of the Kurdish question to understand the political conditions within which the Kurdish cultural field emerged. I aim to link the transformations in the Kurdish theater field to the changes in the political field because of these two fields structurally and institutionally interlinked.

In the last fifty years of the multiethnic Ottoman Empire, the concept of nationalism became a substantial discussion topic through the rebellions of non-Muslim ethnicities in the Balkan region. The idea of Turkish nationalism was born in the Balkan region through the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP-İttihat ve Terakki Cemiyeti) which ruled the Ottoman Empire between 1908 and 1918. The founders of the new Republic had organizational and ideological connections to CUP. The effects of Emile Durkheim's functionalism and the idea of harmony became the starting point for the Turkish nationalism of the Republic. The nationalist movements of minorities in the Ottoman Empire were considered the destructive element of the empire; however, Turkish nationalism was saluted as the foundation stone of the new state: The Republic of Turkey. In the Ottoman Empire, there was a multilingual cultural

field. The theater plays, newspapers, books, and other mass communication tools were produced in Turkish, Kurdish, Armenian, Arabic, Greek etc. However, a monolingual language policy was constitutive of the Turkish nationalism of the Republic.

The Turkish language declared to be the only legitimate language in the Republic. The founders of the Republic followed the idea of Ziya Gökalp and members of Committee of Union and Progress. Ziya Gökalp stressed the nationalist ideology of Committee of Union and Progress. "Today in Europe only those states which are based on a single-language group are believed to have a future."<sup>65</sup> Speaking Turkish is counted as the key element to be a part of the nation by the founder figures and ministers of the Republic. The Republic of Turkey followed a political agenda to create a modern nation-state which is based on the assimilation and oppression of different ethnicities and homogenization of the people under the "Turkish nationality". The language policy of the new republic was based on the idea of the monolithic nation-state. The non-Muslim minorities such as the Greek and the Armenian people have the right to education in mother tongue under the control of the Ministry of Education by the Lausanne Agreement.<sup>66</sup> On the other hand, education in Kurdish and Arabic languages was not protected by the Lausanne Agreement because the speakers of these languages were Muslim. The Law on the Unification of Education (Tevhid-i Tedrisat Kanunu) (1924) and The Surname Law (Soyadı Kanunu) (1934) had a great importance in erasing the visibility of minority languages. With the passing of The Law on the Unification of Education, all educational institutions were gathered under the Ministry of Education. This law aimed to centralize and secularize the education system by banning the religious education institutions where non-

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<sup>65</sup> Ziya Gökalp, *Turkish Nationalism, and Western Civilisation*. Translated by Niyazi Berkes. London: Greenwood Press, 1981, 81

<sup>66</sup> "Treaty of Peace with Turkey Signed at Lausanne, July 24, 1923" in *The Treaties of Peace 1919-1923*, Vol. II, (New York: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1924)



Turkish languages like Kurdish and Arabic were used as education language.<sup>67</sup> With the introduction of The Surname Law (Soyadı Kanunu) (1934), the citizens of Turkey had to have an official Turkish surname. As Welat Zeydanlıoğlu remarks:

Throughout the 1920s and 1930s, the Kemalist regime mobilized all its forces to promote Turkish and spread the ideas and products of the language revolution. For example, during the "Citizen, Speak Turkish!" (Vatandaş, Türkçe Konuş!) the campaign, launched in 1927 and which peaked in 1937, posters were hung on walls, bulletins were distributed on the streets and public declarations were made advocating that all Turkish citizens should speak Turkish.<sup>68</sup>

The juridical bans and regulations on the Kurdish language have continued during the history of the Republic. In 1959, Law No. 7267 stipulated that "village names that are not Turkish and give rise to the confusion are to be changed in the shortest possible time by the Interior Ministry after receiving the opinion of the Provincial Permanent Committee"<sup>69</sup>. After the 1960 coup d'état, the new constitution (1961)'s article 58 of the Law Concerning Fundamental Provisions on Elections and Voter Registers stated, "it is forbidden to use any other language or script than Turkish in propaganda disseminated in radio or television as well as in other election propaganda."<sup>70</sup>

The Turkish army came to the political stage as a core agent again by the two coup d'état in 1971 and 1980. The new regulations after both coup d'états sustained the previous denial policies. Some of Kurdish and left-wing political and cultural organizations were banned. For

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<sup>67</sup> Welat Zeydanlıoğlu. "Turkey's Kurdish Language Policy." *De Gruyter Mouton*, no. 217 (2012): 99-125, 103

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 103

<sup>69</sup> Kerim Yildiz and Fryer Georgina. *The Kurds: culture and language rights*. London: The Kurdish Human Rights Project, 2004, 23

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.* 26

instance, Nizamettin Ariç, a Kurdish singer and film director from Ağrı, was arrested in 1979 for singing in Kurdish. Rather than serving a 5 to 15 years prison sentence, he moved to Berlin as a political refugee.<sup>71</sup> The 1982 constitution sustained and strengthened the bans on non-Turkish languages. Law 2932 forbade the "utilization of any language in the dissemination, printing, and expression of ideas, which is not in the official language recognized by the Turkish state." It also stated that "Turkish is the mother tongue of all Turkish citizens" and prohibited "the use and dissemination of other languages as a mother tongue."<sup>72</sup> Moreover, the Kurdish names of villages were systemically changed into Turkish names. David McDowall points out that by 1986, 2,842 Kurdish villages were given Turkish names.<sup>73</sup>

Since the 1970s, the idea of armed struggle and founding Kurdish organizations separate from Turkish political organizations gained importance among Kurdish political activist during these years. In the 1970s, several Kurdish political organizations<sup>74</sup> emerged. PKK was founded in 1978 and won the competition among Kurdish political parties and started an armed struggle against the Turkish army in 1984. With the rising of PKK's armed resistance, the 1990s and 2000s became the most conflicted period of the Kurdish question in the history of the Republic. The foundation of pro-Kurdish political parties, the Kurdish culture centers, publishing houses, music groups and television channels are some developments of this period. The Kurdish cultural field was deeply affected and shaped by political conditions. The visibility of the Kurdish movement in the political field has risen beginning with the 1990s. The transformation

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<sup>71</sup> M. Hakan Yavuz. "A Review of Nizamettin Ariç's Kurdish Ballads Album." *A Preamble to the Kurdish Question: the Politics of Kurdish Identity*, no. 18.1 (1998): 9–18, 14

<sup>72</sup> M. Hakan Yavuz. "A Review of Nizamettin Ariç'S Kurdish Ballads Album." *A Preamble to the Kurdish Question: the Politics of Kurdish Identity*, no. 18.1 (1998): 9–18, 14

<sup>73</sup> David McDowall. *A Modern History of the Kurds*. London: I. B. Tauris, 2000, 18

<sup>74</sup> Kurdistan Democratic Party of Turkey (Türkiye Kürdistan Demokrat Parti-TKDP), Revolutionary Eastern Cultural Hearts (Devrimci Doğu Kültür Ocakları -DDKO), Turkey Kurdistan Socialist Party (Türkiye Kürdistan Sosyalist Partisi - TKSP), Rızgari, Kurdistan National Salvationists (Kürdistan Ulusal Kurtuluşçuları-KUK), KAWA and Kurdistan Workers Party (Partiya Karkerên Kürdistan - PKK)

of the political field affected the shaping of the Kurdish cultural field. By the repealing Law 2932 in 1991 (ban on the Kurdish language), the Kurdish art field emerged, and the war of positions gained importance through Kurdish culture organizations, artists, and intellectuals – In Gramsci's terms organic intellectuals. Legal Kurdish political parties and cultural institutions were first founded during the 1990s.

At the beginning of the 2000s, the DSP-ANAP-MHP coalition government<sup>75</sup> pledged to carry out constitutional reforms in line with European Union standards to surpass the deadlock in the politics of the late 1990s and sustained its superiority against the peripheral political movements. On 16 December 1999, the Vice-Prime Minister and President of ANAP Mesut Yılmaz stated that “The way to European Union is passing through Diyarbakır”.<sup>76</sup> The amendment of Article 26 of the Constitution in 2001 was a significant reform as this article had prescribed the use of prohibited languages "in the expression and dissemination of thought". After the repealing of language ban in 1991, the recent change which legalizes the use of Kurdish on radio and television broadcasting was the second important legal regulation about the use of Kurdish language in the public domain. Although Turkish will be the basis of TV and radio broadcasts, broadcasts in different languages and dialects used by Turkish citizens in their daily lives became possible. Furthermore, it has been emphasized that such broadcasts cannot be against the fundamental principles of the Republic enshrined in the Constitution and the indivisible integrity of the country.

One of the successors of the Welfare Party (Refah Partisi, RP -), The Justice and Development Party (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi, AKP) came to power in 2002. AKP continued

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<sup>75</sup> Under the Prime Minister Bülent Ecevit's leadership Democratic Left Party-Motherland Party-Nationalist Movement Party coalition government. The 57<sup>th</sup> government of the Republic of Turkey

<sup>76</sup> Nevzat Çiçek. "AB Yolu Diyarbakır'dan Geçer." *Sabah*, 10.08.2009. Retrieved 20.04.2017 from [https://www.sabah.com.tr/siyaset/2009/08/10/ab\\_yolu\\_diyarbakirdan\\_gecer](https://www.sabah.com.tr/siyaset/2009/08/10/ab_yolu_diyarbakirdan_gecer)

<sup>77</sup> Diyarbakır is the most populated Kurdish city in Turkey.

the harmonization regulations with the European Union and put the membership of the European Union as its primary goal. As Dağı states, “the Islamists began to realize that Western demands for democratization and human rights in Turkey overlapped with their own search for protection against the Kemalist establishment, especially the military, and the judiciary”.<sup>78</sup> These alliances have shaped the history of the Kurdish question in the 2000s. The AKP government has spearheaded several reforms in order to comply with the EU accession criteria. These reforms were introduced as part of the harmonization process which resulted in various amendments to the 1982 Constitution and other legislation. It is also worth noting that not even one of these constitutional and legislative amendments refer to the Kurdish language or Kurds specifically. However, by those reforms, the Kurdish movement gained an advantage in the war of positions.

After the harmonization regulations, the Kurdish language gained visibility and legitimacy in the public sphere. The rights to education and court defense in mother tongue became important topics for the Kurdish movement. Moreover, the use of Kurdish in the municipalities' brochures and signboards was legalized by the regulations. In spite of the reforms about the use of the Kurdish language in mass media; the state interventions and surveillance on Kurdish media continued during this period. For example, the Roj TV, which is a Denmark-based Kurdish satellite station, was not allowed to broadcast through the official satellites of Turkey. In 2004, Turkey's public service broadcaster the Turkish Radio and Television Corporation (Türkiye Radyo ve Televizyon Kurumu, TRT) started to broadcast in different languages like Kurdish, Arabic and so on for two hours per week but the Turkish subtitle was required in those broadcastings. “In January 2009, however, state-run channel TRT-6 commenced its broadcast exclusively in Kurdish, with Prime Minister Erdoğan

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<sup>78</sup> İhsan Dağı. ‘The Justice and Development Party: Identity, Politics, and Human Rights Discourse in the Search for Security and Legitimacy’, in Yavuz, M.H. (ed.) *The Emergence of a New Turkey: Democracy and the AK Party*, Salt Lake City: The University of Utah Press, 2006, 143

congratulating the launch of the channel with a few words in Kurdish.”<sup>79</sup> However, TRT 6 (*TRT-KURDÎ*) could not dominate the Kurdish TV broadcasting. The foundation of the *TRT-KURDÎ* was not only a result of reforms in the Kurdish Question but also a counter-move of the state for the war of positions in Kurdish cultural field. By the foundation of TRT 6, the state tried to operate as an agent in the Kurdish cultural field to establish its hegemony. For example, the use of Kurdish language in this state-sponsored Kurdish channels aims to differentiate itself from the language used in television channels associated with the Kurdish movement. When I asked which regional dialects are used in TV channels and if there is a consensus on TV language, Tuncay (an academician who completed his MA in Artuklu University Kurdish Language and Literature Department) answered as “TRT 6, ROJ TV and some Islamic oriented Kurdish TV channels use different words for the same words. The Kurdish languages used by Roj TV was labeled as the language of PKK so TRT 6 never use some specific words such as ‘heval-friend or comrade’.”<sup>80</sup> In this period, various small TV channels started to broadcast in the Kurdish language; however, those Kurdish TV channels faced with many legal investigations. According to the Kurdish Human Rights Project's report, the local private TV station, *Gün TV*, which broadcasts from Diyarbakır, has faced legal harassment with more than 60 cases filed against it since its foundation in 2001.<sup>81</sup>

The period between 2009 and 2015 was named as the “Kurdish Opening”. The Kurdish Opening project aimed at sustaining peace between the Turkish army and the PKK. As part of this project, civil, political and cultural rights of the Kurdish people were discussed widely; however, these rights were not recognized by the legal regulations. The Kurdish Opening

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<sup>79</sup> Welat Zeydanlıoğlu. "Turkey's Kurdish Language Policy." *De Gruyter Mouton*, no. 217 (2012): 99-125, 116

<sup>80</sup> Interview with Tuncay, 18.07.2017

<sup>81</sup> Kurdish Human Rights Project. *Recognition of linguistic rights? The impact of pro-EU reforms in Turkey*. London: Kurdish Human Rights Project, 2005, 23

changed only the facto situation of the cultural rights of Kurdish people. The state control on the Kurdish language did not disappear. For example, the education in mother tongue for Kurdish people was not legalized. During the Kurdish Opening process, the AKP government legalized the de facto situation but a comprehensive, rights-based language policy was not implemented. The main juridical change was the right to a fair trial in mother tongue in 2013<sup>82</sup><sup>83</sup>. On 28 February 2015, at the end of long negotiations, the AKP government representatives and HDP parliamentarians declared a pact of opening policies which was called as Dolmabahçe Declaration or Agreement (*Dolmabahçe Müitabakattı*). As Cuma Çiçek and Vahap Coşkun states:

The 2013 Newroz Declaration after a two-year dialogue process came to a critical verge with the Dolmabahçe Declaration. At February 28, 2015, at the Prime Minister's Office at Dolmabahçe, the parties to the Peace Process made a mutual statement in front of the cameras for the first time.<sup>84</sup>

However, this agreement was publicly rejected by the President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan on 25 April 2018.. He claimed that he did not know the content of the declaration.<sup>85</sup> 4 months after the Dolmabahçe Agreement, the general elections took place. At the general election on 7 June 2015, HDP gained %13, 12 of all votes and 80 parliamentarians in the National Assembly.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> RESMÎ GAZETE (The Republic Of Turkey Official Gazette) Law number: 6411 Admission Date: 24.01.2013

<sup>83</sup> A result of Kurdish arrestees' wide protests. For detailed information: BİANET, "Anadilde Savunma Hakkı Raporları", <https://m.bianet.org/konu/anadilde-savunma-hakki>

<sup>84</sup>Cuma Çiçek and Vahap Coşkun. "The Peace Process From Dolmabahçe To Present-Day : Understanding Failure And Finding New Paths", Heinrich Böll Stiftung Association Report, 2016, 8

<sup>85</sup>Adana - BIA News Desk, "President Erdoğan: What Dolmabahçe Agreement?", Bianet, 25.04.2016, retrieved 29.11.2016 from

<https://bianet.org/english/politics/174188-president-erdogan-what-dolmabahce-agreement>

<sup>86</sup> High Election Council Reports, 2015

<http://www.ysk.gov.tr/tr/7-haziran-2015--25-donem-milletvekili-genel-secimi/3304>, retrieved 19.01.2017

By this result, HDP became the first and only pro-Kurdish party which passed the election threshold. AKP lost the majority in the National Assembly by gaining 40,87% of all votes. A couple of weeks after the elections, the Turkish army started international operations against PKK's bases in Iraq. KCK ended the ceasefire on 11 July 2015, and PKK started to stroke back against the Turkish army operations.<sup>87</sup> With the failure of coalition negotiations between AKP and CHP (Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi – Republican People Party), another general election was decided. On the 1 November 2015 election, AKP gained the majority in the National Assembly, and HDP passed the election threshold by gaining 10,76% of all votes. One year after the start of the armed clashes, another milestone event of the political history of Turkey happened. On 15 July 2016, a coup d'état attempt was suppressed by the government. On 21 July 2016, the cabinet declared the state of emergency. In this extraordinary period, the political and cultural institutions of the Kurdish movement is either banned or suspended.<sup>88</sup>

All in all, in the current situation, there is not a political initiative to solve the Kurdish Question of Turkey. The Kurdish Question has always been one of the crucial problems of the Republic. Despite ceasefire periods and several attempts for the recognition of the rights of Kurdish people, the state policies have mostly been based on security concerns. Undoubtedly, this general overview of the Kurdish Question does not cover all aspects. In this chapter, I tried to give a brief background information to understand the political dynamics of the Kurdish cultural field – specifically Kurdish theater field. In the following chapter, I am going to state the effects of the political history of the Kurdish Question on the Kurdish cultural field.

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<sup>87</sup> T24, “İşte 7 Haziran’dan 1 Kasım’a seçime etki eden olaylar”, T24, 03.11.2015, retrieved 13.02.2016 from <http://t24.com.tr/haber/iste-7-hazirandan-1-kasima-secime-etki-eden-olaylar,315129>

<sup>88</sup> Cuma Çiçek and Vahap Coşkun. “The Peace Process From Dolmabahçe To Present-Day : Understanding Failure And Finding New Paths”, Heinrich Böll Stiftung Association Report, 2016

## 2\_B\_Kurdish Theater during the Language Ban Period

In spite of the ban on the Kurdish language, the artistic activities existed even before 1991. Certain interpretations of the law and left-wing political movements' practices created grey areas regarding the implementation of this ban. This helped certain art branches including literature, music, and theater to emerge in Kurdish during this period. In this period, the written Kurdish art products were mostly published outside of Turkey. The written Kurdish literature could not develop under the ban conditions. The luckiest Kurdish art branch was Kurdish music in this period because smuggling and reproduction of music cassettes were much easier than copying a Kurdish novel or producing a theater play.<sup>89</sup> A theater practice requires a rehearsal period and space and staging a play in public was almost impossible.. Moreover, because of the language ban, very few Kurdish people could read and write in Kurdish despite that they could speak Kurdish. Therefore, from 1919<sup>90</sup> to the repeal of language ban in 1991, only a few theater texts were written and staged. In the following chapter, I will specifically focus on the effects of the ban on the development of the Kurdish theater field through concrete examples and the discussions on the traditional performance.

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<sup>89</sup> According to Reigle, The history of Kurdish music recordings in Turkey can be divided into seven periods, demarcated by political events that shaped access to existing audio technologies: 1. 1902-1923 Ottoman Empire. Cylinders; 78-rpm records recorded in Turkey. 2. 1923-1960 Early Republic. Language proscribed; 78s imported or smuggled into Turkey. 3. 1960-1971 Military Coup, May 27, 1960. A few 45-rpm records allowed. 4. 1971-1980 Military Coup, March 12, 1971. Cassettes become important, though illegal. 5. 1980-1991 Military Coup, September 12, 1980. Intensified language ban; cassettes continue. 6. 1991-2001 Law 2932 repealed. Birth of the Kurdish recording industry in Turkey. 7. 2001-present Easing of Restrictions. Full-time Kurdish television broadcasting allowed; Internet.

Robert F. Reigle. "A Brief History of Kurdish Music Recordings in Turkey." *Hellenic Journal of Music Education, and Culture* Vol. 4 | Article 2 ISSN 1792-2518 (2013): 1-3

<sup>90</sup> The first Kurdish theater text *Memê Alan* by Evdirehîm Rehmî Hekarî was written in 1919.



The studies on the traditional Kurdish dramatic plays<sup>91,92</sup> have increased in last three decades. However, the traditional Kurdish dramatic plays were mostly studied as a part of the Anatolian or Turkish culture. The books and documentaries of Metin And, Şükrü Elçin, Nurhan Karadağ and Şahika İzmen classified the Kurdish traditional theatrical plays under Anatolian or Turkish traditional plays.<sup>93</sup> As Duygu Çelik states in these studies the Kurdish people do not exist with their national identities, and they are rather represented as the Anatolian peasantry, and some researchers such as Bengîn Amedî, Yakup Aykaç and Aydın Orak claim that the roots of modern Kurdish theater lie in those plays.<sup>94</sup> Those who argue against this argument say that contemporary Kurdish theater plays have followed the Western theater forms since 1991<sup>95</sup>. Duygu Çelik's non-published Ph.D. dissertation "Dengbêjî Tradition and Its Effects on Kurdish Theatre in Turkey" draws several connections between traditional Kurdish folklore and modern Kurdish theater. Çelik analyzes the traditional village plays such as *Taziye*, *Kawayê Hesinkar* (Kawa the Hammersmith), *Aşvan* (Millwright), *Sînor* (Border), *Mîr Mîran* (Phony Lord), and *Pezkogiro – Pezoguro* as the former examples of the modern Kurdish theater.<sup>96</sup> However, the term 'modern Kurdish theater' needs to be defined in relation to those plays. Since I analyze the Kurdish theater from the perspective of the institutionalization and emergence as an art field, I

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<sup>91</sup> "Seyirlik Oyun" is a concept to describe the short plays and skits which are staged at weddings, festivals, and other traditional celebrations.

Bengîn Amedî. "Kürt Seyirlik Oyunları Ve Tiyatro." *War* 4 (1998): 37-40.

<sup>92</sup> The plays Kosegelî, Beranberdan ve Bûka Baranê are the examples of Kurdish dramatic plays. Duygu Çelik. "Dengbêjî Tradition and Its Effects on Kurdish Theatre in Turkey." Istanbul University, 2017, 121

<sup>93</sup> Ibid. 97.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid. 97.

<sup>95</sup> Interview with Belçin, Selim, Kamil, Gülçin.

These interviewees are from the old generation (founders in 1990s) and the middle generation of the Kurdish theater. As a playwright and actor, I followed the Kurdish theater plays since 2008. I agree with the idea that the Kurdish theater forms are the examples of the several Western theater forms not the successors of Dengbêj tradition.

<sup>96</sup> Duygu Çelik. "Dengbêjî Tradition and Its Effects on Kurdish Theatre in Turkey." Istanbul University, 2017, 100

do not focus the connections the traditional village plays because the existence traditional village plays do not seem to have any direct influence on the institutional Kurdish theater in the post-1991 period.

*Memê Alan* (1919), written by Evdirehîm Rehmî Hekarî and published in *Jîn Magazine* issue no 15 and 16 in İstanbul, is accepted as the first Kurdish theater text. In addition to this, Cafer Sarıkaya states that a play titled “Kurdish Drama” was staged at Chicago World Columbian Exposition of 1893 by Ahmad Abu Khali al-Qabbani’s theater company which was founded in Egypt and sponsored by the Ottoman Empire for the Chicago exposition.<sup>97</sup> Although staged in Arabic, *Memê Alan* is still accepted as the first Kurdish theater text. After *Memê Alan*, hundreds of Kurdish theater plays were written and in Iraq, Iran and Armenia<sup>98</sup>. However, in Turkey, there were only a few examples of written and staged plays because of the language ban. The Kurdish theater performances were mostly hidden. Although the short skits in Kurdish were played in political meetings, there had been no continuous practice in this field. In the history of the republic, the first Kurdish theater text *Birîna Reş* (Black Scar) was written by Musa Anter in the prison in 1959. The text was published in Kurdish and Turkish in 1965 but was banned. This ban was repealed on 16 February 1965 by Diyarbakır Criminal Courts of Peace.<sup>99</sup> The court expert stated that the use of non-Turkish language was not an illegal act.

The visibility of the Kurdish identity or the use of Kurdish speeches, *strans* (songs) and *kılams* (dengbêj songs) in theater plays started with the rise of political theater in the 1960s and in 1970s. With the rise of leftwing movements in the 1960s, the political theater emerged and the social issues and political problems concerning Kurdish people found space in these plays. For instance, a Kurdish director and actor Cemil Özen (Mamoste Cemil) song Kurdish *strans*

<sup>97</sup> Cafer Sarıkaya. "Kürt Tiyatrosu 1893 Şikago Dünya Fuarında." *Kürt Tarihi Dergisi*, Volume:2, August-September (2012): 48

<sup>98</sup> Çetoyê Zedo and Yavuz Akkuzu, *Kürt Tiyatro Tarihi*, İstanbul: Evrensel Basım Yayın, 2016, 256

<sup>99</sup> Musa Anter, *Ferhanga Khurdi-Tirki: Kürtçe-Türkçe Sözlük*, İstanbul: Yeni Matbaa, 1967, 170-171.

in the play *Deprem ve Zulüm* (Earthquake and Cruelty) of the *Devrimci Ankara Sanat Tiyatrosu* (Revolutionist Ankara Art Theater –DAST) in 1978. The play was inspected by state experts such as Ord. Prof. Dr. Sulhi Dönmezer, Doç. Dr. Erol Cihan ve Doç. Dr. Köksal Bayraktar. According to the experts' report, there were Kurdish speeches in some parts of the play. The Kurdish peasants in the play spoke the Kurdish language. The audience answered the actors in Kurdish.<sup>100</sup> According to one of the writers and actors of the play Şıh Ali Yalçınar:

Since there were Kurdish dirges and speeches, the play was banned for around ten years. We were punished through custody and detentions. Investigations were started at everywhere the play was staged. As an expert, Ord. Prof. Dr. Sulhi Dönmezer gave a report which suggested to ban the play. In spite of the people who asked to ban the theater play, Haldun Taner - an important figure in theater field – gave a report stated that the play served the brotherhood of Turkish and Kurdish peoples and did not support separatism.<sup>101</sup>

As seen, the Kurdish theater practices faced with investigations and other legal interventions. In spite of all preclusions, a Kurdish play could be staged in the 1970s. *Dawiya Dehaq*, written by Kemal Burkay, was the first Kurdish play that was staged during this period. According to Zêdo and Akkuzu, the play was staged by the *Devrimci Halk Kültür Derneği* (Revolutionist People Culture Association – DHKD) on 21 March 1978 at Dian Cinema in Diyarbakır. The

<sup>100</sup> “Oyun, birçok yerinde alkışlarla kesiliyor. Oyunun bazı bölümleri Kürtçe konuşmalarla sürdürülüyor. Kürt köylüleri Kürtçe türküler okuyorlar. Bazı sahnelerde çoşan seyircinin, sahnedeki konuşmaları Kürtçe cevap verdiği duyuluyor.” “Bilirkişi Raporları”, Halk Tiyatrosu/Deprem ve Zulüm: Bir Dönemin Sanat ve İdeoloji Belgeseli, İstanbul, Yaba Yayınları, 2009, p. 79.

<sup>101</sup>Mesut Kara, “Deprem ve Zulüm”, Evrensel, 22.12.2013, Retrieved 02.04.2017 from <https://www.evrensel.net/yazi/70115/deprem-ve-zulum>

Kürtçe ağıtlar, konuşmalar olduğu için yaklaşık on yıl yasaklandı. Gözaltılar, tutuklamalar oldu. Oynandığı her yerde soruşturmalar açıldı. Ord. Prof. Sulhi Dönmezer bilirkişi olarak, 'oyun cezalandırılmalı' diye rapor verdi. Oyunun bölücülük suçundan yargılanmasını isteyenlere karşı, tiyatronun önemli ismi Haldun Taner ise oyunun Türk ve Kürt halklarının kardeşliğine hizmet ettiğini söylüyor, 'bütününe bakıldığında bölücülük yapmadığını anlarsınız' diye rapor veriyordu.

play was also staged in Ceyhan, Adana, and İstanbul after the 1980 coup d'état.<sup>102</sup> The text was published in *Özgürlük Yolu*<sup>103</sup> journal. After the repealing of the language ban, *Dawiya Dehaq* was published by Deng Publishing in 1991 and staged by an amateur theater group -*Şanoya Roja Azadî*- at HEP's (People's Labor Party) İstanbul Küçükçekmece meeting room on 17 August 1991.<sup>104</sup> Selim Çürükkaya's short play *Demirci Kawa'dan Çağdaş Kawa'ya* (From Kawa the Hammersmith to Kawa the Contemporary) was the other example of the propaganda plays. Although the language of the play was Turkish, the play was based on the Kurdish epic *Kawa* and *Dehaq*. This played was written and staged in prison by the political prisoners to their visitors in Diyarbakır Prison after the 1980 coup d'état.<sup>105</sup> Unfortunately, the knowledge on the Kurdish theater practices is limited with the cases that I mentioned above. We do not know if there were any other Kurdish theater practices. When I asked my interviewee Selim (male, actor /director, old generation) if there were any amateur political theater practices in the Kurdish regions like Mamoste Cemil and his friends did in İstanbul, he says that:

It is told that there were some plays which are played at houses in Dersim in the 1970s.

I heard that amateur people prepared short skits for party meetings or political celebrations in the 1970s, but we have not any documents, records or text about them.<sup>106</sup>

Moreover, the Kurdish regions were under the local state of emergency in the same period so there was not any space for the Kurdish art branches to develop.

<sup>102</sup> Çetoyê Zedo and Yavuz Akkuzu, *Kürt Tiyatro Tarihi*, İstanbul: Evrensel Basım Yayın, 2016, 256

<sup>103</sup> May 1978 volume 35 Turkish version, June-July 1978 volumes 37-38 in Kurdish version

<sup>104</sup> Çetoyê Zedo and Yavuz Akkuzu. *Kürt Tiyatro Tarihi*, İstanbul: Evrensel Basım Yayın, 2016, 256

<sup>105</sup> Özgür Halk Dergisi, "Interview with Selim Çürükkaya: Dehakların olduğu ülkelerde Kawa'larda çıkar", Özgür Halk Dergisi, April 1991, retrieved 03.03.2016 from

[http://www.madiya.net/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=141:dehaklarn-olduu-uelkelerde-kawalarda-ckar&catid=37:roeportaj&Itemid=56](http://www.madiya.net/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=141:dehaklarn-olduu-uelkelerde-kawalarda-ckar&catid=37:roeportaj&Itemid=56)

<sup>106</sup> Interview with Selim, 09.02.2017

In the 1970s, there were theatrical and performative practices related to the propaganda activities for the political movements. However, by 1980 coup d'état, the leftwing and Kurdish political and cultural organizations were banned. Under those circumstances, the political meetings, public celebrations and agitprop theater practices of Kurdish organizations ended for about 10 years. The armed struggle was the core element of the Kurdish movement, so the theater practices could not find a space even as a political tool in the political field since the 1990s.

In the second half of the 1980s, with the foundation of Kurdish associations in the metropolis outside of Kurdish region like İstanbul, İzmir, Mersin, the art courses started in those associations for young Kurdish people. However, the language in those courses was Turkish. In İstanbul, Mamoste Cemil (Cemil Özen) who acted in the play *Deprem ve Zulüm* (Earthquake and Cruelty) was the only person who executes theater practices. Those activities were hidden so the prepared skits were not publicly played. Mamoste Cemil (Cemil Özen) tells their first attempts of the amateur Kurdish theater performances as follows:

When the 'East Meetings' occurred, "The speakers and singers came, and some skit plays were played. But the skit plays were Turkish. There had been not Kurdish plays until 1975. However, people made some plays which are related to the Kurdish problem. Moreover, in Turkish plays, there were Kurdish words and songs...In 1987, Zeytinburnu Halkevi (Zeytinburnu Community Center) was founded. During our theater practice in the community center, we started to ask why Kurdish does not exist and why Kurdish theater does not exist...At those times, we make our rehearsals at strange places because if we were to be caught by the police, we all would be gone. They would accuse us of being part of an organization because we played in Kurdish. ... We played those plays in the houses. For 2.5-3 years, we played in different houses in different neighborhoods on every Saturday and Sunday... I founded three mobile theater

groups...There were a couple of plays that we have 20-30 audiences. Except for those ones, our audiences were more than 30 people. One time, I counted 145 people in the house, there were 25-30 children on the tables. After the play, we would discuss the play and the current political situation with the audience. We would leave early in the morning because we could not leave at night.<sup>107</sup>

I call these amateur Kurdish theater performances as underground theater. They were using offices of various Kurdish associations and houses to perform their plays. They didn't have access to the proper theater stage. As the armed struggle has started to be influential in the Kurdish movement, the use of art as a propaganda tool lost its importance in the 1980s. However, the Kurdish political organization has noticed Mamoste Cemil's theater practices. Mamoste Cemil tells the relationship between the party and his group and how they reached their audiences as follows:

At first, people from the political organizations came and ask who we are, what we do. After that, they supported us... At that time, we were undertaking performances in the houses, the players were interested in politics at the same time. The party members came to where we play. They pretended to be ordinary people and asked questions of us. We talked with them. Sometimes, we encountered with negative attitudes from them. Some of them used to say, "what kind of play is this, this is nonsense". However, after some time, their support increased.<sup>108</sup>

This relation has importance because it shows the enthusiasm of the Kurdish political organizations to control any other political activity in the civil society. This approach also

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<sup>107</sup> Alişan Akpınar and Volkan Mantu. "Interview with Cemil Özen: Mamoste Cemil ve Halkçı Kürt Tiyatrosu Denemesi", *Boğaziçi Gösteri Sanatları Topluluğu Website*, September 2005, retrived 16.01.2015 from <http://eski.bgst.org/tb/egitim/1113.html>

<sup>108</sup> Ibid.

caused the power struggles between the Kurdish political movement and theater field in the 1990s and 2000s.

All in all, because of the struggle between the state and Kurdish political organizations, the art practices emerged as a part of this struggle. The basic motivation of the political organizations was to use art as a political tool. For example, the short skits at the protest meetings were the examples of the using theater as a political tool. The theater plays *Dawiya Dehaq* and *Demirci Kawa'dan Çağdaş Kawa'ya* based on Kurdish mythology was the representation of the power of Kurdish resistance. The plays *Birîna Reş*, *Deprem ve Zulüm* were the examples agitprop form of the political theater. This situation was not a coincidence because, since the 1960s, the political theater gained importance among the leftwing groups. The plays related to the Kurdish issue were examples of the political theater echoes such as Erwin Piscator<sup>109</sup> and Bertolt Brecht<sup>110</sup> theater understandings. The theater practices of Mamoste Cemil's theater group can also be considered as an example of Augusto Boal's theater echole Theater of the Oppressed<sup>111</sup>. Boal developed the concept of Forum Theater in the 1970s under the topic of Theater of the Oppressed. Boal applies the concept of simultaneous

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<sup>109</sup> Piscator aimed to the foundation of a proletarian theater which accelerates the mobilization of the working class through conscious propaganda. For detailed information:

Piscator, Erwin. *The Political Theatre. A History 1914–1929*. Translated by Hugh Rorrison. New York: Avon, 1978

<sup>110</sup> Bertolt Brecht as a Marxist playwright and director created a new form of epic theater. According to Anthony Squiers, “Brecht theorized about many important social and political issues—sometimes expressly in this notes, journals, essays, and letters other times he embedded those thoughts in his artistic works. At times his theorization is incredibly unique; for example, his concept of 'estrangement effects', theorized the role art could play in undermining dominant worldviews and its potential role in creating a social revolution.”

Anthony Squiers. “The Social and Political Philosophy of Bertolt Brecht”, Western Michigan University, 2012, 16-17

<sup>111</sup> Augusto Boal aims to use of theater as a mean for promoting social and political change. In the Theater of Oppressed echole, the audience is an active part of the performance. Boal defines the audiences as "spect-actors". The point is showing, analyzing and transforming the daily life reality of audiences by audiences.

dramaturgy in Forum Theater. In early forms of 'simultaneous dramaturgy', the audience could propose any solution, by calling out suggestions to the actors who would improvise the changes on stage.<sup>112</sup> By this theatrical form, the traditional audience-actor relation is broken, and the audience becomes a member of the performance. Mamoste Cemil tells that they discussed with the audience during and after the performance. Although he does not mention Augusto Boal in the interview, he gives the perfect example of the forum theater:

- Did the people intervene the play, did they get angry or yell?
- Yes, of course. For example, they turn to the actor and say you cannot sit like that. It is not how we sit. I would immediately intervene and change the actor's sitting style to see if that works better. During those plays, audience culture developed well.<sup>113</sup>

The state surveillance on the expression of Kurdish identity, language, and art forms prevented the emergence of the Kurdish art practices in the public realm until 1991. Informally circulating contraband music cassettes, Europe based Kurdish TV channels, a few published short stories in political journals, amateur theater skits were the only productions of the Kurdish culture field during this period. The Kurdish theater remained as an underground theater. Moreover, the art practices were the supplementary part of propaganda activities by the political parties or organizations. In other words, there was not an autonomous Kurdish theater field in the Bourdieusian sense because a field has its operational logic, specific rules agents, and structures. Moreover, the position of each agent in the field is a result of interaction between the specific rules of the field, agent's habitus and agent's capital (social, economic and

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<sup>112</sup> Augusto, Boal. *Theater of the Oppressed*, New York: Theatre Communications Group, 1993, 132-133

<sup>113</sup> Alişan Akpınar and Volkan Mantu. "Interview with Cemil Özen: Mamoste Cemil ve Halkçı Kürt Tiyatrosu Denemesi", *Boğaziçi Gösteri Sanatları Topluluğu Website*, September 2005, retrived 16.01.2015 from <http://eski.bgst.org/tb/egitim/1113.html>



cultural)<sup>114</sup>. However, the Kurdish theater practices were not institutionalized, regular or sustainable. The productions were the result of personal initiatives, so we cannot define a Kurdish theater field during this period. The emergence of Kurdish theater on a regular and institutional basis took place in the 1990s.

## **2\_C\_The Effects of Language Ban on the Development of Kurdish Theater**

In this part, I am going to show the effects of the language ban on the human source of Kurdish theater and different approaches to the relationship between the Kurdish language and theater. The emergence and development of the Kurdish theater field have always encountered the problem: lack of the people who can act, write and direct in Kurdish. The human capital of the Turkish theater field (national theaters, municipality theaters, and private theaters) comes from conservatoires, acting courses of Municipality Theaters, amateur theaters like university clubs. However, the Kurdish theater field is deprived of such avenues where they can be trained in performing arts in their own language. This is an ongoing problem for the Kurdish theater field.

Even after repealing the law 2932 - language ban - in 1991, the use and visibility of the Kurdish language in art productions were still very limited. Moreover, the Kurdish cultural centers which opened language courses were suffered from the state oppression. The culture

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<sup>114</sup> Pierre Bourdieu. *Distinction: a social critique of the judgment of taste*. London: Routledge, 1984, 73

institutions in different cities were closed, there were criminal charges against Kurdish plays during the 1990s. In the same year of the repeal of the language ban, an Anti-terror Law (Terörle Mücadele Kanunu - TMK) legalized. The first TMK (Law number 3713) was accepted in the national assembly of Turkey on 12 April 1991.<sup>115</sup> In 1992, the Constitutional Court canceled some articles of the law upon objections. The article 8 of the TMK regulates the political and cultural activities concerning "The propaganda against the indivisibility of state". This article was used against political meetings, media, and cultural institutions. The article 8 was changed on 27 October 1995.<sup>116</sup> By this change, the prison sentences were reduced to pecuniary punishments.

These juridical regulations prevented the learning of Kurdish language of young generations. During the fieldwork, I realized that the biggest challenge for theater groups was to find people who are fluent in any dialect of the Kurdish language. Even those who speak Kurdish did not know how to write in Kurdish. In my interview with Sabri, (male, dramaturg /writer, middle generation) when I asked if there is any Sorani (the Kurdish dialect used in Iraq) theater text translated into Kurmanji ( the Kurdish dialect used in Turkey and Syria) and which regional dialects of Kurmanji in Turkey have been mostly used in Kurdish theater texts in the 1990s. He answered:

They (the actors, actresses, directors, and playwrights) did not know Kurmanji very well. Most of them could not write in Kurmanji. How can you expect any translation from them? You should ask people which language playwrights used in their plays' first drafts in the 1990s. Most of them wrote their texts first in Turkish, then they were

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<sup>115</sup>Fikret İlkiz, "Yeniden Terörle Mücadele Kanunu Tasarısı", *BİANET*, 27.06.2006, retrieved 12.12.2016 from <https://bianet.org/bianet/siyaset/76650-yeniden-terorle-mucadele-kanunu-tasarisi>

<sup>116</sup>Fikret İlkiz, "Yeniden Terörle Mücadele Kanunu Tasarısı", *BİANET*, 27.06.2006, retrieved 12.12.2016 from <https://bianet.org/bianet/siyaset/76650-yeniden-terorle-mucadele-kanunu-tasarisi>

translated into Kurdish. Moreover, many actors and actresses memorized the Kurdish lines before playing on the stage.<sup>117</sup>

The Kurdish actors and actresses were speaking Kurdish on the stage without knowing the language. Despite the repeal of the ban, the effects on the Kurdish generations sustained and shaped the dynamics of the Kurdish theater's emergence and development. All interviewees emphasize that the lack of human source is the most important problem for the development of the Kurdish theater. Kamil (male, actor/director, old generation) participated the Mesopotamian Culture Center (MCC)<sup>118</sup> at the beginning of the 1990s. I discussed the motivation of the first participants of the Kurdish cultural centers. When I asked him "You had not seen any Kurdish theater plays before you participated in the theater course of MCC. What was it that made you motivate to practice theater?" He answered as follows:

When we started to engage in theater practices, we were motivated by political concerns. The theater was perceived as a political tool for propaganda and a struggle arena against cultural assimilation. But nobody knew how to prepare a theater play. Moreover, we have to learn the language before learning theater.<sup>119</sup>

Selim (male, actor / director, old generation) also emphasized the lack of knowledge on theater and human source:

We called everybody that we can reach to give lectures and workshops on the theater. We assigned each member of our theater group (MCC) tasks to make presentations on the history of theater, acting methodology and art streams. After we completed our theater education, we opened theater courses to educate young people as actors and

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<sup>117</sup> Interview with Sabri, 06.02.2017

<sup>118</sup> Mesopotamian Culture Center (MCC) was founded to revive all branches of art in Kurdish language and sustain the institutionalization of Kurdish art field in 1991. In the next chapter, I am going to analyze the role of MCC in the Kurdish theater field in detail

<sup>119</sup> Interview with Kamil, 28.05.2017

actresses because there were only two theater groups namely MCC and KAYY-DER which could sustain theater practices. There were not actors and actress who could play in Kurdish.<sup>120</sup>

To understand the relationships between artists and the Kurdish language, in the interviews I also asked if their mother language is Kurdish or Turkish and when they learned Kurmanji or Zazaki<sup>121</sup> and if they can write in Kurdish. The old and middle generations of my interviewees improved their language through theater practices and language courses. None of them could write in Kurdish before they started to theater practices. Only a few interviewees from the young generation knew how to write in Kurdish before they participated in a theater group. Their relationship with the Kurdish language can be described as familiarity. Almost all of my interviewees state that they became familiar with the Kurdish language in their family and through the pirate or smuggled albums of Kurdish singers like Şiwan Perwer, Dengbêj Şakiro, Ciwan Haco etc. Mahmut (a male Kurdish actor, young generation) describes his personal experiences with the Kurdish language as:

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<sup>120</sup> Interview with Selim, 09.02.2017

<sup>121</sup> The Kurdish language has four main dialects and many regional dialects. According to Lewis, Ethnologue describes Sorani (Central Kurdish) as having 3,500,000 speakers in Iraq and a similar number in Iran; Kurmanji (Northern Kurdish) with 15,000,000 in Turkey, 2,800,000 in Iraq, 1,000,000 in Syria, and 350,000 in Iran; —Southern Kurdish (Palewani) with 3,000,000 in Iran; and Laki with 1,000,000 in Iran.

Lewis, M. P., Simons, G. F., and Fennig C. D., (Eds.) *Ethnologue: Languages of the World*, Dallas, Texas: SIL International, 2013, 132.

In addition to that, there is an ongoing debate on if Zazaki a.k.a. Kirmancki is another dialect of Kurdish language or it is a different language which belongs to the same language family with the Kurdish language. When I asked the linguist Joyce Blau at my visit to Paris Kurdish Institute, she answered that "I refuse the concept of dialect. If enough time is passed each 'dialect' becomes a language. English, German etc. were the so-called "dialects" of the Latin language. In 500 years, Zazaki and Kurmanji will be totally different languages with similarities like English and German. Because my this field is restricted to Turkey, I use the term "Kurdish language" as Kurmanji.

We did not know Turkish until we started primary school. Our bond with the language was through music cassettes. There were Ciwan Haco's, Rojda's, Rotinda's and others' cassettes in Kurdish that we like .... I faced with written Kurdish in my university period through literature journals<sup>122</sup>

In the interview, Selim (male, actor / director, old generation) answers my questions on the first language he learned:

At first, I learned Turkish. My family speaks Kırmançki (Zazaki). But my mother tongue is Turkish. As a person whose mother tongue is Turkish and who learned Zazaki from his family, acting in Kurmanji was an interesting case. I learned Kurmanji in İstanbul. When I came to İstanbul, there were some people who spoke Kurmanji from Bitlis and Diyarbakır but their dialect was not familiar to me so I did not get it. At that time, it was possible to find Şiwan Perwer's pirate albums. I listened so much to learn. The language courses were opened later in our theater. Actually, I learned Kurmanji through theater rehearsals.<sup>123</sup>

As I mentioned above, the smuggled or pirate music records were the only reachable art productions during the 1990s. For the old and middle generations, reaching Kurdish music productions was a problem because of the ban. Even though the young generation had the opportunity to reach art productions in legal ways, there were two main problems for them: First, they could not read Kurdish texts and write in Kurdish. Second, they had to speak Turkish in public areas. Although most of my interviewees learned Kurdish in their childhood; when they started primary school education, they had to give up using Kurdish. Deniz (a female actress and playwright, young generation) says that:

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<sup>122</sup> Interview with Mahmut, 16.04.2016

<sup>123</sup> Interview with Selim, 09.02.2017

We are 9 brothers and sisters. All of us learned Kurmanji first. However, in the second year of my primary education, I failed the class.... After that, my parents forbid to talk in Kurdish. They spoke Kurdish to each other, but they used Turkish when talking with us. When they stopped talking Kurdish to me, I stopped talking with them at all for 3-4 months. Can you believe it? It seems like a lie but it is not. They took me to physical examination because of that.<sup>124</sup>

Akın (male, actor, young generation)'s experience with his mother tongue was different than Deniz. When I asked what his family's attitude was regarding Kurdish use in daily life, he answered as:

My family speaks Kurdish, we are not unlucky in this sense. I still cannot speak Turkish with my father because I am ashamed. When I look at my father's eyes, I cannot speak Turkish. It is a shame for me, the Kurdish is our daily language. Because of this, I could speak Kurdish very well but I could not read Kurdish texts[...] After I came to İstanbul and met with Mehmet (male, actor/director/playwright, middle generation) and Belçin (female, actress/ director/ writer, middle generation) I started to understand my mother tongue in the real sense. This process started with dubbing rather than theater. As soon as I came, I started to dubbing in a studio. Mahmut (male, actor, young generation) and other people spoke Kurdish in there. When I went to the studio for the first time, they prepared the 'Brave Heart' in Kurdish language. It was a strange experience for me because all those magical characters in the movie spoke Kurdish. I had gone to some Kurdish plays before but they were not as magical as this movie. I thought that if those characters speak Kurdish, it means that the Kurdish language really exists. Then, I

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<sup>124</sup> Interview with Deniz, 19.01.2018

improved my Kurdish. After that experience, I have used Kurdish not only while acting or dubbing but also taking notes.<sup>125</sup>

The Kurdish theater groups were not only the art groups but also a school for language improvement. In the 1990s, the members of theater units in Mesopotamian Culture Center took language courses from the teachers of the Kurdish Institution which was founded in 1992 to learn and improve their ability to speak and write in Kurdish. In the 1990s, the play texts were written by only three playwrights Hüseyin Kaytan, Kemal Orgun and Mamoste Cemil (Cemil Özen).<sup>126</sup><sup>127</sup> Using Turkish in acting courses for the beginners was a requirement to understand each other. Moreover, the existence of several regional dialects of Kurmanji caused difficulties especially for the newcomers of the theater groups. In this sense, Neriman (female, actress/director/ writer, middle generation) tells her experience about the use of Kurdish in Mesopotamian Culture Center:

I knew Kurdish but I did not know how to read and write in Kurdish. Moreover, there was a funny situation: I did not talk during the first month in the journal department. People were speaking Kurdish. When I listened to them, I thought that I did not know Kurdish, and I did only know my regional dialect. After the first month, I started to talk and a poet friend Cemil Benli said that ‘you could speak, why didn’t you talk before?’ I said ‘your language is different (same dialect but with local differences).’ ... When I consider the situation now, I realize that people mostly used Diyarbakır and Mardin dialect. Moreover, there was a common academic dialect<sup>128</sup> in the MCC. I was afraid

<sup>125</sup> Interview with Akın, 11.04.2016

<sup>126</sup> Mirza Metin, *Jêrzemîn: Şanoya Li Jêrzemîne*. Diyarbakır: Diyarbakır Metropolitan Municipality Publishing, 2014, 23-58

<sup>127</sup> Only one of Mamoste Cemil’s play (Rojbaş) was staged in MCC. We do not know that which language used in the writing process of the play. Hüseyin Kaytan was a Zazakî so he learned Kurmanji after he participated MCC. He wrote his plays in Turkish and translated into Kurmanji (Kurdish).

<sup>128</sup> The participants used the most common words and grammar structures. It was a kind of unification of language to understand each other

of talking the academic dialect. At that time, I learned Kurdish by typesetting the journal. After the *Jiyana Rewşen* (in Kurdish and Turkish) and *Rewşen* (in Kurdish) magazines were published, I studied the language. I studied the Kurdish language from the journal I published."<sup>129</sup>

Even the people who worked in the literature unit of MCC suffered from the language problems. In addition to that, the daily conversations in the MCC were in Turkish except the office of *Rewşen* magazine.<sup>130</sup> These examples show both the negative effects of the ban period and the significant role of culture centers to eliminate those effects. The culture centers acted as counter-hegemony institutions against assimilation. As a result, the elimination of language ban's effect and increasing the human source of the Kurdish art field were important parts of the emergence and development of the Kurdish theater field. Despite all efforts of the cultural centers, the human source problem has never ended for the theater groups even in the 2000s. I asked if the number of performers is still a problem for the Kurdish theater groups, Belçin (female, actress/ director/ writer, middle generation) who is a member of one of the most popular Kurdish theater groups in İstanbul complains about this problem:

At the beginning of the 1990s, speaking Kurdish is enough to be part of a play in the cultural centers, however, now we are a professional theater group. We need qualified actors and actresses who can not only speak Kurdish but also act. Both speaking, and acting is important for us. We opened courses and included our trainees in our plays when they were ready. However, most of them did not continue after one or two plays.

The number of qualified performers in the Kurdish theater field also affects the emergence of new theater groups in the field. When I met with Arif (male, actor, young generation) who was

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<sup>129</sup>Interview with Neriman, 19.01.2017

<sup>130</sup> Interview with Belçin, 04.05.2017



a member of a Turkish theater group, I asked how they could gather their groups to stage a Kurdish play, he emphasized the lack of performers who could speak Kurdish:

I was educated in Turkish theater, but I have always wanted to play in Kurdish. After we translated the Moliere's text, we adapted the play by narrowing the character number. We had never played in Kurdish before. We had rarely conversations in Kurdish with each other. Our daily language was Turkish. Moreover, we added some new members who can speak Kurdish. But newcomers did not have any experience in acting. One of them was the husband of an actress friend in the group.<sup>131</sup>

Arif (male, actor, young generation)'s narrative is about their theater practices in 2015. It shows that the lack of the human source in the Kurdish theater field was still an ongoing problem for the emergence of new theater groups. Deniz (female actress/playwright, young generation) also shares a similar experience in the process of her first Kurdish theater play in 2017:

I want to prepare a Kurdish play. I participated in a group (founded at the beginning of the 2000s) but this group lost its function. We could not continue because of personal discussions. At first, I did not choose to leave because I could not find people who could act in Kurdish. However, I could not perform in Kurdish there because we could not continue our rehearsals. I left there and find two people who do not know Kurdish to gather a theater group. I wrote and staged a play in 2017. In the play, I speak Kurdish and the other friends speak a fabricated language. This choice is not because of that they do not know Kurdish. The use of a fabricated language is caused by the content and dramaturgy of the play. However, I could not stage a 3-person-play in Kurdish with two

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<sup>131</sup> Interview with Arif, 28.10.2017

friends who do not know Kurdish. The language problem provokes my artistic creativity.<sup>132</sup>

All in all, the political conditions prevented the artistic development and increase of human source in the Kurdish theater field. To find a performer who can speak and act in Kurdish became a real problem for the Kurdish theater groups. One of the aims of the Kurdish cultural centers was to improve the Kurdish language ability of the artists and give language education to young people to increase the human source in the art field. In the next chapters, I am going to focus on the emergence and development of the institutional Kurdish theater between 1991 and 2002.

### **Chapter 3: The Emergence, Development, and Institutionalization of the Kurdish Theater between 1991 and 2002**

In this chapter, I will analyze the emergence, development, and institutionalization of Kurdish theater in terms of the power struggles between the political field and the Kurdish cultural field focusing on contradictions and discussions among diverse actors. First, I will focus on the political conditions of the emergence of the Kurdish theater and make a critique of the Kurdish movement in the cultural sphere. Then, I will analyze the functioning and transformation of the Kurdish theater through the political transformations, structural changes and position-takings of the agents through Gramsci's counter-hegemony and Bourdieu's culture field theories.

First of all, a field has its own rules, logic, institutions, and agents. The period of the emergence, development, and institutionalization of the Kurdish theater in the 1990s is also the

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<sup>132</sup> Interview with Deniz, 19.01.2018

process of emergence of a Kurdish theater field as an art field in sense of Bourdieu's approach. The emergence of an art field is a process. Despite the fact that an autonomous Kurdish theater field did not exist at the beginning of the 1990s, I will use the term Kurdish theater field to analyze the process of the Kurdish theater between 1991 and 2002.

To understand the dynamics of the Kurdish theater field, we have to understand the "nebulous" relationships among the Kurdish political organizations, cultural institutions, and theater groups. There are two irreconcilable points of view about the relationship between Kurdish cultural organizations, legal political parties, and illegal political organizations. The first one claims that any legal political or cultural institution is directly related with the illegal parties or organizations and they take orders from them. The second one claims that the legal Kurdish cultural and political institutions are totally independent organizations which collaborate with other legal organizations to defend the rights of Kurdish people. These both claims accept the political and cultural field as homogeneous structures.

I use the term of nebulous relation which is proposed by Deniz Cenk Demir in his Ph.D. dissertation.<sup>133</sup> Demir's study examines the relationship between the first formal pro-Kurdish parties and the illegal organizations, addressing whether they were mere fronts for the illegal organizations in the legal political arena or autonomous initiatives emerging from the greater Kurdish national movement and Turkey's left-liberal politics.<sup>134</sup> Demir claims that the relationships between the illegal and legal front of the Kurdish movement are always ambiguous and transitional.

To sum up, I claim that the nebulous relationships among illegal, legal and cultural organizations of the Kurdish movement can be analyzed by comparing the theoretical and

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<sup>133</sup> Deniz Cenk Demir, "Legal Fronts or Autonomous Initiatives?: Nebulous Relationship Between the PKK and the Earliest Formal Pro- Kurdish Political Parties in Turkey", McGill University, 2017, 1

<sup>134</sup> Ibid.

practical aspects of the movement. Therefore, I start with an analysis of the Kurdish movement in the cultural sphere.

### **3\_A\_ Kurdish Theater as a Political Tool in the Period of 1991-2002**

The armed Kurdish movement in Turkey is always been evaluated as a monolithic structure. The domination of the one party not only shaped the Kurdish movement's hierarchical structure and decision-making mechanism in the political field but also affected the structure and functioning of the Kurdish cultural organizations. From 1984 to 1990, the dominant party tried to open a space for itself by using force to become the "only" representative of the Kurdish people. The movement aimed at a total transformation for the Kurdish people. As Hamit Bozarslan marked that “Different from the former Kurdish movements, PKK connected the national independence to the formation of a new Kurdish identity.”<sup>135</sup>.

The new Kurdish identity was not only a reaction to rising oppressive Turkish nationalism but also an objection to the feudal definition of Kurdishness. As B. Siyem Ezgi Sarıtaş stresses:

The colonial revolution could be successful only if it was able to establish a new Kurdish identity. The new individual - the new Kurdish identity – did not define itself as an antithesis of the Turkish identity. Rather, it defined itself as the antithesis of its own past. The old identity was delineated by Öcalan as a debased (düşürülmüş) identity.

Treason and tribal attachment (Özcan, 2006) in addition to the Turkification efforts of

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<sup>135</sup> Hamit Bozarslan, “Türkiye’de Kürt Sol Hareketi” in *Modern Türkiye’de Siyasal Düşünce*, Volume 8: Sol, edited by Tanıl Bora and Murat Gültekin, İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2007, 1192

the state and the chauvinistic education system which have alienated the Kurds from their culture (Bozarslan, 2007).<sup>136</sup>

This ideology of the Kurdish movement aimed to dominate the civil society and establish its counter-hegemony against both Turkish state's assimilation process and former interpretation of Kurdish identity. The culture and institutionalization policy of the Kurdish movement after the founding of Mesopotamian Cultural Center can be analyzed with Gramsci's hegemony theory because Gramsci points out two struggle spheres i.e. political society and civil society for the revolution. Political society is a sphere of domination through violence, coercion, and war of maneuver; however, civil society is a sphere of consensus through cultural / ideological hegemony and war of positions. In general, Gramsci describes civil society as "the sphere in which ideas and beliefs were shaped, where bourgeois 'hegemony' was reproduced in cultural life through the media, universities and religious institutions to 'manufacture consent' and legitimacy."<sup>137</sup> From this perspective, the repeal of language ban in 1991 was a success for the Kurdish movement because, in Gramscian terms, the war of maneuver opened a space for the war of positions. As Gramsci stated that "'war of maneuver' could only succeed with a prior 'war of position' in the form of struggle over ideas and beliefs, to create a new hegemony."<sup>138</sup> This idea of a 'counter-hegemonic' struggle – advancing alternatives to dominant ideas of what is normal and legitimate – has had broad appeal in social and political movements. It has also contributed to the idea that "'knowledge' is a social construct that serves to legitimate social

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<sup>136</sup> B. Siynem Ezgi Sarıtaş, "Articulation Of Kurdish Identity Through Politicized Music Of *Koms*", (MS Thesis, Middle East Technical University, 2010), 73

<sup>137</sup> Andrew Heywood, *Political Ideas, and Concepts: An Introduction*, London: Macmillan, 1994, 100-101

<sup>138</sup> Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*. Translated and Edited by Q. Hoare and G. N. Smith. New York: International Publishers, 1971, 54

structures.”<sup>139</sup> The basic political mission of the Kurdish cultural centers executes the war of positions in the civil society.

Gramsci's concept of counter-hegemony refers to a confrontation against existing hegemonic rule and its representations in politics, media, education, art, history etc. By Nicola Prat's words, counter-hegemony is "a creation of an alternative hegemony on the terrain of civil society in preparation for political change".<sup>140</sup> At the beginning of the 1990s, the discussions on the assimilation, identity, culture, and art gained wide currency also among the Kurdish intellectuals and legal pro-Kurdish parties. Through those discussions, the Kurdish movement which includes all parties and organizations in the political field put two basic goals. The first one is to resist the hegemony of the state over young immigrant Kurdish people in urban areas. The second one is to create and modernize the Kurdish culture in accordance with the ideology of the movement. These two goals brought the idea of using art as a political tool in the Kurdish movement. Therefore, the foundation of the new and big culture organizations like the Mesopotamian Cultural Center, the Kurdish Institute were motivated by those two goals.

The mass migration to the big cities from the Kurdish cities since the mid-1980s led to an increase in the Kurdish population in big cities in 1990s and the emergence of the local associations like *Tunceliler Derneği*, *KAYY-DER*(Kiğı – Karakoçan – Adaklı – Yayladere – Yedisu Sosyal Yardımlaşma, Kalkındırma ve Kültür Derneği , Kiğı – Karakoçan – Adaklı – Yayladere – Yedisu Social Solidarity, Development and Culture Association) (the association of the towns of Bingöl province) and *SEVDER* (the association of the towns of Maraş province) which aim for solidarity among immigrants. These centers became socialization spaces for Kurdish immigrants in the big cities. The foundation of the cultural institutions created a great

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<sup>139</sup> Andrew Heywood, *Political Ideas, and Concepts: An Introduction*, London: Macmillan, 1994, 101

<sup>140</sup> Nicola Christine Pratt. “Bringing politics back in: examining the link between globalisation and democratization”, *Review of International Political Economy* Vol. 11, No. 2, (2004): 331-336

enthusiasm among the Kurdish youth. The young Kurdish population of İstanbul consisted of two groups of people. First, Kurdish university students, who came from different cities, and second, children of immigrant families, who had to abandon their places in the Kurdish region. Neriman (female, actress/ director/ writer, middle generation) states her motivation to participate the MCC in the mid-1990s as follows:

Being there was a magical thing. You know that you are a Kurdish and you speak Kurdish but until being there you are not aware of that your language really exist. It was not spoken only in your family. I said this for the young people like me who lived in İstanbul.<sup>141</sup>

Not only the old generation who were the first participants of the Kurdish cultural centers but also the middle generation who started to practice Kurdish theater in the mid-1990s emphasize their political motivation to participate the cultural centers. When I asked two Kurdish performers who practice theater since the mid-90s, Bahaddin (male, actor/director, middle generation) and Belçin (female, actress/ director/ writer, middle generation) about their goal and motivation to join the MCC, Bahattin said that:

I think the existence of theater courses was like a rebellion against the denial of your Kurdish identity. It was a rebellion against that the Kurdish nation or Kurdish language does not exist as you were told in the school. In there, Kurdish people prove their existence in language and art.<sup>142</sup>

In a similar vein, Gülçin (female, actress, middle generation) said:

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<sup>141</sup> Interview with Neriman, 19.01.2017

<sup>142</sup> Interview with Bahaddin, 07.01.2015

All participants were attracted by the idea that the Kurdish Theater exists, the Kurdish language can be used on the stage and we (Kurdish people) exist. That was why the Kurdish young people chose to come to MCC.<sup>143</sup>

The cultural centers mobilized the Kurdish youngsters and attracted them to participate through their political concerns. The Kurdish movement's idea of the counter hegemony realized through the cultural centers. The Kurdish movement expands its influence on the civil society in the 1990s. In the cultural realm, Mesopotamian Culture Center and the Kurdish Institute led the production of the new Kurdish culture and identity.

### **3\_A\_1\_Mesopotamian Cultural Center: The Core Cultural Organization of the Kurdish Movement**

I take 1991 as a turning point for the emergence of the institutional and continuous Kurdish theater practices because it was the year of repealing the language ban. In 1991, by the repealing of the Law 2932, the use of Kurdish language in music, publications, theater and other art branches was no longer illegal. Following the elimination of the language ban on the Kurdish language, Mesopotamian Culture Center (MCC)<sup>144</sup> was founded on September 27,

<sup>143</sup> Interview with Gülçin, 28.10.2017

<sup>144</sup> *Navenda Çanda Mezopotamya(NÇM)* in Kurdish - *Mezopotamya Kültür Merkezi(MKM)* in Turkish



1991, at Tarlabası, İstanbul.<sup>145</sup> The founders of the culture center were the political activist, intellectuals including symbolic names for the Kurdish movement linguist and writer Feqî Hüseyin, sociologist İsmail Beşikçi and writer and journalist Musa Anter. MCC was an organization which aims to resist the hegemony of the state over young immigrant Kurdish people in urban areas and to creates and modernizes the Kurdish culture in accordance with the ideology of the movement. The founder and the first president of MCC İbrahim Gürbüz states the function of MCC as:

A nation could have strong armies but if that nation had not cultural, artistic and scientific organizations, those armies and political organizations would have been dissolved like flash in the pan. A nation's art, culture, literature, novel and archeological assets are the nation's heart [...] A culture center was a necessity to centralize our looted culture assets and save them from assimilation. We started with this perception.<sup>146</sup>

Mesopotamian Culture Center was founded to revive all branches of art in Kurdish language and sustain the institutionalization of Kurdish art field.<sup>147</sup> The purpose is determined as “research, select, transform and homogenize the existing elements in a systemic way construction of a 'national' culture.<sup>148</sup> The logo of MCC symbolizes this desire of the Kurdish

<sup>145</sup> Mirza Metin. *Jêrzemîn: Şanoya Li Jêrzemîne*. Diyarbakır: Diyarbakır Metropolitan Municipality Publishing, 2014, 23-23

<sup>146</sup> Zeynep Kuray, “20. Yılında MKM'den Büyük Kutlama”, ANF Agency, 09.04.2011, retrieved 15.02.2017 from <http://www.firatnews.com/index.php?rupel=nuce&nuceID=49187>

Bir ulusun çok güçlü orduları olabilir, çok güçlü örgütlenmesi de olabilir, ama o ulusun, o halkın eğer kültürel, sanatsal ve bilimsel örgütlenmesi yoksa, o ordular, siyasal örgütlenmeler bir saman alevi gibi bir gün dağılıp, yok olabilir. Bir ulusun can damarları, kan damarları, o halkın sanatıdır, kültürüdür, edebiyatıdır, romanıdır, bilimsel ve arkeolojik değerleridir. Yağmalanan kültürel değerlerimizin merkezileştirilmesi, toparlanması, asimilasyondan kurtarılması anlamında bir kültür merkezine ihtiyaç vardı. Bu bilinçle yola çıkıldı”

<sup>147</sup> Interview with Kamil, 28.10.2017 and Interview with Gülçin, 28.10.2017

<sup>148</sup> B. Siyem Ezgi Sarıtaş, “Articulation Of Kurdish Identity Through Politicized Music Of *Koms*”, (MS Thesis, Middle East Technical University, 2010), 69

movement. In the logo, there are a mountain, *Firat* and *Dicle* rivers, *Kawa* (a historical figure in the Kurdish culture), an olive branch to represent peace, the sun (it is also a folkloric image), the first Newroz flame and several books to represent science. As a cultural center, MCC was thought as an alternative academy or conservatoire for all artistic branches related to the Kurdish culture.

The distinctive character of MCC was the support given by the pro-Kurdish political parties and symbol names of the Kurdish political and intellectual fields since its foundation. Therefore, the visibility of the MCC exceeded the former culture associations like *KAYY-DER*, *SEVDER*, *HKD* (People's Culture Association), *Bin Çiçek Açsın Kültür Merkezi* (Thousand Flowers Bloom Cultural Center), *Tohum Kültür Merkezi* (Seed Cultural Center) etc. In addition to that, MCC attracted the people working for other small associations and cultural centers. According to Abdullah Arı, the small-scale organizations were founded by taking *KAYY-DER* and *SEVDER* as a model, but those small associations and culture centers could not sustain their existence.

Mesopotamian Culture Center succeeded the first step of counter-hegemony attempts. The culture center had the function of recreation of national culture and resistance culture. The MCC became a public space for Kurdish youngsters in İstanbul. Many of the participants of MCC music, magazine and theater groups are young Kurdish university students, immigrant youngsters, and workers. According to Siyem Ezgi Sarıtaş, "The cultural centers opened spaces for the Kurdish youngster who identify themselves with their ethnicity, but who were 'alienated from their national culture' could 'meet with their culture'."<sup>149</sup> The profiles of MCC participants were suitable for the Gramsci's concept of organic intellectuals. Gramsci states that

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<sup>149</sup> B. Siyem Ezgi Sarıtaş, "Articulation Of Kurdish Identity Through Politicized Music Of *Koms*", (MS Thesis, Middle East Technical University, 2010), 70

“Every social group that originates in the fulfillment of an essential task of economic production creates its own organic intellectual.”<sup>150</sup> The organic intellectuals are culture organizers for Gramsci and they produce the ideology of their classes. The organic intellectuals have vital importance for the hegemonic struggle:

One of the most important characteristics of any group that is developing towards dominance is its struggle to assimilate and conquer 'ideologically' the traditional intellectuals, but their assimilation and conquest are made quicker and more efficacious the more the group in question succeeds in simultaneously elaborating its own organic intellectuals.<sup>151</sup>

Although Gramsci's theory and terms belong to the Marxist class analysis, the practical application of his theories embodied in the Kurdish art field by the Kurdish movement. The members of theater unit were taken not only artistic education but also political and language courses. Therefore, their theater perspective was shaped by the ideological concerns and art-politics discussion. Selim (male, actor / director, old generation) describes their attempts to emerge and develop the Kurdish theater as:

Kurdish theater did not emerge in the homeland of Kurdish people. Kurdish theater was not developed by people who know the Kurdish language very well. It developed with a purpose with a conscious. That is why it was the revolutionist. We all took language lessons from the Kurdish Institute or our friends whose language capacity was approved by the Kurdish Institute. Most of us were not dreaming of sleep in Kurdish since we started the theater practices.<sup>152</sup>

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<sup>150</sup> John M. Cammett, *Antonio Gramsci and the Origins of Italian Communism*, California: Stanford University Press, 1967, 202.

<sup>151</sup> Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*. Translated and Edited by Q. Hoare and G. N. Smith. New York: International Publishers, 1971, 10.

<sup>152</sup> Interview with Selim, 09.02.2017

This comment shows how the foundation of the culture centers served the struggle of counter-hegemony of the Kurdish movement in the civil society. The counter-hegemony discourse was the main point of my interviewees who worked in theater and literature units of MCC: “We had to establish the Kurdish theater, we had to educate ourselves and give a shape to Kurdish culture. The discussion on the relation of art and politics was our basic ongoing discussion.”<sup>153</sup> The organic intellectuals of İstanbul MCC took significant roles in different cities of Turkey such as Diyarbakır, Van, Şanlıurfa, Mersin, Adana, İzmir, Mardin, Siirt to establish the theater groups of the Kurdish cultural organizations.

Since the institutionalization of the Kurdish Theater was started with Mesopotamian Culture Center (MCC), MCC became the dominant organization in the emergence and development period through cultural center networks in the Western metropolises and Kurdish regions. Between 1991 and 2002, there were 7 Kurdish theater groups which produced Kurmanji or Zazakî plays.<sup>154</sup> When we look at the number of Kurdish theater groups and their relationship with MCC, the dominance of MCC becomes obvious.

Mesopotamian Cultural Center: The theater unit of İstanbul MCC divided into three subunits such as *Teatra Jiyana Nû*, *Şanoya Helîn* and *Sarya Halk Sahnesi* (Sarya People Stage).<sup>155</sup> *Teatra Jiyana Nû* is the main group who produces professional theater plays. *Şanoya Helîn* (founded in 1995) was the unit of beginners. The new participants were trained by the actors of *Teatra Jiyana Nû* in *Şanoya Helîn*. If the successful trainees of *Şanoya Helîn* wanted to continue the theater practices, they participated in the *Sarya Halk Sahnesi*. The main mission of the *Sarya Halk Sahnesi* was to research the traditional Kurdish plays like village plays and produce

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<sup>153</sup> Interview with Selim, 09.02.2017

<sup>154</sup> Mirza Metin. *Jêrzemîn: Şanoya Li Jêrzemîne*. Diyarbakır: Diyarbakır Metropolitan Municipality Publishing, 2014, 12

<sup>155</sup> In the following sections, I am going to tell the story of the theater groups' names. All of them were the reflection of the zeitgeist of the Kurdish Theater field in the 1990s.

agitprop plays. The plays of *Sarya Halk Sahnesi* were staged in party meetings, labor strikes, and political celebrations. In Mirza Metin's book *Jerzemîn*, the history of *Teatra Jiyana Nû* is described as follows:

The group was founded in 1991 under the roof of Mesopotamian Culture Center in 1991. Mamoste Cemil (Cemil Özen) was the first director and playwright of the group. In 1992, the group was reformed and named as *Teatra Jiyana Nû* under the leadership of Hüseyin Kaytan who is director and playwright. *Teatra Jiyana Nû* still continues to prepare plays.<sup>156</sup>

*Teatra Evîna Welat*: The group was founded by Hüseyin Kaytan under the roof of KAYY-DER in 1990. The first name was *Sığınak Tiyatrosu* (Shelter Theater). The group was named as *Teatra Evîna Welat* in 1993. The first Kurdish (Kurmanji) play *Lal-Govenda Hilo* (Tongueless-Dance of Eagle) was in 1995.<sup>157</sup> The language of theater courses was Turkish at first. The director Hüseyin Kaytan participated MCC in 1992. In 1994, Hüseyin Kaytan was suspended from MCC and turned back to KAYY-DER. In 1994, there were other people who were suspended from MCC like Kemal Orgun, Nursel İnce. Both of them played in *Lal-Govenda Hilo* and turned back to MCC again.

*Teatra Hêvî*: The group started its theater practices by the foundation of MCC's İzmir branch office in 1994. The group continued its theater productions for 10 years. For now (2013), the group still exist but there are not continuous theater practices.<sup>158</sup>

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<sup>156</sup>Mirza Metin. *Jêrzemîn: Şanoya Li Jêrzemîne*. Diyarbakır: Diyarbakır Metropolitan Municipality Publishing, 2014, 23

<sup>157</sup> Ibid. 58

<sup>158</sup> Ibid. 65

*Teatra Arzeba*: The group started its theater practices by the foundation of MCC's Mersin branch office in 1996. The two directors and trainers were sent from İstanbul MCC to organize the theater practices.<sup>159</sup>

*Teatra Arsen Poladov*: The group started its theater practices by the foundation of MCC's Batman branch office *Bahar Kültür Merkezi* (Bahar Culture Center) in 2000.<sup>160</sup>

*Teatra Nûpelda*: The group was founded by the directors of İstanbul MCC under the roof of Adana branch office of MCC. The group does not exist anymore.<sup>161</sup>

*Teatra Amar*: The group was founded in İstanbul MCC in 2002. *Teatra Jiyana Nû* also existed its theater practices in İstanbul MCC at the same time. *Teatra Amar* continued its theater practices about 2 years.<sup>162</sup>

Between 1991 and 2002, 6 out of 7 theater groups were the groups of MCC's branch offices. The only group which did not have any organizational connection with MCC was *KAYY-DER's Teatra Evîna Welat*. However, the director Hüseyin Kaytan and some actors and actresses participated in İstanbul MCC's theater practices as director, playwright, and players. In short, the history of institutional Kurdish theater's emergence and development period is the history of Mesopotamian Culture Center between 1991 and 2002. In the next section, I am going to analyze the role of the Mesopotamian Cultural Center in the Kurdish theater field.

### **3\_A\_2\_Conflicts between the Kurdish Political Field and Theater Field**

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<sup>159</sup> Ibid. 76

<sup>160</sup> Ibid. 86

<sup>161</sup> Ibid. 102

<sup>162</sup> Ibid. 106

The repealing of the Kurdish language ban in 1991 did not immediately create a free space for the Kurdish art practices. During the 1990s, all MCC branches were closely surveilled by the police and most of them were temporarily banned several times. None of my interviewees can remember how many times police undertook operations against them and artists were taken into custody. All MCC branches sustained their existence despite the state intervention like legal investigations, police operations

The depopulation of the villages, regional state of emergency conditions, the number of unidentified murders and the armed struggle between the army and PKK in the Kurdish region shaped the state's policies toward the Kurdish culture centers. For instance, Diyarbakır branch office Dicle-Fırat Cultural Center's theatrical practices depended on the density of the war between PKK and the Turkish army. When the armed conflicts rose, the cultural centers became the first internal targets during the conflict and the many members were taken under custody.<sup>163</sup> For instance, when the armistice was declined by PKK, İzmir Mesopotamia Culture Center and Diyarbakır Dicle-Fırat Culture Center were closed by the state in 1993-1994. After a couple of plays in Mersin MCC such as *Zordarê Dinê*, *Mizgîn*, *Zilan* and *Kirasê Jinê*, the group had to start to produce only short plays because many members were arrested or escaped from the investigation of the play.<sup>164</sup> Gülçin (female, actress, middle generation) tells the Şanlıurfa Cultural Center case: "The Urfa branch could not stay open for more than one week. Kamil (male, actor/director, old generation) went there as theater trainer and he got arrested in a week."<sup>165</sup> Kamil gives more details about the absurd situation:

I was released after two days. Police could not close the culture center without a legal decision but they let only the trainers go into the cultural center. Neither trainees nor

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<sup>163</sup> Interview with Belçin, 04.05.2017

<sup>164</sup> Mirza Metin. *Jêzêzêzîn: Şanoya Li Jêzêzêzîne*. Diyarbakır: Diyarbakır Metropolitan Municipality Publishing, 2014, 76

<sup>165</sup> Interview with Gulçin, 28.10.2017

audiences could not enter. In the legal sense, there was no ban but police could take precautions for 'security reasons'.<sup>166</sup>

As I mentioned above, the reason that the first MCC branch office was founded in İstanbul was the oppression of the state relatively light compared to the Kurdish regions. In spite of those conditions, İstanbul MCC confront many legal investigations and closures in the 1990s. *Teatra Jiyana Nû* was closed several times in the 1990s. When *Teatra Jiyana Nû* looked for a qualified theater stage to rent, the police intervened: the stage – Maya Sahnesi, in İstiklal Street- was rented by the group members but as Selim (male, actor / director, old generation) tells "The police forced the landowner to repel us. When we went to stage, we saw that our all equipment was thrown out from the stage."<sup>167</sup> The second place which was rented and constructed as theater stage (Helîn Stage) in 1995 was closed by the state in 1998.

To sum up, the Kurdish institutions were always supervised and intervened by the state because mobility and socialization of Kurdish youth through cultural institutions were perceived as a threat to the state. The repeal of the language ban did not mean the recognition of Kurdish art's freedom by the state. The Mirza Metin's book *Jêrzemîn* (Underground) which consists the Kurdish theater groups' information and play brochures in 1991-2013 defines the position of the Kurdish theater in the eye of the state: The underground theater. In the introduction chapter of the book, Metin says that:

Gathering information about the groups and their plays were not easy because most of the archives were lost at the police operations to the cultural centers. Some names on the play brochures are the code names to prevent people against the police.<sup>168</sup>

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<sup>166</sup> Interview with Kamil, 28.10.2017

<sup>167</sup> Interview with Selim, 09.02.2017

<sup>168</sup> Mirza Metin. *Jêrzemîn: Şanoya Li Jêrzemîne*. Diyarbakır: Diyarbakır Metropolitan Municipality Publishing, 2014, 16



The state's intervention to the art practices was not the only problem for the Kurdish cultural centers. The subordination attempts of the political field over the theater field, the power struggles and the positions of the agents in the Kurdish theater field were other important factors in the shaping of the Kurdish theater field. As Bourdieu states that: "The principle of the dynamics of a field lies in the form of its structure and, in particular, in the distance, the gaps, the asymmetries between the various specific forces that confront one another."<sup>169</sup> To analyze the power struggle between the Kurdish political field and theater field, I am going to benefit from the Bourdieu's field theory, because the power struggles among fields are the focus area for Bourdieu's approach. Bourdieu does not reduce the power struggles into hierarchical relations. For him, a field has its own regulations, institutions, agents, and logic to be classified as a field. In the 1990s, the domination and subordination of the political field over the Kurdish Theater field is the core part of my analysis.

I start with the question of why Mesopotamian Cultural Center became a struggle area. MCC had the political support of the Kurdish institutions like pro-Kurdish parties. In the 1990s, MCC gained influence on Kurdish art field and became the most visible representative of the Kurdish art so it became a useful tool for the party's desire to have hegemony over the civil society. As mentioned before, Bozarslan marks that the dominant political party's desire for the new Kurdish identity required a cultural organization which can be controlled by the party itself. Many interviewers approve the argument that the party tried to control the management of the cultural institutions. Moreover, the management of MCC tried to discipline members by using the discourse of the revolutionist identity, morality and culture. For example, emotional relations among group members were strictly forbidden. The punishment for that kind of relations is forcing an individual self-criticism and temporary suspension. In 1994, because of

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<sup>169</sup>Bourdieu, Pierre and Wacquat, Loic J.D. *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992, 101

those rules, the half of the members of the theater unit was temporarily or permanently suspended from the MCC. During my interviews with the old generation of Kurdish theater, they avoided answering the detailed content of those discipline meetings. The ones who stayed in the MCC after 2002 said that the reproducing those discussions is not useful.<sup>170</sup><sup>171</sup> The ones who were fired from the MCC in 2002 answered my questions off the record. In sum, as one of the actors/directors, Kemal Orgun marks in an interview that "MCC was an art institution but it was organized as a political organization".<sup>172</sup>

In conclusion, the ideological oppression in MCC caused internal conflicts in the art units because the political motivation of the most of the individuals was superior to their artistic motivation. All of my interviewees who participated MCC in the 1990s said that they wanted to be part of the Kurdish political movement, the cultural productions were secondary tools of the political movement. Political purposes were superior to the artistic in their eyes. The period from the 1991 – the foundation of MCC- to the mid-90s was the period of the foundation of all art branches in MCC. By the mid-90s, the self-education, specialization, and professionalization became the key points for the art units. This process had two sides such as systemization of the art training and changes in the participants' motivation. Selim (male, actor / director, old generation) describes that process as follows:

We defined ourselves in accordance with our political motivations in MCC. But our friend Yasemen always said that I am here for the theater. She did not involve ideological discussions and play writings. She just wants to perform... After a while,

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<sup>170</sup> Interview with Kamil, 28.05.2017

<sup>171</sup> Interview with Gülçin, 28.05.2017

<sup>172</sup> Ali Kılıç and Özgür Çiçek. "Interview with Kemal Orgun: Profesyonel Oluşumlar Yaratılmalı" *Boğaziçi Gösteri Sanatları Topluluğu Website*, September 2005, retrieved 16.01.2015 from <http://eski.bgst.org/tb/egitim/1114.html>

we decided that we must start to focus on the theater how we found and how we develop [...] The struggle in the art field is also crucial. We were going to shape the Kurdish theater against the oppression, assimilation, and ignorance to our culture.<sup>173</sup>

This quotation shows that the political motivations were still valid to be an artist in a Kurdish art branch. As the expertise in theatre increases among the members of Teatra Jiyana Nû, the discussions of art and politics enter a new phase. These were the first steps of the Kurdish theater's becoming a "field" in Bourdieusian sense. The dynamics of the theater field were not only shaped by political purposes anymore. The artistic concerns in the Kurdish theater field increased. By 1995, the new participants of the theater unit were not allowed to directly participate in the Teatra Jiyana Nû. Selim (male, actor / director, old generation) says that:

The management<sup>174</sup> blamed us to not letting the newcomers participate the Teatra Jiyana Nû. They blamed us for being a faction. We said that they are not as qualified to be part of the theatre [...] We became the lead figures in theater groups because we trained ourselves. New members had to catch us, so we started a training program for the new participants.<sup>175</sup>

However, this attempt was not accepted by the management in the first place. The management did not approve establishing of a closed professional group, but the artists insisted and established a separate course for the participants of the theater unit. This conflict shows that the

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<sup>173</sup> Interview with Selim, 09.02.2017

<sup>174</sup> I must state a definition to clarify the term "management of MCC". There were two structures for the management of MCC such as the coordination council and top management. The coordination council consisted of the representatives of the art units such as music, theater, literature, cinema, and folklore. The top management was the executive management of MCC which did not include members of art units. In the chapter, the management refers to the top management of MCC.

<sup>175</sup> Interview with Selim, 09.02.2017

management's control over the theater groups' decision-making process was weakened because of the increased cultural and educational capital of the agents.

In 1995, *Teatra Jiyana Nû* put goals for itself to develop the Kurdish theater as a qualified art branch.<sup>176</sup> The play *Rojbaş* was the first theatrical productions after the rejoining the group members after the suspensions in 1994. During the rehearsals of *Rojbaş* play, *Teatra Jiyana Nû* gained its motivation to improve their theatrical practices and expertise. Selim (male, actor/director, old generation) tells the rehearsal process as:

We organized people to discuss the future of MCC. The management changed in 1995 so the tension between the members and management (the tension was caused because of the suspensions) decreased a bit. Musicians also participated in the play *Rojbaş* so they supported us to build a new stage. We rented a place in the İstiklal Street and rebuilt that place as a stage. Everybody took responsibility to find a financial resource for example musicians went to weddings and they donated their earnings to build the stage.<sup>177</sup>

Until 1995, the plays were staged in MCC's building's basement in Tarlabaşı, a Kurdish immigrant ghetto near to Taksim Square and İstiklal Street. A new place was rented and constructed by actors and actresses in İstiklal Street. The Street was the cultural center of İstanbul full of bookstores, theater stages, cinemas, cafes. The opening of a new stage was not economically supported by the management. The cost of construction of the stage was afforded by the plays incomes and concerts. The music unit economically supported the theater unit. The opening of new theater stage in İstiklal Street mobilized the artists from all art units of MCC. This attempt was the first semi-autonomous initiative of *Teatra Jiyana Nû*. The first play of

<sup>176</sup> Interview with Kamil, 28.05.2017

<sup>177</sup> Interview with Selim, 09.02.2017

theater course participants (the newcomers) was staged in that stage. The stage was named as Helîn Stage and the theater course was named as *Şanoya Helîn* after the death of Helin Başak Kanat. With the foundation of the Helîn Stage, *Teatra Jiyana Nû* had its own separate and autonomous place. Many Kurdish artists like Ahmet Kaya, Çetin Akdeniz came and give concerts at the new stage. The visibility and audience number of *Teatra Jiyana Nû* radically increased. When I asked them what was changed after the new stage in İstiklal Street, Gülçin (female, actress, middle generation) states that:

The İstiklal Street was the cultural center of İstanbul. We became visible thanks to that stage. The audience capacity basement of Tarlabası building was around 60-70 people but our new stage was much bigger... The many Kurdish university students started to come to our plays. There were the theater plays, concerts, art courses every day.<sup>178</sup>

In spite of the decrease in MCC management's control power on the theater unit, there were still some restrictions. For example, the several people outside of MCC came and gave concerts at Helîn Stage but not all people could come there because they were not in the same ideological line with the dominant Kurdish movement. When I asked how the new stage (Helîn Stage) in the İstiklal Street affected the visibility of *Teatra Jiyana Nû* and their relationships with other Kurdish or Turkish artists, Selim (male, actor / director, old generation) tells:

The poet Nesimi Aday told me many years after the building of the new stage. He said that 'I pass in front of your stage every day. I see you carrying bricks to build the stage. I want to come but you would not accept me. Many times, I go home and cry.' He thought that MCC was not open to independent Kurdish artists. He was right. The new

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<sup>178</sup> Interview with Gülçin, 28.05.2017

stage brought a kind of autonomy for the MCC member artists. It was our stage so we could give all decisions independent from the MCC management's direct control.<sup>179</sup>

Between 1991 and 1994, a few plays were staged by MCC theater unit, however, between 1995 and 1998 the number of long and short plays radically increased. With the building of the new stage, *Teatra Jiyana Nû* experienced its golden age between 1995-1998. Between 1995 and 1998, *Teatra Jiyana Nû* completed its schooling aims. The theater unit divided into three parts: Şanoya Helîn as the course for new members, *Sarya Halk Sahnesi* (Sarya People's Stage) as the secondary level of school where agitprop plays were prepared and graduates of Şanoya Helîn gained theatrical experience and *Teatra Jiyana Nû* as the main theater of MCC run their rehearsals and prepared many plays. The plays of *Teatra Jiyana Nû* were still political but they were not prepared in the agitprop form. *Teatra Jiyana Nû* started to try different theatrical forms rather than Piscator's political theater and Brechtian epic in its plays. But the aesthetic concerns were not still the only determiner. For example, at the reinterpretation of the *Rojbaş* play after the building of the Helîn Stage, the play became three-act-version. First two acts were played in traditional comedy forms, but the third one's form was Brechtian epic. As the director, Selim (male, actor / director, old generation) said: "The third act did not fit the integrity of the play because the political manifest requires that kind of final."<sup>180</sup> As another example, at the play *Dewaya Generalê Teneke* (The Tin General's Trial), the dramaturgy was based on the dichotomy of proletariat and peasantry. Although the dramaturgy of the play was suitable for the official ideology of the movement, it was harshly criticized by Mamoste Cemil because it did not fit the Brechtian epic form. However, *Teatra Jiyana Nû* continued its theatrical experiments. Meanwhile, the contemporary theatrical schools like Grotowski theatrical Ecole gained influence. *Komara Dînan Şermola* (Şermola Republic of Mad People) which is

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<sup>179</sup> Interview with Selim, 09.02.2017

<sup>180</sup> Interview with Selim, 09.02.2017

criticized as a post-absurd play was the first example of the Grotowski Ecole. During the Kurdish region tours of *Teatra Jiyana Nû* after 1995, the members explore the traditional Kurdish village plays, and *Teatra Jiyana Nû* started to inspire from that tradition. Traditional plays and stories were reinterpreted free from the political requirements. The play *Qal û Qir* was the perfect example of the reinterpretation of traditional rural plays.

In conclusion, between 1995 and 1998, *Teatra Jiyana Nû* started to stage more qualified plays, reach more audience and complete and systemized being a theater school aim. All these experiments and avant-garde theatrical practices were continued until 1998. 1998 was the turning point for both the Kurdish political movement and the theater field.

### **3\_A\_2\_1\_Period of Crisis in Kurdish Theater Field between 1998 and 2001**

In the political field, 1998 was a turning point for the Kurdish movement. An armistice was declared by the movement. It was a period of panic, despair, and chaos for the Kurdish movement. At the same year, the large-scale operations against the pro-Kurdish political party HADEP and culture institutions started. When I asked the other culture centers' situation after 1998, Belçin (female, actress/ director/ writer, middle generation) answered as "I can say that it was a fall for them. Those organizations were executed by the political motivation. Therefore, their practices were affected far more than İstanbul MCC's."<sup>181</sup> In Istanbul, the Helîn Stage at the İstiklal Street was closed by the result juridical prosecutions. The closure of Helîn Stage

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<sup>181</sup> Interview with Belçin, 04.05.2017

caused a decline of art activities, but the state oppression was not a new phenomenon for MCC. On the other hand, the real crisis for MCC's art activities was the total change of the top management.

In 1998, MCC's management changed and the new management declared a regulation for the content of MCC's cultural activities in all art units. The decision of MCC management was shaping all cultural activities in accordance with political propaganda necessities. This decision caused a strong objection of the members of MCC. One of the directors of *Teatra Jiyana Nû* Selim (male, actor / director, old generation) explains the reason for the artists' objection as: "The management thought that the discussions cause division... The main problem between the theater group and MCC management was on the relation between art and politics, revolutionist attitudes etc."<sup>182</sup> The political discussions on the art practices of MCC members was not a new phenomenon. When I asked what the distinctive characteristics of the new hierarchical relationships between the management and the artists in the MCC, Neriman (female, actress / director, middle generation) answers that: "Since the foundation, the top management always tried to control MCC but the coordination council which consists of the artists were the determiners of the cultural activities' content."<sup>183</sup> The management's declaration about the content of the art productions caused a crisis between 1998 and 2001. All my interviewees who participated in the MCC in the 1990s state that the problem was not among the artists but the between the artists and management. During my field research, I could only reach the artists of MCC. I went to *İsmail Beşikçi Vakfı* (İsmail Beşikçi Foundation) to make an interview with İbrahim Gürbüz - one of the founders of MCC and *İsmail Beşikçi Vakfı* -, sent e-mails, call his secretary but I could not reach him. Other former managers of MCC also did not answer my e-mails. Even the ones who stayed at MCC at the end of the crisis period

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<sup>182</sup> Interview with Selim, 09.02.2017

<sup>183</sup> Interview with Neriman, 19.01.2017



disproved the management's approach. When I asked the reasons of the discussions, Kamil (male, actor/director, old generation) who stayed at MCC answered as "I do not think that talking about the problems at that period is beneficial for the Kurdish theater, but I have to say that the artists did not cause the problem." Gülçin (female, actress, middle generation) who also stayed at MCC after the crisis period says that "It is not easy to tell all discussions, but the problem was not among artists. It was between the artists and the management. The discussions continued too long and both sides refused to compromise."<sup>184</sup>

The core discussion between the theater group and the management was about the relation between art and politics and the role of art in political and cultural fields. This discussion is not only about the content of the plays but also organizational hierarchy, political priority and management and aims of MCC. In this sense, the transformative dynamics of the Kurdish theater field in the crisis period were the subordination struggle between the political field and cultural field. Bourdieu states that "The dynamics of a field lies in the form of its structure and, in particular, in the distance, the gaps, the asymmetries between the various specific forces that confront one another."<sup>185</sup> At the end of the 1990s, the individuals in Kurdish theater became qualified and quantitatively enough to found independent art organizations and determine the rules of an art field. The triggered dynamics of the transformation was the change in MCC members' art motivations and their cultural capitals. The cultural and social capital of the members of MCC's theater units created the power of resistance against the subordination of the political field and defining of the ordinary functioning of the Kurdish theater field. At the beginning of the 1990s, the motivations of the members to participate in the MCC were purely political but few exceptions. However, when the management of MCC tried to intervene in

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<sup>184</sup> Interview with Gülçin, 28.05.2017

<sup>185</sup> Pierre Bourdieu and Loic J.D Wacquat. *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992, 101

theater, the artistic concerns and different critiques of the political art were the objection points of the members. If this kind of intervention happened at the beginning of the 1990s that would not cause the separation of members from the MCC. However, in 1998 it did because the Kurdish theater field started to gain its characteristics and functioning dynamics as an independent field.

Between 1998 and 2001, a couple of congresses and meetings organized in MCC and to solve the problems. However, Mehmet (male, actor/director/playwright, middle generation) described these meetings as:

Some of those meetings longed 3-4 days. The purpose was not to find a common way to continue. Those meetings were organized to politically lynch the people who did not agree with the management.<sup>186</sup>

Selim (male, actor / director, old generation) also emphasize the same issue:

We said that we have some agitprop plays which were produced in *Sarya Halk Sahnesi* but the political theater is not only shouting slogans at the stage. They (the management) did not understand this. Actually, it is normal because they do not any knowledge of art.<sup>187</sup>

If the problem had been unique for the theater group, we could have been said that the problem may be caused by different elements like personal or egoistic conflicts, lack of communication etc. However; the same problem existed between music and literature departments between the management of the cultural center. My two interviewers who worked in the literature department's journal *Jiyana Rewşen*'s editor board emphasis the problems of management's

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<sup>186</sup> Interview with Mehmet, 12.05.2017

<sup>187</sup> Interview with Selim, 09.02.2017

approach to art: Belçin (female, actress/ director/ writer, middle generation) tells the process of the literature unit of MCC as:

At that time, I worked in the literature unit which published the literature journal *Rewşen* (*Jiyana Rewşen*). *Rewşen* became a school for the written Kurdish literature... After 1998, the top management declared that *Rewşen* is going to be a political bulletin where the writings, stories, and poems of the Kurdish political prisoners send. We said that it is a Kurdish literature journal, only if they are qualified enough we publish[...] Moreover, there were several bulletins as they wanted like *Özgür Politika*... *Jiyana Rewşen* was the only literary journal and it had to stay as it was. We were six people at worked *Jiyana Rewşen*, some of us were the founders of the literature unit... After the discussions, we stayed away for six months. After that, they apologized to us and ask to return. We returned and changed the name of the journal as *Rewşenname*. However, nothing was changed in management's approach. We said that the art is not the determiner but only politics. We do not want to be part of it. All art units started with agitprop productions, but they found their ways. We could say that the Kurdish theater exists, Kurdish literature exists from the artistic perspective. It was the management's approach which failed the MCC.<sup>188</sup>

On the other hand, Kemal Orgun (male, actor / director, old generation) who did not leave MCC in the crisis period emphasize the transformation of the political field to stresses the reasons of the crisis in MCC:

The first 3-4 years were the period of chaos and recognition...Between 1998 and 2002, many experienced members left.... There were a change and transformation but at the same time, some people insist on their old habits. These two sides clashed, and one side

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<sup>188</sup> Interview with Belçin, 04.05.2017

chose to the easy way and they left. Grotowski (a theater scholar) has a sectarian understanding and the people who left the same understanding.<sup>189</sup>

MCC was not only the base of the Kurdish theater's emergence and development but also a place for Kurdish youngsters to get socialized, politicized and be educated. All my interviewees describe the relationships among the participants as the period of solidarity, dedication and commune life. Despite my interviewee claim that the problem was between the top management and the artists, the Kemal Orgun's narrative shows that there is factionalism among the artists. Moreover, labeling all conflicts inside the MCC to the political discussions is ignoring the functioning of the Kurdish theater field. The prestigious positions like a director in the theater groups always concrete hierarchical relationships among the artists. The problems caused by those hierarchical positions were insignificant at the beginning of the 1990s because of the political motivations of the participants. After the mid-1990s, the increase of artistic conflicts through hierarchical positions in the *Teatra Jiyana Nû* could not be solved by emphasizing the political solidarity because the period between 1998 and 2002 was the period of political crisis.

To sum up, the transformation of the political field triggered a crisis period in the Kurdish theater field. The crisis period prevented the production of new plays. Some plays which were prepared between 1995 and 1998 continued to stage. However, except the short-plays, *Teatra Jiyana Nû* produced 2 plays between 1991 and 1994, 6 plays between 1995 and 1998 but only one new play between 1998 and 2001. At end of this period, some people were permanently suspended from MCC's literature, theater and music units. Many others left after the suspensions and MCC lost its human source that organizes and produce all cultural productions. 35 players/directors/writers (including the trainees of *Şanoya Helîn* and *Sarya*

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<sup>189</sup> Ali Kılıç and Özgür Çiçek. "Interview with Kemal Orgun: Profesyonel Oluşumlar Yaratılmalı" *Boğaziçi Gösteri Sanatları Topluluğu Website*, September 2005, retrieved 16.01.2015 from <http://eski.bgst.org/tb/egitim/1114.html>

*Halk Sahnesi*) out of 44 members of MCC theater units left the cultural center. After that, MCC lost its dominance over the Kurdish theater practices. In the next chapter, I am going to analyze the emergence of the independent Kurdish theater groups and their relationships with the Kurdish political organizations, pro-Kurdish parties' municipalities, and MCC related theater groups.



#### **Chapter 4: The Kurdish Theater Field in the 2000s**

At the beginning of the 2000s, the changes in the Kurdish theater gained a transformative characteristic in different aspects. First, the emergence of independent Kurdish theater groups and their influence on the Kurdish theater transformed the relationship between the political field and theater field. At the beginning of the 1990s, the political motivations of the members of theater groups are the determinant dynamic of the shaping the Kurdish theater. Kemal Orgun who was one of the directors and playwrights of MCC shares a similar point of view on the political motivation of theater groups in the 1990s: "In past, being a patriot is the measurement

point of practicing art".<sup>190</sup> Around the mid-90s the increase in the cultural capital of artists, changes in the motivation of the individuals in the cultural centers showed themselves through the conflicts related to art and politics. Erdal Ceviz who left the MCC and participated the foundation of the first independent Kurdish theater group *Seyr-î Mesel* said in an interview in 2005: "We aim to create a theater group which was run by the artistic concerns."<sup>191</sup> The emergence of the independent Kurdish theater groups was the result of this conflict. This approach gained weight among all Kurdish theater groups in the 2000s. Kenan Doğu who was a member of Diyarbakır Raman Culture Center which was a member of MCC network states that:

In the Kurdish political movement, the culture centers were tools for the revolution at the founding period. The art was also considered as a tool in this sense. Today (2005), in the Kurdish region, there had been a change in perception in the last 6 years and the art itself became the main purpose.<sup>192</sup>

As Doğu states that the artistic concerns gain weight even in MCC related theater groups. My analysis on the Kurdish theater field in the 1990s mostly based on the relation among state, Kurdish political movement and the function of the Kurdish cultural centers. The role of artists and internal conflicts of the field gained a transformative characteristic at the late 1990s and caused a structural change in the field with the fall of Mesopotamian Culture Center which was the dominant institution in the field. In the Kurdish theater field in the 2000s, the field is

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<sup>190</sup> Ali Kılıç and Özgür Çiçek. "Interview with Kemal Orgun: Profesyonel Oluşumlar Yaratılmalı" *Boğaziçi Gösteri Sanatları Topluluğu Website*, September 2005, retrieved 16.01.2015 from <http://eski.bgst.org/tb/egitim/1114.html>

<sup>191</sup> Özgür Çiçek and Volkan Mantu. "Interview with Erdal Ceviz: Sanatsal kaygılarla yürüyen bir yapı oluşturmayı hedefliyoruz. ", *Boğaziçi Gösteri Sanatları Topluluğu Web*, October 2005, retrieved 16.01.2015 from <http://eski.bgst.org/tb/egitim/1115.html>

<sup>192</sup> Ayşan Sönmez and Selin Aydınoglu. "Interview with Kenan Doğu: Halkçı tiyatro gelişmeli", *Boğaziçi Gösteri Sanatları Topluluğu Web*, October 2005, retrieved 16.01.2015 from <http://eski.bgst.org/tb/egitim/115.html>

determined by the increasingly complex relationships among the independent groups, conflicts surrounding economic and cultural capital of individuals in those groups, and finally personal and artistic conflicts among actors in the theatre field. As Bourdieu states:

Artistic revolutions, for instance, are the result of transformations of the relations of power constitutive of the space of artistic positions that are themselves made possible by the meeting of the subversive intentions of a fraction of producers with the expectations of a fraction of the audience, thus by a transformation of the relations between the intellectual field and the field of power.<sup>193</sup>

Bourdieu offers a perspective to understand the artistic revolution in the Kurdish theater field. I divide my analysis on the Kurdish theater field in the 2000s into two periods. The first period is the autonomy struggle of the Kurdish theater in political, economic and dramaturgical senses between 2002 and 2013. In this period, the independent Kurdish theater groups became the pioneer of the Kurdish theater in Turkey and eliminate the direct disciplinary actions and subordination attempts of the political field. The second period is the Kurdish theater groups' hybridization and becoming part of the alternative theater field between 2013 and 2017. In this period, the Kurdish theater groups limited their relations and activities in the Kurdish theater field. However, in the second period, the Kurdish theater groups started to exceed the boundaries of the Kurdish theater field and connect with the alternative theater groups in Turkey.

#### **4\_A\_The Period of Struggle for Autonomy from main stream Kurdish political movement between 2002 and 2013**

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<sup>193</sup> Pierre Bourdieu and Loic J.D: Wacquat, *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992, 105

The most visible elements of the transformation in the Kurdish theater was the increase in the number of independent Kurdish theater groups and emergence of a 'Kurdish theater field' as Bourdie defines. The Kurdish theater field in the 2000s was no longer functioning through political concerns. In this period, the economic relations, the emergence of different artistic tendencies, changes in the agent's social and economic capitals, the internal conflicts in the theater groups also became determinant factors in the field.

Between 1991 and 2002, there were 7 Kurdish theater groups and 6 of them were under the branches of the Mesopotamian Culture Center; however, in the 2000s, this situation completely changed in two main aspects. First, the number of independent theater groups were now more than the number of MCC network's theater groups. The second and more important aspect is that the role and effectiveness of the independent theater groups have started to dominate the Kurdish theater field because of their qualified human source in sense of artistic development. To show the changes in the field, I state the brief histories of the new Kurdish theater groups which were founded after 2002:

*Şanoya Şarederiya Amedê* (Diyarbakır Municipality Theater)<sup>194</sup>: It was founded as Diyarbakır Belediyesi Dr. Orhan Asena Şehir Tiyatrosu (Diyarbakır Municipality Dr. Orhan Asena City Theater) in 1990. It was recognized as official 'City Theater' by the Ministry of Culture in 1993. In 1995, the Welfare Party won the municipality election and abolish the theater. In 1999, the pro-Kurdish party DEHAP won the municipality election and opened the city theater. Diyarbakır City Theater staged its first Kurdish play *Hewarî* (*Taziye – Condolence*) written by Murathan Mungan in 2003. After 2003-2004, the group staged only Kurdish plays and gathered

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<sup>194</sup>Mirza Metin. *Jêzêmin: Şanoya Li Jêzêmine*. Diyarbakır: Diyarbakır Metropolitan Municipality Publishing, 2014, 110



experienced Kurdish actors and actresses of Mesopotamian Culture Center and its branches. Diyarbakır City Theater was the first group which stage theater plays for children in the the Kurdish language. On 25 October 2016, Diyarbakır Municipality President Gültan Kışanak was taken under custody. She was arrested on 1 November 2016, and the government appointed a mosque caretaker instead of her. The mosque caretaker Cumali Atilla who was the district governor of Etimesgut, Ankara abolish the work agreements of the actors, actresses, and directors of the Diyarbakır Municipality Theater on 14 December 2016.<sup>195</sup> The members of the municipality theater founded an independent theater group named *Şanoya Bajêr a Amede* (Amed City Theater) on 12 February 2017.

*Teatra Seyr-î Mesel*<sup>196</sup>: It was founded in 2002 by about 20 actors, actresses, and directors who left or were sustained from MCC. It was the first and biggest theater group of the autonomous period of the Kurdish theater field. The groups staged multilingual (Kurmanji, Kırmançkî-Zazakî and Turkish) plays.

*Teatra Avesta*<sup>197</sup>: The group was founded in 2003 by former MCC members. The group staged its plays in Kurmanji.

*Teatra Yekta Hêvî*<sup>198</sup>: The group members found a theater unit under the roof of *Dicle Fırat Kültür ve Sanat Merkezi* (Dicle Fırat Culture and Art Center) which was a branch office of Mesopotamian Culture Center network in 2003, Diyarbakır. The theater unit of the cultural center was named as *Teatra Yekta Hêvî* in 2009. One of the *Teatra Jiyana Nû* directors Kemal

<sup>195</sup> İstanbul - BİA Haber Merkezi, “Kayyum Diyarbakır Şehir Tiyatrosu Oyuncularını İsten Çıkarttı”, BİANET, 05.01.2017, retrieved 07.01.2017 from <https://bianet.org/bianet/siyaset/182412-kayyum-diyarbakir-sehir-tiyatrosu-oyuncularini-isten-cikartti>

<sup>196</sup> Mirza Metin. *Jêrzemîn: Şanoya Li Jêrzemîne*. Diyarbakır: Diyarbakır Metropolitan Municipality Publishing, 2014, 154

<sup>197</sup> Ibid.172

<sup>198</sup> Ibid.184

Ulusoy who stayed at MCC after the crisis period participated the theater practices as director in 2010.

*Mezopotamya Dans*<sup>199</sup>: It is a dance performance group which was founded under the roof of İstanbul MCC. Although it is not a theater group, the several performances of MCC were based on the Kurdish epics like *Mem û Zîn*, *Destana Kawayê Hesinkar*.

*Teatra Birca Belek*<sup>200</sup>: It was founded in 2005. The group was formed under the roof of Mem û Zîn Culture Center (a branch office of MCC network) in Cizre. There was only one play which was stage by *Teatra Birca Belek* between 2005 and 2013.<sup>201</sup>

*Teatra Tîlermen*<sup>202</sup>: It was founded in 2005. The group was formed under the roof of Mardin Culture Center (a branch office of MCC network) in Mardin. There was only one play which was stage by *Teatra Tîlermen* between 2005 and 2013.<sup>203</sup> The group did not sustain theater practices.

*Teatra Çırûsk*<sup>204</sup>: In 2007, the group was also founded under the roof of Mardin Culture Center (a branch office of MCC network) in Mardin. *Teatra Çırûsk* staged two plays (in 2008 and 2011). The group did not sustain theater practices.

*Teatra Arzela*<sup>205</sup>: In 2007, the group was founded under the roof of Arzela Culture Center in İstanbul. The members of the group were amateur artists (students and textile workers). Aydın Orak who is the founder of *Teatra Avesta* and a former MCC member directed the only play (*Deq*) of the group.

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<sup>199</sup> Ibid.190

<sup>200</sup> Ibid.204

<sup>201</sup> Ibid.205

<sup>202</sup> Ibid.208

<sup>203</sup> Ibid.209

<sup>204</sup> Ibid.224

<sup>205</sup> Ibid.212

*Teatra Bakur*<sup>206</sup>: The group was founded in 2007 under the roof of İstanbul MCC. In 2009, the group abolished itself and joined *Teatra Jiyana Nû*, which was main theater unit of İstanbul MCC).

*Destar*<sup>207</sup>: *Destar* was founded by Mîrza Metîn and Berfîn Zendelîoğlu who was former members of MCC and *Seyr-î Mesel* in 2008, İstanbul. The group built a stage called *Şermola Performans*. *Destar* became one of the most productive and visible Kurdish theater groups after its foundation. The group also built partnerships with alternative theater groups in İstanbul and Germany. Around 2015 and 2016, the *Destar* decided to use the title “*Şermola Performans*” as the name of the group.

*Teatra Peristan*<sup>208</sup>: The group was founded Gûlbahar Dağ and Nurten Demirbaş. Nurten Demirbaş is also a former member of MCC and an active member of *Seyr-î Mesel*. *Teatra Peristan* prepared just one play titled *Peristan* and they did not continue theater practices. The play *Peristan* was supported by *Başak Sanat Vakfı* (Başak Art Foundation) which was founded by Helin Başak Kanat’s family. As I state above, MCC’s Helîn Stage and theater unit *Şanoya Helîn* were also named after Helin Başak Kanat.

*Teatra Mîtannî*<sup>209</sup>: The group was founded in 2008 under the roof of Mardin Nusaybin Municipality’s Mîtannî Culture Center. This cultural center can count as a member of the MCC network. The group was reformed under the leadership of the director Kemal Orgun who was a member of *Teatra Jiyana Nû* (MCC).

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<sup>206</sup> Ibid.216

<sup>207</sup> Ibid.229

<sup>208</sup> Ibid.246

<sup>209</sup> Ibid.250

*Teatra Med*<sup>210</sup>: Teatra Med was founded under the roof of the Şanlıurfa Viranşehir Municipality's *Med Kültür-Sanat Merkezi* (Med Culture-Art Center) in 2009.

*Tiyatro Boyalı Kuş*<sup>211</sup>: The group was founded in 2000 as an alternative feminist theater group. *Tiyatro Boyalı Kuş* is not a Kurdish theater group. The group cooperated with Aydın Orak who was a former member of MCC and founder of *Teatra Avesta* to prepared a play titled *Nûrê* (translation of Henrik Ibsen's play *Nora: A doll house*) for the İstanbul International Theater Festival in 2010.

*Teatra Demsal*<sup>212</sup>: The group was founded in İstanbul, 2010. The group staged only one play titled *Sergo* and abolished itself. The director of the play was Erdal Ceviz who was a former member of MCC and active member of *Seyr-î Mesel*.

*Navenda Çand û Hunerê Cegerxwîn* (Cegerxwîn Culture and Art Center)<sup>213</sup>: The culture center opened a theater course for young people in 2012 and staged a play per year as a graduation play.

*Navenda Çand û Hunera Zembilfiroş* (Zembilfiroş Culture and Art Center)<sup>214</sup>: There is no detailed information about the cultural center and theater group of the cultural center. The culture center was founded by Diyarbakır Silvan Municipality. The only known play was the group is *Gêjo* in 2012.

*Teatra St*<sup>215</sup>: The group was founded by the former members of MCC and *Seyr-î Mesel* in 2012. The first play of the group was *Êşa Zimanekî* was staged under the roof of *Seyr-î Mesel*. The second play Anton Çehov's play *Hırç û Xwezgînî* (The bear) in 2013 under the roof of an

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<sup>210</sup> Ibid.258

<sup>211</sup> Ibid.262

<sup>212</sup> Ibid.266

<sup>213</sup> Ibid.270

<sup>214</sup> Ibid.277

<sup>215</sup> Ibid.280

alternative art platform *Boğaziçi Gösteri Sanatları Topluluğu* (Boğaziçi Performing Art Ensemble). Around 2015 and 2016, the group abolished itself.

*Teatra Tov*<sup>216</sup>: The group was founded by several actors and actresses who were former members of different university theater groups (none of the university theater groups could prepare their plays in Kurdish) in 2013. The group prepares plays in Turkish and Kurmanji.

*Teatra Deng û Bêj*<sup>217</sup>: The group was founded in İstanbul, 2013. I can reach the information about the founders' membership of MCC. The play *Tırs û Xof* was in Kurmanji with Turkish surtitle.

*Kızıltepe Sanat Tiyatrosu* (Kızıltepe Art Theater)<sup>218</sup>: The group was founded under the *Eğitim-Sen* (a labor union in the education sector) and prepared a Kurdish play titled *Mala Dînan* in 2014. According to Emrah Koyuncu who was the former director of *Eğitim-Sen* theater group, the group prepared Turkish plays before. The people who try to publish a Kurdish literature journal were exiled by the Ministry of Education. Between 2002 and 2005, the members of *Eğitim-Sen* theater group prepared Kurdish plays under the roof of *Etkin Sanat Merkezi* (Etkin Art Center) and Kızıltepe Municipality. However, there are not any documents such as play brochures or text about the plays. I reach the information via an interview with Emrah Koyuncu<sup>219</sup> in 2005 at *İstanbul Amatör Tiyatro Festivali* (İstanbul Amateur Theater Festival).

*Konservatuvara Aram Tîgran* (Aram Tîgran Conservatoire)<sup>220</sup>: The Conservatoire was founded by Diyarbakır Metropolitan Municipality in 2012. Theater department of the conservatoire

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<sup>216</sup> Ibid.286

<sup>217</sup> Ibid.290

<sup>218</sup> Ibid.294

<sup>219</sup> Ayşan Sönmez, Cüneyt Yalaz, Fırat Güllü and Sevilay Saral. "Kızıltepe Etkin Sanat Merkezi'nden Emrah Koyuncu İle Söyleşi", *Mimesis Tiyatro Çeviri/Araştırma Dergisi*, İstanbul: Boğaziçi University, (2014): 237-269

<sup>220</sup> Mirza Metin. *Jêzêmîn: Şanoya Li Jêzêmîne*. Diyarbakır: Diyarbakır Metropolitan Municipality Publishing, 2014, 298

staged Kurdish (Kurmanji) plays. Diyarbakır Metropolitan Municipality Theater members gave theater education in the department.

*Roja Avesta*: The group was founded under the roof of *Raman Kültür Merkezi* (Raman Culture Center) in Diyarbakır, 2000 by the Kurdish university students.<sup>221</sup> Some of the group members participated in theater training in different branches of MCC. Raman Culture Center had also a children theater group titled *Gûlen Avesta*.<sup>222</sup>

*Deneysel Sahne*: *Deneysel Sahne* which was founded as an alumni organization of a university theater club. The group staged Turkish plays. In a group of Kurdish performers took initiative and staged Moliere's *The Imaginary Invalid* (*Nexweşê Nexweşîyê*) in 2014.<sup>223</sup>

*Sevadil*: The group was founded in 2017 by Kurdish and Turkish artists. *Bê Ziman* is a multilingual play which was written by Derya Mori Uygurlar staged in 2017. The group will stage another play *Kûr Mori* written by Derya Mori Uygurlar in Kurmanji as a part of an international project.

I reached the information about Kurdish theater groups through my interviews, newspaper articles, and Mirza Metin's book *Jêrzêmin*. According to Metin, there were several theater groups which did not continue theater practices did not send materials about the group's history and plays are not mentioned in the book.<sup>224</sup> Metin says that some groups which did not continue theater practices did not send materials about the group's history and plays. In addition to that,

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<sup>221</sup> Ayşan Sönmez and Selin Aydınoglu. "Interview with Kenan Doğu: Halkçı tiyatro gelişmeli", *Boğaziçi Gösteri Sanatları Topluluğu Web*, October 2005, retrieved 16.01.2015 from <http://eski.bgst.org/tb/egitim/115.html>

<sup>222</sup> Evrensel Haber Merkezi, "Tiyatro salonu yok", *Evrensel*, 17.01.2004, retrieved 11.11.2016 from <https://www.evrensel.net/haber/147190/tyatro-salonu-yok>,

<sup>223</sup> Volkan Mantu, "Kültürel Çoğulcu Tiyatro Günleri'nde 2. Gün", *Mimesis Sahne Sanatları Portalı*, 06.05.2014, retrieved 01.12.2016 from <http://www.mimesis-dergi.org/2014/05/kulturel-cogulcu-tyatro-gunlerinde-2-gun/>

<sup>224</sup> Mirza Metin. *Jêrzêmin: Şanoya Li Jêrzêminê*. Diyarbakır: Diyarbakır Metropolitan Municipality Publishing, 2014, 16

I could not reach many Kurdish culture center and their websites because they are either closed or banned by different statutory decrees under the state of emergency started in July 2016.

In short, the Kurdish theater field becomes varied in the 2000s through the emergence of new theater groups. However, the increase in the number of groups did not mean that Kurdish theater field completed its foundation period. The diversity in the 2000s was caused by two reasons, namely, former members of İstanbul MCC founded new independent theater groups and the emergence of new cultural centers in the Kurdish region with the support of pro-Kurdish parties' municipalities. The groups which were founded under the roof of cultural centers and directed by the former members of MCC branches were theater courses, not professional theater groups. On the other hand, not all groups that I mentioned above could sustain their theater practices or prepared plays. However, many groups could not sustain their theater practices more than a few plays. Moreover, after the leave of members of theater units in İstanbul MCC, the members of *Şanoya Helîn* and *Sarya Halk Sahnesi* participated to *Teatra Jiyana Nû* so theater education system of İstanbul MCC failed. Moreover, *Teatra Jiyana Nû* which is the dominant group in the Kurdish theater field in the 1990s lost its productivity. For instance, the Mesopotamian Culture Center produced 9 theater plays, many short skits under three theater units between 1991 and 2001. Those plays were staged many times in different cities for a long time. However, between 2002 and 2009, *Teatra Jiyana Nû* could produce only 6 theater plays including one-person-plays and beginners' training plays. According to Mirza Metin's *Jêrzêmin*, the group did not produce any play between 2009 and 2013.<sup>225</sup> Between 2002 and 2013, *Seyr-î Mesel* which was founded by the 22 people, who left the MCC, produced 12 theater plays and several performance projects. *Seyr-î Mesel*'s plays were staged more times than MCC's plays in the same period.<sup>226</sup> As another example, *Destar* produced 7 plays between 2008

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<sup>225</sup>Mirza Metin. *Jêrzemîn: Şanoya Li Jêrzemîne*. Diyarbakır: Diyarbakır Metropolitan Municipality Publishing, 2014, 23-57

<sup>226</sup> Ibid.154-171

and 2013. These numbers show that the new theater groups became more productive and visible than *Teatra Jiyana Nû*. By 2013, *Teatra Jiyana Nû* continued theater practices without producing theater plays.<sup>227</sup> The independent theater groups, especially *Seyr-î Mesel*, became the locomotives of the Kurdish theater in Turkey. By the foundation of *Seyr-î Mesel*, mutual artistic collaboration, and productions among independent Kurdish artists. For example, one of the first projects of the *Seyr-î Mesel* was *Masalların Düğünü* (The wedding of tales). This play was offered by the Kurdish singer Metin Kahraman to *Seyr-î Mesel*. The play was a music and theater performance in seven languages like Turkish, Kurmanji, Zazakî, Armenian etc. This play was supported by Democratic Turkey Initiative.<sup>228</sup> This kind of collaboration was not possible under the roof MCC because even the artists decide the content of the artistic productions, in the crisis period the management of MCC eliminate the autonomy of the art groups in the cultural center.

To sum up, the period of 2002- 2013, there were five determinant theater groups or institutions in the Kurdish theater field such as *Şanoya Şarederîya Amedê* (Diyarbakır Municipality Theater)<sup>229</sup>, *Teatra Seyr-î Mesel*<sup>230</sup>, *Teatra Avesta*<sup>231</sup>, *Destar*<sup>232</sup> and *Mezopotamya Dans*<sup>233</sup> in senses of sustainability, production quality, and visibility.

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<sup>227</sup> Ibid.57

<sup>228</sup> Interview with Selim, 09.02.2017

<sup>229</sup> The group produced 21 plays between 2003 and 2013.

Mirza Metin. *Jêzêzê: Şanoya Li Jêzêzê*. Diyarbakır: Diyarbakır Metropolitan Municipality Publishing, 2014, 110-153

<sup>230</sup> The group produced 12 plays and several performance projects between 2002 and 2013

Mirza Metin. *Jêzêzê: Şanoya Li Jêzêzê*. Diyarbakır: Diyarbakır Metropolitan Municipality Publishing, 2014, 154-171

<sup>231</sup> The group produced 6 plays including the mutual play with Tiyatro Boyalı Kuş between 2005 and 2013. Mirza Metin. *Jêzêzê: Şanoya Li Jêzêzê*. Diyarbakır: Diyarbakır Metropolitan Municipality Publishing, 2014, 172-183

<sup>232</sup> The group produced 7 plays between 2008 and 2013. Mirza Metin. *Jêzêzê: Şanoya Li Jêzêzê*. Diyarbakır: Diyarbakır Metropolitan Municipality Publishing, 2014, 229-245

<sup>233</sup> The group produced 6 dance theater plays and dance performances between 2005 and 2013.



#### **4\_A\_1\_ New Power Balances in the Kurdish Theater Field**

My analysis about the emergence and development period of the Kurdish theater in Turkey is mostly based on the relations among the state, the Kurdish political movement and the Kurdish theater institutions) groups through Gramsci's concept of hegemony. The triggered conflict in the transformation of the Kurdish theater field is the subordination struggle between the Kurdish political field and theater field. In the new period which started with the emergence of the independent Kurdish theater groups after 2002, the determinant dynamics in the field verified. In this period, I propose three analysis axes. First one is the relation between the state and Kurdish theater field. The second is the economic conditions and political relations in the Kurdish theater field. And the third one is the position-takings of individuals, the conflicts based on artistic tendencies, motivations and hierarchical struggles in the theater groups.

##### **4\_A\_1\_1\_State Intervention to the Kurdish Theater between 2002 and 2013**

The first axe - the relations between the state and Kurdish theater groups - is the simplest one to understand because these relations were the projections of the political conditions. Except for the few cases in the Kurdish opening period, the state oppression on the Kurdish theater field continued. The state intervention and prevention to the Kurdish theater was legitimized by different juridical articles like 'provoke people for rebellion', 'praising the crime and criminal'.

For example, Metin Boran who was the general art director of Diyarbakır Municipality Theater gives several examples of the interventions:

Diyarbakır Municipality Theater (DBŞT) prepared a Turkish play titled *Mahmud ile Yezida* and used some Kurdish words and Şiwan Perwer's Kîrîwo song in the play in 2001. The play was banned because of the song...After censoring some parts and using the song's instrumental version, the ban was repealed. Between January and April 2001, the play was staged 65 times and reached around 18 000 audiences. However, the office of the Diyarbakır governor sued the play. I was sentenced one-month-prison sentence.<sup>234</sup>

The reason for the prison sentence of Metin Boran was sedition of people. The interventions were also caused by the local governors' initiative. For example, the child play in Turkish *Şarkılarımız Ölmesin* written by Yılmaz Onay was banned because of the theatrical poster. In the poster, a child writes the name of the play on a wall. The office of the Diyarbakır governor banned play because the poster provokes children to write slogans on walls.<sup>235</sup> Another banned child play was *Gozort* in the 2001-2002 season. The play was written by academic Metin Balay and playwright Ali Meriç, and it was awarded by State Opera and Bale Workers Solidarity Foundation (*Devlet Opera ve Bale Çalışanları Yardımlaşma Vakfı – TOBAV*). The play was banned before the premiere by the provincial directorate of the Ministry of Education. The reason was that the play was not a child play. Metin Boran says that:

The play was awarded in the child play competition of TOBAV. We objected the ban of the provincial directorate of the Ministry of Education. It came into light that they did

<sup>234</sup>Ayşan Sönmez and Selin Aydınöglü. "Interview with Metin Boran: Sanatın ve tiyatronun yaygınlaşması için ekip olarak çabaladık", *Boğaziçi Gösteri Sanatları Topluluğu Web*, October 2005, retrieved 16.01.2015 from <http://eski.bgst.org/tb/egitim/1110.html>

<sup>235</sup>Ayşan Sönmez and Selin Aydınöglü. "Interview with Metin Boran: Sanatınve tiyatronun yaygınlaşması için ekip olarak çabaladık", *Boğaziçi Gösteri Sanatları Topluluğu Web*, October 2005, retrieved 16.01.2015 from <http://eski.bgst.org/tb/egitim/1110.html>

not read the play text. After that, the ban was repealed... The play reached around 6000 disadvantaged children thanks to the support of Diyarbakır Municipality.<sup>236</sup>

According to the juridical regulations, the theater plays which were organized by local NGOs must be approved by the local government offices. Many tours of different Kurdish theater groups were not approved by the local government office because of the security reasons. When I asked if there was any change in the relationship between state and Kurdish theater groups after their leaving from MCC, Mehmet (male, actor/director/playwright, middle generation) says that:

Not only MCC and its related groups but also all Kurdish artists were seen as suspicious organizations or people. In our tours, the NGOs applied for permission to the local government office one month earlier than the staging date. However, the permission was not given until the staging day. We sold tickets, but we did not know that if we could stage our plays. The police waited in front of the stage and did not allow any audience to enter until the permission was given. Sometimes, we did not get the permission.

I asked if there was a continuity of the state control and intervention to the independent Kurdish theater groups in the 2000s, Selim (male, actor /director, old generation) who was one of the founders of *Seyr-î Mesel* says that:

We made a tour for one month and stage our plays 25 times I different places. In our group, there was three actor who evaded the draft for obligatory military service. In many places, the police came and check the criminal records of every group member. The police took three of us under custody because of the obligatory military service

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<sup>236</sup>Ayşan Sönmez and Selin Aydınöglü. "Interview with Metin Boran: Sanatınve tiyatronun yaygınlaşması için ekip olarak çabaladık", *Boğaziçi Gösteri Sanatları Topluluğu Web*, October 2005, retrieved 16.01.2015 from <http://eski.bgst.org/tb/egitim/1110.html>

records. The normal procedure is that police take you to inform the local army office and released you until the next call-up period of the army. However, they have to the right to keep you one day until the procedure completed. They use this right every time. After a couple of times, we decided to go to the police headquarters one day before the play. When we went to a city to stage our play, three of us went to the police headquarter. We stayed one night at the police station and on the next day, we performed our plays.<sup>237</sup>

The reasons for the bans were not declared to the theater groups. The common reason was the 'security reasons'. Not only independent theater groups but also official municipality theaters faced similar difficulties. Mesut who was a member of Diyarbakır Municipality Theater gives the absurd examples about the bans of the local government office:

The local governor of Mardin did not give permission for our play in 2002. We sent all documents like the play text, identity information of the director and players for the permission three weeks ago. We went to Mardin for the play and on that day, we were informed that our play was not allowed. I went to meet with the local governor. He said that in the play the wife of local governor takes socks from peasants as a gift, a local governor's wife did not take gifts from people because it is a bribery.<sup>238</sup>

The direct intervention to the Kurdish theater groups was not the only problem. In the art field, ignorance and hesitation were strong attitudes to the Kurdish art organizations. The visibility of the Kurdish theater practices was still limited despite new groups were founded. The Kurdish theater groups were seen as political organizations, not art organizations. Until 2009-2010, none of the independent Kurdish theater groups or Diyarbakır Municipality Theater were invited any state-related festivals like theater festival of the national theater or municipality theater.<sup>239</sup> They

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<sup>237</sup> Interview with Selim, 09.02.2017

<sup>238</sup> Interview with Mesut, 03.11.2017

<sup>239</sup> Interview with Yasin, 29.10.2017

could find a place in some culture NGOs festivals like TAKSAV (*Toplumsal Arařtırmalar Kltr Sanat iin Vakıf* – Social Research, Culture and Art Foundation) festival in Ankara and amateur festivals which were organized by university theater groups. The most significant change in the relationships between the state and Kurdish theater field was the staging of the Kurdish theater plays in Diyarbakır Municipality Theater (DBŐT) because the DBŐT was a state institution in sense of juridical order. The first Kurdish play of DBŐT was *Taziye (Hewarî* is the Kurdish name of the play) written by Murathan Mungan in Turkish in 2003. This case was not a symbol of the state toleration over the Kurdish art because the Diyarbakır Municipality was won by the pro-Kurdish party HADEP. The ruling party was AKP one of the successors of Welfare Party which closed the municipality theater in 1995.

To sum up, the ongoing state oppression over the Kurdish theater was related to the political situation. I can enlarge the examples of the state intervention on the Kurdish theater in the autonomous period of the Kurdish theater field; however, this continuity of oppression had not a crucial importance to change the balances in the Kurdish theater field. The two other aspects that I mentioned above had more significant roles in the dynamics of the field.

#### **4\_A\_1\_2\_ Economic Problems, Political Embargo, and the Internal Conflicts in the Kurdish Theater Field**

In this part, I am going to look at the economic conditions in the Kurdish theater field, the political embargo over the independent theater groups, and the power struggles of the agents in sense of increasing their social, cultural, and economic capital in the Kurdish theater field. Those dynamics were the main basis of the functioning of the Kurdish theater field in Turkey.

I analyze two aspects to understand the economic conditions in the Kurdish theater field. First one is the problem of commodification. The art field is not free from the economic structures. During its history, the theater practices were economically supported by ruling classes like Ancient Greece's rich citizens, monarchs in the Middle Age, the bourgeois class etc. Because theater plays as a public performance had also use value to control the civil society. Because of the same reasons, theater practices were also prevented. With the industrial age, the art field and culture itself became the part of an industry. However, theater has lost its significance in sense of use value because a theater play can stage only one place at a time. The cinema sector, internet-based broadcastings are much more common, and their consumption is easier than theater practices. In addition to these conditions, the long-lasting language ban prevented the development of the Kurdish theater field in sense of reaching the audience. In general, the political conditions also decrease the Kurdish theater groups' number of audience. In the 1990s, the Kurdish theater groups reached their audience through the political organizations' connections. However, in the 2000s, this kind of audience organization became a problem for the independent theater groups. The political organizations did not give any support to independent theater groups because of the political reasons. The power struggle between the political organizations and the theater groups shaped the relation between art and politics, and the independent theater groups faced with an economic and political embargo in the first decade of the 2000s. This struggle and embargo is the second aspect of my analysis for the Kurdish theater field in the 2000s.

With the foundation of the independent theater groups at the beginning of the 2000s, the relation among the Kurdish political organizations, MCC network, and independent theater groups gained a hostile characteristic. Neriman (female, actress/ director/ writer, middle generation) and Belçin (female, actress/ director/ writer, middle generation) who were suspended from MCC after the crisis period and participated to the foundation of a new

independent theater group say to describe the situation as Neriman (female, actress/ director/ writer, middle generation): “The political organizations saw our leaving from MCC as a treason.”<sup>240</sup> “In MCC, an artist was seen as political activist. When we left MCC, they labeled us as traitors of the movement.”<sup>241</sup> Not only the theater groups which were founded by the former MCC members but also other independent theater groups faced with the same approach of the political organizations. For instance, in Mardin Kızıltepe, Emrah Koyuncu who found a theater group in a labor union *Eğitim-Sen* complained about pro-Kurdish parties’ municipalities and culture centers:

In the labor union, we faced bureaucratic problems. The people who tried to prepare a Kurdish literature journal was exiled...The more important problem was the attitude of the municipality and the culture centers (he means the culture centers of MCC)...Our political organizations did not accept any alternative way... They want to politicize the art in every way.<sup>242</sup>

The political field sustained the subordination attempt over the cultural field despite the fact that this kind of approach caused a crisis in MCC and failure of MCC’s art mission. In addition to that, the economic conditions became a core problem for the independent theater groups. In MCC, none of the artists were paid except bus tickets and pocket money which was not paid regularly. Many of the members were at their 20s and supported by their families or they worked at part-time jobs. However, they have rehearsal places and stages in MCC. The independent theater groups must afford the rent of their stage other related costs by ticket sales. However, in İstanbul none of the party offices and other political organizations support their ticket sales

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<sup>240</sup> Interview with Neriman, 19.01.2017

<sup>241</sup> Interview with Belçin, 04.05.2017

<sup>242</sup> Aşan Sönmez, Cüneyt Yalaz, Fırat Güllü and Sevilay Saral. “Kızıltepe Etkin Sanat Merkezi’nden Emrah Koyuncu İle Söyleşi”, *Mimesis Tiyatro Çeviri/Araştırma Dergisi*, İstanbul: Boğaziçi University, (2014): 237-269, 241

and audience organizations. The solution was organizing tours all around Kurdish regions and some metropolises where Kurdish immigrants live. When I asked my interviewees from the independent Kurdish theater groups what the problems they faced to organize their tours in 2004 and later years in the Kurdish region of Turkey:

Selim (male, actor director, old generation): We sold tickets in İstanbul, but we could not afford our stage rent and the cost of setting, costumes and other expenses of our place. Then we decided to make a tour in Kurdish regions. It was the only solution, so we organized a one-month tour. We aimed to stage our plays in 25 different cities or towns. We had to make the announcement of our plays by ourselves in the day of play because neither local NGOs nor party offices helped us. Moreover, in some places, they prevented our announcements. We ask our friends to help us to announce our plays.<sup>243</sup>

Neriman (female, actress /director, middle generation): “We could not send our tickets to anywhere to sell before the play. Most of the NGOs, labor unions and party offices were informed about our leaving MCC.”<sup>244</sup>

Mehmet (male, actor/director/playwright, middle generation):

In our tours, we went to every neighbor and sell tickets. In a town, my aunt was in the municipality council. She helped us and introduce us with some NGOs to organize ticket sales. In some plays, MCC branch offices did not allow us to stage our plays in their stages. We staged our plays at cinemas, wedding saloons etc. I have to say that some people in the party offices (pro-Kurdish parties) knew

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<sup>243</sup> Interview with Selim, 09.02.2017

<sup>244</sup> Interview with Neriman, 19.01.2017



our situation, and they helped us. They told us that prevention of a Kurdish theater group is nonsense.<sup>245</sup>

Belçin (female, actress/ director/ writer, middle generation) :

One of the important problems was finding a stage for our plays. We could not get any municipality stage or MCC branch offices' stage except a few cases. In the first tour, in small towns, people did not know anything about our relations with MCC. In some places, we had to tell who we are: We were Kurdish artists who want to just practice theater...It was difficult to find an NGO to organize our ticket sales. In Adana, we were 11 performers on the stage, but we had only 8 audiences.<sup>246</sup>

These witnesses show that there was a restriction on the independent Kurdish theater groups. At the same time, personal initiatives and alternative political approaches opened spaces for those groups.

In the 2000s, the pro-Kurdish parties gained local elections and came to power in municipalities. This situation supported the local cultural centers and the founding of theater stages. The local theater groups that I mentioned at the beginning of this chapter sustained their theater practices thanks to municipalities' supports. However, the problem of local cultural centers and MCC branches was the human source to practice theater. Since the 1990s, the executive art directors of local theater groups were mostly members of İstanbul MCC. In the 2000s, the number of independent Kurdish theater groups' members much more than İstanbul MCC's theater group *Teatra Jiyana Nû*. This situation brings a deadlock to the Kurdish theater field because there were opportunities to practice theater and there were people who could

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<sup>245</sup> Interview with Mehmet, 12.05.2017

<sup>246</sup> Interview with Belçin, 04.05.2017

practice theater but their political approaches prevented collaboration. The independent theater groups were invited to a few local art festivals by municipalities. They organized tours in the Kurdish regions a couple of years after the first tour of *Seyr-î Mesel* in 2004. All of my interviewees from the independent theater groups say that they could manage to organize tours in the Kurdish regions in spite of all problems until the foundation of art organization companies in 2007 and 2008. These preventions became systemized through the organization companies which won the tenders of the municipalities in the Kurdish region. Many of my interviewees say that until the establishment of the organization companies, they could use the personal connections to get permission to use the municipalities' stages. By the foundation of the organization companies, almost all cultural festivals were monopolized. The embargo on those groups highly affected their economic sustainability. Erdal Ceviz, who left MCC and found *Seyr-î Mesel*, in an interview in 2005 says that

Organizational conflicts determine the theater field. For example, the local government problem is the problem of theater. You struggle for many years and open a space for Kurdish people through municipalities, but you cannot enter that space because you are not preferred... Under these circumstances, our theater adventure is a heroism. We cannot establish sustainable economic conditions, we could not produce policies on art, so we could not raise good players.<sup>247</sup>

In the 2000s, the lack of economic capital of theater artists became another problem for all theater groups including *Teatra Jiyana Nû* and independent theater groups like *Seyr-î Mesel*. The cultural and social capitals of the agents could increase their economic capital through staging plays. The Kurdish theater groups looked for different ways to economically survive.

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<sup>247</sup>Özgür Çiçek and Volkan Mantu, "Interview with Erdal Ceviz:Sanatsal kaygılarla yürüyen bir yapı oluşturmayı hedefliyoruz. ", *Boğaziçi Gösteri Sanatları Topluluğu Web*, October 2005, retrieved 16.01.2015 from <http://eski.bgst.org/tb/egitim/1115.html>

The theater groups *Seyr-î Mesel* and *Destar* prepared child plays in Turkish and got permission from The Provincial Directorate for National Education Ministry to stage their plays in primary schools. Preparing child plays was a method to afford costs for many alternative theater groups especially in big cities. However, the income of all plays was not enough for all members of the groups. People who decided to continue their lives as actors and actresses could not afford their economic necessities. Many of them had to give up theater practices or started to participate in theater rehearsals once a week. The limited human source of the Kurdish theater field started to decrease. Moreover, in the period of the autonomy struggle in the Kurdish theater field, the theater groups did not exceed to collaborate with other alternative theater groups. Some people chose to abandon the theater and acting in TV series, other chose to get a job in different sectors. When I asked the commodification problem of the theater in general and the economic problems of Kurdish theater groups and artists, Sabri (male, dramaturg /writer, middle generation) gives an example about a former actor of MCC "My friend N.K. left one of the MCC branches. He is acting in soap operas and cheap comedy films right now. I asked him if he missed the Kurdish theater. He said no because he could pay his house rent."<sup>248</sup> Istanbul based theater groups were the main groups which were affected by the economic conditions because other Kurdish theater groups in the Kurdish regions were not professional theater groups except the Diyarbakır Municipality Theater (DBŞT). Even MCC İstanbul started to take course payments from the trainees.<sup>249</sup> In the Kurdish regions, the lack of economic support for the municipalities caused similar economic problems. Metin Yılmaz who was the director of Mardin Culture Center (MCC branch office in Mardin) complain about the same problem:

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<sup>248</sup> Interview with Sabri, 06.02.2017

<sup>249</sup> Arı, Abdullah. "Kültürel Faaliyetler Bağlamında Bağcılar İlçesi", *Mimesis Tiyatro Çeviri/Araştırma Dergisi*, İstanbul: Boğaziçi University, (2014): 203-235, 233

Especially the economic conditions affect the participation to a theater group and create a better environment and personal artistic- development. The actors/actresses who must work in another job to survive have to leave the theater group after a while.<sup>250</sup>

According to the general director of DBŞT Metin Boran, "DBŞT was an official organ of the municipality; however, at the beginning of the 2000s, the members of DBŞT were not paid regularly. Some members were volunteers."<sup>251</sup> When Osman Baydemir became the mayor of the Diyarbakır, the economic conditions of the DBŞT developed and members became contracted workers.<sup>252</sup> To sum up, the economic conditions and political problems narrowed the Kurdish theater field.

The problem of the theater groups was not only the political and economic embargo. In the same period, the internal conflicts based on artistic tendencies and personal disagreements of the artists on their positions in the groups became another determiner dynamic of the Kurdish theater field. Analyzing an art field based on just economic and political conditions does not give a comprehensive result because an art field is always the struggling area for the artistic desires and positions. The reason I applied Bourdieu's field methodology is to understand the conflicts based on the economic, cultural and social capital of the agents in the field. For instance, being a famous director, playwright or actor/actress gives power to an individual to shape the theater field through his/her social and cultural capital. This social and cultural capital of an individual determines his/her position in the art field. Not only social, economic and political conditions but also the power of individuals' positions shape an art field.

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<sup>250</sup> Ayşan Sönmez and Selin Aydınöglü. "Interview with Metin Yılmaz: Kürt Tiyatro Ekonomik ve Kurumsal destekten Yoksun", *Boğaziçi Gösteri Sanatları Topluluğu Web*, October 2005, retrieved 16.01.2015 from <http://eski.bgst.org/tb/egitim/117.html>

<sup>251</sup> Ayşan Sönmez and Selin Aydınöglü. "Interview with Metin Boran: Sanatın ve tiyatronun yaygınlaşması için ekip olarak çabaladık", *Boğaziçi Gösteri Sanatları Topluluğu Web*, October 2005, retrieved 16.01.2015 from <http://eski.bgst.org/tb/egitim/1110.html>

<sup>252</sup> Interview with Yasin, 29.10.2017

For example, Gisèle Sapiro in his book *The French Writers' War, 1940-1953* applied a hybrid methodology which combines historical sociology and Bourdieu's critique on the art field to present not only various conflicts, discussions, and accusations among French writers but also social, literary and political engagements, institutional changes in the period 1940-1953.<sup>253</sup> In the book,

Sapiro suggests that Bourdeaux's political evolution was the more expected path for someone from this 'rising provincial bourgeoisie' background, but that Mauriac's 'socially improbable' trajectory is explainable as a function of the refractive forces exerted on him by the 'autonomous pole of the literary field.'<sup>254</sup>

Therefore, I believe that focusing the power struggles and position-taking in the field gives another perspective to understand the dynamics of the field. I emphasize the power of gossip as a measurement point of conflicts in the field. In this part, I am going to look at the internal conflicts based on artistic desires and position-takings as a dynamic of the Kurdish theater field.

During the 1990s, there were several disagreements on the form or dramaturgy of the plays. However, these disagreements were the basic requirements of a collective practicing. The point is to use disagreements to take positions in the theater groups. These kinds of struggles became visible in the 2000s because the Kurdish theater field became diversified and the political discipline on the theater groups was weakened during this period. As I quoted before, Kemal Orgun blames the people who left MCC as the source of factionalism in the theater group. In the 2000s, the desire to become famous and influential among the theater groups motivated individuals to accumulate economic and social capital. In an interview,

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<sup>253</sup> Gisèle Sapiro, *The French Writers' War, 1940-1953*, translated by Vanessa Doriott Andersona and Dorrit Cohn Durham: Duke University Press,2014

<sup>254</sup> An unknown writer, *A review on "The French Writer's War "* accessed 05.05.2017,from [goo.gl/T1OVIg](http://goo.gl/T1OVIg)

Mehmet Emin Yalçinkaya, who was one of the founders of DBŞT, describes the institutional problems of the Kurdish theater in Turkey as follows:

Between 1984 and 2000, the political concerns were more important than artistic concerns... Individualistic artistic benefits like political benefits have come to be important in the 2000s. The positions in the culture centers were perceived as stepping stone for some people.<sup>255</sup>

Yalçinkaya's claim is related to the pro-Kurdish parties' municipality theater and other MCC related cultural centers. On the other hand, in the independent Kurdish theater groups, the conflicts based on the statue, artistic and individual ambitions became clearer and caused leaving the groups. In this period, the Kurdish theater field experienced that kind of conflicts after the changes in political conditions after 1998 and the crisis period of the MCC. One of the old MCC member and founder of an independent Kurdish theater group, Selim (male, actor / director, old generation) stresses the change in the motivation of artists and the reasons for the internal conflicts in the theater groups as:

In the 2000s, we experienced a corruption in sense of political theater. Some people tried to make ourselves as projects. For example, Murat Batgi says that Kurdish people have their own Cem Yılmaz (a famous Turkish stand-up artist) ... The concept of democracy and democratic federalism became visible in the discourse of the Kurdish political movement. Some people misunderstood this concept in the theater groups. Theater stage is the dictatorship, the director must be the only determinant. Director opened spaces for performers, but the last decision belongs to him. We can manage the

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<sup>255</sup>Ayşan Sönmez and Selin Aydınöglü. "Interview with Mehmet Emin Yalçinkaya: Sözlü edebiyattan ciddi bir şekilde yararlanılmalıdır", *Boğaziçi Gösteri Sanatları Topluluğu Web*, December 2005, retrieved 16.01.2015 from <http://eski.bgst.org/tb/egitim/118.html>

group collectively, but we cannot apply some collectivity to the plays. People wanted to present ourselves without enough knowledge of theater."

In this point, I have to say that Selim (male, actor / director, old generation) was also blamed my interviews because of his power hunger. Mehmet (male, actor/director/writer, middle generation) says that

There was a discussion between him and Faysal about why Selim directs all plays. Faysal started rehearsals of his play with a group of performers but they could not have succeeded because of the Selim's effect on the group. At that time, I did not believe this situation caused by Selim's attitude. 3-4 years later when I tried to direct a play with our trainees, I faced with the same problem and I could not finish the play [...] After we left *Seyr-i Mesel* while, the trainees of *Seyr-i Mesel* came to us and said that they wanted to work with us because I was their teacher and when I left the theater courses did not efficiently sustain. I also went to talk with the friends about the situation and told them the trainees did not leave on our demand. However, their participation in our group caused a tension.<sup>256</sup>

In this point, the problem was not Mehmet (male, actor/director/playwright, middle generation)'s qualification in directing because he started to direct plays just after he left the group in 2008. In the same period, Belçin (female, actress/ director/ writer, middle generation) shares a similar story about the group:

We wanted to make our plays, direct our plays but the only director was Selim. After I left the group I wrote and directed 3 plays in 4 years. This shows that the problem is not my ability to write or direct. The problem was opening space for people. I do not blame only him because around 2007-2008, the group lost its efficiency because of the

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<sup>256</sup> Interview with Mehmet, 12.04.2017

economic problems and personal conflicts. The group neither offered sustainable economic conditions to its members nor opened space to them to satisfy themselves in the artistic sense.<sup>257</sup>

Belçin's narrative is based on the problems of both the economic capital of the individuals and their art or statue related desires. For the second, the Bourdieu's social capital could not entirely contain all sense of the problem because, an artist' satisfying himself or herself is not only about the social, cultural capital or his/her statue in the field but also there is a psychological aspect such as being visible, feeling satisfied etc.

These witnesses show that the reproduction of authority and defending positions in the theater groups caused leavings from the groups. The people who left the first independent theater groups must find different ways to continue theater because they were accepted to any MCC related group. In addition to this, they also did not want to participate any MCC related groups because the political discipline and control did not open space for them to practice theater.

The internal conflicts have also shaped the relations in the DBŞT which was the locomotive of MCC related theater groups. Metin Boran who was the Turkish general art director of DBŞT between 1999 and 2004 states:

Because of the personal conflicts and political discussions, our productivity decreased in 2001-2002. My personal life became a gossip topic and some performers changed attitudes. These gossips were not related to the theater or art in any way.

I give these examples to enlighten the leavings and changes in the Kurdish theater groups because a structural analysis does not cover this kind of micro-dynamics in the field. For

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<sup>257</sup> Interview with Belçin, 04.05.2017



example, When the *Destar* staged its play in the National Theater Stage in Van, some newspapers announced that a Kurdish play was staged in the Van National Theater Stage for the first time. *Destar* gave an interview to the Taraf newspaper<sup>258</sup> that “*Destar*’s play is not the first Kurdish play staged in Van National Theater Stage. There were a few other plays staged before, but those plays applied as Turkish plays.” One day after the *Destar*’s interview in Taraf newspaper Aydın Orak who is the director of Teatra Avesta published an article on *Gündem* Newspaper. Orak’s article claims that *Destar* misinformed the public about which play is the first staged Kurdish play in a National Theater stage. Belçin (female, actress/ director/ writer, middle generation) says:

I called Aydın Orak and said that *Destar* did not claim that its play was the first Kurdish play staged on a National Theater Stage. I sent our interview in the Taraf. He apologized but not publicly. After a couple of years later, I saw that he added that article into his book *Radikal Tiyatro*.<sup>259</sup>...He also wrote a book on the Kurdish theater with full of plagiarism, and a Turkish critique Yaşam Kaya declared him as “the person who regenerate the Kurdish literature”<sup>260</sup> in *Nokta Journal*. Yaşam Kaya does not know anything about Kurdish literature and he is not a literature critique. Aydın Orak uses this kind of advertisement to get positions in the art field.<sup>261</sup>

The problems such as economic difficulties, political embargo, and desire to become famous triggered the discussions among the theater groups and put the Kurdish theater in a deadlock.

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<sup>258</sup> Taraf newspaper was closed by the statutory decree on 27 July 2016. Therefore, I cannot give the link as a reference.

<sup>259</sup> Aydın Orak, *Radikal Tiyatro*, İstanbul: Belge Yayınları, 2012

<sup>260</sup> Yaşam Kaya, “Kürt Edebiyatını Diriltten Adam”, *Nokta Dergisi*, Volume: June 2016, İstanbul, 2016

<sup>261</sup> Interview with Belçin, 04.05.2017

#### 4\_A\_2\_Deadlock: Failure of Reconciliation in the Kurdish Theater Field

The continuity of the state intervention and political embargo on the independent theater groups, the economic difficulties and the power struggles among artists caused a deadlock in the Kurdish theater field. Moreover, the Kurdish theater groups could not open spaces for mutual productions with the groups or individuals outside of the field except a few cases. As one of the DBŞT art directors, Mehmet Gündüz says that “Kurdish theater workers have a false consciousness. The feeling of self-sufficiency and closedness narrows the Kurdish theater field. This situation does not develop the Kurdish theater.”<sup>262</sup>As I repeat, again and again, the period of peace in Turkey opened space for the development of art activities. Moreover, peace periods weaken the political oppression of the art groups. This deadlock of the Kurdish theater field and changing political conditions in the period of Kurdish Opening (the first period of the opening is 2009-2011 and the second period 2013-2015) triggered a reconciliation period in the Kurdish theater field.

By 2009, Turkey entered the first period of the Kurdish Opening. The opening process on / off continued until 2015. Foundation of pro-Kurdish party HDP as an alliance of the Kurdish movement and Turkish leftwing political parties started a new political era for the Kurdish movement. The main slogan was *Türkiyelileşme* which means the Kurdish movement's becoming a part of a leftwing democratic political movement widespread in Turkey. The political developments that I state in the first chapter of this thesis affected the Kurdish theater and triggered a transformation in the field. On the other hand, the changes in the field were not just projections of the political transformations. The internal dynamics of the field followed its

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<sup>262</sup> Ayşan Sönmez and Selin Aydınoglu. “Interview with Mehmet Gündüz: Bilim eğitim veren ve veri toplayan bir kuruma ihtiyacımız var”, *Boğaziçi Gösteri Sanatları Topluluğu Web*, December 2005, retrieved 16.01.2015 from <http://eski.bgst.org/tb/egitim/1112.html>

own way. Nevertheless, the effects of the political transformation made a huge contribution to the reconciliation attempts in the Kurdish theater field. Because the subordination of the Kurdish political field over the Kurdish theater field was weakened at the beginning of this period.

In the former section, I state that the continuity of the state oppression, a political embargo on the independent theater groups, the economic conditions, the power struggles based on the artistic tendencies and position-takings caused a deadlock in the Kurdish theater field. In 2008, Berfin Zenderlioğlu and Mirza Metin left *Seyr-î Mesel* and found a new theater group *Destar*. *Destar* became the most productive Kurdish theater group after its foundation. At the same time, *Teatra Avesta* which was founded by Aydın Orak and a few former MCC members became visible in the theater field through its theater productions. On the other hand, *Seyr-î Mesel* and *Teatra Jiyana Nû* could not produce theater plays because of the lack of human sources and the economic conditions. Moreover, the experienced members of *Teatra Jiyana Nû* participated in the Diyarbakır Municipality Theater (DBŞT) because DBŞT started to prepare all theater plays in the the Kurdish language. When I asked them what the perspective of the artists in the MCC related groups about the problems after 2002, one of the DBŞT actors and organizers Yasin (male, actor, middle generation) says that

I participated in the DBŞT in 2003. I did not know the other Kurdish theater groups in İstanbul. I just heard that there were several groups, but I did not saw their plays in Diyarbakır. Around 2008-2009, we started to discuss establishing a solidarity network among the Kurdish theater groups. The former discussions, embargos, and conflicts had to end because the Kurdish theater could not develop under those circumstances. There

were not hundreds of Kurdish theater groups. We have to find a way to develop the Kurdish theater.<sup>263</sup>

These initiatives in the theater field and the political conditions started a reconciliation term in the Kurdish theater. The period between 2009 and 2013 was the period of reconciliation for the Kurdish theater field. The independent Kurdish theater groups such as *Teatra Avesta*, *Destar*, *Seyr-î Mesel*, *Teatra Sî* have invited the theater festival in the Kurdish cities like Batman and Diyarbakır. These festivals were organized by DBŞT and other MCC related groups. Moreover, the independent theater groups started to use the municipalities' stages in the Kurdish region for their tours. In 2012, "The First Kurdish Theater Conference" was organized in the Amed (Diyarbakır) Theater Festival. Almost all Kurdish theater groups participated both in the festival and the conference. In the final declaration of the conference, a 9-person- committee was established. This committee was tasked with establishing a Kurdish theater museum, organizing an international Kurdish theater conference, the founding of a Kurdish Theater Union..<sup>264</sup> As Belçin (female, actress/ director/ writer, middle generation) from one of the most known independent Kurdish theater groups says that

The Kurdish Theater Conference was a big step for the Kurdish theater field. The committee could not succeed to realize the declaration articles, but Kurdish theater groups started to communicate and organize festivals in Batman and İstanbul after the conference...We solved our problems like embargo etc. in that conference.<sup>265</sup>

Neriman (female, playwright/actress/director, middle generation) emphasizes the importance of the conference as:

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<sup>263</sup> Interview with Yasin, 29.10.2017

<sup>264</sup> Evrensel Kültür, "Kürt Tiyatrosu Konferansı bitti, *Evrensel*, 20.12.2012, Retrieved 06.04.2016 from <https://www.evrensel.net/haber/44194/kurt-tiyatrosu-konferansi-bitti>

<sup>265</sup> Interview with Belçin, 04.05.2017

The conference was important because they (she means MCC related groups) accepted that the embargo on the independent Kurdish theater groups was wrong. We could discuss those issues in the conference; however, the MCC related groups waited for approval of the final declaration by their political organizations. We aimed a platform, but the party asked us to become a part of the MCC network. Therefore, the Second Amed Theater Festival was canceled in 2013.<sup>266</sup>

Both Belçin (female, actress/ director/ writer, middle generation) and Neriman (female, actress/ director/ writer, middle generation) experienced the crisis period of MCC between 1998 and 2002 and faced the Kurdish political organizations' embargo against the independent Kurdish theater groups. The reconciliation step of the movement was seen as an opportunity for the Kurdish theater field to develop and establishing collaborations among all Kurdish theater groups. The Second Amed Theater Festival was organized between 26 April and 4 May 2013, in Diyarbakır by the Diyarbakır Metropolitan Municipality. The independent Kurdish theaters such as *Teatra Avesta*, *Seyr-î Mesel*, *Destar*, *Teatra Sî* have invited to the festival. In the festival program, there were plays and workshops of DBŞT, MCC branch offices' theater groups, the Kurdish theater groups from Iraq and Iran plays and the alternative theater groups such as *İstanbul Talimhane Tiyatrosu*, *İstanbulimpro*, and *Ankara Domus Sanat Çiftliği Topluluğu*. In the first day of the festival, The Second Kurdish Theater Conference was organized. After this conference, a closed meeting was organized. Deniz (female, actress/playwright, young generation) who was a contracted performer in Diyarbakır National Theater says that "I could not enter the closed meeting. There was a name list which includes MCC theater groups and independent Kurdish theater groups."<sup>267</sup> After the closed meetings, the festival committee

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<sup>266</sup> Interview with Neriman, 19.01.2017

<sup>267</sup> Interview with Deniz 19.01.2018

declared that festival was canceled because of the economic problems between the organization company and the Diyarbakır Municipality. However, the real reason was the harsh political discussions in the closed meetings. Yasin (male, actor, middle generation) tells why the festival was canceled as:

In the closed meeting, people insulted each other. Moreover, some people harshly criticized the Kurdish political movement. That kind of criticism was not acceptable.

Nobody can be disrespectful to the values of the movement in that way.<sup>268</sup>

Economic problems were announced as the reason for cancellation despite the fact that all tickets were sold, all expenses of the groups like accommodation, transportation, food were already covered by the municipality. Neriman (female, playwright/actress/director, middle generation) tells why the festival was canceled as follows:

The expectation of the political organization was our participation in the MCC network. In other words, they wanted us to practice theater under the roof of MCC. We had bad experiences about being under the control of MCC management. We offered a platform system for the Kurdish theater groups. We said that we refused to participate the MCC... After the festival, some friends published articles<sup>269</sup> in the online theater portal and newspapers. It was the first time, we publicly discussed the intervention of the Kurdish political organizations. Until that time, we did not publicly discuss because we did not

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<sup>268</sup> Interview with Yasin, 29.10.2017

<sup>269</sup> Mirza Metin, "Mısko ile Muhabbetler", *Radikal*, 01.12.2015, retrieved 12.03.2017 from <http://www.radikal.com.tr/kultur/misko-ile-muhabbetler-1483393/>

Baran Demir, "Kürt Tiyatrosuna Ambargo Var" (There is an embargo on Kurdish Theater), Mimesis Sahne Sanatları Portalı, 22.11.2015, Retrived 28.11.2016 from <http://www.mimesis-dergi.org/2015/11/kurt-tiyatrosuna-ambargo-var/>

want to harm the Kurdish movement. However, after the cancellation of the festival, we said that enough is enough.<sup>270</sup>

Mehmet (male, actor/director/playwright, middle generation) tells the following discussions after the cancellation of the festival as:

I published an article about the cancellation. As you said, nobody could understand what that article was about the theater festival's cancellation. It was a bit metaphorical. However, after I published the article, many people understood that it was about the problems at the festival in Amed. After that article, the friends in MCC and DBŞT did not talk to me... For now, I think that we can open a clean page. We forget the massacres in this country. Cannot we forget resentments?<sup>271</sup>

Belçin (female, actress/director/playwright, middle generation) tells the period following the cancellation of the festival as follows:

We kept silent for years to not to harm the movement by publicly discussing the problems. I was educated in those institutions (She means MCC)...Being under the roof of a specific institution cannot be the criteria to practice Kurdish theater. We were offered jobs in TRT 6<sup>272</sup>. We refused it. They still brand us as the agents of the state. We will obey neither state nor them. We want to be independent in our productions. I know that if I went back to MCC related institutions I would waste my all time and energy in the meetings and discussing the political approaches of the institution. The absolute power causes corruption. They want one cinema, one theater etc.<sup>273</sup>

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<sup>270</sup> Interview with Neriman, 19.01.2017

<sup>271</sup> Interview with Mehmet, 12.05.2017

<sup>272</sup> The official Kurdish TV Channel of the Republic of Turkey

<sup>273</sup> Interview with Belçin, 04.94ç2017

The term 'agent of the state' that Belçin (female, actress/ director/ writer, middle generation) mentions became the problem for the other people who study on the Kurdish art. For instance, Tuncay who was a student in Mardin Artuklu University in Kurdish language and Literature Department tells a similar example: "I wanted to study on the dêngbej tradition. I went to the *Dêngbej* House of the Diyarbakır Municipality. However, the political organizations labeled us the state agents and refused to help us."<sup>274</sup> On the other hand, Yasin (male, actor, middle generation) answered this criticism of the independent theater groups as the following:

I accepted that there was an embargo over those groups between 2002 and 2008. However, we changed it. *Destar*, *Seyr-î Mesel*, *Teatra Avesta*, *Teatra Sî* came and staged their plays many times in DBŞT's stage and Cegerxwîn Culture and Art Center's stage. Moreover, after the cancellation of the festival in Diyarbakır, we invited them into the Batman Theater Festival which was organized by the same groups and the same people. I must tell them. I was in the committee of The Third Amed Theater Festival in 2014. I called Belçin (female, actress/ director/ writer, middle generation) and invited their two plays one Turkish one Kurmanji. She asked the economic conditions. The festival covered expenses of transportation and accommodation of all groups. In addition to that, the municipality and the organization company paid 2500 Turkish Liras for each play. Belçin told that she had to consult her group. After that, she called me back and said that 2 500 TL was not enough. I told her, we could pay only this amount. We paid every group including the groups from İran and Iraq. When I saw the articles in 2015, I wrote an answer around 5 pages against their criticism because none of them mentioned our invitation after the cancellation of the festival. My group did not want to sustain the discussion and convince me to not to publish. They are using the discourse of embargo

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<sup>274</sup> Interview with Tuncay, 18.07.2017



to get positions among the alternative theater groups as victims. Moreover, Baran Demir also wrote an article that there is an embargo on the Kurdish theater groups. His group came and staged their plays in Diyarbakır more than once. We did not invite their last play because their play was not qualified enough. Our festival is a theater festival, so we must consider the qualification of the plays.<sup>275</sup>

In the interview, Belçin (female, actress/ director/ writer, middle generation) claimed that the reason of invitation to the Batman Theater Festival after the cancellation was the demand of the audience. She did not mention the Yasin (male, actor, middle generation)'s invitation in 2014. The reason why her group refuses the invitation in 2014 might be either economic or avoiding the similar problems at the festival in 2013. All in all, the failure of the reconciliation embodied the bifurcation between MCC related theater groups and the independent theater groups in the Kurdish theater field. The Kurdish Theater Union which was offered in the final declaration of the First Kurdish Theater Conference in 2012 was founded by MCC related groups. Other groups were not invited to the union. Moreover, none of the independent theater groups staged their plays in Diyarbakır, Batman, and İstanbul Kurdish Theater Festivals after 2014.

#### **4\_B\_ Hybridization and the Kurdish Theater as a Part of the Alternative Theater Field between 2013 and 2017**

The rise of alternative theater field in the 2000s opened a space for the independent Kurdish theater groups to establish collaborations with the non-Kurdish theater groups and become more visible in the theater field. To understand the process of the Kurdish theater

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<sup>275</sup> Interview with Yasin, 29.10.2017

groups' becoming part of the alternative theater field, I will start with a brief description of this field. Colin Chambers defines alternative theater as:

Alternative theater: A term that gained currency in Britain in the late 1960s and 1970s as a loose movement of individuals, groups, and venues grew around a set of theatrical ideas opposed to the mainstream, which by then included the subsidized theatre that had once been the alternative to the commercial theatre. Fringe was seen as marginal and defined in relation to the mainstream rather than countering it. Generally, the term is applied to any theatrical practice that offers values in opposition to those of the predominant drama. Usually politically as well as aesthetically inspired, it often embraced an ensemble ideal.<sup>276</sup>

Cansu Karagül claims that the alternative theater field in Turkey gradually emerged since the 1960s and as an art field.<sup>277</sup> The alternative theater groups like *Devekuşu Kabare*, *Dostlar Tiyatrosu* as independent theater groups produced and staged their own plays outside of the conventional stages. They increased their effects in the theater field became the most popular groups. However, in the 1980s and 1990s, the alternative theater field narrowed down because of the political and economic conditions. In the 2000s, a young artist generation emerged and transformed the theater field in Turkey. The alternative theater groups in İstanbul like *Altıdan Sonra Tiyatro*, *Mekan Artı*, *İkinci Kat*, *Galata Perform* transformed apartment flats, storehouses into theater stages. They staged different contemporary plays from different art streams, established solidarity mechanisms among alternative groups and stages. Despite some of them were economically supported by the Ministry of Culture, they succeeded to sustain their administrative and artistic independence. Since the beginning of the 2000s, a lot of new

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<sup>276</sup> Colin Chambers, *The Continuum Companion to Twentieth Century Theatre* London: Continuum, 2002, p.19-20.

<sup>277</sup> Cansu Karagül, *Alternatif Tiyatrolar*, İstanbul: Habitus, 2015, 91-104

plays were written and staged by those groups, and they executed international projects with foreign writers, directors and theater groups. In the 2000s, the alternative theater groups became the locomotive groups of the dominant. I use the term “alternative theater field” to describe this theater field which emerged in the 2000s in İstanbul.

After the failure of the reconciliation, DBŞT and other MCC related theater groups organized their festivals and Kurdish Theater Union meeting without the participation of other theater groups. The other theater groups such as *Teatra Avesta*, *Destar*, and *Teatra Sî* collaborate with other alternative theater groups in İstanbul and staged their plays in their stages. In addition to this, with the closure of DBŞT in 2016 and foundation of Amed Şehir Tiyatrosu as an unofficial successor of DBŞT, the Kurdish theater field entered a period of hybridization and becoming part of the alternative theater field. Since 2002, there were independent Kurdish theater groups; however, those groups practiced theater in the boundaries of the Kurdish theater field. Around 2010, some groups like *Destar*, *Teatra Avesta* started undertook mutual projects with the Turkish theater groups in alternative theater field. This transformation became a permanent change for all theater groups including independent and MCC related groups.

The members of *Teatra Avesta* prepared Henrik Ibsen’s play *Nora* with Tiyatro Boyalı Kuş for İstanbul Theater Festival of İKSV (İstanbul Culture and Art Foundation), one of the most prestigious theater festival in Turkey,. *Destar* participated several projects with the alternative theater groups and worked with different writers, performers and directors like *6 Üstü Oyun* Project, Language Plays Trilogy of *Destar*, international theater projects with theater groups *Kumbaracı50*, *D22* and foreign theater groups. In addition to that, the members of *Destar* individually participated the several projects of other alternative theater groups as directors, performers or playwrights such as Emek Stage’s plays *Babil* and *Sevmekten Öldü* *Desinler*, Bakırköy Municipality Theater play *Sherlock Hamid*, Gezi Protest play *Gezerken*,

*Ara Durak* in cooperation with Fringe Ensemble from Germany and many other theater projects. On the other hand, *Destar*'s integration into the alternative theater field was not an easy process. Mehmet (male, actor/director/writer, middle generation) tells how they made connections with the other theater groups as:

When we founded our group, we did not want to make the same mistakes as MCC and *Seyr-î Mesel*. We aimed to create a space for every member to write and direct plays. The foundation of the alternative theater stages in Beyoğlu gave us the opportunity to meet with different groups. We were the same generation with other stages' owner groups. We establish a relationship based on solidarity among theater stages in Beyoğlu. For instance, we prepare mutual brochures, projects, and festivals with them. Each stage created its own aura and the audiences of each stage learned the other stages. We used Turkish surtitle at our plays because thanks to that solidarity Turkish audience became our audience... For now, we can discuss that why any other alternative theater group does not interested in preparing Kurdish theater play. In İstanbul, there are around 4 million Kurdish people. Why not the municipality theater prepares Kurdish theater plays in İstanbul?<sup>278</sup>

In addition to that, Belçin (female, actress/ director/ writer, middle generation) emphasizes their attempts to exceed the boundaries of the Kurdish theater field as:

Opening a space in the theater field of Turkey for us was not easy. We applied so many festivals. At first, most of them rejected us. Every time, I called the organizers and asked for an explanation. It is normal to get rejected, but we wanted to the reason for the rejection. Accepting as a Kurdish theater was not easy at first because the Kurdish theater groups had not built relationships with other groups until we tried. For instance,

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<sup>278</sup> Interview with Mehmet, 12.05.2017

when we rejected by the ODTÜ (Middle East Technical University) Theater Fest, I called and asked them how many groups applied to your festival? Is there any other Kurdish theater group applied? They said no, there is not any other Kurdish theater group. I asked that were not you curious about Kurdish theater. In the same day, they apologized and invited us to their festival. We went staged our play and discuss our plays. It was a ready good experience for both sides... We experienced a similar process with İKSV. We prepared a good application form with drawings, stage design etc. Our play was rejected, but Tiyatro Boyalı Kuş's play which was a Kurdish translation of Henrik Ibsen's play Nora was accepted. When I asked the reason for the rejection, they said that our artistic history and qualifications were not enough for the festival. I check the Tiyatro Boyalı Kuş's play content. The members of the play except for the director Jale Karabekir were the members of Teatra Avesta. However, there were some performers who never played in any play before. I called İKSV festival Dikmen Gürün and said that the rejection reason was not satisfied for us. She hung up on me. I called again and another director Leman Yılmaz answered me. I said that we were going to issue a press statement... Our friends from alternative theater stages in Beyoğlu came and supported us... I learned that the festival committee asked for extra security where *Tiyatro Boyalı Kuş* staged the play, Nora. They thought that Kurds would assault... After the festival, we meet with the coordination committee and establish a relation. Next year, we were rejected agains, but we knew that it was not related to being a Kurdish theater group. For example, last year we participated in the *İKSV* theater festival. We were also invited by some university theater groups... When we were invited for *Newroz* celebration, we asked them to sell tickets because we want people to understand that practicing Kurdish theater is not just a political activism... All in all, opening a space for ourselves was also a struggle. At the end of this process, we could

make mutual projects and establish solidarity mechanism. We could establish the relationship with other alternative theater groups, but we could not establish the same relationships among Kurdish theater groups.<sup>279</sup>

The relation between the Kurdish theater groups and alternative theater groups opened spaces to multilingual plays and increasing the visibility of the Kurdish theater. Belçin (female, actress/director/ writer, middle generation) says that

The institutional model of *Kumbaracı50* gave many ideas for us about the sharing of economic profits, the principle of transparency, and equal distribution of works. Moreover, the relations among the alternative theater groups in Beyoğlu expanded the theater field and increase the number of audiences.<sup>280</sup>

The story of *Destar* is the story of acceptance of a Kurdish theater group as just a theater group. *Teatra Jiyana Nû* which restarted to theater practices around 2014-2015 faced with similar problems with *Destar*. Rosa (female, actress/director, middle generation) gave a specific example between *Teatra Jiyana Nû* and a theater stage:

We agreed with one of the well-known stages of İstanbul to perform our play. We paid the deposit for the stage and organized ticket sales. When I called the stage a week before to make some arrangements, the stage asked if our play is Kurdish. After that, they said that there is a problem in the program of the stage, and they offered to cancel the play and pay the deposit back. I told them if you cancel, we are going to issue a press statement. After that, they asked if we will hang posters and flags on the stage and if our audience will shout slogans. I said that we are playing one of the Bertolt Brecht's play. We are practicing theater and the only difference between you and us that our play is

<sup>279</sup> Interview with Belçin, 04.05.2017

<sup>280</sup> Interview with Belçin, 04.05.2017

Kurdish. They thought that Kurdish people are organizing protests everywhere by their nature.<sup>281</sup>

Despite the integration of the Kurdish theater field and alternative theater field, the Kurdish theater groups were seen as just political organizations by some groups and individuals in the theater field of Turkey. The independent theater groups' follow the path of becoming a part of alternative theater groups had similar characteristics of HDP's '*Türkiyelileşme*'<sup>282</sup> approach. On the other hand, this process faced another difficulty in 2015. The ending of the Kurdish Opening Process transformed both the political field and the conditions in the Kurdish theater field.

#### **4\_B\_1\_The Kurdish Theater Field in the State of Emergency Period**

After the 7 June 2015 elections, the government declared the Kurdish Opening Process was ended. The armed clashes between PKK and the army started again. I stated the details of this process in the previous chapters. Moreover, on 15 July 2016, there was a coup d'état attempt against the government. The government declared the state of emergency after a couple of days later.<sup>283</sup> Despite the Kurdish movement did not have any relation with the coup d'état attempt, the Kurdish political and cultural organizations affected in the worst way. Since the declaration of the state of emergency, all mayors of the pro-Kurdish party DBP were either suspended or imprisoned. The government appoints a trustee all DBP municipalities which are more than 90. The trustees canceled all municipality aids for the Kurdish cultural centers. Moreover, all MCC

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<sup>281</sup> Interview with Rosa, 11.08.2017

<sup>282</sup> *Türkiyelileşme* is a political approach of HDP. Since HDP was founded as an alliance among the Kurdish movement, leftwing parties, ecologists, feminist and many different oppressed groups, the party aimed to enlarge its political agenda to exceed the limits of being just a pro-Kurdish party.

<sup>283</sup> See also the former section: Studying under the Conditions of the State of Emergency

branch offices except İstanbul branch office were closed by statutory decrees.<sup>284</sup> The theater groups of those culture centers tried to continue their theater courses and rehearsal in different places.

There were direct and indirect effects of the state of emergency in the Kurdish theater field. For example, some groups were closed by the state. In addition to that, the visibility of the Kurdish theater in mainstream media vanished. The closed groups lost most of their new participants / trainees. Moreover, the economic conditions became harder and harder for them. The new conditions affect the number of active groups in the Kurdish theater field. The independent theater groups *Teatra Avesta* and *Teatra Sî* did not produce theater plays in last 3-4 years so the state of emergency indirectly affected those groups. On the other hand, all MCC branch offices except İstanbul office, Kurdish municipality theaters, and *Seyr-î Mesel* was closed or banned. For example, *Seyr-î Mesel* was also closed on 12 November 2016. The first closure decision was for 3 months, but after 3 months *Seyr-î Mesel* was closed permanently. However, the closure of *Seyr-î Mesel* did not vanish the people who try to practice Kurdish theater. Neriman (female, actress/ director/ writer, middle generation) states the current situation as:

On the day *Seyr-î Mesel* closed, we were at the meeting. I heard that a statutory decree was announced. In the meeting, I said that the government might close our group... Police came and took all our documents, archive, costumes, and settings. Some of our trainees left the group. We reformed our courses. For now, we continue our theater courses and rehearsal in different places.<sup>285</sup>

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<sup>284</sup> The republic of Turkey, Statutory Decree Number 2935/110 of The State Of Emergency Regulations at November 11, 2016

<sup>285</sup> Interview with Neriman, 19.01.2017



*Şermola Performans* (Formerly known as *Destar*) was not closed because it was founded as a private company. However, the members of the young generation of the group do not exist anymore. Belçin (female, actresses /director, middle generation) says that

We staged child plays to afford the economic needs of our new friends. They also made dubbings for films in a Kurdish TV studio. For now, one of them had a child and gave a break. The other one Akin (male, actor, young generation) got married and moved to Germany. We made a huge effort for improvement of Akin. He got the most prestigious acting play in Afife Theater Prizes. However, he left the group. Neither we nor this country could offer people a sustainable and predictable future in the theater field. It is not easy that reform a group of people under these economic and political conditions. I think the realizing project based theater practices are more efficient for now.<sup>286</sup>

As Mehmet (male, actor/director/playwright, middle generation) says that

*Şermola Performans* choose a path that the writers and directors of the group cooperate with other theater groups in Turkey and in Europe. Belçin directed two plays in a municipality theater and an alternative theater group. She will direct a graduation play in a university conservatoire. I am going to Germany for six months, we will prepare two performances there.<sup>287</sup>

As seen, the cooperation in the alternative theater field offered *Şermola Performans* to sustain their theater practices. Belçin (female, actress/ director/ writer, middle generation) and Mehmet (male, actor/director/playwright, middle generation) are still preparing Kurdish plays but they also directed theater plays in different languages.

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<sup>286</sup> Interview with Belçin, 04.05.2017

<sup>287</sup> Interview with Mehmet, 12.05.2017

On the other hand, the state of emergency harshly affected the other locomotive group of the Kurdish theater: DBŞT. DBŞT went into liquidation in a different way. The members of DBŞT includes contracted performers, people who were employed in different positions like architects and temporary personals of district personals. There were three Sur Municipality personals in DBŞT. When a trustee was appointed to the Sur Municipality, he calls those three personal and took them into the service as the fuzzes. Yasin (male, actor, middle generation) tells the process as:

When we write the code of DBŞT, we did not put the requirement of conservatoire graduation. Because there was not any conservatoire where the education language is Kurdish. Our conditions were 5-year-experience, interview, and theater practicing exam. When the trustee Cumali Atilla was appointed to the Diyarbakır Municipality, he changed this code and brought the requirement of conservatoire graduation. Only a few of us were graduated from a conservatoire. Therefore, all of us suspended from DBŞT. He did not shut DBŞT down on the paper, but he suspended all members of DBŞT. In February 2016, we found Amed Şehir Tiyatrosu (Amed City Theater) as a private company. Except for a few people, all members of DBŞT participated in the group.<sup>288</sup>

In the foundation of Amed Şehir Tiyatrosu, many alternative theater groups staged their plays and donated their income to Amed Şehir Tiyatrosu. Those alternative theater groups were invited to the theater festival in Diyarbakır. In a sense, with the closure of DBŞT, Amed Şehir Tiyatrosu became a part of alternative theater field. Since the income of the plays in Diyarbakır is not enough for the economic needs of the theater group, Amed Şehir Tiyatrosu organized a

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<sup>288</sup> Interview with Yasin, 29.10.2017

tour in different cities of Turkey and Europe. However, passports of some actors and actresses were canceled by the state because of ongoing investigations, and the tour had to be cancelled.

MCC's İstanbul branch was not closed so *Teatra Jiyana Nû* continues its theater practices and prepares plays. However, most of the members of *Teatra Jiyana Nû* work at different jobs. Rosa (female, actress/director, middle generation) says that "We were at the regenerating period of *Teatra Jiyana Nû*, but we could not open any theater courses right now to include new members. We struggle to survive."<sup>289</sup>

Under the state of emergency conditions, the visibility of the Kurdish theater is also prevented by different institutions. For instance, in April 2017, Bilgi University did not allow Kurdish Theater Conference. The conference took place at Boğaziçi University.<sup>290</sup> In a foundation university in İstanbul, a Kurdish theater text was rejected as a part of a graduation play. When I asked about the use of Kurdish in university conservatoirs to Berivan (female, actress/singer, young generation), she answers as:

I wanted to use a Kurdish song and tirade in my graduation play. However, the head of department Ali (an anonomy name) says that he could not accept a performance in any other language than Turkish. He claims that he could not evaluate my performance. I use English and French songs and poems in my graduation performance, and it was okay for him.<sup>291</sup>

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<sup>289</sup> Interview with Rosa, 11.08.2017

<sup>290</sup> İstanbul - BİA Haber Merkezi, "Bilgi'den İzin Çıkmadı, Kürtçe Tiyatro Konferansı Boğaziçi'nde", BİANET, 13.04.2017, Retrieved 15.04.2017 from <https://bianet.org/bianet/sanat/185415-bilgi-den-izin-cikmadi-kurtce-tiyatro-konferansi-bogazici-nde>

<sup>291</sup> Interview with Berivan, 27.02.2017

In addition to that, many Kurdish TV channels were banned. The programs or TV series in those channels were important income sources for Kurdish actors and actresses. This worsened the economic problems of theater groups and the Kurdish artists.

Despite those difficult conditions, there is not a solidarity relationship between independent Kurdish theater groups and MCC related theater groups. As I understand from my interviews, there are personal initiatives to establish solidarity, but these initiatives have not given concrete results yet. Economic, political and personal problems in the Kurdish theater field badly affected the participation of the young generations to the Kurdish theater. My younger interviewees were not interested in the former conflicts among the Kurdish theater groups. They were looking for the ways to both practice theater and economically survive through theater. To show how all conflicts of the field affected the young generation and foundation of new theater groups in the Kurdish theater field, I quote the story of Deniz (female, actress/ writer, young generation) as a conservatoire educated artist who wants to practice Kurdish theater. She experienced all processes of the Kurdish theater field in the 2000s such as state oppression, power struggle between the political movement and the Kurdish artists, conflicts based on positions in the groups and economic crisis of the Kurdish theater. When I asked her experience of practicing theater and becoming an artist in the Kurdish theater, she told that

After my graduation from Adana Çukurova University Conservatoire, I started to work in the Diyarbakır National Theater which is the state theater as a contracted artist. One of my professor Tamer Levent in university was the General art Director in Diyarbakır National Theater. In some plays, he adds some Kurdish songs and small parts by consulting me. However, preparing a Kurdish play was not legally possible in the National Theater. At the same time, I followed every play of DBŞT because they could practice Kurdish theater...One day, one of the DBŞT members invited me to participate

in their theater group. I wanted to practice Kurdish theater, but I must economically support my family. I offered acting in both institutions in accordance with the program of National Theater. They did not accept my offer. It seems reasonable that they did not accept this kind of arrangements, but their attitude was not helpful to someone like me who wants to practice Kurdish theater. They saw me as a Kurdish person who chose the state's theater over a Kurdish group. In 2011, I met with Selim - who was one of the former members of MCC and founder of *Seyr-î Mesel* in the theater festival in Diyarbakır. I participated in the *Seyr-î Mesel*'s play *Ay Carmela* as costume designer and director assistant in 2013. I gave workshops about the concept of physical theater and clown acting to the trainees and some performers of the group. My contract with the Diyarbakır National Theater continued until 2015. In 2015, I came to İstanbul to practice theater in Kurdish. We decided to translate August Strindberg's play, *Matmazel Julie*. Between 2013 and 2015, they did not prepare any play and the internal conflicts of the group prevented productions. After the translation of the play *Matmazel Julie*, we started the rehearsals. However, a week later one of the actors wanted to leave the project. I was suspicious because some people saw me as an outsider. We made a meeting and I directly asked that if the problem was my participation. He said "Yes, I wanted to work with the people I know." Some of the people, especially Selim objects to his point of view, but I decided to leave. After I left they could not continue to rehearse that play because they had not enough number of actress...I was ambitious about preparing a Kurdish play. I found a group with a couple of artists. I wrote a multilingual play which includes Kurdish, Turkish, Persian and an invented language...I invited people from all Kurdish theater groups... After the play, we talk about the play. After a play, a woman from MCC came to me and wanted to meet in another day. In the play discussions, she said that she liked the play. When we met the next day, she said that

“You presented a Kurdish father who is a part of the political movement as an inadequate character.” I answered that the Kurdish people might also be bad people even they were a part of the political movement. At that time, I realized that I made the right choices. I do not get permission from anybody or any institution to practice Kurdish theater. To avoid that kind of intervention, I found my group with Turkish artist... The institutional Kurdish theaters only care about the Kurdish audience but alternative theater groups aim to reach everybody...When I applied to the Amed Theater Festival to stage my play, they asked me for a video record of the play. I did not accept that because a video record misrepresents a theater play. If they wanted to open spaces for the new generations, they should have accepted my play. I could make a bad play. However, without meeting the Kurdish theater groups and Kurdish audience, how can I improve myself?<sup>292</sup>

The story of Deniz (female actress/playwright, young generation) shows that basic problems and power struggles in the Kurdish theater field affect the participation of the young generation. The young generation of the Kurdish theater looks at the theater from an artistic point of view. The pure political motivations are not valid for practicing Kurdish theater anymore. However, the political power struggles and former conflicts still affect the theater practices of the young generation in the Kurdish theater field.

In the current situation, the Kurdish theater groups in Turkey are both members of Kurdish theater field and alternative theater field. Despite the difficulties, it seems that the Kurdish theater in Turkey finds a way to sustain and develop itself in sense of economic, political and artistic through becoming a part of the alternative theater field. The new theater group Sevadil which was founded by Turkish and Kurdish artists is a product of the collaboration of Turkish and Kurdish artists in the alternative theater field. All in all, some the

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<sup>292</sup> Interview with Deniz, 19.01.2018

Kurdish theater groups like MCC related cultural centers in the Kurdish region and *Seyr-î Mesel* continued theater courses with new participants and making rehearsals of their future projects in 2017. In addition to that, the theater groups such as *Şermola Performans Şanoya Bajêr a Amede* (Amed City Theater - *Amed Şehir Tiyatrosu*), *Teatra Jiyana Nû* and *Sevadil* continuous preparing new plays and staging their former plays despite the state of emergency conditions. To summarize the current political tendencies and artistic motivations of the Kurdish artists, I want to end with the sentences of Rosa (female, director/actress, middle generation):

The Kurdish theater started as an underground theater. People emerged from this theater by whispering. For now, we were prevented, we were exiled to the basements to rehearse our plays. But the Kurdish theater succeeds to survive and developed under any circumstances. We are not whispering anymore. We believed that we will survive and rise again.<sup>293</sup>

All in all, the Kurdish theater field experienced two major transformation in the 2000s. The first one was the struggle for autonomy against subordination attempts of the political field, and the second one is the hybridization and becoming part of alternative theater field. The 1990s was the period of emergence and development of the Kurdish theater, and in this period theater's use value as a political tool was the main factor which shaped the functioning of the field. During the 2000s, the Kurdish field experienced more complex conflicts in political, economic and social realms. The political conditions and power struggles are still significant dynamics in the Kurdish theater field; however, the internal dynamics based on economic structures, artistic concerns, positions in the field became as important as the political conditions.

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<sup>293</sup> Interview with Rosa, 11.08.2017

## Chapter 5: Conclusion

In this study, I analyze the social, economic, and political dynamics of the Kurdish Theater field between 1991 and 2017. Following Gramsci's theory of counter-hegemony and Pierre Bourdieu's critique of the art field, I explore the transformation of the Kurdish Theater field by focusing on the power struggles between the political field and cultural field and external sanctions and internal conflicts in the field. During my 3-year-long field research, I followed İstanbul-based Kurdish theater groups as an actor and theater critique. During this period, I made interviews with the founders of the Kurdish theater in the 1990s.

The ongoing state oppression is the core problem of both the development of the Kurdish art branches and the studies on the Kurdish cultural field. Due to the scarcity of comprehensive research on the Kurdish theater field, I benefited from existing research on different Kurdish art branches such as music or cinema. The studies on the Kurdish art in Turkey can be divided into two groups. The first group analyzes the politicization of the Kurdish art branches such as literature, music, and cinema. Sarıtaş's<sup>294</sup>, Hamelink's<sup>295</sup>, Kuruoğlu's<sup>296</sup>, Çiftçi's<sup>297</sup>, Reigle's<sup>298</sup> and Barış's<sup>299</sup> studies are well-grounded examples of this approach. Following these research, I also explore the tension between the Kurdish political field and Kurdish cultural field. The Kurdish movement enabled and accelerated the development and institutionalization of the

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<sup>294</sup> Bünyem Siyem Ezgi Sarıtaş, "Articulation of Kurdish Identity through Politicized Music of Koms." (MA Thesis Middle East Technical University, 2010)

<sup>295</sup> Wendelmoet Hamelink. *The Sung Home. Narrative, Morality, and Kurdish Nation*, Leiden: Brill, 2016.

<sup>296</sup> Alev Kuruoğlu and Wendelmoet Hamelink. "Sounds of Resistance: Performing the Political in the Kurdish Music Scene" in *The Politics of Culture in Turkey, Greece and Cyprus*, ed. By Leonidas Karakatsanis and Nikolas Papadogiannis, Newyork: Routledge, 2017

<sup>297</sup> Ayça Çiftçi, "The Politics of Text and Context: Kurdish Films in Turkey in a Period of Political Transformation." (Ph.D. Thesis, Royal Holloway University of London, 2015),

<sup>298</sup> Robert F. Reigle. "A Brief History of Kurdish Music Recordings in Turkey." *Hellenic Journal of Music Education, and Culture* Vol. 4 | Article 2 ISSN 1792-2518 (2013)

<sup>299</sup> Wendelmoet Hamelink and Hanifi Barış. "Dengbêjs on Borderlands. Borders and State as Seen through the Eyes of Kurdish Singers-Poets". *Kurdish Studies Journal* 2, (2014): 34-60



Kurdish art branches. The support for the Kurdish art branches has been about the movement's counter-hegemony struggle. However, when an art field emerged in the Bourdieusian sense of the term, the mainstream Kurdish political movement tried to control and discipline those art fields. This conflict is the most significant problem of the Kurdish cultural field in Turkey. The second group analyzes Kurdish art field using post-colonial theories.<sup>300</sup> These studies mostly focus on the questions of identity construction and collective memory. They also explore how migration, urbanization and collective consciousness influence Kurdish art field. In this thesis, I tried to combine the sensitivities of these two groups of studies by focusing both on structural and subjective dimensions in my analysis of Kurdish theatre field.

My analysis divides the history of the Kurdish theater into two main periods: the emergence and development of the institutional Kurdish Theater in Turkey (1991-2002) and the Kurdish Theater field in the 2000s (2002-2017). The institutionalization of the Kurdish theater in Turkey started after the repeal of the language ban in 1991. In the first period between 1991 and 2002, The Kurdish Theater was seen and used as a complementary tool of the political movement. In other words, the political Kurdish movement opened a space for the Kurdish theater to emerge and develop through the institutionalization. The use value of the Kurdish theater as a political tool was the basic motivation behind the theater practices in this period. The transformation in the Kurdish political field started in the late 1990s with the rise of conflicts in the relationships between art and politics in the Kurdish theater field. The struggle between the Kurdish theater field and political field triggered a crisis and transformation between 1998 and 2002. As a result of the tension between the political and artistic concerns, the Kurdish theater field has started to emerge as an "art field" as Bourdieu describes. My study investigates the Kurdish theater in the 2000s under two interwoven periods: first, the period of

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<sup>300</sup> Engin Sustam, "Mahlul Öznedden Maduna: Kürt Kültürel Çalışmaları Ve Bellek." In *Türkiye'nin Demokratikleşmesi Etnik-Dini Kesimler Üzerinden Değişimin Analizi*, edited by Hakan and Zelal Kızılkın Kısacık Samur, 149-223. Konya: Çizgi Kitabevi, 2014.

struggle for autonomy from the mainstream Kurdish political movement between 2002 and 2013, and second, the Kurdish theater's hybridization and becoming a part of the alternative theater field in Turkey between 2013 and 2017. In the first period between 2002 and 2013, the independent Kurdish theater groups became the pioneer of the Kurdish theater in Turkey and avoided direct disciplinary actions and subordination attempts of the political field. However, the monolithic perspective of the Kurdish movement partly negatively influenced the struggle of the new independent Kurdish theater groups for autonomy. Despite the proliferation of the Kurdish theater groups, their collaborations and activities stayed within the boundaries of the Kurdish theater field. The commodification of theater practices, political embargo over independent theater groups, ongoing state oppression, and economic problems of the artists caused a deadlock in the Kurdish theater field. Between 2010 and 2012, there were reconciliation attempts between the independent groups and the movements' cultural centers and municipality theater groups. The aim of reconciliation was to gather Kurdish artists under the roof of the cultural centers. However, the proposal that this center should be managed by the Kurdish political organizations was refused by the independent groups, and they rather offered an egalitarian solidarity platform. This reconciliation thus failed because the agents in the independent Kurdish theater groups refuse the superiority of the mainstream Kurdish political movement. Therefore, MCC related groups and the independent theater groups followed their own paths in the theater field. In the second period between 2013 and 2017, the Kurdish theater groups started to exceed the boundaries of the Kurdish theater field and connected with other theater groups in the alternative theater fields. The collaborative projects with different groups, multilingual plays, reaching different audience profile by using Turkish and English surtitles were the significant changes. Not only independent groups but also MCC related groups experienced a hybridization, and the Kurdish theater field became a part of the alternative theater field in Turkey. In this period, the young generation started to take responsibilities to

reshape the Kurdish theater. They refused to be part of state-related institutions like TRT 6's production companies as a political attitude. In addition to that, their basic motivation was the development of the Kurdish theater from an artistic point of view.

The old and middle generation members of the Kurdish theater experienced the conflict between the art and political movement in the cultural centers since the mid-1990s. For both generations, the political motivations were superior to their artistic motivations. The transformation of the Kurdish theater field in the 2000s triggered differentiated approaches of the agents about the relationship between art and politics. However, during this period the young generation started to practice Kurdish theater mainly with artistic concerns. Most of them started to practice theater in Turkish. It is the most important difference between the young generation and the former generations of the Kurdish theater. This dynamic is likely to determine the future of the Kurdish theater in Turkey.

The Kurdish theater field is a very complex art field because the field includes the relationship between the state and Kurdish art groups, power struggles between the Kurdish theater field and political field as well as internal conflicts of the theater groups. Political and artistic differences and conflicts among three generations of the Kurdish theater have also been very important for the formation of the Kurdish theatre field. Considering structural changes like economic, political and social is not enough to analyze the transformation of the Kurdish theater field. Therefore, following the agents in the field is crucial to understand the dynamics of the emergence, development, and transformation of the Kurdish theater field in Turkey. I have analyzed the social, economic and cultural capital of agents as well as their artistic and political motivations in relation to hierarchical relationships and internal conflicts of the theater groups. However, there are limits to the analysis of the role of agents. For instance, the desire to be visible on the stage, to define himself or herself in terms of art forms, self-satisfaction as a human being in the creation of an art practice are not easy to describe and understand. In the

art field, the social, political and economic conditions as well as the roles and positions of agents might be analyzed as determining factors. However, it is much difficult to analyze how one's imagination play into one's art related decision. I will clarify my dilemma by giving an example. For instance, the Beat art stream had relationships with the political conditions post-WW II period and the existential crisis of the post-WW II generations. We can analyze both phenomena in sociological terms; however, we cannot reduce the personal contributions of Allen Ginsberg, William S. Burroughs, and Jack Kerouac to this art stream into a structure-agent analysis. Moreover, William Blake's artistic effect on the Beat generation cannot be comprehensively measured. For Bourdieu, an agent's economic, social and political capital, doxa and habitus determine her position in the field; however, an individual is more than being a product of the social structures. People have enthusiastic and complex psychological and subjective relationships with their art practices. My research shows how people's personal desires, ambitions, conflicts and envy inform both personal and collective decision making processes in the formation of Kurdish theatre field in unexpected ways. Closely examining individual and collective dimensions of agents' actions and thoughts in the Kurdish theater field in the last three decades, this thesis shows that we need hybrid methodologies and interdisciplinary approaches to make a comprehensive analysis of complex relationship between collective and individual art practices as well as the relationship between politics and art.

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