

REPRESENTATIONS OF THE KURDISH QUESTION  
IN THE NEW CINEMA OF TURKEY

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İSTANBUL ŞEHİR UNIVERSITY

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REPRESENTATIONS OF THE KURDISH QUESTION  
IN THE NEW CINEMA OF TURKEY

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BY

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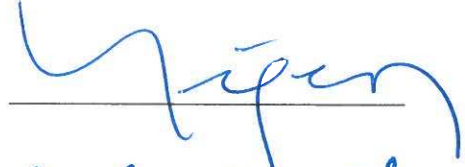
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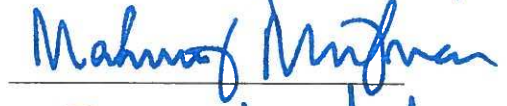
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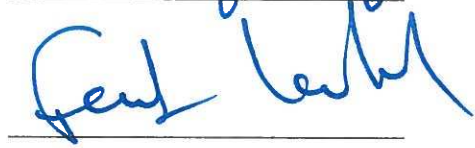
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## **ABSTRACT**

### **REPRESENTATIONS OF THE KURDISH QUESTION IN THE NEW CINEMA OF TURKEY**

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This thesis aims to explore representations of the Kurdish question in the new cinema of Turkey that has emerged since the 1990s. The study focuses mainly on how the Kurdish question –by all actors from Kurds to Turks– has been represented, and what kind of representational strategies have been operated in films. In order to read filmic representations thoroughly, the study uses diagnostic critique for analysis. Diagnostic reading of films requires considering filmic texts within their context, and results in giving insight to social realities. Within this framework, nineteen films entailing the Kurdish question in the new cinema of Turkey were selected. The selected films expand over a period starting from 1996, which is accepted as the beginning of the new cinema of Turkey, to the first years of the 2010s. The films were critically read via approaches of theoretical texts, other films, or audience reactions. As a result, it has been seen that the films entailing the Kurdish question in the new cinema of Turkey embodied around three major themes: fantasizing the question, facing the other, and reckoning with the past. In the end, these three themes can be read as indications of different social demands which can be found in different perceptions of the Turkish society towards the Kurdish question.

Keywords: Representation, Kurdish question, new cinema of Turkey, diagnostic critique

## ÖZ

### YENİ TÜRKİYE SİNEMASINDA KÜRT MESELESİNİN TEMSİLLERİ

Aydınlık, Yasin

MA, Kültürel Çalışmalar Bölümü

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Bu tez, 1990'larla birlikte ortaya çıkan yeni Türkiye sinemasında Kürt meselesinin temsilleri üzerine odaklanır. Çalışmada özellikle, Kürt meselesinin bütün aktörleriyle nasıl temsil edildiği ve filmlerde hangi temsil stratejilerinin kullanıldığı üzerinde durulmaktadır. Çalışma, film temsillerini derinlemesine bir okumaya tabi tutmak için teşhise dayalı okuma yöntemini kullanır. Filmlerin teşhise dayalı bir okumasını yapmak, film metinlerini bağlamlarıyla birlikte değerlendirmeyi gerektirdiği gibi toplumsal gerçeklikler hakkında bir kavrayış da kazandırır. Bu çerçevede, yeni Türkiye sinemasında Kürt meselesine dair on dokuz film seçilmiştir. Seçilen filmler, yeni Türkiye sinemasının başlangıcı kabul edilen 1996'dan 2010'ların ilk yıllarına kadar uzanan bir sürece yayılmaktadırlar. Filmler, teorik metinlerle, başka filmlerle ya da seyirci tepkileriyle birlikte ele alınarak eleştirel bir okumaya tabi tutulmuştur. Bunun sonucunda, yeni Türkiye sinemasında Kürt meselesine dair filmlerin üç ana izlek etrafında şekillendiği görülmüştür: Meselenin fantezileştirilmesi, ötekiyle yüzleşme ve geçmişle hesaplaşma. Sonuç olarak bu üç farklı izlek, Türkiye toplumun Kürt meselesine dair algısında kendine yer bulan birbirinden farklı toplumsal taleplerin birer tezahürü olarak okunabilmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Temsil, Kürt meselesi, yeni Türkiye sineması, teşhise yönelik okuma

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## INTRODUCTION

The Kurdish question has been one of the fundamental problems in Turkey for decades. As the President of Turkey declared in 2009, it is the primary question of the country, and it must be solved (Yetkin, 2009). Especially by the 1990s, some important changes began to take place in the historical process of the Kurdish question. As Mesut Yeğen (2011) states, the cultural and political aspects of the Kurdish question were first recognized by the state during the period that started in the 1990s, and is still an on-going one (p. 22). The Kurdish discontentment had originally become significant at the end of the Cold War, and concepts such as democracy and human rights gained power in modern politics, as Turkey began experiencing the trend of globalisation. Since it is such a multidimensional issue, the Kurdish question requires to be explored from different perspectives. As a result of its significance, it is inevitable for the Kurdish question to be a theme in motion pictures. This thesis aims to approach the Kurdish question from a cultural studies perspective. The main purpose of this study is to discuss how the Kurdish question is represented and what kind of representational strategies are used in the new cinema of Turkey.

The 1990s mark the beginning of a new era, not only in the historical process of the Kurdish question, but in the history of cinema in Turkey as well. Cinema in Turkey, which first developed during the beginning of the century reached its peak years during the Yeşilçam era, but it found itself in a crisis, starting with the second half of the 1970s. By the 1990s, this crisis deepened, and it is possible to speak of a downfall of the cinema industry. However, since the mid-1990s, a new process of reconstruction began for cinema in Turkey. Asuman Suner (2006) identifies this as a new wave of cinema, which emerged in the second half of the 1990s and still continues today, as “the new Turkish cinema”. For her, it is possible to define the rise of this new cinema in two dimensions that stem out in opposite ways. On the one hand, there is great budgeted “popular cinema” that highlights movie stars or/and famous directors, and it has been becoming more and more popular with intensive publicity campaigns carried out on the media before the release of films belonging to this genre. Popular cinema has a wide range of publicity/screening opportunities, and reaches great box office success. But on the other hand, there is small budgeted “art” cinema that carries the

mark of its director on the creative processes, starring amateurs and non-celebrities most of the time. In art cinema there is limited opportunity for distribution and display, but it may become popular at national and international festivals due to attention and prestigious awards received (p. 33-38).

Suner (2006) mentions the classification of the new Turkish cinema is problematic from several aspects. Primarily, this classification restrains the cinema of Turkey in the category of “national cinema”. Not only is this categorization insufficient to explain transnational phenomena, but also it brings out practical problems such as uncertainty regarding which films are to be classified as national films. Secondly, the classification as national cinema reproduces the discourse that accepts both Hollywood cinema and European art cinema under the category of universal cinema. This is a restrictive and reductive approach, as it restrains non-Western cinema practices into the national discourse. Finally, the periodization of the new Turkish cinema has the risk of overlooking the continuity that exists in the cinema in Turkey. However, she puts forward the idea that such a frame is necessary for the new cinema that emerged during the second half of the 1990s, in order for it to become visible as cultural material to be interpreted (p. 38). In this study, similar criticisms take place in the framework of new Turkish cinema; as well similar periodization is accepted as the necessity mentioned by Suner. However, my argument will slightly differ from that of Suner regarding classification as “the new cinema of Turkey” that I will adopt, in this thesis, in order to remove the national emphasis on periodization.

In this study, Douglas Kellner’s (2010) diagnostic critique method will be borrowed, in order to explore how the Kurdish question is represented in the new cinema of Turkey. Accordingly, films “provide artistic visions of the world that might transcend the social context of the moment and articulate future possibilities, positive and negative, and provide insights into the nature of human beings, social relations, institutions, and conflicts of a given era” (p. 14). The diagnostic reading of films is important to understand what kind of changes the Kurdish question has undergone in the perception of the Turkish society, along with changing social conditions.

In the first chapter that reads “How to Read Cinema? Towards a Diagnostic Critique”, the theoretical framework will be presented for the diagnostic perspective as a method of reading filmic texts inter-textually. This requires a focus on the structure of

language, processes of interpretation, and discussions carried out on how one finds correspondence in cultural representations during the period extending from structuralism to post structuralism. Secondly, by referring to Lacanian psychoanalysis theory, the triple structure consisting of the Symbolic, the Imaginary and the Real, and the Mirror Stage that has a significant place in explaining these processes will be reviewed. The psychoanalytic film theory, which is based on Lacan's arguments, is another prominent point to be mentioned. Lastly, Gramsci's concept of hegemony that has important place in the discussion regarding post-Marxist theory of ideology, and Althusser's notion of Ideological State Apparatuses will be summarized briefly, and the relationship that Žižek establishes between ideology and Lacanian terms for fantasy will be discussed. The diagnostic critique that will be used as method to examine films entailing the Kurdish question in the new cinema of Turkey is a deconstructive application combining the theoretical framework presented above.

In the second chapter, which is titled "The Kurdish Question: Recognition, Denial and Confession", a brief summary of the historical background of the Kurdish question will be provided. It is seen that the Kurdish question is divided into three major periods during the historical process that begins in the late Ottoman Empire and continues into present day. The first period is the recognition period that began with Ottoman modernization movements and ended with the first constitution of the new Republic. The second one in which the Kurdish question and the Kurdish identity were denied continued from 1924 until the first years of the 1990s. In this period, the existence of the Kurdish question was denied by discourses such as banditry, resistance of tribes, reactionary attempts, or economic underdevelopment. The third period that began in the 1990s and is still experienced contemporarily, is a period where the recognition policy of the Kurdish question has been put into effect once more. It is this very period that has written history where the bloodiest years in the Kurdish question have been experienced. In the 2010s, it can be said the Kurdish question has entered the "solution process" in the axis of a weak recognition policy along with denial that still lives on.

Finally, in the chapter titled "Representations of the Kurdish Question in the New Cinema of Turkey", a diagnostic reading will be carried out on nineteen films that have been selected according to whether they entail the Kurdish question, within the new cinema of Turkey. The period under study is composed of a broad span, from the year

1996, which is accepted as the beginning of popular and political wings of the new cinema of Turkey, to 2011. The films selected within this aspect present a wide area for exploration regarding how the Kurdish question is reflected in the new cinema of Turkey. These films are *Eşkya* (Yavuz Turgul, 1996), *Işıklar Sönmesin* (Reis Çelik, 1996), *Güneşe Yolculuk* (Yeşim Ustaoglu, 2000), *Vizontele* (Yılmaz Erdoğan, 2001), *Fotoğraf* (Kazım Öz, 2001), *Büyük Adam Küçük Aşk* (Handan İpekçi, 2001), *Deli Yürek: Bumerang Cehennemi* (Osman Sınav, 2001), *Vizontele Tuuba* (Yılmaz Erdoğan, 2004), *Yazı Tura* (Uğur Yücel, 2004), *Gönül Yarası* (Yavuz Turgul, 2005), *Kurtlar Vadisi: Irak* (Serdar Akar, 2006), *Gitmek: Benim Marlon ve Brandom* (Hüseyin Karabey, 2008), *Bahoz* (Kazım Öz, 2008), *Nefes: Vatan Sağolsun* (Levent Semerci, 2009), *Güneşi Gördüm* (Mahsun Kırmızıgül, 2009), *İki Dil Bir Bavul* (Özgür Doğan Orhan Eskiköy, 2009), *Min Dît* (Miraz Bezar, 2010), *Gelecek Uzun Sürer* (Özcan Alper, 2011) and *Press* (Sedat Yılmaz, 2011) (See Appendix). Documentary films that entail the Kurdish question are excluded from this study.

As a result, this study aims to shed light on the changing perspectives of the Kurdish question in the Turkish society during the last two decades. The films, which will be explored by employing the method of diagnostic critique, provide opportunity to see what kind of continuities or transformations have taken place in the approach of the society to the Kurdish question in the 1990s and 2000s. These films will enable the making of implications entailing the period of the problem where the most change has been experienced. In this sense, this thesis will contribute not only to the literature of the new cinema of Turkey, but to the studies on the Kurdish question as well.

## 1. HOW TO READ FILMS? TOWARDS A DIAGNOSTIC CRITIQUE

With the emergence of the new cinema in Turkey in the 1990s, there has been a noticeable increase in the number of films that focus on the Kurdish question, use it as background, or simply touch upon it. This thesis aims to critically analyse nineteen films that were filmed during the period referred to as the new cinema of Turkey, which still is an on-going period since the second half of the 1990s.. The films have been selected according to their relation to the Kurdish question. In order to examine what kinds of representational strategies are used and how they are operated in the selected films, it is crucial to identify the relationship between cinema and social history. As Kellner (2010) states, “In addition to laying bare the sociopolitical fantasies and personal dreams and nightmares of an era, the critical analysis of film can help dissect and deconstruct dominant ideologies, as well as show key ideological resistance and struggle in a given society at a specific moment” (p. 39-40). In light of this, the following chapter will inquire the historical development of the Kurdish question, and its place within state discourse, as well the historical process through which it has found this place will be examined. In the last chapter before the conclusion, I will investigate the representations of the Kurdish question and how they have been produced via films under the socio-political conditions of the period concerned. However, first, since it represents the main focus of this chapter, I will discuss why representation and especially cinematic representation is of much importance in understanding the social, and diagnostic critique as method in reading these representations.

### 1.1. From Structuralism to Post-Structuralism

Stuart Hall (2003), opens his book *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices* by questioning the connection between culture and representation. He indicates that the concept of culture is highly related to the meanings that people share. For him, culture is not simply “the sum of the great ideas, as represented in the classic works of literature, painting, music and philosophy”. Similarly, it is not “the way of life of a people, community, nation or

social group” either. Rather, in a broad sense, culture is “concerned with the production and the exchange of meanings – the ‘giving and taking of meaning’ – between the members of a society or a group” (p. 2). Here, it is important to indicate that the culture is not only in people’s minds, but also in their cultural practices (or processes). As Hall (2003) shortly states, culture “permeates all of society” (p. 3). His emphasis on cultural practices brings ‘representation’ into the forefront; because, how people re-present things takes place “at the very heart of social life” (p. 3).

To understand the production and the circulation of meaning within cultural codes and systems of representation, one has to start with the notion of language and how signification operates through it. Hall (2003) divides the concept of representation into two related systems which are crucial in the process of meaning-construction: mental representations and language. While the former “is the system of concepts and images formed in our thoughts which can stand for or ‘represent’ the world” (p. 17), the latter is the system to “correlate our concepts and ideas with certain written words, spoken sounds or visual images” (p. 18). These two complementary systems provide a link between things, concepts, and signs together, so that meaning is produced through language. That is, what makes the shared meanings of people in a culture accessible is language. As a result, language gains a privileged position in the study of culture. Therefore, representation is briefly defined as “the production of meaning through language” (Hall, 2003, p. 28).

Hall (2003) defines three approaches to explain the production of meaning through language: the reflective, the intentional and the constructionist approaches. In the reflective approach, the true meaning that exists in the world is intrinsic to objects, people, ideas or events. For that reason, the function of language is to reflect those meanings like a mirror. As opposed to the reflective approach, the intentional approach claims that meaning does not lie in the world; rather, it is imposed to the things by the author. Obviously, both of these approaches lack for understanding the social character of language. On the other hand, the constructionist approach sees meaning as a construction by using representational systems. As this work is mainly inspired by the constructionist

approach to language, I will present a review of this approach. In order to understand the social constructionist view of language and representation, the structuralist linguistics will be the starting point of this chapter.

Ferdinand de Saussure is considered to be “the founding father of modern linguistics” (Ungar, 2004, p. 157). The new approach that he introduced in his famous book *Course in General Linguistics* not only changed the science of linguistics, but also influenced a wide range of intellectual disciplines. His emphasis on the underlying structure of rules and codes governing total language system has led people to call his method as ‘structuralist’ (Sanders, 2004). Kearney (1994) briefly summarizes the structuralist method as “to comprehend *particulars* by describing their interrelationship within the totality of *general* codes which govern them” (p. 240). To explain this interrelationship, Saussure (1989) makes some basic distinctions between concepts such as *langue-parole*, *signifier-signified*, *syntagmatic-paradigmatic* and *diachrony-synchrony*.

At first, Saussure (1989) makes a separation between *langue* (language) and *parole* (speech); while the former “exists perfectly only in the collectivity,” the latter is “an individual act of the will and intelligence” (p. 13-14). The *langue* is the underlying structure of language which governs it through being internalized by a given speech community. For example, the preferred word order of English language is subject-verb-object and it is impossible for any English speaker alone to change it. The *parole*, on the other hand, is the actual speech act, the specific utterance within the limits, the structures and the rules of the *langue*. Saussure’s this separation of the social and the individual parts of communication results with a break with the intentional understanding of the working of language which is explained above (Saussure, 1989).

After that, Saussure (1989) defines the fundamental unit of this language system: the linguistic sign. With Saussure’s words, “a linguistic sign is not a link between a thing and a name, but between a concept and a sound pattern” (p. 66). The revolutionary character of Saussurean linguistics lies there: it approaches to language as relational rather than referential which was accepted previously. According to Saussure (1989), the linguistic sign consists of two fundamental

parts: *signifier* and *signified*. The linguistic sign “tree” can be given as an example that includes the sounds of “t-r-e-e” (the signifier) and the concept of “tree” (the signified). Moreover, Saussure claims that the relationship between these two units is *arbitrary*, that is, there is not any natural law governing them; as Kearney (1994) adds, “it is a matter of social and cultural convention” (p. 244). The sign “tree” signifies “tree” not because of the word’s containing the essence of “tree-ness”, but of its being different from “bird” or something else. This results with the fact that the language system is *differential*, consisting of these differences without which the meaning cannot be produced as the sign does not have any meaning on its own (Saussure, 1989).

Saussure advances on this detail and creates a significant novel formulation: the differentiation “between *syntagmatic* and *paradigmatic* modes of signification”. In order to discern a term from its adjoining one, the interaction of the signifiers acts syntagmatically. For example, the sentence ‘the blue bird sings’ can be used as an instance to show this relation. The noun ‘bird’ is connected to the adjective coming before it and the verb after it. On the other hand, the paradigmatic relation works by the way of “association” instead of “contiguity”. In the sentence above, the noun ‘bird’ becomes distinct from the complete language system by not being ‘birth’, ‘burn’ or something else. This differentiation gives it “its signification by means of an implied phonetic opposition to other associated terms” in that system (Kearney, 1994, p. 247).

Lastly, the relational structure of signification brings language systems up for discussion in terms of synchrony and diachrony as well. As it is known, until Saussure, language is at the forefront with its diachronic aspect. Saussure (1989), by contrast, defines language as “a system of pure values, determined by nothing else apart from the temporary state of its constituent elements” (p. 80). According to that, if the meaning of a word emerges within the relation with the entire system in a specific moment, it is compulsory to analyse the language in that specific moment. It is surely beyond doubt that the changes language phenomena have experienced throughout historical process can be discussed. However, the diachronic dimension of language is nothing short of successiveness of the synchronies in Saussurean approach (Culler, 2001).



According to Turner (1990), what makes Saussure's theory of linguistics tremendous is its ability to relate language and culture directly so that it is difficult to separate them. As he explains,

The insights contained within Saussure's theory of language have a relevance beyond linguistics because they reveal to us the mechanisms through which we make sense of our world. Specific social relations are defined through the place language allocates them within *its* system of relations. Such an explanation of language endows it with enormous determining power. Reality is made relative, while the power of constructing "the real" is attributed to the mechanisms of language within the culture. Meaning is revealed to be culturally grounded – even culturally specific... Culture, as the site where meaning is generated and experienced, becomes a determining, productive field through which social realities are constructed, experienced, and interpreted. (p. 14-15)

After Saussure, 'structuralist' theoreticians, highly influenced by his theory, applied the Saussurean linguistic method to different areas such as anthropology (Claude Lévi-Strauss), psychology (Jacques Lacan), ideology (Louis Althusser) and so on. It was Roland Barthes who took cultural associations into consideration by extending Saussure's approach into a new discipline called *semiotics*. His famous book *Mythologies*, Barthes (1991) introduces the concept of myth as "a type of speech," "a system of communication," and "a mode of signification". The trinity of signifier, signified and sign as Saussure mentions is also present in this new approach. Apart from these, there is myth as a semiotic system at a secondary level. Accordingly, the sign consisting of the signifier and the signified at primary level becomes signifier at secondary level. For Barthes, a myth not only lies within language, but also it can be found in some other discourses such as photography and cinema. A famous example that Barthes gives is the cover photo of *Paris-Match* magazine on which "a young Negro in a French uniform is saluting" to the French tricolour. This depiction of the cover is, as Barthes states, the *meaning* of it. However, he adds, what the cover picture signifies to him is more than its *meaning*: "France is a great Empire, that all her sons, without any discrimination, faithfully serve under her flag, and that there is no better answer to the detractors of an alleged colonialism than the zeal shown by this Negro in serving his so-called oppressors" (p. 93-102).

Not long after, cinema becomes one of the fields of application for this new

discipline. Although there have been the theoreticians writing that cinema has a quasi-language structure before, it is after Saussure that film is explored profoundly as a language in itself. Theoreticians like Umberto Eco, Pier Paolo Pasolini and Peter Wollen have applied structuralist linguistics to film theory. Among these pioneers, Christian Metz is the key figure (Stam, 2000). Metz (2012), believing that cinema is obliged to unfalteringly lean on linguistics, starts his works which are the basis of cine-semiology by discussing whether cinema is a *langue* (language system) or a *langage* (language). His answer to this discussion is that cinema is a *langage*. He puts forward two reasons for that. First, cinema is not a communication tool, rather a tool for expression. Language, on the contrary, requires a two-way communication. Second reason is that cinema lacks of an arbitrary sign unlike as it is in linguistics. Conventional images, which have a contractual and exact meaning because of a usage repeated for a long time, turns into a kind of sign in cinema. (p. 72). Thus, “by moving from one image to two, film becomes language. Both language and film produce discourse through paradigmatic and syntagmatic operations. Language selects and combines phonemes and morphemes to form sentences; film selects and combines images and sounds to form syntagmas” (Stam, Burgoyne, and Flittery-Lewis, 2005, p. 38-39).

On the other hand, as Hall (2003) criticizes Saussure’s theory of linguistics from some aspects. While his work focuses almost on *meaning* aspect of signification process, it does not give any attention to *reference*. However, “later linguists made a distinction between, say, the meaning of the word BOOK and the use of the word to refer to a *specific* book” (p. 34). Besides, Saussure pays almost all his attention to the *formal* aspects of the language, but he does not concern the *dialogic* features of it –which refers to the function of language in dialogues between different speakers in everyday life. This also results the questions of *power* in language to be overlooked. Lastly, the structuralist theory of linguistics is criticized for its insistence on being a ‘science.’ Saussure’s theory approaches language as a ‘closed’ system which can be degraded into its formal elements. Language can work with a scientific precision nearly as an object. According to the cultural theorists succeeding Saussure, since language not only remains rule-

governed but also is in a constantly changing structure, it is understood as open-ended by definition. As a result, “meaning continues to be produced through language in forms which can never be predicted beforehand and its ‘sliding’... cannot be halted” (Hall, 2003, p. 35). Post-structuralists attempt to overcome these criticisms directed to structuralism.

As Madan Sarup (1998) indicates both structuralism and post-structuralism which came up as a result of the structuralism critique have a common ground on the criticism they express for *human subject, historicism, meaning and philosophy*. Nevertheless, post-structuralism differs in several points from its predecessor. According to both structuralists and post-structuralists, “the ultimate goal of the human sciences is not to constitute man but to dissolve him” (p. 1). Such understanding refers to a certain disengagement from Cartesian conception of the unitary subject which makes human subject, putting human subject in the centre of existence, authority for meaning and truth. Furthermore, “they have an antipathy to the notion that there is an overall pattern in history” (p. 2). This anti-humanist and anti-historicist approaches, as stated above, are parallel to the view that meaning occurs not as an extension of an historical process but a specific time. As Sarup (1998) clarifies, “while structuralism sees truth as being ‘behind’ or ‘within’ a text, post-structuralism stresses the interaction of reader and text as a productivity. In other words, reading has lost its status as a passive consumption of a product to become performance” (p. 3-4). This situation requires that post-structuralists, unlike structuralists, demote the signified and make the signifier dominant.

Along with this shift from structuralism to post-structuralism, the concept of *intertextuality* becomes prominent in the study of cultural representations. The term ‘intertextuality’ which is Julia Kristeva’s translation of Bakhtinian notion of *dialogism*, means “transposition of diverse signifying systems of signs into each other, thereby transgressing the meanings of fixed symbolic systems” (Kearney, 1994, p. 335). As for Bakhtin, dialogism is “the necessary relation of any utterance to other utterances” (as cited in Stam et al., 2008). Intertextuality, then, becomes

a valuable theoretical concept in that it relates the singular text principally to other systems of representation rather than to an amorphous “context”

anointed with the dubious status and authority of “the real” or “reality.” In order even to discuss the relation of a work to its historical circumstances, we are obliged to situate the text within its intertext and then relate both text and intertext to the other “systems” and “series” which form its context. (Stam et al., 2005, p. 209)

Therefore, from a cultural studies perspective, the term intertextuality “forces analysis to move continually between the text and the social conditions that frame its consumption, and limits textual interpretations to specific historical locations” (Turner, 1990, p. 125). In this regard, this study argues that the films entailing the Kurdish question in the new cinema of Turkey cannot be read independent of the historical, social and political conditions of the period they have been produced in. For that reason, the films that will be studied in this research will be read sometimes with the historical developments on the Kurdish question, sometimes with the dominant state discourse, and mostly with the other films studied.

## **1.2. Lacanian Subject and the Psychoanalytic Film Theory**

Jacques Lacan is influenced by the structural linguistics put forth by Saussure. As a matter of fact, what makes Lacan important in psychoanalytic tradition is this connection he established between linguistics and psychoanalysis (Lemarie, 1981, p. 3). As he states in his famous formula, “unconscious is structured like a language” (Lacan, 1999, p. 48). For Lacan, language is the prerequisite to unconscious which is the object of a theoretical investigation area called psychoanalysis (Vergote, 1981, p. xvi). Contrary to Saussure who claims that it is possible to be outside language somehow, Lacan thinks that not only can the subject not be reduced only to the language but also it is impossible to get rid of the language. This subject, being included in the culture through language by comprehending, thinking and giving voice to its own reality only by mediating its experience, is subject to formal rules of this structure of the reality. In other words, the reality for a human is the reality which is organized by the mediation of the symbolic system, which can be thought by help of the symbolic mediation, and which can be distinguished and fictionalised. In the symbolic order, the subject is structured through language and, in Lacan’s words, this “subject is that which is represented by one signifier to another” (Homer, 2005, p. 40-45).

According to Lacan, it is Oedipus complex which makes a human enter into the language or the culture (Vergote, 1981, p. xviii).

Before coming to Oedipus complex, it is necessary to look at Lacan's triple sequenced order consisting of the Real, the Imaginary and the Symbolic. Understanding this triple structure is the prerequisite to understand Lacan's idea of the formation of the human subject. The Real constitutes the first step for this triple order. The Real, as Evans (1996) states, is the reality which must be assumed although it can never be known or imagined; it "is outside the language" (p. 162-163). Thus, its definition can only be made in a negative way that this negativity is intrinsic in the definition itself. In Lacan's opinion, the Real is a hard kernel which cannot be included by the Symbolic. Defining the Real by its exteriority to the Symbolic means situating it in a pre-human position. Therefore, entire experience of a baby who cannot speak or construct images yet goes into the area of the Real. Furthermore, this implies that everything pre-human which can be named as "Nature" is "the Real". Although natural objects and phenomena are tried to be controlled in the area of the Symbolic, the Real always presents its kernel which cannot be symbolized (Grigg, 2008). In this sense, for example, death experience is always the Real itself. The area that can be symbolized, on the other hand, forms the reality of the subjects (Birkan, 1999, p. 246). In Lacan's words "that which has not seen the light of day in the symbolic appears in the real" (cited in Grigg, 2008, p. 8)

The Imaginary, as "a kind of pre-verbal register whose logic is essentially visual", is the second stage which is called 'the mirror stage' by Lacan (Sarup, 1988, p. 28). The mirror stage has two basic features. The first of these is the desire for the unification with the mother, the second is the acquisition of the body image through identification with "the other". The child, being yet to have the language, heads for the attainment of the body wholeness which he/she experiences as fragmented by identifying with someone else, a peer, the visual image of his/her mother or their holistic image on the mirror. The main desire of a child at this stage is to complete what is missing in his/her mother, to unify with her, to be the object of her desire. What is missing in his/her mother is the "phallus". This lack which does not contain any signifier at this stage will be coded by the signifier of

“phallus” when the child gets into the order of the sign (Evans, 1996). The child trying to keep the bodily wholeness through identification, at the same time, tries to cope with the Real by restraining it to the images. In spite of that, he/she does not make any effort to name the images or to establish semantic associations between them. The Imaginary, in this sense, is a stage at which the world is not fragmented by categories or binary oppositions yet (Birkan, 1999, p. 247).

Learning the language and starting to speak it, the subject enters into the Symbolic order. This is the last stage of Lacan’s triple order. The Symbolic comes up as a linguistic, grammatical and cultural structure where self, which is formed at the imaginary stage, can become a subject. In Lacanian psychoanalysis, the transition to the symbolic cultural order is the same thing as the transition to Oedipal state (Evans, 1996, p. 203-204). For Lacan, the establishment of the reality system of a human depends not much on natural frustrations emerging from the child’s relationship with his/her mother, but more on the meaning these frustrations find in the symbolic cultural order. The child undertakes the frustrations from the relationship with his/her mother by the mediation of the sign which is provided by the family discourse. In this way, not only are the biological frustrations linked to the socio-cultural code, but also the first seeds of Oedipus complex are planted. The desire of the child to be *phallus* in order to make up for the lack in the mother is coded directly to the unconscious without locating in the conscious. Phallus, later, steps in within the Symbolic through the Name of the Father. In the relationship of the mother and the child, the Name of the Father is a third as being phallus. Accordingly, this is debarring and castrating for the child in his/her unmediated relationship with the mother. Thus, the child comes across the symbolic law for the first time. This law, the foundation of the family, is the prohibition of the incest. The child learning “the Law of the Father” attains his/her cultural place in the family. As a result of this confrontation with the law and the prohibition, the child finds the solution in identification with the mother’s object of desire which takes him/her apart from the mother. Eventually, throughout the Oedipal stage, the child completes the process, which he/she begins by reaching the Name of the Father with the symbolization of the reality of the father, by accepting to be subject to the Law of the Father, and develops a

cultural “subject” identity (Homer, 2005). In Sarup’s (1988) words, Oedipus complex is

the moment in which the child humanizes itself by becoming aware of the self, the world and the others. The resolution of the Oedipus complex liberates the subject by giving him, with his Name, a place in the family constellation, an original signifier of self and subjectivity. It promotes him in his realization of self through participation in the world of culture, language and civilization. (p. 11)

Coming into existence after all these processes, Lacanian human subject is in a fragmented structure. However, since the foundation of Lacan’s concept “self” is in the Imaginary, this self has the illusion of wholeness. In fact, the speaking subject exists in the Symbolic order. Symbolic order fragments the subject by trying to restrain both undefined existence of the Real and imaginary identifications of the self into closed categories, contrasts and the system of binary oppositions. Subject exists with its dividedness between the Imaginary and the Symbolic, enunciation and statement. Entering the area of the Symbolic as it begins to speak, the subject is not able to achieve expressing the relationship between the self and its images because of the fact that these images do not have any correspondence in the language, and thus it splits into two parts. Hence, what constitutes and fragments the subject is the Symbolic order itself. Fragmented subject creates a fantasy object in order to cope with this undefined “excess” of the Real, which cannot be included within the boundaries of the Symbolic order (Lemarie, 1981). The fantasy of the subject functions as an attempt to “sustain the illusion of unity with the Other and ignore his or her own division. Although the desire of the Other always exceeds and escapes the subject, there nevertheless remains something that the subject can recover and thus sustains him or herself.” Lacan calls this “something” as *objet a* (Homer, 2005, p. 87). *Objet a*, as “the object of desire”, is the fantasmic equivalent of the primal lack which the subject does not know anything about and (Evans, 1996, p. 128-129).

Before Lacanian psychoanalysis becomes famous, it is discovered by the film theory (McGowan and Kunkle, 2004). The “psychoanalytic turn” in film studies beginning in 1970s and carrying on during 1980s puts cinema in the processes where the desire as a social applied and psychical matrix and the subjectivity are

produced (Arslan, 2009, p. 17). In this theory which is named as “Apparatus Theory”, three names comes to the forefront: Jean Louis Baudry, Christian Metz, and Laura Mulvey. In his pioneering articles “Ideological Effect of the Basic Cinematographic Apparatus” and “The Apparatus: Metapsychological Approaches to the Impression of Reality in Cinema”, Baudry (1992) starts out with the analogy between the mirror stage and cinema apparatus. The reality effect of the film is formed through the experience created on the spectator and the placement of the spectator in the subject position. This position is the result of a process in which the subject is not able to tell the perception and representation apart, the perception and the representation are equalized. Cinema offers a character similar to the early experience where the boundaries between the child and the self are ambiguous and to early forms of the satisfaction. Cinematic world, by making the subject master of the gaze and producing an illusion of reality through the continuity of the images, puts the spectator in a central, imaginary and transcendental position. The ideological side of the apparatus is that subject is made to be felt as the source of the meaning although it is the result of the meaning.

Likewise, Metz’s approach to the cinema apparatus is formed by the way of the mirror stage (Arslan, 2009, p. 19). According to Metz (1992), film operates like primal mirror on one hand, differs from it on the other hand. Different from the one in the mirror, although spectator’s body is absent on the screen, adult spectator, having lived through the mirror experience before unlike the baby, can establish world of objects even without seeing their own reflection. However, what is seen on the mirror is always the other. The spectator is the one perceived without perceiving. This *all-perceiving* and *all-powerful* spectator of Metz identifies firstly with the film itself, secondly with the characters. Even though the spectator knows that everything happening on the screen is fictive, through primary and secondary identifications he/she believes that these events are real. Being a fetish for Metz, visual mechanism of the cinema tries both to eliminate the lacking on which it is grounded and to cause it to be forgotten, and to remind this lacking all the time by doing this. Moreover, all the visual techniques of the cinema substitute the missing object for the subject.



Just as Baudry and Metz, for Mulvey, the recognition and acceptance of the image in cinema is the similar process as the recognition of the ego in the mirror stage (Mulvey, 1992). Though, Mulvey argues that the process characterized by voyeurism, voyeuristic pleasure and narcissism is formed in relation to patriarchal unconscious, and extends this fundamental assumption to the filmic formation of the gender. Mulvey's aim is to use psychoanalysis as a political weapon in putting psychoanalytic theory into political service and revealing how the unconscious of the patriarchal society structure the film style. The reference point of desire in cinema is constantly going back to the castration complex as the traumatic moment which bears it. Mulvey states that it is necessary to think the image of woman in relation to this traumatic moment (Arslan, 2009, p. 22-23).

At this point, the psychoanalytic film theory gains considerable importance to understand the relationship established between the spectator and the image in the filmic narratives that will be examined regarding the Kurdish question. Being especially one of the basic notions of the psychoanalytic film theory as well, the notion of identification will be used to analyse the distance which the film puts between itself and the spectator, the ideological positions to which it invites the spectator, or what sort of representational strategies they appeal in the identification processes. Nevertheless, the films and the identification processes that they include the spectator are not sufficient alone in the analysis of the films entailing the Kurdish question. In the analysis of the ideological position to which the film invites the spectator, it is also necessary to have a look at certain notions of post-Marxist theory of ideology.

### **1.3. Hegemony, Ideology, and Cinema**

Historical circumstances enabling psychoanalytic film theory emerge are consist of theoretical discussions on the relationship between cinema and ideology (Arslan, 2009, p. 16). As Comolli and Narboni (1992) declared in their famous essay "Cinema/Ideology/Criticism", "*every film is political*, inasmuch as it is determined by the ideology which produces it... The cinema is all the more thoroughly and completely determined because unlike other arts or ideological systems its very manufacture mobilizes powerful economic forces" (p. 684). Not

seeing the camera in a neutral way but as an ideological apparatus, this approach gets its political-conceptual repertoire from Althusser's theory of ideology (Arslan, 2009, p. 16).

In Lacanian psychoanalysis, in the symbolic system of the language, the concepts like "mother", "father", and "family" which are synonymous with passing on the cultural order are determined and defined in the language or family discourse. However, as Tura (2010) indicates, the existence of the family as a cultural structure means that this discourse becomes concrete and materialized. In that case, cultural discourses and ideologies cannot be seen only as a design. Ideologies and discourses not only represent the reality at the level of the design, but also form a founding element of this reality. Here ground the foundations of Althusser's theory of ideology (p. 178). In spite of this, Lacanian psychoanalysis is not the only foundation of Althusser's conception of ideology. As Eagleton states, what Louis Althusser does is "to derive a theory of ideology, of impressive power and originality, from a combination of Lacanian psychoanalysis and the less obviously historicist features of Gramsci's work" (1991, p. 136-137).

For Antonio Gramsci, unlike Althusser, key term is the concept of hegemony rather than ideology. Gramsci generally uses the term hegemony in the meaning of a ruling power's style of winning the consent of people under its domination (Kearney, 1994, p. 173). The term, according to Eagleton (1991), in its broadest meaning, can be defined as the range of entire practical strategies that the dominant power applies in order to win the consent of the people under its domination. Hegemony is a wider category than ideology: It includes ideology, but cannot be reduced to it. Hegemony is not just a successful type of ideology. It has various ideological, cultural, political and economic aspects. Ideology makes a reference to the methods for power struggles existing primarily at the level of signification. As for hegemony, it reveals itself in the non-discursive practices as well as cultural, political and economic structures, namely rhetorical expressions. Gramsci associates hegemony with "civil society". What he means with this is all the institutions between the state and the economy: private television channels, family, church, kindergartens etc. All of them are seen as hegemonic apparatuses which tie individuals to the dominant power by consent rather than by force.

Force, on the contrary, is associated with the state having the monopoly on 'legitimate' violence. Accordingly, for the government, in just the same way as customs, habits and spontaneous practices, it is general preferable to spread to the fabric of the social life and, that way, to 'become natural'. Thus, the concept of hegemony not only expands and enriches the classical notion of ideology, but also makes this term obtain a concrete structure and a political intensity. With Gramsci, takes place a transition from the ideology as 'thought systems' to the ideology as a social practice that is experienced and accustomed (1991, p. 112-114).

Similarly, in Althusser's conceptualization of the ideology, there is a shift from the ideology as a thought to the ideology as a practice. For Althusser (1971), on one hand an ideology is the design of relationships between individuals and conditions of existence, on the other hand it has a material aspect. An ideology always exists both in an apparatus and in the practices of that apparatus. In his article "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses", Althusser (1971) discusses that every social formation, in order to sustain itself, has to produce and, also, reproduce the conditions of its production. As a result of this, the reproduction of labour-power requires, as the indispensable condition of itself, the reproduction of not only the skills but also its resignation to the dominant ideology or the practice of this ideology. This is because "it is in the forms and under the forms of ideological subjection that provision is made for the reproduction of the skills of labour power" (p. 133).

Althusser (1971), in order to explain the reproduction of ideological subjection he mentioned, adds another structure called Ideological State Apparatuses to the classical Marxist definition of the State as the State apparatus. Dividing the State apparatus in two as (Repressive) State Apparatus and Ideological State Apparatuses, Althusser (1971) defines the latter as "a certain number of realities which present themselves to the immediate observer in the form of distinct and specialized institutions" (p. 143). Ideological State Apparatus (ISA) consists of institutions like "religious ISA (the system of the different Churches), "educational ISA (the system of the different public and private 'Schools') or "cultural ISA (press, radio and television, etc.)" (p. 143). As is the case with the

Gramsci's distinction between state and civil society, a similar difference is observed between Althusser's (Repressive) State Apparatus and ISAs: whereas the former operates "by violence" and the latter operates "by ideology". The way to hold the State power depends upon the hegemony applied on the inside and outside of ISAs. Such that, ISAs are the elements providing the reproduction of the relations of production behind the "shield" of (Repressive) State Apparatus. The "harmony" among (Repressive) State Apparatus and ISA and ISAs separately is ensured by means of the dominant ideology.

According to Althusser's conception of ideology, what is recognized wrongly is not primarily the world but it is the misrecognition of the self, which is a problem of the 'imaginary' dimension of the human existence. This situation gets its basis from the fragmented subject formed at the mirror stage of Lacanian psychoanalysis. Entering the ideological area, the subject finds its own consistent image soothingly on the 'mirror' of the dominant ideological discourse by exceeding the limits of its own fragmented existence. The human-subject equipped with this imaginary self will be able to perform in socially-accepted ways from that time on (Eagleton, 324). In Althusser's (1971) words, "all ideology hails or interpellates concrete individuals as concrete subjects" (p. 198). For Eagleton (1991), although Althusser's theory of ideology contains misreadings of Lacanian psychoanalysis from certain points, it is accepted as one of the most important developments of the subject in modern Marxist thought. With Althusser, ideology is no longer purely a distortion or misthinking, a curtain coming between the person and the reality, or an automatic result of meta-production. It is an indispensable tool for the production of human subjects (p. 330).

Slavoj Žižek, differently from these two basic conceptualizations of ideology, sets out to reconstruct the notion of ideology in contemporary world which is claimed to be post-ideological (Sharpe, n.d.). Žižek (1989), gets to the work by questioning the validity of the classical understanding which emphasizes that ideology, as being the misrecognition of the social reality, constitutes a part of this reality itself. Does the ideology conception finding expression with Marx's formula "they do not know it, but they are doing it" still operate? (p. 27). Žižek's (2012) answer

is negative: ideology has nothing to do with the “illusion”, the awry representation of its own social content. A political point of view, even when it develops quite “right” attitude towards the objective content, might still be entirely ideological (p. 7). Besides, it is not the whole of entirely material institutions, consisting of ISAs. In Žižek’s (2012) words,

Neither ideology *qua* explicit doctrine, articulated convictions on the nature of man, society and the universe, nor ideology in its material existence (institutions, rituals and practices that give body to it), but the elusive network of implicit, quasi-‘spontaneous’ presuppositions and attitudes that form an irreducible moment of the reproduction of ‘non-ideological’ (economic, legal, political, sexual...) practices. (p. 15)

In the age of cynical reason, the subject knows the falsehood quite well. As an ideology, cynicism provides a new conception. Therefore, Žižek (1989) changes Marx’s formula as follows: “they know that, in their activity, they are following an illusion, but still, they are doing it” (p. 30). In other words, individuals who are well aware of the particular interest behind an ideological universality still do not reject it. However, Žižek points out that it is necessary to distinguish cynicism here from the *kynicism* which represent that lower classes reject the official culture through irony and sarcasm. Kynicism turns the official proposition upside-down by putting up the situation it is enunciated against it. For instance, when a politician preaches about that sacrificing oneself for the country is a sacred duty, kynicism exposes the personal gain he gets from others’ self-sacrifice. Cynicism, on the other hand, is the answer given by the dominant culture to this kynical: “it recognizes, it takes into account, the particular interest behind the ideological universality, the distance between the ideological mask and the reality, but it still finds reasons to retain the mask” (Žižek, 1989, p. 26). The fundamental level of the ideology is not a level of illusion masking the real situation of the things out, but it is a level of unconscious fantasy which, in itself, structures the social reality. Cynical distance is one of the many ways to close eyes to the structuring power of the fantasy: although things are not taken seriously, kept at arm’s length, they are still done (Žižek, 1989, p. 30). This process, as Žižek (1989) mentions, operates through ideological fantasy:

Ideology is not a dreamlike illusion that we built to escape insupportable reality; in its basic dimension it is a fantasy-construction which serves as

a support for our 'reality' itself: an 'illusion' which structures our effective, real social relations and thereby masks some insupportable, real, impossible kernel... The function of ideology is not to offer us a point of escape from our reality but to offer us a point of escape from some traumatic, real kernel. (p. 45)

By Žižek's (1989) conceptualization, ideological fantasy is a foundation providing consistency for the reality of human subject. Thus, a traditional symptomatic readings are not sufficient for the criticism of this new conception of ideology. It is no longer possible to confront ideological text, by subjecting it to the "symptomatic reading", with its vague points, the things it is obliged to suppress in order to keep its consistency – cynical reason considers this distance right from the beginning. The main function of the criticism of ideology is to determine its impossibility in a given ideological structure.

Diken and Laustsen (2011) puts forward that cinema, as a fantasy machine, is a source for a social analysis from this aspect. Films reveal social unconscious by providing a mirror enabling the identification and social control (p. 28). As Žižek states, the greatest success of the art of film is not recreating the reality in a fictional narrative or making the spectator perceive the fiction as real by dissuading them; on the contrary, it ensures that the fictional side of the reality itself is realized, the reality itself is experienced like a narrative (p. 77). On one hand trying to constitute the reality through narrative and on the other hand uncovering the fictional structure of the reality, this two-sided structure of the cinema is, also, the important indicator of its political power.

Concordantly, Ryan and Kellner (2010) state that films, as cultural representations, have a determinative role on how the social reality is to be constructed. By enciphering the discourses of social life, films convey them in a form of cinematic narratives. Instead of being the media to reflect the reality lying outside of the cinema setting, they carry out a transfer between different discursive levels. By this way, cinema itself becomes a part of the cultural representations system which constructs the social reality. Hereunder, for example, these representations will determine if capitalism is perceived as a "predatory jungle" or as a utopia of freedom. These representations are taken over from the culture participated in and turned into a part of the self by being

internalized. These internalized representations remould the self as to adopt the values which are intrinsic to cultural representations in question. Therefore, having a voice in the production of the representations both has a crucial significance with regards to the conservation of social power, and is an indispensable source for the movements aiming social transformations. From this aspect, cinema has great importance in the maintenance of the political struggle. Films are ideological; nevertheless, it is not sufficient to take ideology only as a simple medium of dominance. For them, ideology is an effort intended to ease the social tensions and to respond in a way that they do not pose a threat to the social order based upon injustice. However, at the same time, by trying to soothe the powers capable of reversing the injustice-based order when they are given free rein, to guide and to neutralize them, ideology forms an evidence to the capacities of these powers, in other words to the very thing it intends to deny (p. 34-39).

At this point, films, exactly as Zizek (2001) states, reveal the fictive structure of the reality or the social. In this study, agreeing that all the films are ideological, I tried to explore which ideological narratives lie in the films entailing the Kurdish question and through which representations the ideology becomes functional. Throughout the study, it will be examined that through which representations the dominant ideology is reproduced, or on which ideological formations the opponent movements constitute their political struggles. On the other hand, the moments when the ideology as a fiction or a fantasy exposes its own fictive structure will be another major discussion point of this study.

#### **1.4 Reading Film Diagnostically**

A socially constructionist approach to films requires a significant disengagement from *auteur* and *genre* theories claiming that the film is under the control of the director. Appearing first in the late 1950s and the early 1960s, the *auteurism* movement places the director into the centre of the film. Accordingly, the director is the absolute expert on the film produced (Stam, 2000). However, also with the “The Death of the Author” declaration of Barthes in 1968, the influence of the director on the film is shattered. According to this, as every work of art, films are

not under the control of a certain person, but rather they are the productions of historical and social conditions they belong to (Wartenberg, 2011). As it is mentioned before, the meaning gets out of the director and attains a constructed structure as a result of the shift, happening in the approach to the language, from the reflective and intentional approaches to the constructionist one. Similarly, genre theory also claims that a film belongs to a certain genre since it has the features of that genre (Stam, 2000). Nevertheless, with the rise of the intertextuality, this approach implying that a text has an essence loses its power. This study chooses a different method from these two approaches which fix the meaning in the film.

At the junction point of the theoretical material mentioned thus far, Kellner (2009) proposes the notion *diagnostic critique* as a method to read the films. For him, diagnostic critique “uses films to analyze and interpret the events, hopes, fears, discourses, ideologies, and sociopolitical conflicts of the era”. Moreover, it contains “a dialectic of text and context, using texts to read social realities and events, and using social and historical context to help situate and interpret key films”. Thus, this critique “involves situating films within their sociohistorical environment and showing how they articulate sociopolitical events and struggles of the time”. Reading filmic texts from a diagnostic perspective enables to have opinion about social problems and conflicts, and to make evaluations on the dominant ideologies and the current opponent powers. What makes it possible is that the films are “important source of knowledge, if used judiciously with the tools of history, social theory, and critical media/cultural studies”. As a result, “critical study of film ...may provide privileged insight into how people behave, look, and act in a particular era, as well as their dreams, nightmares, fantasies, and hopes” (p. 17-35).

Within this context, in this study, in order to analyse the films related to the Kurdish question in the new cinema of Turkey, diagnostic critique that Kellner (2009) suggests will be used. As an intertextual and deconstructionist approach, diagnostic critique, in filmic representations of the Kurdish question, neither sees the director as the absolute determiner of the meaning of the films as it is the case in auteur theory, nor it sees the genre as the essential bearer of the meaning of



the films as it is suggested in the genre theory. Instead of this, in this study, the films entailing the Kurdish question will be read together with other filmic or non-filmic texts. From a diagnostic perspective, the films to be studied will be examined through how they represent the social and historical events and struggles entailing the Kurdish question of the period they have been produced in. During the process of reading films diagnostically, the notion of identification borrowed from the psychoanalytic film theory and the notion of fantasy being one of the basic components of Zizek's ideology theory will guide this study.

## **2. THE KURDISH QUESTION: RECOGNITION, CONFESSION, AND DENIAL**

Kurdish question of Turkey is an issue which is highly complicated, disputable and sensitive in the political sense (Kirişçi & Winrow, 1997, p. 212). The complicated structure of the problem requires to examine its evolution in the historical process. Certainly at this point, comes up the question where the roots of the problem traces to. Yeğen (2011) mentions three important periods in the Kurdish question: The first period which corresponds to several years following the Empire and preceding the Republic, the second period which extends from 1924 to 1990s, and the third period which is still being experienced beginning from 1990s (p. 22). In order to better understand this periodization expanding over nearly a century, it is necessary to examine the social and political changes and transformations happened in the society of Turkey. Yeğen (1999) insists that the Kurdish question has to be understood by connecting it to the social history of Turkey in 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. For him, being not simply a multidimensional but a multi-layered social problem, the Kurdish question cannot be read independently of the modernization adventure of Turkey leaving its mark on the last two centuries (p. 13-16). Therefore, to discuss the historical background of Kurdish question reaching the present day, it will be pertinent to view the modernisation movements beginning in the later 19<sup>th</sup> century.

### **2.1. From the Empire to the Republic**

Ahmad (2006) states that Selim III's accession to the throne of Ottoman Empire struggling with a lot of problems in and out in the later 18<sup>th</sup> century started the longest-termed reformation century of the empire resulting in the revolution in 1908. Until that time, the reform movements were tried to be made throughout the 18<sup>th</sup> century end up being unsuccessful. Similarly, the military reforms that Selim III aimed to implement not only met with obstacles of the alliance of janissary-ulema, but also cost the sultan's life (p. 28). The reforms that Selim III had to leave incomplete were put into practice in a more determined and severe way by his successor, Mahmut II. Being one of the most radical one of the reformist sultans, Mahmut II launched out by abolishing the Janissary corps

gorily. Thereafter, with the power he had gained from the elimination of this major military obstacle, he embarked on a set of educational and governmental reforms. However, as Lewis (2008) puts forward, Mahmut II knew very well that the way to carry out these reforms passed through keeping all of the powers within his hands and ensuring the centralisation in the government (p. 125). In this sense, it can be said that centralisation was the most distinctive feature of the Ottoman reform movement which was systematised by Mahmut II and whose major axis consisted of modernisation-westernisation.

As Yeğen (1999) points out, a central governmental-political organization was the situation which was experienced throughout the entire social history extending from Mehmet II to Mahmut II. However, the centralisation of Ottoman was an exceptional one. What made the Ottoman centralisation particular was that the classical Ottoman policy and government offered the opportunity to ethnic, religious and cultural communities of the rural areas for an 'integration' with the centre even if loosely (p. 85). In spite of the intensive reform practices carried out in the axis of centralisation, not just the economic and military crisis that the Ottoman Empire is ridden by did not ended, but also it increased by getting deeper. In order to cope with this crisis, Abdülmecit ascending to the throne after the death of Mahmut II in 1839 promulgated the Imperial Rescript of Gülhane as a far more comprehensive reform programme. Tanzimat Period beginning with this promulgation becomes the start of an era including equality for all the people Muslim or non-Muslim and constructing the superiority of the law. Together with this transformation, an important step was taken on the way to secularism at the same time (Ahmad, 2006, p. 40-41). The centralisation policy increasingly continued. The main aims of Tanzimat was to generalise the governmental and political control of the centre to the rural areas. One of the significant effects of this to the Ottoman social structure was the escalation of the tension going on between the rural areas and the centre. In parallel with the expansion of the scope of the centralisation policy, the Empire came up against a decentralist resistance to the centralisation in government and politics (Shaw & Shaw, 1997, p. 55)

The Muslim opposition having made to the reforms brought by Tanzimat resulted

in the formation of a group calling themselves “Young Ottomans” (Ahmad, 2006, p. 45). Young Ottomans argued that the most viable strategy to preserve the integrity of a state which had been organized on a multi-ethnic and multi-faith social composition could only be achieved by the notion of Ottomanism having neither an ethnic nor a symbolic value (Yeğen, 1999, p. 85). Nevertheless, as Ahmad (1986) states, the idea of nationalism spread among the peoples bound to the empire so much that it was too late anymore to go through with the Ottomanism dream created by the peoples who were free, equal and united in peace, and who were loyal to the ruler of an empire which was formed of diverse nations and sects (p. 113). Although the movement did not last more than 5 years, its impact was huge. It can be stated that, the movement of Young Ottomans affected, to a great extent, the establishment of the constitutional regime in 1876 and Ottoman constitutional monarchy movement opposing the period of autocracy of the sultan after 1878 (Zürcher, 2000, p. 108).

The ethnic separatism whose increase could not be prevented means the continuation of the loss of lands. The Constitution (*Kanun-i Esasi*) proclaimed in 1876 and the Parliament (*Meclis-i Mebusan*) beginning the works in 1877 were followed by the period of autocracy starting with the closure of the parliament in 1878 by Abdühamit II (Lewis, 2008). This period came to an end in 1908 as the sultan re-promulgated the constitution that he had suspended thirty years before. Anyone coming from Muslim, non-Muslim or another ethnic origin celebrated the declaration enthusiastically hugging each other in the streets (Ahmad, 2006, p. 61). Nonetheless, the celebrations did not take long, the Committee of Union and Progress (*İttihat ve Terakki Cemiyeti*) became the only one having a say in the government (Lewis, 2008, p. 294-295). As Shaw and Shaw (1977) indicates, under the regime of the Committee of Union and Progress, the tension between Ottomanism and nationalism, Islamism and Turkism, centralisation and decentralization, which are the basic projects developing by accelerating towards the end of the 19th century, increased by getting deeper (p. 273). From the period beginning with the year 1913, centralisation against decentralisation and Turkism against Ottomanism became policies whose validity was not indisputable from the point of central political power (Yeğen,

1999, p. 73). The defeat of Ottoman Empire in the World War I which had been joined under the circumstances brought the Committee of Union and Progress to an end. At the end of the war, not only Ottoman Empire lost all the land except Anatolia, also the Anatolia was invaded by the prevailing states.

The independence (and foundation) process lasting from 1919 to 1922 in the leadership of Mustafa Kemal emerged as a struggle, far from being nationalist, aiming to save the sultanate and caliphate (Lewis, 2008). A part of the Kurds remaining faithful to Ottoman Empire throughout the World War I supported Mustafa Kemal and his friends by joining the resistance movement in Anatolia right after the war. Whereas another group consisting of Kurdish nationalists aimed at an autonomous government even if being in Turkish state, a third group composing of powerful tribe leaders intended to dominate over the lands they have been controlling. However, the last two groups could not achieve to be organized effectively. At the end, the government of Ankara under Mustafa Kemal succeeded in drawing the tribe leaders to the resistance movement and stimulating Kurds' loyalty to Caliph-Sultan and to the country (Kirişçi & Winrow, 1997, p. 83). In this process, both the government in İstanbul and the government in Ankara gave up reducing the Kurdish question to a social problem that can be solved by reforms, differently from their predecessor, Committee of Union and Progress. Both governments not just gave the credit to the relation of Kurdish question to cultural and political rights, but also promised to handle the problem with the recognition policy (Yeğen, 2011, p. 23). After a range of military and political accomplishments of Mustafa Kemal and his friends, the Grand National Assembly was opened in 1920, the sultanate was abolished in 1922 and finally a new state named as Turkish Republic was founded in 1923 (Zürcher, 2000).

## **2.2. National Struggle and the Denial of the Question**

The founding fathers of the Republic who see no harm in recognizing cultural and political rights of the Kurds during a few years following the Empire left this attitude aside in a few years succeeding the foundation of Republic. As Yeğen (2011) also states, firstly the recognition policy and then the acceptance of the cultural and political nature of the problem were abandoned. The Kurdish

question was not a political problem which had to be handled with the recognition policy anymore; it became a *social* problem that could be solved with the help of revolutions. As McDowall (1992) states,

Despite official statements of recognition of 'the national and social rights of the Kurds', it quickly became clear that Atatürk's interest following the defeat of the Christian elements was in the creation of a nation-state along European and authoritarian lines, and it was a specifically Turkish and secular state that he intended. The Kurds of Turkey very quickly lost their special identity and the status they had enjoyed as fellow Muslims. (p. 36)

As a result of this, the new regime started with the mistrust and suspicion against Kurds. As Özoğlu (2004) states, "an unfortunate period was about to begin, a period in which their political loyalties were always doubted. In the minds of some Turkish nationalists, any manifestation of Kurdish identity was and is a major threat to the indivisibility of the Republic" (p. 3).

In this long period from the later 1980s to the beginning of 1990s, the outlook of the state towards the Kurdish question also continued in different discursive constructions. Being the production of social and political transformation like centralisation, modernisation, secularisation, and nation formation, preceding the Republic, the Kurdish question came forth as the denial of Kurdish identity. This categorical denial discourse was expressed in the discursive practices about that there were no Kurds in Turkish country (Yeğen, 1999). The most distinct example of this could be seen in the 1924 Constitution made by the founding fathers of the regime. In the preamble of 1924 Constitution introduced to the Assembly, it was stated that "Our state is a nation state. It is not an international or supranational state. The state does not recognize any nation other than Turkish nation" (Gözübüyük & Sezgin, 1957, p. 7). As a consequence, the 88<sup>th</sup> article of the constitution became as "In Turkey, everyone is called 'Turk' in terms of citizenship regardless of their religion or race" (Kili & Gözübüyük, 1985, p. 128). Therefore, the Kurds of the Republic, in Yeğen's (2009) words, being "Prospective-Kurds" were invited to the Turkishness firstly, and later to the 'first-class citizenship' (p. 48).

The Kurds having been invited to the Turkishness in this way caused the most serious revolt in the history of the Republic in 1925. As Bruinessen (n.d.) states,

Sheikh Said Rebellion having broken out for the purpose of an independent Kurdistan bounded to the Islamic principles was suppressed harshly by the regime. As Yeğen (1999) puts forward, the regime placed this rebellion in a discourse that it was a revolt aiming to bring caliphate and sultanate back, although it was never proved (p. 132). This attitude was the manifestation of the Kurdish question to be coded as a reactionary attempt in the state discourse. Bruinessen (1992) points out that, in the period following the suppression of the rebellion, the policies to assimilate Kurds became the official ideology of the state (p. 166). The second major Kurdish attempt subsequent to Sheikh Said Rebellion is the set of rebellions having lasted from 1926 to 1930 and taken place around Mount Ararat in the summer of 1930 (Kirişçi & Winrow, 1997). Crushing the last rebellion in 1930 as well, the state aimed to solve the Kurdish question with a large scale housing policy. That is to say, the state tried to break the resistance against centralisation with further centralisation. In this period including 1930s and 1940's, the Kurdish question was perceived as a resistance of the tribes against modernisation, civilisation, and centralisation. Moreover, the approach, whose content continued until 1990s by being varied, about that all these rebellions were caused by 'foreign provocation' found its place in the state discourse (Yeğen, 1999). For these reasons, while the Dersim Rebellion having broken out in 1937 was responded with "utmost brutality", "Kurdish villages were closely policed, and use of the Kurdish language, dress, folklore and names prohibited. The area remained under martial law until 1946" (McDowall, 1991, p. 38).

The transition to multi-party system in 1946 put an end to the 27-year power of one-party regime when Democratic Party won elections held in 1950 by landslide against the Republican Party (Ahmad, 2006, p. 126). In this election, Kurds supported Democratic Party mostly (McDowall, 1991, p. 39). Government pressure on the Kurdish movement which had fallen into silence after the suppression of Dersim Rebellion rather severely decreased relatively with the multi-party period (Bozarlan, 2003, p. 850). As Yeğen (1999) points out, with the 1950s, the Kurdish question began to be seen not as a problem to be ironed out anymore, but as a social problem that had to be solved (p. 159). In this

manner, the idea of 'Eastism' which supported the economic development in the eastern regions neglected by the state (McDowall, 1991, p. 39). After this approach, in the dominant discourse of 1960s and 1970s, the situation turned into a reading of Kurdish question as a regional economic underdevelopment (Yeğen, 1999, p. 163). However, the 10-year power of Democratic Party ended with a military coup in 1960. As Kirişçi and Winrow (1997) states, "the army was indisposed by Democratic Party rule; especially by 'liberalization' in eastern regions which would lead to increase in Kurdish nationalist consciousness" (p. 107).

1961 Constitution made after the coup explicitly guaranteed the freedoms of thought, expression, organisation, and press (Ahmad, 1994, p. 223). As a result of this, "Kurds, as Turks, were able to participate in political life so long as they claimed a Turkish identity. ...But they had to proceed with care, and had to belong Turkish parties, since it was ...illegal to form a specifically Kurdish party" (McDowall, 1991, p. 40). Besides that, for the first time in the history of the country, the Kurdish question was pointed out in the founding documents of an official party (Yeğen, 2009, p. 164). In such a political atmosphere, Kurds started to be aware of their ethnic identities increasingly (Kirişçi & Winrow, 1997, p. 113). The public demonstrations held in Kurdish cities in 1967 transformed into an intensive mass action where the national and social demands were expressed. Nevertheless, the intervention of the army on March 12, 1971 with the memorandum it had given to the government caused the Kurdish movement get out of this process by weakening (Bozarslan, 2008, p. 855-856). Following the memorandum, many people connected with the Kurdish movement were arrested and tortured (McDowall, 1991, p. 43).

The easing off the political atmosphere under the control of the army caused the diversification and radicalisation of Kurdish movement by the second half of 1970s (Bruinessen, n.d., p. 55). The growth of Kurdish movement with radicalisation in 1970s resulted to a large extent from the reasons like the mass migration from Kurdish cities into the west of Turkey, the increase in the opportunities of education for Kurds, and the impotency of the existing government (Bruinessen, 1992). This political activation was followed by a



martial law including Kurdish cities in 1979 by the government of that period (McDowall, 1991, p. 43). Coming to September of 1980, the army seized the control of the country once more in the history of the republic (Zürcher, 2000, p. 405). With this military coup,

The ban on Kurdish was implemented more strictly than ever, villages and homes were raided by the army, and tens of thousands of people, primarily Leftist activists and Kurds, were arrested and interrogated, frequently under torture. Indeed, by the end of the decade it was generally thought that approximately half of the 250,000 or so civilians arrested by the authorities on security grounds were in fact Kurdish. (McDowall, 1991, p. 44)

At the end of all these historical processes and discursive practices, Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) gets on the stage beginning from the second half of 1980s. The party emerging as a student movement in the second half of 1970s started the biggest armed resistance of Kurdish movement lasting from August 15, 1984 to 1999 (Bozarslan, 2008).

### **2.3. Nineties Experience and Onwards**

As it is seen in the previous part, the second period beginning from the first constitution of the Republic and going on until the beginning of 1990s passed with the denial of the Kurdish question. Throughout the seventy years, the Kurdish question was seen as social problem which could be resolved by the revolutions or as a public order related problem which could be overcome with discipline and banishment. On the other hand, although being a social or public order related problem, Kurds always remained as citizens predestined to be Turkified in the eyes of the state (Yeğen, 2011, p. 32). Nonetheless, coming to the 1990s, Kurds were not seen to respond positively to the assimilation invitation of the state. The Kurdish rebellion starting in the mid-1960s preserved its persistency until 1980s in spite of the military interventions. PKK attacks starting in 1984 were not confined in the military targets; they aimed at economic targets like factories, energy power plants or oil facilities, tourism facilities, or teachers and schools. Raiding and burning Kurdish villages and killing the civilians were the tactics that PKK used to establish its authority on the villagers till the beginning of 1990s. On the other hand, not just the state of emergency continuing

from 1987 was still practised, but also Anti-Terror Law was called out in 1991. The state gave a severe respond to the PKK violence intensified in 1993 by giving complete authority to the army. When it came to 1994, PKK was weakened in a considerable extent (Kirişçi & Winrow, 1997).

On the other hand, the state did not refrain from giving the signal that it returned to the recognition policy of Kurdish identity. In the year 1991, the parliament removed the Kurdish broadcast ban valid since 1983 and the Prime Minister Süleyman Demirel announced that the state recognized “the Kurdish reality” in a visit to Diyarbakır. However, in the year 1993, on one hand the death of the President Turgut Özal who sought the ways to disarm PKK having declared ceasefire, on the other hand the slaughter of 33 soldiers by PKK caused this recognition policy to be left aside (Yeğen, 2011, p. 36). The army began to pursue a more aggressive policy after this slaughter (Marcus, 2007, p. 221). This aggressive attitude towards PKK was directed to the villages who were suspected to be PKK sympathisers because had they refused to join the village guarding system. The villages which could not be protected by the soldiers were evacuated and from time to time burned in order to prevent them to be used by PKK for logistic purposes (Kirişçi & Winrow, 1997, p. 135). As Marcus (2007) states,

In stories repeated with increasing frequency and despair, Kurdish villagers complained that security forces (sometimes accompanied by their proxy army) turned up in the early hours of the morning, forced everyone into the center of the village, and told them to join the armed guards or to evacuate the settlement. Villagers were beaten and their houses burned: often men were taken away for questioning, some later turned up dead. The pressure and the threats were too much for most and whole villages now packed up and left. (p. 222)

The main aim in this period of forced migration, referred as “nineties experience” by Kurban and Yeğen (2007), was to prevent PKK militants from sheltering in the highlands and to break the connections between PKK and Kurds. This displacement became in such a great size that could not be compared the previous ones: Until the end of the decade, nearly 3000 villages or lands were evacuated sometimes by being burnt and sometimes without setting any time limit to the residents. From a region with a few million citizens, more than a million of them were displaced (p. 49). The time passed from 1993 to 1999 was

committed to the memories as the bloodiest period in the Kurdish question of Turkey (Yeğen, 2011, p. 36). As Kurban (2009) puts forward, in the period of armed conflict between the years 1984 and 1999, especially after the year 1987 when the state of emergency was announced, human rights violations were made heavily against the people in eastern and south-eastern regions of Turkey. Forests, houses, gardens were burnt; people were killed, injured and lost when they were under custody (p. 55).

In the year 1999, a new period started in the Kurdish question when Abdullah Öcalan, PKK leader, was arrested and brought to Turkey. The organization declared a ceasefire and decided to take its members outside the borders (Marcus, 2007). On the other side, in the Helsinki Summit of European Union in the same year, candidanship of Turkey was approved ("Türkiye-AB ilişkilerinin tarihçesi," 2011). In the process following these developments and parallel to them, Turkey did not start the process to apply the capital punishment of Öcalan (Yeğen, 2011). Passed relatively without violence, in the first two years of AK Party government coming to power with a huge voter support in 2002, modest but significant steps were taken in the area of human rights and about the political demands of Kurds (Balta Paker, 2014). The state of emergency and some limitations on Kurdish were revoked. Both Kurdish was permitted to be learned in private courses, and TRT and private channels were permitted to broadcast in Kurdish for limited time. Thus, by 2000s, the state had put the recognition police in practice again (Yeğen, 2011, p. 37).

Notwithstanding, PKK's calling off the ceasefire, the foundation of Kurdistan Regional Government in Iraq and the nationalist opposition in the country against EU reformation demands brought about a change once more in the progress of Kurdish question (Yeğen, 2011, p. 37). The regional government founded in Iraq was important because, when managing their strategies, both the state and the Kurdish movement had to look out for the existence of political authority in Iraq Kurdistan as a parameter from that time on. By making the Kurdish question in Turkey open to the influences of the regional dynamics more than before, this situation began to make insufficient, intellectually and politically, the dispositions perceiving it as a Turkey-scaled state tradition and a problem of democratisation

(Saraçoğlu, 2014). However, as well as the problems belonging to foreign politics like the beginning of decline in the hopes regarding membership in the relations with EU, and the fact that Kurdish question hit the streets caused the partial collapse of the mood of optimism of the first three years of AK Party government. Street demonstrations starting with the news of a flag burnt in Mersin transformed into a large flood of anger against Kurds. The year 2005 was significant to pass into history as the year when the maximum number of lynch attempts had happened. In the same year, a bookstore in Şemdinli was bombed by persons to be identified as soldiers later (Balta Paker, 2014). In this atmosphere, the army marked out the recognition policy adopted in Kurdish question. According to General Staff, the reforms to be made had to be limited by the individual rights. When the government approved this directive of General Staff and EU did not object, the recognition policy was suspended although not taken back (Yeğen, 2011, p. 37).

Henceforth, the belief 'prospective-Turks' about Kurds existing from the first years of the Republic was changing. Nevertheless, as Yeğen (2009) also states, the perception of Kurd began to be placed somewhere outside of the Turkishness circle as a consequence of this. In the notice published by the military authority after the flag event in Mersin, the ones having joined to the demonstrations are stated as "pseudo citizens" for the first time. From another aspect, several terms like Jewish-Kurds which established a relation between Kurds and diverse types of non-Muslims were started to be used. Beyond question, what made official authorities anxious so much to resort to the term pseudo citizen could not be just the flag event. The concern, mainly, was originated from the Newroz demonstrations in 2005 indicating that the bonds of Kurdish citizens to the political unity had weakened, and from the protest demonstrations happened after the bombing of Şemdinli bookstore. Fighter aircrafts were flown over tens of thousands of people who had participated in the funeral of three people killed in the demonstrations. This discursive change, quite obvious that, was the outbreak of the disappointment of the Republic who had lost hope about the Kurds resisting to be Turkified.

On one hand high state officials tried to make Kurds pay for being recognized, on

the other hand a new activation occurred in the Kurdish question with the second half of 2000s. In the year 2005, the Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan had already mentioned firstly that Kurdish question was the problem of Turkey ("Erdoğan: "Kürt sorunu," 2005), and then that it was his problem in person ("Kürt sorunu benim," 2005). However, coming to 2009, it was uttered by the President Abdullah Gül himself that Kurdish question was Turkey's most important problem which had to be solved (Yetkin, 2009). The same year, the government declared the Kurdish Initiative in order to find the ultimate solution to the problem. Immediately after the initiative was announced, the reaction of the public to the entrance of the first group from PKK to the country from Habur border gate was harsh. The welcoming made by such a huge crowd for the members of PKK as if the group had been coming from the victory led AKP to close the door they had opened because of the fear of losing the votes of the nationalists in the next elections. On the other hand, the actors doing politics actively in the Kurdish question through KCK lawsuits were declared to be terrorist by the jurisdiction (Balta Paker, 2014). However even so, in this process, a state channel started to broadcast in Kurdish for 24 hours a day and the universities were permitted to open Kurdish language and literature departments (Yeğen, 2011, p. 39). With the effects of all these events, the name of the process evaluated to "Democratic Initiative" first, and later to "National Unity and Brotherhood Project".

The negotiations between MİT and PKK authorities beginning in 2009 in Oslo and interrupted in 2011 (Balta Paker, 2014) came to the fore again after 2011 election victory of AK Party. When a new process of negotiation with Abdullah Öcalan being in İmralı Prison began in 2013, the transition to a new phase in Kurdish question was carried out. PKK declared a ceasefire and withdrew a part of its members outside the borders. In return, the government avoided the military operations aimed to kill PKK members. In its broad naming "solution process" still continues via a set of negotiations with Öcalan and PKK members held closed to the public by various committees, despite all the zigzags in Kurdish question in 2000s. As a result, it can be said that the Kurdish question still preserves its place at the top of the agenda of Turkey.

### 3. REPRESENTATIONS OF THE KURDISH QUESTION IN THE NEW CINEMA OF TURKEY

#### 3.1. National Fantasies: The Many Faces of the Kurdish Other

McGowan (2007) describes the fantasy as an imaginative act which distorts social reality. In this way, “fantasy creates an opening to the impossible object and thereby allows the subject to glimpse an otherwise inaccessible enjoyment. For him, works of art, as imaginative acts, “translate private fantasies into public ones, which provide imaginary response to shared forms of dissatisfaction and thus have an appeal beyond the individuals who generate them” (p. 23-24). Popular films, being the places where social fantasies are produced continuously, provide a wide range of materials for the diagnosis of these fantasies. National subjects are included in the fantasmic universe of popular films to the extent that these films give consistency to their ideological reality. It is, to a great extent, what makes a film popular: its providing the spectator with a fantasmic scenario that masks the Real of desire. For that reason, it is possible to find dominant scenarios/discourses, which the society has fictionalised, in popular films. Thus, the kind of fantasies the cinema in Turkey produces about social conflicts has to be sought primarily in popular films.

The 1990s are the years when the films touching on the Kurdish question directly or indirectly begin to find place in the new cinema of Turkey in parallel with the social and political developments regarding the question. Especially in popular cinema, it is understood from the number of the audience that films touching on the subject in some way receive a great deal of attention. This part discusses the representational strategies operating in popular films related to the Kurdish question and how they become functional. For this reason, eight films are selected among the ones which have been the most watched from the 1990s to present: *Eşkiya* (Yavuz Turgul, 1996), *Vizontele* (Yılmaz Erdoğan, 2001), *Deli Yürek: Bumerang Cehennemi* (Osman Sınav, 2001), *Vizontele Tuuba* (Yılmaz Erdoğan, 2004), *Gönül Yarası* (Yavuz Turgul, 2005), *Kurtlar Vadisi: Irak* (Serdar Akar, 2006), *Nefes: Vatan Sağolsun* (Levent Semerci, 2009), and *Güneşi Gördüm*

(Mahsun Kırmızıgül, 2009).<sup>1</sup>

### 3.1.1. Childish Heroes from a Fantasized Past

Made in 1996, Yavuz Turgul's film *Eşkiya* is accepted to be the beginning of the popular wing of the new cinema of Turkey (Suner, 2006, p. 34). The great box-office success of the film in that year was, also, seen as a sign of hope for the cinema of the country not being able to overcome the crisis it was going through after Yeşilçam. Indeed, not only has the interest of audience of the country increased considerably for domestic films, but also these films have started to appear among the most watched films. Yılmaz Erdoğan's film *Vizontele*, released in 2001, is one of box-office hits as well. The common characteristic in these two significant films is not only the box-office records they have broken. *Eşkiya* and *Vizontele* are also in accord with each other through their attitude towards Kurdish question, which they maintain by the way of the fantasmic stories they present to collective imaginary. *Eşkiya* tells the story of a former bandit's search for the woman he loves. Baran is out after 35 years of jail time. Coming back to his village, he sees that everything is under the water of a dam. Everybody at the village had to immigrate. Baran learns that Keje, the woman he loves, was taken to İstanbul by his former friend Berfo. He starts out his journey to İstanbul in order to find them. Cumali who he meets in İstanbul feels sorry for the old man and checks him into the guest house he stays in. With the help of his young friend, he begins to search for Keje.

As for *Vizontele*, a sequence of tragicomic events developing in a town after people's meeting television for the first time is shown. The information of state's bringing television to a town in the southeast region of Turkey in the year 1974 is met with fascination and enthusiasm by the villagers. From that time on, all the

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<sup>1</sup> Among these films, *Eşkiya* released in 1996 reaching 2,572,282 spectators, *Vizontele* released in 2001 reaching 3,308,320 spectators and *Kurtlar Vadisi: Irak* released in 2006 reaching 4,256,566 spectators not only were the most watched films of their release years, but also they beat the record to be the most watched film until those years in Turkey. Released in 2009, *Güneşi Gördüm* reaching 2,491,754 spectators and *Nefes: Vatan Sağolsun* reaching 2,436,780 spectators became the first and the third most watched films of that year. *Vizontele Tuuba* released in 2004 reaching 2,894,802 became the most watched film of the year, *Deli Yürek: Bumerang Cehennem* released in 2001 reaching 1,051,352 spectators was the third most watched film of the year, and *Gönül Yarası* released in 2005 with 898,000 spectators was the fourth most watched film of that year. For detailed information please refer to <http://www.sinematurk.com>.

villagers are curious about what this new device is like. However, officials coming to the town go back hastily leaving the television without setting it up. Mayor, Nazmi, reluctantly asks for help of the “village idiot”, Emin, in order to make the television work. In contradiction with his nickname, Emin is famous for his inventions. Nazmi and Emin get to work to have the television work among all the things that the villagers say to make fun of them. The sequel *Vizontele Tuuba*, released in 2004, tells the events happening before military coup in 1980 in the same town.

Suner (2006) states that ‘infantilized’ adult characters take an important place in nostalgia films of the new cinema of Turkey (p. 73). According to Suner (2006), what nostalgia films do is to vindicate the past as a childhood narrative, to justify society by ‘infantilizing’, and, in this way, to get rid of the burden of the past (p. 99). *Eşkiya*, *Vizontele* and *Vizontele Tuuba* are among the films which Suner handles within the scope of nostalgia films. The characters Baran, in the first one, and Emin, in the other two, are represented as infantilized adults. In Suner’s (2006) description, Baran “watches everything happening around with a childish naivety, cannot catch up with the events, is always deceived by the others. In this city full of evils, Baran the Bandit is a childish legendary character coming from a different world” (p. 76). For example, to Cumali who asks how he will find her, he says that, if necessary, he will look at the faces of ten million people one by one and look for her. Together, they go out and begin searching Keje in the streets of İstanbul. To the never-ending questions of Cumali about where they are going, Baran states that he does not know the answer, but that he tries to hear the sound of the city. Likewise, as Suner (2006) argues, “Emin who has not an authority to submit himself to or an idealized father figure to identify himself with is a child who has never grown up or has never forced to be grow up” (p. 93).

Childishness is one of the representational strategies that Hall (2003) usually encounters in the representations regarding the black other. For him, it is essential to infantilize the *difference* in popular representations so that hierarchal binary opposition between white master and black male slave is reproduced. By doing so, white master ensures the authority he established on the black other by making him a child free from responsibilities. In this way, the other is make



'harmless' (p. 262). Kaplan (1997), also, says that Hollywood cinema has the similar approach not only regarding in racial but also in ethnic representations. Accordingly, it is a quite common strategy for the other to be infantilized in a negative way and pacified sexually (p. 80). In *Eşkiya* and *Vizontele*, feeding on the stylistic codes of Hollywood (Suner, 2006, p. 34), it is possible to find a similar strategy. However, unlike in the cases of Hall and Kaplan, infantilization operates here in a positive way: it gains importance for identification.

Both Baran and Emin are depicted as desexualized characters. Cumali jokes around with his friends about Baran's sexual life. When Sevim comes to his room, he is unresponsive. As Erdoğan (2007) states, Barzan is as if he pushes his sexual desire into the background for a more incorporeal purpose in the nature (p. 53). As for Emin, he is indifferent to women other than a Danish tourist once visited the village and kissed him. Apart from this platonic love, he falls in love with Tuğba in the sequel; nevertheless, this is also a childish love. Thus, the gaze of Kurdish other, being perceived as a threat by national subject, is made harmless and the way for identification with the characters is cleared. Such a propitiation is significant, because, as Saracoğlu (2011) puts forward, the perception that leering at women is the essential characteristic of Kurds generally shows itself in the imaginary of national subject (p. 126). In relation to that, it is useful to recall, within this scope, the claims about censoring of the film *Gitmek: Benim Marlon ve Brandom* (2008), which will be discussed later on, on the grounds that a Turkish woman cannot fall in love with a Kurdish man (Önderoğlu, 2008, "Kültür Bakanlığı "Gitmek"i Festival Programından Çıkarttı").

*Eşkiya* and *Vizontele* try to justify not only the past, but also the present (Suner, 2006). In the year 1996 when *Eşkiya* was released there was an ongoing low intensity conflict in the East and Southeast regions of Turkey. As a result of that, in order to prevent PKK guerrillas sheltering on the mountains and to cut the connection between Kurdish people and the organization, citizens were displaced by evacuation of villages and lands. Within almost a decade, nearly 3000 villages or lands evacuated by being burnt sometimes and without setting any time limit. From a region with a few million citizens, more than a million of them were displaced (Kuban, Yeğen, Ladisch & Duthie, 2012). Among such

intensive displacements, Baran coming out of prison sees his village having been abandoned, too. However, villagers had to leave their lands because the newly constructed dam would submerged the village underwater. The only person left in the village, Ceren Ana, explains the situation saying “After you were imprisoned, the order was violated, evils prevailed, oppressed ones suffered”. The film, here, follows a subtle representational strategy: evacuation of villages and displacements are not denied; nevertheless, social reality is perverted through a fictive fantasy. As a result, space is also taken into the national fantasy.

For Suner (2006), as Baran’s underwater village belongs to past, Baran is, also, a hero belonging to the past (p. 74). From the first scene of the film where he is seen in front of the prison door, Baran is like a time traveller coming from the past with his traditional outfit, confused eyes and attitude towards life. From that time on, İstanbul in the 1990s will be narrated from the point of a Kurdish bandit of 1960s. Similar to *Eşkiya*, *Vizontele* tries to cope with the social reality of its age by sheltering into a fantasmic reconstruction of the past. The film consists of memories of Yılmaz, the son of Nazmi the Mayor, in regard to his childhood in 1970s. It can be seen more clearly especially in the sequel *Vizontele Tuuba*. Yılmaz –being the director Yılmaz Erdoğan himself– is included in the film as a voice-over and informs the audience that he will tell a summer memory. Intertwining of past and present gives the film an ambiguous atmosphere. As a consequence of this ambiguity, the feeling that the mountains are cleared of the bandits is given to the spectator in both films. As it is stated at the beginning of *Eşkiya*, from the bandit gang caught by the gendarmerie in the Mount Cudi 35 years ago, nobody has stayed alive except Baran. In *Vizontele*, on the other hand, mountains shot in wide angle are frequently shown. Contrary to social realities of the 1990s, there is order and tranquillity in the mountains.

### **3.1.2. Mythic Enemies in a Manichean Battle**

Gürbilek (2012) argues that, after the 1990s, Turkey will choose new popular heroes from “powerful Turks who wage war against the new objects of fear, use every trick in the book in order to protect the city from filth and chaos, and from a new young man stereotype who does not need to feel innocent anymore” (p.

51). Proving Gürbilek right, it is noticed that when the time from the end of the 1990s to the second half of the 2000s is taken into consideration, two television series make an overwhelming impression in the popular cultural medium of Turkey: *Deli Yürek* (1998-2002) and *Kurtlar Vadisi* (2003-2005). After *Kurtlar Vadisi*, the final episode of which was televised in 2005, is re-featured on television as *Kurtlar Vadisi: Terör*, it is banned by Radio and Television Supreme Council (RTÜK). In the same year, it is back on television as *Kurtlar Vadisi: Pusu*. By the year 2014, it is still on air. Mafia/police heroes profiled in these series as macho, masculine, tough, even cruel when necessary gains popularity especially among young people. It is not only their heroes what makes two series this much interesting. These series claim to present a perspective from 'inside' to the events in recent history of Turkey.

Yusuf Miroğlu of *Deli Yürek* and Polat Alemdar of *Kurtlar Vadisi* are the nationalist-conservative characters who start a bloody fight to defeat the formation called "deep state" and their 'plots on homeland' played with their international connections. There is always a link between these bloody plots endangering 'national interests', and the Kurdish question. Being on television until quite recently, *Sakarya-Fırat* and *Tek Türkiye*, also, have similar themes. Being extensions one each for these series, the films *Deli Yürek: Bumerang Cehennemi* (2001) and *Kurtlar Vadisi: Irak* (2006) look from a far-right conservative perspective. In *Deli Yürek: Bumerang Cehennemi*, it is narrated that Yusuf Miroğlu who goes to Diyarbakır for his army friend's wedding is caught in the middle of a conspiracy. *Kurtlar Vadisi: Irak*, on the other hand, narrates the events the middle of which Polat Alemdar falls in when he goes to Iraq upon the crisis of American soldiers putting sacks over Turkish soldiers' heads. Both films can be read as nationalistic narratives one each in the sense that Turkish characters secure the justice with their own hands against the ones who betray their country or who threaten it.

Svetlana Boym (2001) states that one of the two narratives of contemporary nationalisms which feeds on right-wing popular culture is conspiracy theories. According to Boym (2001);

The conspiratorial worldview is based on a single transhistorical plot, a Manichaeian battle of good and evil and the inevitable scapegoating of the mythical enemy. Ambivalence, the complexity of history and the specificity of modern circumstances is thus erased, and modern history is seen as a fulfillment of ancient prophecy. "Home," imagine extremist conspiracy theory adherents, is forever under siege, requiring defense against the plotting enemy. (p. 47-48)

In the same way, Açıkel (1996) asserts the most important ideological common ground defining Turkish right-wing is "The Holy Synthesis" which is a manifestation of Turkish-Islamic synthesis discourse. The most significant determiner of this conceptualization is "the discourse of the repressed". The subject of the Holy Synthesis has lost its glorious imperial past. This "egocentric attitude" seeing everyone apart from itself as the source of its being repressed finds response in conspiracy theories. "Foreign and domestic enemies, for that reason, are productive discursive instruments. Some people always try to 'hinder' from outside; try to prevent 'their development'" (p. 183).

The opening scene of *Deli Yürek: Bumerang Cehennemi* portrays one of the perfect examples of such paranoia. This scene which is not directly related to the film opens with a voice-over dubbed on the title of the film: "These lands are Mesopotamia, the boomerang hell of the global plots. Even, God sent his prophets here to establish the world order. This is because, these land were, in fact, a heaven on earth". In this way, space is not just made the object for a conspiracy, but also attributed a kind of holiness. From now on, the subject of The Holy Synthesis is ready to witness the conspiracy. Immediately after that, appears a hand making some arrangements with a pen on the map. Accordingly, the Eastern and South Eastern Anatolia regions of Turkey are being divided into states and shared. In the background, this feeling is supported by the discussions, of a group who tries to take share from this distribution, in English, German, Arabic, Armenian and Kurdish. All of them are concerned to determine their own demands and red lines. Kurdish one, complaining about being neglected, says that they are not much different from Turkish state. When the one from USA advices him to be patient, he answers: "The oppressed people of Mesopotamia are not your pawns". The scene ends when Diyarbakır is marked as the capital state and "Kurdistan" is written. In this way, as The Holy Synthesis is reproduced, Kurdish

question is reduced to foreign provocation.

As it is known, Gaffar Okkan, Diyarbakır Chief of Police, was killed as a result of an unidentified murder in 2001. *Deli Yürek: Bumerang Cehennemi*, released in the same year, questions this murder from the mouth of the character Cemal. According to Cemal, being the “smiling face of the state”, Gaffar Okkan has broken the people’s distrust to the Turkish state. Since Okkan’s such attitude has disturbed ‘foreign powers’ and their collaborators within the state, he is assassinated. At this point, Cemal implies that unidentified murders in the 1990s in that region were committed by the same groups. Unidentified murders for which the number given is 3000 are accepted by Cemal; yet what happens there is still reduced to the plot of foreign powers. Hizbullah’s regional manager Hasan the Butcher is revealed to be an American agent from Dakota. A retired commander from Turkish Armed Forces, Şeref helps this Kurdish-American collaboration. Thus, the global plot is revealed: Kurdish question is a fictive scenario standing by the support of interest groups in Turkish Army and Kurds’ being provoked under the control of USA. As a result, the social and the political reality of the Kurdish question is overlooked.

The conspiracy theory with regard that the solution of Kurdish question is prevented by the foreign powers who do not want Turkey develop is one of the indispensable arguments of *Kurtlar Vadisi*. Having been released in 2009, *Kurtlar Vadisi: Gladyo* (Şadullah Şentürk) presents a similar scenario by using the names of real people. For instance, the assassination of Abdullah Öcalan is stopped at the last minute by the help of a US agent. The steps to solve Kurdish question taken by Turgut Özal is prevented. With such interventions of USA, Turkey is faced with obstacles when the question is ‘just about to be solved’. Having been released at the time when Kurdish Regional Government became autonomous, *Kurtlar Vadisi: Irak* turns its camera to Kurdish people in Iraq. Turkmen leader in the film complains that Americans allots the mountains to Kurds, the desert to Arabs, and the petroleum to themselves. A distribution like the one in the opening scene of *Deli Yürek: Bumerang Cehennemi* is made. Within this distribution, Kurdish and Arab leaders are represented simply as puppets under the control of USA.

Beyond doubt, there can always be some truth in these stories, but these conspiracy films ignore the ethno-political side of the Kurdish question. Both in *Kurtlar Vadisi: Irak* and *Deli Yürek: Bumerang Cehennemi*, there is only one mythical enemy: USA. In the Manichean war of good and evil, good is represented by Turkish State and its supporters; bad is represented by the USA and its collaborators. Kurds' position in this categorization is determined by their relations with Turkish State. To demonstrate, Abdülhey and Cemal characters being the closest ones to the protagonists are 'acceptable' Kurds who work collaboratively with the state and whose loyalty is not questioned. It is known that Abdülhey is right-hand man of Polat Alemdar who works for Turkish intelligence. Abdülhey whose being Kurd is emphasized repeatedly throughout the film is, also, pointed out with his Kurdish. At one of the last scenes of the film, when Memati says that Kurds are responsible of everything happened, Abdülhey reproaches to his friend saying he is also a Kurd. Memati responds supporting 'friend or foe' dichotomy of nationalist discourse of the film: "You are different, Abdülhey". Abdülhey's reply as "Everything starts with this" is a rather inconsistent and naive criticism in a fiction using marginalization of the other as a representational strategy.

Another one of the 'different' ones as Memati mentions is Cemal, Yusuf Miroğlu's Kurdish friend from Diyarbakır. By a flashback scene at the beginning of the film, Yusuf and Cemal's army days in South-eastern Anatolia are shown. Yusuf and Cemal come across with a funeral when they go to Cemal's fiancé, Leyla's house after an operation. Leyla acknowledges them about that her brother from whom they could not hear any word for a month is killed in the mountain fighting for PKK. Yusuf and Cemal immediately understand that her brother is one of the guerrillas they killed during the operation. With this memory at the beginning, Cemal's position in the film is fixed. In consequence, any potential ambiguity which may be felt towards the character is not permitted. With the emphasis on Cemal's friendship with Diyarbakır former Chief of Police, Gaffar Okkan, this feeling is strengthened. In the narrative of the film, Okkan has been the mediator in reconciliation of families and re-establishing the peace after the guerrilla brother of Leyla was killed.

Although he shows up on and off, another character taking an important place in the film is Bozo, former commander of Yusuf and Cemal from the army. Bozo has chosen to stay in the mountains even after his duty in the army ended and comes to dispense justice with his own hands to the ones who 'make an attempt on their country'. As Erdem (2002) stated, Bozo is presented as a real patriot (p. 96). In other words, in the structure of the film based on good-bad contradiction, Bozo is among the absolute good ones as well. To Yusuf who revolts after an extrajudicial execution he made in a scene of the film, he responds saying "ones who eats his bread by betraying their country, someday, eat a bullet from where they eat the bread". At the finale of the film, when Yusuf kills Butcher David with the bazooka on his hand, it is understood that Yusuf finally agreed to Bozo's lesson. Erdem (2002) finds it dangerous that the film legitimizes the violence this much since it turns the violence into a political discourse and an ideology (p. 96). Indeed, both *Deli Yürek: Bumerang Cehennemi* and *Kurtlar Vadisi: Irak* not only legitimize the violence and extrajudicial execution, but also functions to block the way to the dialogue by connecting this attitude directly to patriotism and nationalism.

### **3.1.3. Proper Citizens of a Benevolent Mother**

The year 2007 has importance from the point that cultural and political entity of Kurdish question is recognized. Both the dominant discrimination policy is removed from the Kurdish question repertoire of the state and the most noteworthy steps to recognition policy are taken. Coming to 2009, a state television channel begins to broadcast for 24 hours a day in Kurdish. It is followed by the permission to open Kurdology departments at universities (Yeğen, 2011, p. 39). In the same manner, Turkish Armed Forces renew their position in the same period. Accordingly, Kurds are ceased to be seen as a clan of Turks. Furthermore, PKK is started to be seen not as an organisation which has to be fought to the last member, but as an organization consisting of 'humans' that have to be brought down from mountains (Yeğen, 2011, p. 57). In the same year, among such political and social fights, two new films are released: *Güneşi Gördüm* (2009) and *Nefes: Vatan Sağolsun* (2009). Both films, having the claim to narrate by placing different sides of the question in the centre, draw great interest of the

audience. Such that, seeing the film with force commanders, İlker Başbuğ, Commander of the Turkish Armed Forces of that period, praises *Nefes: Vatan Sağolsun* ("İlker Başbuğ'dan o," 2009). Mahsun Kırmızıgül's second film *Güneşi Gördüm* narrates the efforts of scattered members of a family having to abandon their village in order to hold on to life in İstanbul and Norway. Levent Semerci's first feature-length film, *Nefes: Vatan Sağolsun* focuses on the stories of a captain in charge of a border post and the soldiers under his command on Iraq border in the early the 1990s.

Çelenk (2010) argues that one of the conditions for the low intensity war going on in the southeast of Turkey to have legitimacy before public is that the image of PKK members should be established as a 'bloodthirsty killer'. On the other hand, image control is not limited to PKK guerrillas. Another image strictly controlled is the image of soldiers. For him, what makes this control necessary is to be able to reproduce the 'long live the homeland' motivation as soldier funerals are sent to houses in a war going on for decades. For that reason, soldiers and martyrs have to be erased from the sphere of public representation. Thus, 'the soldier' who is intended to be represented through the image in question goes far from being human to the extent that he is glorified and anonymized. Soldier and/or martyr image circulating in the representation area becomes an image whose potential to disturb the public conscious is reduced to minimum (p. 90). In this context, the films, *Güneşi Gördüm* and *Nefes: Vatan Sağolsun* meet on a common ground that they flout the invisible rule regarding guerrilla and soldier images in popular cinema. However, the so-called differing attitudes of both films cannot go beyond a fantasmic narrative of Kurdish question, having been fictionalized according to changing dominant discourse.

In *Güneşi Gördüm*, guerrilla is represented with the eldest son of Altun family, Serhat. At the beginning of the film, Davut Altun is seen looking at the photograph a military officer on the wall together with his son who lost his leg because of a mine he stepped on. The photograph on the wall belongs to Davut's son in army, Berat. Younger brother wants his other brother, Serhat's photograph to be hung on the wall. When his father says that they cannot do that, Serhat in the photograph is seen as a guerrilla. Serhat, in the only scene he is seen, comes to



the village with a group of guerrillas. At home, he meets his brother, Berat, having come to use his leave of absence. At this point, the film repeats the rhetoric which reduces the Kurdish question to a fratricidal fight both dramatically and stylistically: Davut is taken into frame torn between two sons. The father and the mother plead their child to come back home. Nevertheless, Serhat is determined in his fight which he has got involved for his family as he states. With his own words, he is one of the dead children of a forlorn people. Quickly, he heads for the door. Standing before him, Berat asks what will happen if they come across with each other in a fight in the meantime. Serhat's answer is straight: "If I die, I will be a terrorist; if you die, a martyr". Serhat is killed in an operation carried on after a few days.

*Güneşi Gördüm's* attitude towards Kurdish question is attributed to the motto "do not let mothers cry" which is one of the discursive reference points of the Kurdish Initiative of the Justice and Development Party (AK Party) government. As a matter of fact, at the end of the film, it is said with Ramazan's words that only mothers cry in this country, it is men who wants the war and only mothers can end this fight. For this reason, the attitude of the film to Serhat goes between "the traitor terrorist" and "the child longed for". Although, by the river where Davut and Berat go to diagnose the bodies of terrorists, they see Serhat's body among other dead bodies, they cannot cry. It is because, on the other side, the soldiers died in the operation wait to be taken home with their coffins wrapped up with Turkish flag. The film uses a dramatic trick here: Captain Caner explains that one of the coffins belongs to Corporal Ahmet who Davut and Berat like very much. Spectator is already prepared for this scene from the beginning of the film with the emphasis on Ahmet's baby on the way and his little time to end army duty. Following this information, Davut and Berat start to cry for both Ahmet and Serhat. That way, the pain for the soldier and the guerrilla is tried to be made equal through brotherhood rhetoric. However, the narrative structure of the film does not let a guerrilla's family to cry for him. Serhat's funeral is brought back home in the back of a van. Later in the film, Ramazan names his new-born son after Serhat. As for Davut, he will hang the photographs of both brothers side by side on the wall of their home in Norway. Hence, a humane attitude towards killed

guerrillas maintained over Serhat throughout the film.

In *Güneşi Gördüm*, the representational strategy operated through Serhat reproduces, fictionally, the fantasy of Turkish soldier who is respectful even to the enemy which finds correspondence in the national subject. *Nefes: Vatan Sağolsun*, on the other hand, takes guerrilla-soldier relation into a different dimension. There is the “Doctor” code named guerrilla commander on the enemy line. The story that we are included from Mete’s perspective begins with a PKK attack. In the attack, Orhan, a close friend of the captain, is killed by Doctor and his guerrillas. The film constructs its dramatic structure on Mete’s struggle to revenge for his friend. Mete and his team capturing Doctor’s girlfriend, Gulam, wounded take young woman to the post in order to treat her. During the treatment, Mete makes an obvious torture to the wounded woman lying on the table. This torturing scene, however, is legitimized by the emotional details concerning Orhan’s story are being emphasized. Even so, Çelenk (2010) thinks that it is important that the film keeps its distance from the images like “bloodthirsty killers” in PKK descriptions, which are produced in the popular language of war. Even guerrillas’ dying standing erect without falling on the ground made the nationalist audience uncomfortable (p. 97). In spite of this change in PKK representations, the films do not accord the ‘other’ side the right to speak. Doctor, Gulam or Serhat do not have a story; on the contrary, they are made up of a voice on the wireless, a photograph or a slogan.

The soldier images in *Nefes: Vatan Sağolsun* are significant in terms of their breaking the invisible rule about the soldier image. For Çelenk (2010), what is seen in the film is that the soldiers died in Karabal location in 1993 are fragile, timid, and indecisive mother’s boys who would choose to live if they had chances to choose (p. 93). Though, when this attitude of the film, which can be seen as anti-war, is kept in perspective, it evolves into a militarist language. Yüksel (2013) criticizes this inconsistent structure of the film’s narrative proceeding through the lives of soldiers:

...on the one hand, because of the sense of loss becoming apparent around soldiers’ being wounded and killed, and the love the commander feels for his wife, “long live the homeland” approach which the film puts into words

indecisively expresses a sense of an ideological fatigue; on the other hand, most of the soldiers' being mythologized via being made attained positive morality and exalted bodies, and their being sacrificed, commander's legitimizing his sadism-included actions of the trauma resulted from the loss of his friend, and his being connected rhetorically to the liberation struggle suspend this critical opportunity. (p. 19-20)

With their guerrilla and soldier representations, it is crucial that the films use the strategy that is mentioned above; nonetheless, it does not change the reality that both films are fantasy-scenarios. In *Güneşi Gördüm*, there is a discourse of underdevelopment dominant in the whole film. Because of the state's indifference, Kurds fall behind economically and socially. Ramazan, in the letter he writes to the directress of the orphanage, says that they have always seen the *Devlet Baba*, but *Devlet Ana* must show herself even if just a little. It can be understood from his saying that *Devlet Ana* has cured his wife, *Devlet Ana* is the service to be brought to the region. Herein, the film resembles *Deli Yürek: Bumerang Cehennemi* complaining about the state's not showing *his* smiling face. Captain Caner deplores to his commander by saying "if only the state bestows hand, binds up wounds". Not only Captain Caner but also all the soldiers in the film try to bestow this hand on the villagers. In the opening scene of the film, in the operation carried out aiming PKK caves, soldiers realize and do not shoot Ramazan and his brother who leave the PKK group and run in open terrain. Colonel always behaves fatherly towards the villagers and do not punish the civilians even when he is told that PKK gets help from the village. Though, he 'has to' give two months' time to the villagers who do not listen his advice despite all of his warnings. Still, the village is not evacuated by force. Especially when the historical realities in the 1990s are taken into account, this approach of the film is solely a support for the reality of official discourse.

#### **3.1.4. Beyond Fantasy: Towards Revealing the Real**

In *Eşkiya* and *Vizontele*, just as Kurdish question is disregarded by being skewed through fantasy, Kurdish identity is also disregarded. For example, Cumali and Baran are caught by the police and taken to the police office. During their interrogation in the police office, Cumali tries to explain that they are only looking for a job and they are not terrorists. They are hundred percent Turkish persons

bound to their state and nation. While Cumali is saying all these, the fact that the camera zooms in on him and leaves Baran out of the frame is an interesting detail. When they are released, once more he reproaches for being confused with terrorists. As a result of such denials, Kurdish language cannot find a place for itself in both *Eşkiya* and *Vizontele*. In the scenario written by Yılmaz Erdoğan inspired from his childhood in Hakkari, there is not even a dialogue in Kurdish. It is as if *Eşkiya* and *Vizontele* are cleared of Kurdish language like the mountains' being cleared of bandits. Thus, the emptiness of the impossible desire that national subject has for one-language and one-nation is filled with a fantasy.

Moreover, in 2004, two films by Turgul and Erdoğan are released: *Gönül Yarası* and *Vizontele Tuuba*. Interestingly, both directors include Kurdish language in their films this time. It is also interesting that Kurdish language is represented in both films in the same way: through Kurdish folksongs and as a cultural element. Suner (2006) stands for the idea that this attitude is one of the main characteristics of the popular films of new Turkish cinema:

Many popular films make use of cultural difference as a decorative element. *Vizontele* and *Vizontele Tuuba*, for example, make reference to Kurdish identity in different dimensions (use of proper names, accented language, ethnic music, and costumes, etc.); however, it is never invoked. Therefore, on the one hand cultural difference is included and accepted. On the other hand, it is left only as a facile mention since power relations on the background of cultural difference, social conflicts, and violence are ignored. (p. 101)

Spectator meets Kurdish in a folk song bar in the first one and in an intercity bus in the second. The question then arises: what has changed during the period from the 1990s to 2004? What makes the change possible, as Yeğen (2011) indicates, is Öcalan's being caught and brought to Turkey in 1999, and Turkey's recognition policy applied during the process of EU negotiations. Following this process, one of the actions taken is reduction of limitations on Kurdish language (p. 37). Hence, Kurdish takes place as a folkloric element in popular cultural representations. In *Gönül Yarası* and *Vizontele Tuuba*, Kurdish is started to be represented as a subtle voice, but not as an element regarding identity –parallel to weak recognition policy of the state. Nazım, the protagonist of *Gönül Yarası*, speaks to villagers in Kurdish while saying goodbyes in the opening scene. Kurdish language is

recognized 'officially'. Collective imaginary is reconstructed through another fantasy in accordance with renewed discourse of the state.

All the other popular films within the scope of this study also follows the same representational strategy that Suner (2006) explains above. In all these films, there are only a few scenes in Kurdish. Whereas Yusuf Miroğlu does not speak Kurdish, Polat Alemdar is witnessed to speak Kurdish in two scenes. One of them is while he is 'teaching peshmargas a lesson', the other one is in his conversation with an old Kurd in the courtyard of a mosque. Cemal, also, has a chat with his grandmother in Kurdish. Baskın (2009) states that the language of the people, living in a complete homogenous structure and in places like village and hamlet relatively far from the external hindrances, is ignored (p. 84). Kurdish language having leached into any moment of daily lives of people finds itself a place in only one-two scenes and with only one-two words. Kurdish soldier in *Nefes: Vatan Sağolsun* is shown to speak to his mother in Kurdish. Apart from these, Kurdish takes place as a lament for the dead in these films. As it can be seen, although Kurdish language is more visible in *Kurtlar Vadisi: Irak* and *Deli Yürek: Bumerang Cehennemi* than others, they have similar representational strategies. Though, there is a difference: In *Deli Yürek: Bumerang Cehennemi* American ambassador and the Hezbollah leader, later revealed to be American agent; and in *Kurtlar Vadisi: Irak* the Kurdish collaborators of USA speak Kurdish. In this way, the film makes Kurdish language a part of the conspiracy with full of negative connotations.

Accented use of Turkish, being one of the basic representation strategies of popular films discussed in this part, reveals the ambivalent structure of ideological fantasy. As it is known, accented Turkish is the most distinct feature of 'Kurdish' or 'Easterner' image established in Yeşilçam era of cinema of Turkey. However, changing socio-political circumstances in the 1990s makes it possible for Kurdish language to start to be used in mainstream films of the cinema of Turkey. The use of both Kurdish as a cultural element, and accented Turkish in general not only becomes a part of the fantasmic structure of the films but also becomes a threat to this structure. So indeed, fantasy forms a basis for fictive reality of national subjects; nevertheless, for the very reason, it has the risk to

expose the social realities entailing Kurdish question, which it tries to conceal. Thus, in the films discussed in this study, there are scenes/representations which allow semantic shifts showing the impossibility of ideological fantasies tried to be established. For instance, mentioned above, Nazım the teacher's speaking Kurdish to the villagers both connotes Kurdish being recognized culturally and indicates the failure of a monolingual republic project, each citizen of it speaking Turkish. Besides, the cultural patterns that Suner (2006) mentions, like "use of proper names, accented language, ethnic music, and costumes" are open to be perceived as the part of an ethnic identity by going beyond the ideological lines being drawn for them at any moment (p. 101).

On the other hand, Çelenk (2010) emphasizes that the film *Nefes: Vatan Sağolsun* is important to an extent that it allows anti-militarist semantic overflows in a society who is not willing to call what happens in Southeast Anatolia as a war (p. 97). Concordantly, Köstepen (2009) examines whether *Nefes: Vatan Sağolsun* is more convenient from an anti-militarist film for the soldiers and veterans to be able to talk about their experiences, doubts and fright regarding this war (p. 83). Indeed, all these meaning overflows make the popular films fragile in the political struggle and threaten like a weapon that the dominant ideology aims at itself. It is possible to encounter similar ambivalent examples in every film discussed in this part. These features make popular films, ensuring that dominant ideology is reproduced through fantasies, open to criticisms. As McGowan (2007) states,

Though the fantasmatic dimension of cinema often works in an ideological way, it also has the ability to undermine the functioning of ideology by exposing the traumatic excess that is central to the ideology and that ideology cannot publicly acknowledge. The political valence of fantasy in a film depends on how the film depicts excess: if it uses excess to fill in ideological gaps and pacify the spectator, then it functions as an ideological supplement; but if it allows excess to stand out and distort the spectator's look, then it functions as a challenge to ideology. (p. 38)

### **3.2. Impossible Desires: The Unknown Faces of the Kurdish Other**

According to McGowan (2007), the fantasy, since it produces an imaginary scenario of what can be attained, blinds the subject towards the underlying lack of ideology. On the other hand, the desire gives importance to what cannot be

reached and grows on this. If the subject relies upon the possibility of the object, it means that it implicitly accepts a whole ideological image which has the ability to convey the absolute pleasure. In spite of this, the subject who desires and who realizes the lacking is the determiner of the ideology, makes an idiosyncratic stand against the requests of the ideology. The best thing done by the films, which do not satisfy the desire through fantasy confronting the subject with the impossibility of the desire, is that they offer the opportunity to take pleasure from the lacking itself, and to realize and accept the unremitting nature of the desire (p. 141-142). Since the films enabling the acceptance of the desire sustain the dissatisfaction of the spectator, they cannot gain much popularity (McGowan, 2007, p. 124).

The concept of identity, which is used to indicate the cultural, ethnic or religious differences, is started to be enunciated more often in Turkey with the 1990s. Especially since the 1990s, the identities that are discussed in public sphere because of their differences have been the Kurdish, Alevi, Armenian and Islamist identities (Suner, 2006, p. 23). The becoming of these differences as apparent and open to question reveals itself in the representations of this diversity. Post-1990 is the time when these differences draw attention as the diversity of the themes in cinema do as well. Ulusay (2005) states that, in such a diversity of the themes in the cinema of Turkey, there is the effect of Turkey's membership of Eurimages, which is a council of co-production funded by European Council, in 1990. Thus, it became possible for the directors, who encounter problems in finding the production support in the domestic market, to make story out of social, political and cultural problems, and to include the representations of identities. Thematically, the key issue of the new political films is directly the problematic of belonging and identity. In this sense, the most significant common ground of the new political films is its problematizing the "national belonging" issue in a way which is, probably, as likely as not before in the history of Turkish cinema (Suner, 2006, p. 256-257).

Studied in the previous part and constituted entirely of the popular films drawing a great number of spectators, the fantasmic narratives entailing Kurdish question present fictive objects to the impossible desire of the national subject through

fantasy. In the films to be discussed in this part, on the other hand, national subjects are forced to face the impossibility of their desires. While doing this, the addressees of the problem are obliged to live together in the fictive structure of the narrative. Sometimes ordinary soldiers and guerrillas, and sometimes a captain and a guerrilla commander face off with each other. Whereas sometimes Turks and Kurds belonging to different classes or social statuses struggle to survive in İstanbul, sometimes the struggles for survival in the region are witnessed from the eyes of Turks. In this way, by creating identification areas both for the national subjects and the Kurdish audience, the spectator is made to become a side of the problem. However, as stated above, the reality of the desire is not acceptable for the spectator, and these films do not attract attention. All films which will be discussed in this part are common in having been discussed in the period when they were released, but not drawing as many spectator as their discussion rates. These films are *Işıklar Sönmesin* (Reis Çelik, 1996), *Güneşe Yolculuk* (Yeşim Ustaoglu, 2000), *Fotoğraf* (Kazım Öz, 2001), *Büyük Adam Küçük Aşk* (Handan İpekçi, 2001), *Yazı Tura* (Uğur Yücel, 2004) *İki Dil Bir Bavul* (Özgür Doğan and Orhan Eskiköy, 2009), *Gitmek: Benim Marlon ve Brandom* (Hüseyin Karabey, 2008), *Gelecek Uzun Sürer* (Özcan Alper, 2011)<sup>2</sup>.

### 3.2.1. Inevitable Encounters with a Peaceful Enemy

It is possible to consider a number of political films that can be included in the new cinema of Turkey from the aspect of taking social/historical events as a theme, and of developing a questioning attitude towards the dominant ideology with these events (Suner, 2006, p. 253). In this regard, the year 1996 can be accepted as the beginning of the political wing of the new cinema of Turkey as well as the popular one. Released in order to “give a drop of water to the sorrows

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<sup>2</sup> When compared to the films studied in the previous part, the spectator rates of the films to be discussed in this part seem quite low. *Gitmek: Benim Marlon ve Brandom* with 13,556, *Gelecek Uzun Sürer* with 38,589, *İki Dil Bir Bavul* with 93,708 and *Fotoğraf* with 24,267 spectators are in considerably lower rank in the watched films list. Reaching relatively more spectators when compared to the total number of the spectators going to the cinema, the films *Büyük Adam Küçük Aşk* with 139,450, *Yazı Tura* with 267,225 ve *Güneşe Yolculuk* with 73,324 spectators cannot be even among the top ten films of their release years. At this point, it is possible to mention the film *Işıklar Sönmesin*. Released in 1996, the film with 133,988 spectators gets on the third rank in the year when *Eşkıya* is on the first. For more detailed box office rates, please refer to <http://www.sinematurk.com>.



felt”, Reis Çelik’s film *Işıklar Sönmesin* can be seen as quite a courageous production for the period it is produced and with the theme it deals. The film tells the struggle of a guerrilla commander and of a Turkish army captain to survive after a clash between Kurdish guerrillas and a group of soldiers belonging to Turkish army in the 1990s in the South East. A similar obligatory togetherness is seen in Kazım Öz’s film *Fotoğraf* released in the year 2001. The film focuses on the travel companionship of two young men setting off, on the seats side by side in a bus, in order for one of them to go in the mountain and for the other to go into the army. Both *Işıklar Sönmesin* and *Fotoğraf*, by forcing the armed sides of the low intensity war to be travel companions, enable the spectator to face his/her addressee.

Scripted based on a real story (Kuleli, 2008, p. 65), *Işıklar Sönmesin* starts with the images of villagers going to their village in a bus. The passengers are having a chat in Turkish and Kurdish. In the meanwhile, the road of the bus is blocked by a group of guerrillas. Guerrillas act in a rough manner towards the passengers. The passengers are got out of the bus and searched, and a village guard is identified. At this instant, the guerrilla commander, Seydo, shows up and calls him to account for his fighting against his own people side by side with the state. The inevitable punishment for such a fault is death. The father of the guard appeals for mercy on behalf of his son by saying that his son has been torn between the state and the guerrilla, and he has found no way out but to do this job. Seydo, on the contrary, insists that the guard has waged war against his people and is a traitor. When the young village guard makes use of an opportunity and tries to run away, he is shot to death by the other guerrillas. The film, among the cries of the old father, shows the sadness of the guerrilla commander. However, according to the commander, the end of a Kurd betraying his own people must be a lesson to all the passengers. With this opening, the film introduces the spectator with a guerrilla leader, who is one of the protagonists of the narrative, with a look from the outside.

In the following scene, it is seen that the army Captain Murat, the other protagonist, is ordered to go to the village of the guard who is killed. Throughout the journey to the village, the spectator watches the go-to village from the eyes of

the army captain, Murat. The stylistic strategy functioning here is explicit: The spectator is invited to identify with Captain Murat. The commander and the soldiers coming to the village are welcomed with reverence and enthusiasm. Captain Murat asks after the people, expresses condolence, and ensures them that the state is always with them. The spectator is informed that, through his dialogue with a kid, the captain has a child as well. By this means, the identification is made easier by enabling the spectator to establish rapport with him. After the captain and the village headman have an exchange of ideas with one another on where the group of guerrillas can be caught, he leaves the town with his soldiers.

The film, in these two preliminary scenes, introduces the spectator to two protagonists through whom the narrative continues, and constructs certain oppositions between the characters. Against a stern, frowning and cruel Kurdish guerrilla commander, there is a tender-hearted, cheerful and compassionate Turkish captain. The film profiles a soldier who says “please” even when he asks for the passengers of the vehicle they stopped to show identity cards. After long searches on the snowy mountains, Captain Murat and his soldiers come face to face with the group of guerrillas they go after. From two groups buried under avalanche falling with the impact of the clash having taken place, the only survivors are Murat, Seydo and a wounded woman guerrilla, Zozan. Coming across Seydo and Zozan who proceed on their way to cross the border, Murat takes two guerrillas hostage. The next part of the film continues with the forced travel companionship of Murat and Seydo, representing the two sides of the war. Thus, the film makes two enemies know each other.

The representation of Captain Murat with the emphasis of his humane aspects is also at the forefront during his travel with the guerrillas. When the captain, who has just lost his soldiers in the clash, catch two guerrillas in a cave, he takes them hostage instead of killing them. All the more interesting, to Seydo and Zozan who ask him to kill them, he says that he is not an execution squad and that they will answer for their crimes within jurisdiction. That is because the ‘bandit law’ and the ‘state law’ are not same things. In the following scenes, the tense relationship of Murat and Seydo softens through the fight to keep wounded Zozan alive. Captain Murat, who is impressed from the effort made by Seydo not to let his

friend freeze, takes off his coat and gives it to the guerrilla. In the scene constructed with shot reverse shot, by showing Murat from a low angle and Seydo from a high angle, the emotional superiority of Murat over Seydo is provided. Seydo feels embarrassed with this favour.

In the war narrative it conducts through men, the film casts a connective role to the woman. This approach, as it is expressed with the motto “do not let the mothers cry” which becomes a state discourse after years, is said to conduct the discussion of the question through women. Zozan, conducting two parties to get closer in the coat scene, dies after a little while later. Nevertheless, woman’s duty as a mediator has not ended yet. The grief that Seydo shows with Zozan’s death changes the captain’s perception of the terrorist as someone who knows nothing than ravaging. After Murat watches Seydo digging a grave for Zozan in the snow with bare hands, he helps the guerrilla leader bury the body.

When the war conditions in 1996 in South East are taken into consideration, it seems too naive for the representation of an officer acting in such manners towards a group of ‘terrorists’ who have killed his soldiers. As a matter of fact, as Kuleli (2008) delivers, the director, Reis Çelik, also, admits that “the film does the soldier somewhat handsome”. He states that he made such a choice by considering that such people, also, do military service under those severe conditions. Hence, it became possible for the film to avoid censorship (p. 67). It is apparent that, unavoidable or not, this choice of the director approaches the narrative of the film to fantasy. In 1996, a guerrilla and an army officer, almost in a civilised way, sit and discuss about the Kurdish question. Moreover, the didactic language of the film reaches to peak in the final scene.

In the film finale, the guerrilla and the officer come across again among the ruins of a ravaged village. Two men, who begin grappling in one of the desolated houses of the village, are stopped by Haydar Ağa, one of the old ones of the village, threatening them with a gun. Haydar Ağa has rejected to leave the village having been evacuated. At this point, the film resorts to an intensive symbolism. Two armed parties of the war are like in a symbolic court before Kurdish people. Haydar Ağa silencing both parties refers to the rhetoric, which is also repeated by

the state all the time, saying the problems cannot be solved with weapons. In the war of the armed ones, it is the people who suffers. At this instant, in such a way increasing the fantasmic narrative of the scene, Haydar Ağa's granddaughter, Dilan, shows up. Both Haydar Ağa and Dilan are like they are coming straight out of a dream. The smile, appeared on the faces of the guerrilla and the soldier with Dilan's coming up, causes them both forget about their fight for a moment. Little Dilan brings two sides together on the same statement, although being symbolic, regarding her father's coming back. Woman's function as a mediator in the narrative of the film still continues. In the last frame, Murat and Seydo, holding the girl from both hands and carrying her, carry the hope and the future symbolized by a girl.

When compared to the fantasmic narrative of *Işıklar Sönmesin*, *Fotoğraf* presents a more realistic attitude in its representations of guerrilla and soldier. The film provides this attitude by taking them away from their political identities and official/unofficial uniforms. Ali, who is on his way to Diyarbakır in order to join the guerrilla, and Faruk, who heads for Tunceli to join his military unit, travel in the same bus sitting on the seats side by side. Due to the conditions at that time, both of them have to conceal where they are going and on which purpose they are going there. Therefore, the film removes the possible prejudices of the both sides fighting. Whereas *Işıklar Sönmesin* is the story of *the guerrilla* Seydo and *the soldier* Murat, *Fotoğraf* is the story of Faruk and Ali only. This situation goes on until the end of the film. The spectator, as well, witnesses the dialogues of two young men without knowing their travel purposes like the characters do not. Faruk and Ali become friends in a short time with ordinary dialogues happening frequently on long travels. These dialogues are as realistic as that they cannot be compared to the long and didactic ones of *Işıklar Sönmesin*. Both of the young men wonder excitedly about their destinations which they will see for the first time in their lives. They talk about love and women, watch the news of a military operation in the service area in silence, or sleep on each other's shoulders on the bus. That is to say, on the surface, there is no reason to bring these two young men in that photo frame in the final scene. When they say goodbye to each other in a bus station, Ali realizes that he has Faruk's lighter.

In the following part of the film, while Ali is waiting in Diyarbakır for the day to be brought to the mountain, Faruk is getting military training. At this point, the film, with the metaphor of a factory, emphasizes that young men joining to army are standardised and militarised. The scene is constructed also stylistically to support this narration. Made to take their clothes in single file and going through several examinations, a group of young men go into a military building and the camera is slid slowly by giving the impression that as if they followed a production line. This feeling is strengthened by the sounds of the hammer coming from inside. When they get out of the building, they drill with sexist marches. Until this point, the film, which is seen to treat Faruk and Ali equally, does not treat the soldier Faruk and the guerrilla Ali in the same way. While the soldier Faruk's conversations are not included, Ali's chats with his friends are heard. The narrative is constructed so as not to allow for any criticism towards the organization through Ali.

Ali and friends are killed as they go up the mountain as a result of an operation carried out by a group of soldiers including Faruk. In the scene after the operation, the conversations of the soldiers are heard, accompanied by the properties of guerrillas scattered on the snow. From the conversations, it is understood that the soldiers have a souvenir photo taken. At that moment, Faruk sees the lighter shining on the snow. He understands that there is also Ali among the guerrillas they killed. What makes it possible for Faruk to understand that the lighter is his is a section from Ludwig van Beethoven's famous composition "Ode to Joy" playing when the lighters lid is opened. As it is known, this composition which is the last section of Beethoven's 9<sup>th</sup> Symphony is identified with peace and brotherhood. The fact that the composition plays when a souvenir photo is taken is an obvious irony regarding the impossibility of the peace under these conditions. Peace and brotherhood are unable to go beyond the discourse level under such cruel conditions of the war. Thus, when Faruk listens to the melody and realizes that Ali is also among the ones killed, he throws the lighter on the snow.

As in *Fotoğraf*, it is possible to see a similar soldier-guerrilla confrontation in Uğur Yücel's film *Yazı Tura* released in 2004. *Yazı Tura* tells the story of Rıdvan

and Cevher having fought in South East together, and their efforts to go back to their previous lives and to accommodate themselves. The spectator sees the story of Rıdvan in the first half of the film resembling *Fotoğraf*. The young man kills a guerrilla that he encounters during a night operation. When the dead bodies of guerrillas are searched, Rıdvan's photo is found on the guerrilla he has killed. Rıdvan, realizing that the guerrilla he has killed is his high school love Elif, begins to run losing control of himself. As a result of the explosion of a mine that he stepped on, Rıdvan loses one of his legs. Güler (2004) states that the friend or foe contradiction, through which the state constructs its own power, is reversed. The fact that Rıdvan kills his love supposing she is the enemy reflects the artificiality of this contradiction and that war wearies do not have a side (p. 90). After coming home, the desperation that he sinks into drives Rıdvan suicide. From this aspect, the film, in Türker's words (2004), is the narrative of the impossibility of returning from the army. When it is read together with *Fotoğraf*, it can be predicted that Faruk who will come back from the war will share Rıdvan or Cevher's destiny.

With this traumatic confrontation scene, *Fotoğraf* strengthens its critique of the official discourse, which it constructs as a metanarrative, with a similar irony in the opening scene. In this prologue, the images of *Zafer Anıtı* in Afyon province of Turkey accompanied by the 10<sup>th</sup> Year March are seen. However, being the most distinct signifiers of the republic, this march is presented in these images with subtitles in Kurdish. On the base of the memorial, there are bronze statues of two naked men. Of the statues, the standing one represents the Turk who tramples on the enemy, and the one who is trampled on represents the enemies occupying Turkey. The standing statue is likened to Mustafa Kemal Atatürk with both the similarity of the faces and the role it signifies ("Zafer (utku) anıtı, n.d."). Kurdish subtitles of 10<sup>th</sup> Year March, mounted on the image of a monument having such a symbolic significance, can be read as a visual allusion to the discourse of the founding ideology, ignoring Kurds. As Çiftçi (2009) states, the notice of nonexistence and declaration of existence of Kurds overlapped in the same frame (p. 269).

Being outside the storyline which manages to remain realistic although it slips

into a metaphoric narrative, the final scene is constructed as a fantasmic narrative. The scene visually completes the criticism of the film regarding that the Kurdish question is in a deadlock in the current situation. A postman sees that there is nobody in the house where he comes to leave a letter. One of the children –named as Savaş<sup>3</sup>– playing blind man’s bluff gets the mail from the postman understanding that it is for his mother. When he opens the envelope, what he sees is a series of photos taken after a military operation. Together with the friends, he looks at each photo. When it comes to the last one, there seen the soldiers who pose for the camera around a guerrilla’s dead body –probably Ali’s– abandoned naked. As the last photo seen, the filmic time stops instantly. Only the child blindfolded is on the move among her friends standing still. Whereas the national subject as spectator faces the reality of the war by looking at the photo with the children standing still, the state denying to see Kurds sways from side to side without knowing what to do.

### 3.2.2. Recusant Children of a Surviving Language

When looked at the films both *Işıklar Sönmesin* and *Fotoğraf*, it is immediately noticed that child characters play an important role in the dramatic structure of the narrative. While Dilan in *Işıklar Sönmesin* refers to the hope for future in the Kurdish question, Savaş in *Fotoğraf* does not give much hope for the peace. When the historical process in the Kurdish question is examined, it is seen that some discursive strategies function through children. It is possible to see one of the closest examples of this in the mobilization in education started for children in the cities of South East recently. Yeğen (2006) points out the campaigns put into practice especially for the girls and in the Kurdish cities or in the districts where Kurdish people live mostly. The major ones are the campaigns “Baba Beni Okula Gönder” (Daddy, Send me to School), “Haydi Kızlar Okula!” (Let’s Go to School, Girls!) and “Okul Öncesi Eğitim” (Early Childhood Education). For him, this attitude is the indicator of the desire of Republic to continue assimilating Kurds, this time by mobilizing the ‘civil society’. In this sense, two films released in the 2000s are noteworthy in terms of structuring their narratives by putting Kurdish

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<sup>3</sup> It means “war” in Turkish.

children that are tried to be educated in the centre. These are Handan İpekçi's film *Büyük Adam Küçük Aşk*, released in 2001, and Orhan Eskiköy and Özgür Doğan's coproduction *İki Dil Bir Bavul*, released in 2009. While the former tells of the relationship of a retired judge and a Kurdish child, the latter focuses on a year of a young men appointed to the South East as a teacher. Both of the films provide the spectator with the opportunity to meet a different dimension of the question by confronting adult Turks and Kurdish children.

Hejar, whose parents were murdered by Gendarmerie Intelligence and Anti-Terror Unit (*JİTEM*), is left to home of a young lawyer by a relative. With the police raid carried on for two organization members that the lawyer hides in the house, everybody except little girl is killed. Running away during the raid, Hejar takes refuge in the next door, Rıfat Bey's home. Following this, Hejar begins to live in his home. However, there is an important problem: Kurdish girl Hejar does not know even a word in Turkish. Rıfat Bey, on the other hand, is a retired judge who is tight-knit to the Republican values. From this point on, as Çiftçi (2007) suggests, the characters in the film and their conflicts come to be read as a national allegory. As Rıfat Bey represents the state with his age, job and mentality, Hejar represents the Kurdish people who are tried to be 'coped with' (p. 44). Rıfat Bey tries to establish his authority on Hejar by banning her from speaking Kurdish. Nevertheless, Hejar does not consent to be assimilated. When Rıfat Bey tries to teach her Turkish and yells at her any time she speaks Kurdish, Hejar responds him in Kurdish insistently. The old man, after a while, has to make compromises on the language issue. Sakine who comes to clean his house is Kurdish as well, and when the little girl starts to shout, Sakine does the translations between them; however, just as much as Rıfat Bey requires. Alluding to the state within this period, Rıfat Bey uses diversified strategies to teach Hejar Turkish. As Çiftçi (2007) states, he aims to give sometimes a rewarding education which teaches the Turkish names of the clothes that he gives her as a present, sometimes a threatening education which informs her that he will give her away to the police if she does not speak Turkish (p. 45).

Not admitting to speak Turkish, to have her plaits cut, or to submit herself, Hejar forces Rıfat Bey come to terms. The spectator witnesses each moment of the



significant change in Rıfat Bey. The old man, who even bans Kurdish to be spoken at first, comes to say “don’t cry” in Kurdish language to the little girl crying. Throughout the film, the language problem, which is the biggest source of the conflict between Hejar and Rıfat Bey, ends up the authority’s partial recognition of the language. Alam (2001) thinks that the suddenness of the change in the retired judge weakens the message aimed to be given by the film (p. 101). On the contrary, Çiftçi (2007) argues that this change is significant from the aspect that the conflict which continues via the language between two sides shifts from a monologue to a dialogue (p. 45). Indeed, it is possible to read the film as a foresight as regards to, as Yeğen (2012) states regarding the first half of the 2000s, the loosening of the repression policy towards Kurdish language in the state discourse (p.37).

Çiftçi (2007) draws an analogy between Rıfat Bey from *Büyük Adam Küçük Aşk* and the teacher Nazım from *Gönül Yarası*. As stated in the previous part, Nazım is an idealist teacher who sees the education as the keystone of the Republic. The democratic identities of both Rıfat Bey and Nazım are especially highlighted. For example, in the first scene where Rıfat Bey is seen, the name of the book he holds is “Devlet ve Demokrasi (State and Democracy)”. Nazım is, also, seen as reading from the writers like Uğur Mumcu, Yaşar Kemal and Adalet Ağaoğlu. What makes two films common is the criticism they bring to the dominant narrative of the state by showing that the discourses of a retired teacher and a retired judge are collapsed. Nazım advises his Kurdish students, to whom he says goodbye at the very beginning of the film, to continue their education no matter what happens. It is in their power. With the same attitude, towards the end of the film, when he says Dünya that she must not tell a tale of desperation and everything is in one’s power, he receives a respond shaking the meaning of the advice he has given to Kurdish children. Dünya summarizes her life beginning from the point that she was raped, and she says him by shouting that everything is not in one’s power, and that the teacher, in fact, must not tell tales. Thus, a Republic tale ends not with a happy ending of the authority but with the tragic ending of the conditions (p. 44-45).

Similarly, what ruins the Republic narrative constructed through language by

Rıfat Bey is that the 'other Turkey' view he has to face when he steps outside to bring Hejar to her relatives. Along the way, Rıfat Bey 'discovers' what he has ignored for so many years. As Çiftçi (2007) puts forward, it is not necessary to go to Kurdish cities to experience the war, or it is not necessary to travel far places to see the meaning of being a Kurd in this country, either (p. 46). This travel becomes an opportunity of recognition for the national subjects who identify with Rıfat Bey as the defender of the republican values from the beginning of the film. Although, by this way, the film slightly opens the door to dialogue in the Kurdish question, the metaphorical structure of the narrative which is constructed as a "story of finding the true path" approximates the film to fantasy and shakes its realness as it is the case in *Işıklar Sönmesin*. On this theme, for a more realistic narrative to be released, it will take some more time. In *İki Dil Bir Bavul*, released in 2009, the spectator witnesses the one-year efforts of a teacher who is in charge of teaching Turkish to Kurdish children in a Kurdish village.

As a matter of fact, it is not for the first time for the cinema of Turkey to come across the 'educator' character who tries to teach Turkish to Kurdish children in *İki Dil Bir Bavul*. Long before the teacher Nazım who learns Kurdish in the Kurdish village he works in *Gönül Yarası*, Erden Kıral's film *Hakkâri'de Bir Mevsim* (1983) centres upon a similar story. An unnamed teacher relegated to a village of Hakkâri with the duty to teach Kurdish children how to read and write –surely in Turkish. In the film where Kurdish is represented only by whispers due to the political conditions, the teacher character is depicted as an intellectual who faces the social truths and the Kurdish reality. However, *İki Dil Bir Bavul* differs from *Gönül Yarası*, *Hakkâri'de Bir Mevsim* and even *Büyük Adam Küçük Aşk* at two points. Firstly, Nazım and Rıfat Bey are the idealist characters who are at an advanced age, and who have no room for doubt about the values they believe in. Nevertheless, the teacher of *İki Dil Bir Bavul* is young, inexperienced and full of hesitations. On that sense, the film is as though it brings the realistic transformations that it makes in the representations of soldiers in *Nefes: Vatan Sağolsun* to the representations of teachers in the cinema of Turkey. Secondly, *İki Dil Bir Bavul* constitutes the relationship of teacher with the children taking the language problem into the centre, unlike the other two films. From this aspect, it

can be stated that the film turns the language into an identity problem.

*İki Dil Bir Bavul* begins with the image of a suitcase loaded on a van. The teacher Emre from Denizli is on his way to Demirci Village of Siverek, Şanlıurfa. When he arrives to the village, he is welcomed by the villagers, places his luggage in his house next to the school, and checks the classrooms. The inadequacy of the physical conditions is obvious. As he complains to his mother on the phone, he knew that he was going to arrive a village, but he has not even imagined anything like this. When the villagers come to him, he tells them about his surprise. He comes to the East for the first time in his life, has grown up in the West, and is used to have everything at his fingertips. On the other hand, the situation is relatively different for the children in the village. Since no student shows up on the first day of the school, the teacher Emre starts to go around the houses one by one. Most of the children have gone to help their families by working in the fields. In the meanwhile, it does not escape from the eyes that Emre can communicate with some of his prospective students only with the help of the translations of the adults in the village.

For the teacher Emre who faces the difficulties of physical conditions, the main face-off is the one with Kurdish language. When he gathers all his students and starts the first lesson, it is seen that the number of the students that he can communicate can be counted on the fingers of one hand. The challenge of the duty given him by the state is obvious: He has to teach how to speak and write in Turkish first and then the other subjects to a class full of students with whom he does not even speak the same language. Thus, the first rule he sets up is that he bans the use of Kurdish in the classroom. The challenge of the situation for the children is also obvious: They have to learn and say everything they know in a language which does not touch their lives. From the moment they go out of the door of the classroom where their teacher forces them to speak Turkish, they have Kurdish in every area of their lives. As Aktan (2009) states, children have social studies and maths of their own; however, when that “suitcase” is open, all the knowledge they have acquired from their experiences repeated time after time in the tough conditions of the village life flies away. The children come to “know nothing”. From that time on, they say watermelon for bird, ear for nose,

and bread for mint (p. 87).

Under these circumstances, it does not take long for the teacher Emre to give in to despair as regards that the children are able to learn nothing at all. He talks on the phone with his mother about that his sole purpose is to teach Turkish very well. He will leave the other subjects for the next year. He complains to the parents about their children's speaking Kurdish all the time: he says "They do not understand my language". Nevertheless, as a parent that he visited says to the teacher Emre, Turkish is a foreign language for 'them'. That is why, the children are able to finish the fifth grade by only having learned Turkish. The teacher Emre does not give up; after a while, he begins to punish the children speaking Kurdish in the class, gets angry for the things they write on the Turkish book and yells at them. Besides that, opposite to the joke of one of the parents about him learning a foreign language there, the teacher Emre has no intention to learn much about Kurdish. Because of the language gap, the teacher Emre cannot communicate with the children and gets lonely at school. Lesson break scenes focus on the teacher who sits alone among the children playing in Kurdish, without being able to communicate with them.

Notwithstanding, even in all this desperation, he does not fail to reproduce the discursive practices of the official ideology and to abide faithfully to them. For example, one of the first things he teaches to the students is the "Student Oath". As it is known, in the statements of the oath which the students are made to take for eighty years until the year 2013 when it is abolished, an emphasis on and a praise to Turkishness are at the forefront. Moreover, the oath ends with the statement that the students dedicate their existence to the Turkish existence. The teacher Emre writes the oath on the board –the part "How happy is the one who says 'I am Turkish!'" is written in capitals- and asks all of the students to memorize it. Every day before going into the school, the children start to say the oath that they have memorized incompletely and probably do not know the meaning. Besides, the celebrations for the national days are not neglected. For the April 23 National Sovereignty and Children's Day, the classrooms are decorated with balloons and flags. The teacher Emre makes a short speech to his students, gathered in the garden, about the meaning of the April 23: Turks/Turkish nation

celebrates the April 23 as a national holiday and the children should appreciate living in Turkey. Nonetheless, all the efforts made through such ideological practices will remain inconclusive. While the teacher Emre leaves the village with his suitcase after a year having passed among language tensions, the children go back to their daily lives elsewhere accompanied by their conversations in fluent Kurdish.

One of the directors of the film, Özgür Doğan informs that they have not interfered any characters in no circumstances. Emre Aydın is really an inexperienced teacher having only just graduated from the university and been appointed to Demirci village. Two directors find the young teacher devastated and feeling disappointment due to being appointed to such a place, in the garden of the teacher's lodge (Çiftçi, 2009). Thereafter, the only thing the directors do is to record an academic year of this young teacher and to mount it as a film. As it is, the film can be classified from the aspect of narrative style, as Baskin (2009) states, neither exactly as an observational documentary, nor as a fiction in its common meaning. Rather, it presents a counter-fiction to the ideological narrative of the republic as a fiction entailing Kurdish question (p. 83). Choosing the rural area as its background, this counter-fiction reveals the artificiality, insincerity or briefly 'fictionality' of the activities performed by the educator of the official ideology in the school of Demirci village. As Yeğen (2009) puts forward, it is a sum of practices which makes the ones looking from outside say "there is a problem here". *İki Dil Bir Bavul* makes visible the impossibility of the ideological fantasy constructed through language about the Kurdish other, of the Kurds having been assimilated as the object of desire of the national subject, or, in Yeğen's (2009) words, of the dreams of the Republic to capture the rural area.

### **3.2.3. Beyond Desire: Towards Becoming the Other**

With the representation strategies they follow, the political films studied insofar make the national subject the addressee of the Kurdish other and call him/her to face the social reality of the Kurdish question. Invited to identify with the Captain Murat in *Işıklar Sönmesin*, the soldier Faruk in *Fotoğraf*, the veteran Rıdvan in *Yazı Tura*, the spectator finds the opportunity to recognize the 'other' side of the

war through the guerrilla characters like Seydo, Ali and Elif who are emphasized with their humane aspects. On the other hand, constructed as an allegory of the Republic of Turkey, the narrative structure of *Büyük Adam Küçük Aşk* enables the national subject identify with Rifat Bey as a Republican intellectual. With the help of the relationship of Rifat Bey with Hejar, the spectator witnesses the assimilationist policy of the Republic applies on the Kurdish question. Beside these, by showing the practices of this policy in a village school in a documentary realism, *İki Dil Bir Bavul* reveals the language issue of which existence is denied by the national subject.

Indeed, looking at all the films closely, it is apparent that social realities, which are treated as if they have not existed for years by the national subject with a cynical attitude, are made visible. This situation shows parallelism with the definition of cynical subject mentioned by Zizek, in other words, although the spectators actually know quite well what has happened entailing Kurdish question, they behave as if they knew nothing about it. Within this context, the political films studied thus far cannot go beyond confronting the addressees of the problem with each other. As a matter of fact, except the sudden change of Rifat Bey on a level that weakens the realism of the film, no transformation can be observed on the views the Turkish characters on the problem at the end of these films. At this point, Yeşim Ustaoglu's film *Güneşe Yolculuk* released in 2000 has a distinct position in the political wing of the new cinema of Turkey. The film, as it is the common point of the films studied in this part, brings a Turkish and a Kurdish character together, and gives the spectator opportunity to face the problem and the addressees of the problem. More significantly, with the journey it makes the Turkish character set out, the film invites the national subject having faced the problem to an identity transformation.

Suner (2006) states that, as its name implies, *Güneşe Yolculuk* is a film based completely on the idea of journey (p.267). This situation is a thematic similarity that can be seen in most films in the political wing of the new cinema of Turkey. It is possible to see this thematic similarity in the political films studied previously. As stories of journey, *Işıklar Sönmesin*, *Fotoğraf* and *İki Dil Bir Bavul* have their protagonists set out a partially inner, but substantially spatial

journeys. In *Büyük Adam Küçük Aşk*, on the other hand, the journey of Rifat Bey is more of an inner one. Nevertheless, the journey in the meaning that Suner (2006) mentions here is a kind of journey which the characters set out as a result of personal losses or social traumas as it is in the films *Çamur* (Derviş Zaim, 2003), *Yazı Tura* or *Bulutları Beklerken* (Yeşim Ustaoglu, 2005) (p. 282-283). In this sense, when the productions about the Kurdish question in the second half of the 2000s are examined, it is possible to come across films matching this description. Hüseyin Karabey's film *Gitmek: Benim Marlon ve Brandom* and Özcan Alper's film *Gelecek Uzun Sürer* can be given as examples for these kind of films.

*Gitmek: Benim Marlon ve Brandom* tells the love story of Ayça from İstanbul and İraqi Kurdish Hama Ali who meet at a film set. After the outbreak of war in İraq, Hama Ali cannot go back to Turkey, two lovers can barely get into touch even on the phone. Thereupon, Ayça sets out a long journey to reach Hama Ali. Throughout the film, the things happened in Kurdish regions of Turkey, İnan and İraq are witnessed on the background together with Ayça. As for *Gelecek Uzun Sürer*, it begins with a journey. The film is the story of Sumru going to Diyarbakır for a musical research. As part of the research, an oral history study is carried out with the Kurds who has lost and never heard of their relatives in the 1990s. With Sumru, the spectator finds the chance to listen at first hand to what the relatives of the missing persons have gone through. On the other hand, what Sumru really looks for is the fate of her lover Harun who has joined the guerrilla three years before. In both films, not only are the losses women's, but also the narratives are constructed through women. Nevertheless, as Özyılmaz (2008) argues, it is not concerned enough in the film whether Ayça after her journey to the East is different from Ayça at the beginning of the film (p. 90-91). A similar criticism can be made for *Gelecek Uzun Sürer*. Both films do not allow much for internal feuds, the maturation of the characters, or the transformation of the spatial journey to an inner journey.

As for *Güneşe Yolculuk*, the case is different. The film tells the story of Mehmet and Berzan who meet and become friends in İstanbul. Mehmet is a young men from Tire working in a team in İstanbul Water and Sewerage Administration (*İSKİ*) for locating the water leaks on the pipes. Although he is a Turk from Aegean Region,

he is subjected to the questions about his being from Eastern part since he is dark-skinned. Berzan is a Kurdish young man who is a street hawker selling music cassettes. He has immigrated to İstanbul from Zorduç village of Şanlıurfa on the event that his father has been taken away by the soldiers raiding their home one night and has never come back. One night, a crowd celebrating after a national match assaults a driver, who does not make way for them, by insulting him as "Are you a Kurd?". Berzan passing by goes towards the car to save the driver. At the same time, Mehmet also goes to help the driver. Two young men running away from the anger of the crowd having turned towards them become friends in no time at all. Mehmet dreams to marry with his lover Arzu. Berzan tells that his biggest dream is to go back to his village and to come together with his fiancé Şirvan waiting for him. However, after a while, he is killed by a gendarme in the events of a demonstration of prisoners' relatives. The sole purpose of Mehmet from now on is to bring the body of his friend back to Zorduç that Berzan has been dreaming of. For Mehmet, this process transforms into an inner journey as well as a spatial one.

According to Suner (2006), *Güneşe Yolculuk* is a film which tell its story not through identity but through identity shifting. The character at the centre of the story is not Kurdish, but a Turk from Aegean Region who is assumed to be Kurdish because of his appearance (p. 271). Mehmet is mistaken for a Kurd constantly in İstanbul where he has come only a few months before. Berzan, also, does not believe this, learning soon after they have met that he is from Tire. One of the turning points in Mehmet's life also takes place as a consequence of these presumptions. The minibus having Mehmet in is stopped by the police one night. The passengers are got out of the bus and the minibus is searched. On Mehmet's seat, a gun in a bag has been found. Actually, the one who leaves that gun is another passenger who has sit beside Mehmet for a little while and has got out of the minibus. Nevertheless, when the police officer asks who the owner of this bag is, all eyes turn on Mehmet. Mehmet having been brought to the police station is interrogated and taken into custody there. The police who seems not to believe Mehmet's being from Tire thinks that he is an organization member.

It is understood from the wounds and the bruises on Mehmet's face after he is



released after a while later that he has been tortured during his stay in custody. When he turns back to the bachelor pad where he stays with his friends, he is not wanted anymore by the dwellers since they find him dangerous. He has lost his job, either. He tells Arzu that the police officer has not believed him to be from Tire in no way when he is in custody. With the combination of the facts that Mehmet from Tire is mistaken to be Kurdish just because he is dark-skinned and that he is taken into custody as a result of a misunderstanding, the othering of him becomes inevitable. Identity shifting as a representation strategy that the film appeals, as Suner (2006) states, shifts the focus of the political discussion put forth by the film from its essentialist and absolute identity definition to an understanding that perceives the identity as more of a social, historical and discursive establishment. That is to say, the concern of the film discusses what it is like to be placed as a Kurd in Turkey of the 1990s (p. 271). By this means, it gives the spectator the opportunity to experience the othering which the Kurdish other is exposed to as well as to face this other. The young man left homeless finds Berzan and begins to stay with him. However, the sudden death of his Kurdish friend becomes a turning point in Mehmet's life.

As a matter of fact, *Güneşe Yolculuk* takes the spectator to this turning point in the opening scene. The scene opens with some blurry images which cannot be distinguished as real or dream. As the camera moves and widens its angle, images are reflected upside down from a small body of water. A man is seen to place a coffin on the back of a van. As the angle widens, the house is seen to be a shanty house. The surrounding shanties are now seen clearly. The man goes into the house again, brings the lid of the coffin and puts it onto the coffin. Turning to the same scene at the middle of the film, it is found out that the man is Mehmet and the one in the coffin is Berzan. Mehmet has decided to take his deceased friend home with a van he stole. Zorlu journey of Mehmet constitutes the last phase of the character's identity journey.

Receiving the news of Berzan's death, Mehmet and Arzu go to morgue to take the body. It is remarkable that Mehmet dyes his hair yellow blonde before he goes to the morgue with a can of spray paint he has found in the trash. Suner (2006) argues that the meaning of this behaviour is not only to conceal the difference but

also to make it clear. What Mehmet aims to do is like capturing his appearance which functions despite and against himself, making a claim on his “blackness” and offending the eyes with his “blackness” (p. 271-272). For Robins and Aksoy (2000), this attitude of Mehmet can be read as a last and hopeless effort to be able to be an ordinary Turk (p. 205). Hence, at the gas station, when he comes across with a police officer who asks Mehmet to drop him out in the closest town, he is *still* from Tire. Along the road, seeing the families who are immigrating to İstanbul, children who try to smuggle newspapers to the city and devastated villages, Mehmet turns his hair to its natural black colour in a hotel room from the window of which he watched the tanks blocking the roads. It is understood from now on that “whatever his efforts, he is rejected and abused by the state and the people to which he thought he had the right to belong” (Robins and Aksoy, 2000, p. 205).

The last signs regarding Mehmet’s identity transformation are seen on the scene where he takes the train when his van gets broken. The dialogue which Mehmet has with the young man coming to his compartment is the evidence that Mehmet is not old Mehmet anymore. The young man sitting across him asks Mehmet where he is going. With answer “Zorduç”, he wonders whether Mehmet is from there. Mehmet nods his head meaning “yes”. The young man, on the other hand, is from Tire, what about Mehmet, has he heard of Tire before? “Yes, a friend of mine was from Tire. Mehmet Kara” answers Mehmet. It is obvious that Mehmet has left his identity behind. After he gets off the train, he takes the coffin to Zorduç on the back of a carriage. As soon as he arrives the village, he sees that the village is under water. Mehmet leaves the coffin to the water of Zorduç. As the director Yeşim Ustaoglu states, when Mehmet leaves Berzan’s coffin to the water and says goodbye to him, the spectator is face to face with a different Mehmet (Baydar, 1999).

As Robins and Aksoy (2000) suggests, *Güneşe Yolculuk* is “about being a Turk” (p. 204). For them, it is “a film about releasing oneself from being a Turk (a post-national and counter-national film). It poses the question that a national community (and cinema) can never pose: the question of change and the conditions of possibility for change” (p. 205). In this sense, the film, different from

the previous ones, does not open a clear space for the spectator to identify with the Turkish or the Kurdish characters. Mehmet seems like a Kurd as much as a Turk. Throughout the film, the spectator also shares Mehmet's doubts regarding his being a Turk. Along the identity journey of Mehmet, an area of experience opens for the spectator as well about what it means to be a Kurd in the 1990s. Thus, the film offers the national subjects as a spectator the opportunities not to witness only what the Kurdish others has gone through as it is the case in the previous films, but to be the other themselves.

### **3.3. Return of the Oppressed: Facing the Nineties of the Kurdish Question**

In her book *Türk Sinemasında Tarih ve Bellek*, Senem Duruel Erkök (2014) states that memory in cinema the 1990s onwards begins to become prominent mostly in the context of minority memories and identity (p. 73). Parallel to social, political, economic and cultural changes seen both in the world and in Turkey, clear-cut transitions in handling of historical issues are also noticeable. Approaching the new millennium, reckoning with the past and the history begins to come up in a different dimension. It can be said that reckoning with the past, in its broadest sense, is formed around the issues such as non-Muslim minorities, Kurdish identity, Islam, and religion in the post-1990s cinema of Turkey. Coming to the 2000s, the increase in the making of film on non-Muslim minorities and Kurdish identity continues without slowing down (Duruel Erkök, 2014, p. 123-124). The 'past' in the post-2000s cinema of Turkey is dealt with –probably more than ever before– in the context of remembering, reckoning through identity, homecoming, recording the past, and recalling the past recordings, and always in relation to the present. Films head towards personal and collective memory by overflowing the frame of a historical narrative. These productions, in relation to the changing political atmosphere in Turkey, tend to face the things that could not been stated before, that are forgotten and repressed. In a way, various films in the cinema of the new era try to constitute an area of resistance (Duruel Erkök, 2014, p. 168).

In this manner, in the post-2000s cinema of Turkey, it is possible to state that documentary cinema plays a principal role in reckoning with the late history and

with the past. It cannot be overlooked that there is a significant increase in the number of documentary productions in which the traces of the collective traumas can be found. The basic tendency in these films is the enunciation and examination of the collective traumas experienced mainly in the late history, and the formation of a past narrative through witnessings by using the method of oral history. The documentary productions like *Ayrılığın Yurdu Hüzün* (Enis Rıza, 2001), *Yeni Bir Yurt Edinmek* (Enis Rıza, 2006), *Nahide'nin Türküsü* (Berke Baş, 2008), *Devrimci Gençlik Köprüsü* (Bahriye Kabadayı, 2007), *Diyarbakır: 5'nolu Cezaevi* (Çayan Demirel, 2009), *İki Tutam Saç: Dersim'in Kayıp Kızları* (Nezahat Gündoğan & Kazım Gündoğan, 2010), *Oğlunuz Erdal* (Tunç Erenkuş, 2010), *Geçmiş Mazi Olmadı* (Mehmet Özgür Candan, 2011), *Annem Barış İstiyor* (Aziz Çapkurt, 2011) are the notable examples in this context (Duruel Erkılıç, 2014, p. 181). Being called as nostalgia film or new political film, being an example of documentary, popular or independent cinema, the productions expanding the borders of the history since the 2000s constitute the mother lode of the new cinema of Turkey. Putting forward the witnessing and documenting function of the fiction, these films establish a cinema of memory which reveal the traumas and the repressed, take a fresh look at the collective past with the help of these rememberings, and thus reconstruct the history in a different context (Duruel Erkılıç, 2014, p. 169).

*Bahoz* (Kazım Öz, 2008), *Min Dît* (Miraz Bezar, 2010) and *Press* (Sedat Yılmaz, 2011), which will be discussed in this part, constitute three most significant examples of narrative following this strategy. These films, like the productions discussed before, form a part of the political wing of the new cinema of Turkey; however, they differ from the ones before in particular points. First of all, it is possible to see all three films as the historical narratives regarding the first half of the 1990s which is a period being the bloodiest (Yeğen, 2012, p. 36) and not being shed light on completely even today. All three films turning the camera on the recent past are in a reckoning with the state as the primary interlocutor of the problem and with the official actors of the period. Secondly, all three films try to look at the dark period mentioned above through certain social identities. *Bahoz* and *Press* focus respectively on what it means to be a Kurdish university student

in İstanbul of the 1990s and to be a dissident journalist in Diyarbakır in the same period. *Min Dît*, on the other hand, makes the spectators face the difficulties of being a child among all the political and social chaos of the period. Thirdly and lastly, these films can be read as transformation, growth and maturation stories being parallel to the political films studied in the previous part. Nevertheless, different from the productions in the previous part, this time the characters who transform, grow and mature are the Kurds. From this aspect, these films do not give national subject the opportunity for identification. Since they do not find an area for identification, the only thing that the spectators left out to do is to witness what happens or to deny it.

### 3.3.1. The Children of ‘Them’: Firat, Gülistan, and Cemal

Looking at the leading characters in three films, it is seen in the very first scenes that none of them fits the ‘separatist Kurd’ discourse in the narrative of national subject. Let alone that the young and even child characters of *Press*, *Bahoz* and *Min Dît* do not have any dreams to ‘divide the homeland’ or ‘founding Kurdistan’, they do not even have any opinions which can be situated in the Kurdish movement. In *Press*, Firat has nothing to do except repairing the broken devices and running errands in the newspaper office. In *Bahoz*, Cemal is not even aware of his Kurdish identity when he step into the university. Gülistan and Firat, in *Min Dît*, are little children who, most probably, know nothing about Kurdish question. However, the things that the characters have been through and/or witnessed throughout the film force them to be politicized, even to act.

*Press* tells the story of a group of journalists working in Diyarbakır office of the newspaper Özgür Gündem in the beginning of the 1990s. As it is indicated at the documentary information given at the end of the film, Özgür Gündem is a newspaper beginning publication on the date 30<sup>th</sup> May, 1992. The newspaper, whose sales are prohibited in the state of emergency region in 1993, is shut down by the court decision in 14<sup>th</sup> April, 1994. 486 of 580 issues, published in the meantime, are pressed charges. Penalties as short term shut down and imprisonment are imposed on the newspaper and the editors in chief respectively. Besides these and even more desperate than these, a great deal of

its journalists, newspaper distributors and newsagents lose their lives as a result of unidentified murders. *Press* is the documentary-fictive narrative of Özgür Gündem journalists who try to do their job under the conditions of the period.

The film starts showing Fırat doing the morning routines like sweeping the floors, taking the newspapers and getting the breakfast ready. Following these rather ordinary images regarding everyday life, in the next scene, on the other hand, the spectator witnesses Kadir being forced to get in a white car. With these two scenes being mounted one after another, film points out that both are principally ordinary experiences in Diyarbakır of the 1990s. This approach goes on throughout the film, just as it happens when Faysal and Alişan go to make news from the street demonstrations. In this scene, Alişan stops by a photographer's shop on the drive to buy some photographic films for their camera. Faysal waits for his friend in front of the shop. In the meantime, an armed man having approached from behind take a shot at Faysal on the back of the neck. When Alişan comes out of the shop, putting the new film into the camera, he has to take a photo of his friend lying on the ground dead in a pool of blood. Similarly, when Alişan is killed at the end of the film, this time Fırat takes the camera. Moreover, daily violence that Fırat witnesses and is exposed to is not limited with these. The burning of the buffets selling Özgür Gündem, threatening phone calls for the journalists in the office or jets flying over their heads whenever they go out are the slices of Fırat's everyday life. For example, they have no choice to put aside the violence they are exposed to in their office which is raided repeatedly, and to go back to work. When Fırat, seeing all this, takes the camera from Alişan lying dead on the ground and takes the photo of him at the end, the film points out that the struggle will continue through this young man.

*Bahoz* tells the story of the identity transformation experienced by Cemal who gets into the university and comes to İstanbul. In the opening scene of the film, Cemal is send off for the university with his father's caution to appreciate this opportunity given by the state and to make the best of it. His being acquainted with the group of Kurdish students in a short span of time results in the awakening of a sense of identity in Cemal. As what he experiences during the time passes until he joins the Kurdish student movement turns into a growth story for

Cemal, it also turns into a narrative of what it means to be a Kurd in İstanbul of the 1990s for the spectator. For instance, the discrimination and exclusion that two Kurdish citizens are exposed to in the bus play an important role in Cemal's transformation. In this scene, two Kurdish friends in an inner-city bus are speaking Kurdish and laughing. In the meanwhile, from the other passengers on the bus, heard the shouting "You ill-mannered mugs! Do you think it is your village here? Why do you disturb us?", "You came from the East and ruined here", "This is Turkey! You have to speak Turkish here!" and "You, separatist men!" Later, the bus is stopped and two Kurds are got off the bus by the head and ears. Yüksel (2012) states that Kurdish-speaking passengers' *interpellation* into the Kurdishness through a racist look results in Cemal's awareness to be one of the addressees of this *interpellation* as a person who can understand Kurdish. On the other hand, this scene draws attention to the fact that the enunciated perception of Kurds as being an "uneducated" and "ignorant" mass in the official discourse of the state regarding Turkishness becomes an exclusionary and hegemonic expression through peasantry (p. 18). Not only is this situation a good example of the recognition policy combined with discrimination emerging with the 1990s in the Kurdish question in the state discourse (Yeğen, 2012), but also it is the visual representation of the policy of "exclusive recognition" adopted against Kurds (Saracoğlu, 2011).

Different from *Press* and *Bahoz*, *Min Dît* witnesses, from the eyes of the children, the struggle of a sister and a brother to survive in the streets of Diyarbakır being left homeless after their parents are murdered by a group of JİTEM members. What makes this film more attractive than the other two is that Kurdish is more apparent unlike the other two films and the narrative continues via the children left behind. As a matter of fact, the director Miraz Bezar, also, supports the idea that the film can fully function if it is told from the eyes of the children ("Bêzar ve Alataş;" 2009), and states that they insistently wanted the entire film to be in Kurdish (Odabaşı, 2010). The characters in the film do not appeal to Turkish in their daily lives if they are not obliged to do so. Kurdish is in front of the spectator as a bare fact. There are no characters like the ones in *Güneşi Gördüm* speaking in accented Turkish even to their children in a village. The language is not either a

cultural pattern as it is in almost all of the films in the popular wing of the new cinema of Turkey, it is a part of the identity itself. Fırat, for example, can solve the mathematical problem that he tries to solve only when it is phrased in Kurdish. Fairy tales are told in Kurdish, the children sing their songs in Kurdish as well.

### 3.3.2. The Children of 'Us': Nuri Kaya, 69, and the Others

In the part where the popular wing of the new cinema of Turkey is discussed, it is stated that how the representations of the soldier and the guerrilla are controlled, and it is argued that with the changing socio-political conditions in the Kurdish question how the representations of the guerrilla transforms from "bloodthirsty killers" to the "citizens that have to be brought down from the mountains". *Nefes: Vatan Sağolsun*, on the other hand, demolishes the dominant representation regime with its representations of the soldiers as being fragile, hesitant and mother's boy. As for *Min Dît*, being in the first place, the films studied in this part are significant from the aspect that they make visible the crimes committed by the state via the military and police forces in the 1990s and treated as if they were never happened. These films expose the social reality which the national subject avoids with a cynical attitude by coming up with the probability that the misdoings, belonging to the 1990s, which are tried to be overcome by being imposed to a nonhuman signifier called JİTEM are actually done exactly by 'our children'.

JİTEM is the only perpetrator of the murders in *Min Dît* and *Press*. Especially in *Min Dît*, the life of a military officer from JİTEM takes an important place. Nuri Kaya, is an officer working for JİTEM. Throughout the film, he is seen as working mostly at nights as part of his job. He is also the one who pulls the trigger to kill the parents of Gülistan and Fırat, being the turning point of the story. Apart from this murder, Nuri Kaya is seen once more as torturing the aunt of the children. Despite these moments, he checks up on the streets of Diyarbakır in the famous "white Renault". However, Nuri Kaya has another life than this dark one. One of the stunning sides of the film is that Nuri Kaya lets the spectator go in his private life. Miraz Bezar emphasizes that he would like to show in this scene that Nuri Kaya is an ordinary man like everyone else along with the crimes he committed



("Bêzar ve Alataş;" 2009). Indeed, the film welcomes the spectator into the home of a JİTEM officer whose relationship with his wife, son and neighbours is not much different from the one of an average spectator. Behind his secret identity, there is a life alike with the spectator's. The daily life of Nuri Kaya throws in the spectator face a striking –and probably avoided to face before- fact: in Diyarbakır of the 1990s, people breathe the same air, sit in the same tea garden or have chat on football with the murderers of their parents, children, friends and maybe themselves in the future. For instance, the father of Gülistan and Fırat asks for a light from his future murderer to light his cigarette (Aydınlık, 2012).

The director deepens this traumatic situation more by way of the children's confrontation with the murderer. Fırat, when his father's murderer that he comes across calls him, he freezes with fear and wets his clothes. Gülistan is more cold-blooded, she faces him down. The events carry Gülistan to the home of the murderer of her mother and father. The spectator, with Gülistan, goes around Nuri Kaya's home and looks at the photo of him dressed in a commando uniform, without his notice. In this scene, taken in a soldier uniform like 'our' children, brothers, friends and even 'us' per se. The photo of Nuri Kaya, who is associated with the murder, torture and the helpless situation of the children from the beginning of the film, and about whom nothing is seen as an indicator of his being a member of JİTEM or being a soldier, turns the perception of the spectator upside down. This is because the national subject believes that as 'one of us', this 'child of the homeland' cannot do 'such things' (Aydınlık, 2012).

*Press*, only just in one of the first scenes of the film, leaves alone the spectator together with a scene of torture that is made on behalf of the state. The journalist Kadir is shown being tortured in a ruined building outside the city immediately after he is abducted. Although the name is never given, the spectator realizes from the image of white car that the torturers are the members of JİTEM. The JİTEM officer wants Kadir to leave the newspaper he works for, otherwise he threatens Kadir with death. This torture and threat seen at the beginning of the film ensures various death threats heard as a voice on the phone are associated with JİTEM and the white car. Resisting the threats he receives from the phone calls, Faysal is killed as a result of an unidentified murder. The reason for the threats causing

Faysal's death is that he makes some news revealing the relation of commanders with the gangs. As the director, Sedat Yılmaz, states that this gang is the Yüksekova Gang which is mentioned in the Susurluk Report as well (Kalaç, 2011). The fact that Alişan clamp down on these relationships beginning from the point where Faysal has left, also, brings about Alişan's death. On the other hand, because of the threats, Kadir decides to go to İstanbul.

Except for mentioning the relationship of JİTEM officers and the commanders of the army with the gangs, the film tells of some war crimes about what happened in the 1990s. As it is known, Mater (2004), in her book *Mehmedin Kitabı* which is banned for a period of time, includes the experiences of many soldiers, who fought in South Eastern Anatolia in the 1990s, both during and after the war. Most of the soldiers who talk about what they have witnessed concerning that period tell of the soldiers who cut the ears or the noses of the dead guerrillas, and even of some who send them to their families. Consistent with these narratives, it is seen in the film that these tortures are talked about. The photojournalist Ahmet, bringing the news which he cannot have published in his newspaper to Özgür Gündem, gives detailed information about how key holders are done from the ears cut from the guerrillas. The film does not choose to exploit the sufferings by showing these photos, since these crimes which are committed and/or are treated as if committed are already present in the collective memory. In another visit, Ahmet shares the news of a harmless young shepherd who is mistaken for a terrorist and is killed. Via Ahmet, the media of that period is criticized for staying quiet on what is happening there.

In *Bahoz*, taking place in İstanbul, JİTEM does not exist, this time the police is the perpetrator of the violence of the state. The relationship of Cemal with the police begins at the very first moment he comes through the university door. Cemal, whose identity check is performed at the university entrance by an undercover police officer codenamed 69, is asked to leave his luggage at the entrance. Since it writes Tunceli on his identity card, it is understood that Cemal is a Kurd. At the same time, when a girl coming with her parents in order to register to the university does not receive even an identity check at the entrance, this discrimination becomes evident. In other words, the problem is deeper than the

fact that whether Cemal is a member of the organization or not. The close follow-up of 69 starting at the beginning of the film continues throughout the film. When the home of the young is raided, Cemal is taken into custody, tortured by 69 there and asked to confess that he is a member of the 'party'. He is, on the other hand, as good as advising Cemal with a fatherly attitude. Just as his father says at the beginning of the film, although Cemal has to benefit from the opportunities provided by the state, he involves in 'organization-businesses'. Whereas, if he wants to do illegal work, he has to be just as the fictitious exporter that he has encountered in front of the courthouse. Released from the custody, Cemal finds out that his best friend, Orhan, has been shot running from the police, and while lying on the ground wounded, he has been shot on the head and killed by the same police officer.

### **3.3.3. Beyond Cinema: Towards Standing against the 'Father'**

Released in the year 2009, Miraz Bezar's film *Min Dît* is significant in the sense of remembering what happened in its premiere in Antalya Golden Orange Film Festival, and understanding the films discussed in this part. As it is known, *Min Dît* is important not just because of the fact that it is the first film to be shot in Kurdish in the new cinema of Turkey but also because it is the first "Kurdish" film competing in the 'national' category in Antalya Golden Orange Film Festival and receiving an award. Şeyben (2009) narrates the festival premiere receiving a great deal of attention and what happened in the interview after the premiere:

...among the spectators, three women above middle age formed incomprehensible protest sentences by slightly raising their voices. Then, one of them left the salon saying "thank you for your labour but not for your time, this place will never be Kurdistan" intending for the crew. After that, another woman began to speak and reproached saying "My brother is a soldier in the East, if only you would show a doctor or a teacher instead of a soldier". Lastly, a man took the floor and said a few words indicating that he found the film "one-sided". (para. 4)

It is not surprising to expect that such reactions aimed at *Min Dît*, which claims to narrate what happens in Diyarbakır of the 1990s from the eyes of the children, will be received by higher dose political films like *Bahoz* and *Press*. Being looked at in that respect, it is possible to generalize such reactions for the films discussed

in the previous part. Nevertheless, the difference that distinguishes these three films from the others is its attempt for reckoning with the national subject in a narrative of a recent past that the national subject remembers well, but without the opportunity of identification. Political films in the previous part, by making the spectator the addressee of the Kurdish other, raise a kind of awareness and present what happens on the Kurdish question exactly at that moment outside the cinema hall. On the contrary, what is seen in this part, in Türker's words (2012), are people whose sufferings are denied to be accepted, who are asked to go on their lives as if nothing happened, and who are ignored when being oppressed (p. 15), it is the return of the oppressed. Thus, in the presence of *Min Dît*, the reactions that these three films receive gain more different meanings than possible reactions that can be received by the popular films in the previous part.

When looked closer to the reactions above mentioned, it is possible to see the traces of three kinds of national attitude that can be come across in everyday life. The first of them is the fear about Kurds' desire to divide the country, which can be summarized with the statement "This place will never be Kurdistan". The second is the postulate, which can be drew from the sentence "My brother is a soldier in the East, if only you would show a doctor or a teacher instead of a soldier", that it is impossible for 'our children' to do such things and at the most it is probable that they do useful things like the doctors and the teachers going 'there' do. Lastly, what is implied by being "one-sided", namely by not showing the things the other party has done, can be summarized as the defence mechanism in the way that all the things having done are, as a matter of fact, a response to what the 'other party' has done (Aydınlık, 2012). In *Press*, *Bahoz* and *Min Dît*, the representations of Kurds and Turks, which are not as nothing of the kind that are accustomed to, not only invalidate the first and the second reactions but also cause questioning of the third reaction which defends the things the state has done as a response.

Exposing the inconsistencies in the discourse of the state, these questionings reveal themselves particularly in *Bahoz*. As Yüksel (2012) puts forward, *Bahoz* brings up the official ideology regarding Kurds, by transforming it into an element of humour in some scenes, and turns it on its head with humour (p. 15). The best

example for this is the scene where Cemal denies to be a Kurd at the beginning of the film. When Cemal says that he is not a Kurd, Müslüm asks him whether his mother speaks anything other than Kurdish or not. Cemal's mother knows no other language other than Kurdish. With that, Müslüm states that he cannot understand how come Cemal is not a Kurd. Cemal's response is interesting: "Since they speak Kurdish, do they have to be Kurds?" His friends makes fun of Cemal upon this response. Abdülbaki says that she may even be English. Later, in a sarcastic seriousness, Müslüm tells the story, which is a common narrative of Kurdish question, about that the word Kurd comes from the sounds *kart-kurt* coming from the feet of Turks walking in the mountains. Ali, without ridiculing, asks about the name of Cemal's mother and learns that her name is Zare. Then, what does it write on her identity card? The name of Cemal's mother in the official records is Zübeyde. The questions and the irony, that the spectator is objected to through Cemal, try to eliminate the common discourses of the 1990s.

In *Press* and *Min Dît*, an emphasis, as a manner of struggle rather than the discourse of the state, on a civil disobedience is at the forefront. In *Press*, although the journalists who are always threatened through phone calls, abducted, beaten or killed in the middle of the street have to be armed in order to defend themselves, they reject to use these weapons. The film support this by the motto "the truth is bulletproof" heard from Alişan's mouth. For what is worth, delivering what happens there to the people is described as the biggest struggle. As for *Min Dît*, the civil disobedience is fictionalized by means of the struggle given by two children whose lives have changed in one night by the state in the 1990s. The only thing left to the children, who are left alone, from their parents is the voice of their mother recorded in a tape. The narrative of the film proceeds by way of the fairy tale "The Wolf with a Bell", told in this tape by the mother, as an allegory of civil disobedience. According to the fairy tale, the villagers who have caught the wolf haunting the village go to the wise man of the village in order to take his advice. The wise man advises them not to kill the wolf, instead, to put a bell around its neck. Thus, precautions can be taken when the wolf approaches the village. In the film, being made up of only a voice record of their mother from now on, the cultural transfer functions to keep the children away from the violence as a

manner of acting. Otherwise, it cannot be possible for Gülistan to take the slingshot from the Fırat's hand anymore. As the director states, the film tries to show the power of the civil disobedience as a manner of acting to the Kurdish spectator at this point ("Bêzar ve Alataş;" 2009). Gülistan who aims the gun at Nuri Kaya sleeping in the bedroom gives up the idea of killing him. Instead of that, she chooses to 'put a bell around the wolf's neck' by revealing his true identity. Nevertheless, the exposure of the murderer does not change their lives for the better. What is seen at the end of the film is that with the orphans packed into the back of a car, Gülistan and Fırat also take the road to one of the metropolises.

*Press*, *Bahoz* and *Min Dît* can be read as three different counter-narratives to the narratives entailing the Kurdish question constructed via fantasies by the popular films. These films leaves the national subject out while giving the Kurdish spectator the opportunity to be included in the political and social setting of the 1990s by identification with Kurdish characters put in the centre of their stories. From this aspect, it can be said that all three films appeal primarily to the Kurdish spectator. As for the national subject who ignores the social reality, these three '90s narratives that are witnessed are already one apiece fictive that can be denied easily. Nevertheless, open-ended endings of all three films take the narrative out of the cinema hall. When going out the cinema hall, the spectators know very well that they will meet Gülistans or Fırats in the streets of the city. When turning on the television, they will get the news saying that a great number of Cemals have been 'neutralized'. They will meet, see or hear from the relatives of a lot of victims whose perpetrators have not been found yet. Film leaves the spectators with the questions about how come the Kurds who even deny to be Kurds go to the mountains, the children who do not even dream of founding Kurdistan are left homeless, or fathers, brothers and sons can turn into war criminals who can torture even dead bodies. Beyond discussing who started the war, it makes the spectators discuss the things done by the state as an unquestionable father. Thus, as Maktav (2013) questions, can Cemal be coded to the collective memory as a 'terrorist' anymore? At the point when *Bahoz* tests the fictive with the reality, can the discourse claiming 'Kurdish children are tricked into going to the mountains' be easily put forward from now on (p. 107)

## CONCLUSION

The close relationship between cultural representations and social history requires thinking about cinema, which is one of the most popular cultural practices of today's world, and not only a medium of entertainment. Films are ideological i.e. they play a significant role in the reproduction of the dominant ideology or in supporting political dissenting movements. Cinema, as Kellner (2010) describes, "is a form of vision that provides ways of seeing, either reproducing conventional modes of seeing and experiencing the world, or enabling one to perceive things one has not viewed or experienced" (p. 13). In the light of this, in order to understand strategies operating in the cinema, it is necessary to approach films by doing profound reading. The theories accepting language is socially constructed enable the text to be read together with other texts. As an intertextual strategy of reading, the diagnostic critique is one of the methods made use of while deconstructing filmic texts. In Kellner's (2010) words, "Properly interpreted and contextualized, films can provide key insights into specific historical persons, events, or eras" (p. 14). In this thesis, I aimed to discuss how the Kurdish question was represented in the new cinema of Turkey, that emerged in the 1990s, and what kind of strategies were operated in these films. In the new cinema of Turkey, I found the implications of narrative structures of the films concerning the Kurdish question presented in the contexts of the discussions, were carried out by separating the problem into three main themes: fantasizing the question, facing the other, and reckoning with the past.

The first of the parts has been constituted by narratives, which are referred to as 'popular' films, since the films have reached high box-office sales. These narratives put forward fictive scenarios of the dominant ideology by mediating the social reality through ideological fantasies. For example, in the film *Eşkiya*, released during the period, which was the peak time of the low intensity war, had constructed one of its characters around a Kurdish protagonist, but who carefully stays away from making any implications about Kurdishness. Similarly, the story of *Vizontele* takes place in a Kurdish village and is obviously about Kurds, but does

not give any room to Kurdish identity. However, as a result of the recognition policy coming into effect during the first half of the 2000s, in *Gönül Yarası* and *Vizontele Tuuba*, which are the next films of the same directors, it is remarkable that Kurdish is included even if only in folk songs. On the other hand, the films *Kurtlar Vadisi: Irak* and *Deli Yürek Bumerang Cehennemi* are constituted narratives about conspiracy theories, and the Kurdish question is presented as foreigner provocation where Kurds can find a place solely in the absolute dichotomy of good and bad. Such conspiracy theories were propagated due to the formation of the Kurdistan Regional Government in Iraq but became less common when the relationship with this new government started to improve during the second half of the 2000s. The changing discourse of state institutions regarding the members of the PKK and the process that the AK Party government started by the name of the “Kurdish Initiative” are reflected in the films of the period. The films such as *Nefes: Vatan Sağolsun* and *Güneşi Gördüm* not only refrain from reproducing the dominant ideology of the time concerning the Kurdish question, but also do not seem to abandon the discourse of “bloodthirsty killers” with the representations of ‘humanised’ guerrillas.

The second part of the problem is constituted of the films, which can be referred to as ‘political’ films, and which are mostly on the forefront of their dissenting stances against the dominant ideology. With these aspects, these narratives try to shake the fantasmic scenarios concerning the Kurdish question by reconstituting social reality. The films, by bringing together both sides of the Kurdish question in their narrative structures, involve national subjects, Kurdish subjects, and consequently the problem. Aiming to emphasize war is actually composed of the tragedies ignored, rather than magnificent heroic tales, *Işıklar Sönmesin*, *Fotoğraf* and *Yazı Tura* carry an anti-war attitude about the solution of the Kurdish question. On the other hand, *Büyük Adam Küçük Aşk* focuses on the relationship of a young Kurdish girl and a Republican intellectual man, and *İki Dil Bir Bavul* tells the story of the relationship of a teacher appointed to the Southeast with his Kurdish students, and calls the spectator to think about the assimilationist policies that the state operates through language. While the former, having been filmed during a period where war remained on the agenda is an allegoric



narrative; the latter, having been released in the later years of the 2000s when the discussion about the problem could happen more openly, represents remarkable documentary realism. The films *Gitmek: Benim Marlon ve Brandon* and *Gelecek Uzun Sürer* introduce Turkish women characters who go to South-eastern cities to search for their Kurdish lovers, and they make the spectator imagine and live what happens in these regions. Proceeding with a similar theme of journey, *Güneşe Yolculuk* not only takes the spectator through a journey of finding identity, but also invites him/her to an identity transformation.

Finally, the films of the third part consist of stories about “the nineties experience” corresponding to narratives reckoning the past, and films of this genre increase in number especially in the 2000s. As a result of the expansion of areas of discussion regarding the Kurdish question in the second half of the 2000s, the human rights violations of the 1990s frequently started to become a contemporary issue. The common feature of these films is to face the Kurdish question introspectively, to show the national and social realities, which have been pretended to be non-existent for so long, and to make the audience witness what really happens in these realities. *Min Dit* focuses on the tragedy of children from Diyarbakır whose parents have been murdered by JİTEM, and *Press* tells the story of a group of journalists trying to anchor news about the events that happened in the region under the pressure of JİTEM. As for *Bahoz*, the theme is the transformation experienced by a group of students who study in İstanbul during the same period and who are the members of the Kurdish movement. These films were all released during the second half of the 2000s, and they are the results of the pursuit of reckoning that began in the 1990s of the Kurds as the primary actors of the Kurdish question.

Although each of the films examined in this study falls under a separate category, each one is analysed by its approach to the Kurdish question, and it is not just to state these groups do not leave room to any transitivity. Popular films are always under the threat of carrying an overflow of meanings, which can shake the fantasmic foundations of ideological narratives. For instance, the Turkish language spoken with an accent, traditional outfits, or Kurdish names in popular films appear before the audience as cultural elements pointing to the Kurdish

identity. As well, there are moments where the films studied under the second category shift towards fantasy time to time. For example, while this shift in *Işıklar Sönmesin* and *Büyük Adam Küçük Aşk* is supportive of the dominant ideology, the fantasy in *Fotoğraf* has a distorting effect on the fantasmic structure of the official ideology. Close to a documentary, the narratives of the films in the third category do not offer the audience any other choice but to witness the events or to deny them. Documentary features and open-ended finales of these films direct the spectator to crosscheck the films he/she watches with social realities. In this sense, how documentary films about the Kurdish question, which were not included in this study handle the problem is another research topic that need be studied in future studies.

Whether popular or political, the approaches of the films examined in the scope of this study to the Kurdish question can be read with identification strategies that take an important place in the narrative structures of the films. The films included in the first group identify the target audience as Turkish spectators who adopt the dominant ideology and these subjects have been mentioned as national subjects throughout the study. Especially in the films *Eşkiya*, *Vizontele*, and *Güneşi Gördüm* where the protagonists are Kurds, it was seen that Kurds are Turkified to be prospective-Turks of the state discourse. This process makes it easier for national subjects to identify with the Kurdish other who he/she encounters on the screen as the protagonist. On the other hand, the films in the second group, by introducing new identification areas both for Turkish national subjects and Kurdish others, invite both sides to be a part of the film, especially the national subjects to face the problem and the address it. Moreover, *Güneşi Gördüm*, with identity transformation puts the protagonist through, and calls upon him, and the spectator becomes the other. Lastly, the films in the third group adopt the idea of not opening areas to the national subjects for identification opportunities as a way of political struggle. The most prominent result of these different approaches shows itself in the number of the spectators of the films. What makes the films in the first group popular is that they present fantasmic objects to the desire of the national subject. In spite of this, the films in the second and third groups do not draw much attention to similar objects, since they show the national subject the

impossibility of his/her desire. To the extent that the films shift to fantasy, the films *Işıklar Sönmesin* and *Büyük Adam Küçük Aşk* are worthy of consideration as they have been watched more than other political films. It is open to be explored how the films, which have been aimed to be read through correspondence, find their place in the minds of the national subject, and are perceived by the Kurdish others.

As a result of this study, it can be said the representations of the Kurdish question in the new cinema of Turkey is concomitant with the progress of the problem from the 1990s to present day. The popularity of fantasmic narratives is the indication that the discourse of prospective-Turks is still in effect in the Turkish society. On the other hand, the noticeable increase seen in the number of films in the 2000s confronts both sides with the problem experienced among one another, and points out that there exists a desire in the society to recognize Kurdish identity. In recent years, the narratives about the events that took place in the 1990s demonstrate that the demand of reckoning the side of the Kurdish question, which has not been talked about much, continues to find its place in the new discourse each day. Kellner (2010) states diagnostic critique “may illuminate past and present historical situations and anticipate future ones” (p. 35). In this regard, it can be predicted that the production of films about the Kurdish question in the new cinema of Turkey will continue increasingly in the 2010s, triggered by developments operated under the name “solution process”. As a natural consequence of the negotiations being carried out and the enhancing recognition policy, it is obvious the films call to recognise the Kurdish identity by confronting it, and this will take place not only in the opponent wing, but in popular narratives as well.

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## APPENDIX

### CREDITS OF THE FILMS MENTIONED IN THE THESIS

#### **Bahoz (The Storm)**

Release Date: 14 November 2008

Box Office in Turkey: 56.854

Director: Kazım Öz

Screenplay: Kazım Öz

Producer: Özkan Küçük, Kazım Öz

Music: Vedat Yıldırım, Burak Korucu, Ayhan Akkaya

Director of Photography: Ercan Özkan

Editing: Kazım Öz

Cast: Cavit Gök, Havin Funda Saç, Selim Algül, Asiye Dinçsoy, Ali Geçimli, Kadim Yaşar, Bertan Dirikoğlu

Distribution: Özen Film

Production: Turkey

Length: 156'

#### **Büyük Adam Küçük Aşk (Big Man, Little Love)**

Release Date: 19 October 2001

Box Office in Turkey: 139.450

Director: Handan İpekçi

Screenplay: Handan İpekçi

Producer: Nikos Kanakis, Handan İpekçi

Music: Serdar Yalçın, Mazlum Çimen

Director of Photography: Erdal Kahraman

Editing: Nikos Kanakis

Cast: Şükran Güngör, Dilan Erçetin, Füsun Demirel, Yıldız Kenter, İsmail Hakkı Şen

Distribution: Özen Film

Production: Turkey

Length: 120'

#### **Deli Yürek: Bumerang Cehennemi (Wildheart: Hell of Boomerang)**

Release Date: 07 December 2001

Box Office in Turkey: 1.051.352

Director: Osman Sınav

Screenplay: Raci Şaşmaz, Osman Sınav

Producer: Osman Sınav, Mustafa Şevki Doğan

Music: Aria

Director of Photography: Tevfik Şenol

Editing: Kemalettin Osmanlı

Cast: Kenan İmirzalıoğlu, Oktay Kaynarca, Zara, Zafer Ergin, Melda Bekcan, Selçuk

Yöntem, Macit Sonkan  
Distribution: Özen Film  
Production: Turkey  
Length: 120'

### **Eşkiya (The Bandit)**

Release Date: 29 November 1996  
Box Office in Turkey: 2.572.287  
Director: Yavuz Turgul  
Screenplay: Yavuz Turgul  
Producer: Mine Vargı  
Music: Erkan Oğur, Aşkın Arsunan  
Director of Photography: Uğur İçbak  
Editing: Onur Tan  
Cast: Şener Şen, Yeşim Salkım, Uğur Yücel, Kamran Usluer, Şermin Hürmeriç  
Distribution: Warner Bros.  
Production: Turkey  
Length: 122'

### **Fotoğraf (The Photograph)**

Release Date: 02 November 2001  
Box Office in Turkey: 24.267  
Director: Kazım Öz  
Screenplay: Kazım Öz  
Producer: Özkan Küçük  
Music: Mustafa Biber  
Director of Photography: Ercan Özkan  
Editing: Zülfiye Dolu, Savaş Boyraz, Özkan Küçük, Kazım Öz  
Cast: Feyyaz Duman, Nazmi Kirik, Mizgin Kapazan, Muhlis Asan  
Distribution: MKM  
Production: Turkey  
Length: 66'

### **Gelecek Uzun Sürer (Future Lasts Forever)**

Release Date: 11 November 2011  
Box Office in Turkey: 38.589  
Director: Özcan Alper  
Screenplay: Özcan Alper  
Producer: Ersin Çelik, Soner Alper  
Music: Mustafa Biber  
Director of Photography: Feza Çaldıran, Tolunay Türköz  
Editing: Umut Sakallıoğlu, Özcan Alper, Ayhan Ergürel  
Cast: Gaye Gürel, Durukan Ordu, Sarkis Seropyan, Osman Karakoç  
Distribution: Tiglon  
Production: Turkey  
Length: 108'

**Gitmek: Benim Marlom ve Brandom (My Marlon and Brando)**

Release Date: 14 November 2008

Box Office in Turkey: 13.556

Director: Hüseyin Karabey

Screenplay: Ayça Damgacı, Hüseyin Karabey

Producer: Hüseyin Karabey

Music: Kemal Sahir Gürel, Erdal Güney, Hüseyin Yıldız

Director of Photography: Emre Tanyıldız

Editing: -

Cast: Ayça Damgacı, Hama Ali Khan, Mahir Günşıray, Volga Sorgu, Cengiz Bozkurt

Distribution: Chantier

Production: Turkey

Length: 93'

**Gönül Yarası (Lovelorn)**

Release Date: 07 January 2005

Box Office in Turkey: 898.000

Director: Yavuz Turgul

Screenplay: Yavuz Turgul

Producer: Mine Vargı, Mustafa Oğuz, Ömer Vargı

Music: Tamer Çıray

Director of Photography: Soykut Turan

Editing: Bülent Taşar

Cast: Şener Şen, Meltem Cumbul, Güven Kıraç, Sümer Tilmaç, Erdal Tosun,

Timuçin Esen, Devin Özgür Çınar, Ece Naz Kızıltan

Distribution: Warner Bros.

Production: Turkey

Length: 138'

**Güneşe Yolculuk (Journey to the Sun)**

Release Date: 03 March 2000

Box Office in Turkey: 73.324

Director: Yeşim Ustaoglu

Screenplay: Yeşim Ustaoglu

Producer: Yeşim Ustaoglu, Ezel Akay

Music: Vlatko Stefanovski

Director of Photography: Jacek Petrycki

Editing: Nikolas Gaster

Cast: Nazmi Kirik, Mizgin Kapazan, Nevruz Baz, Ara Güler

Distribution: İFR

Production: Turkey

Length: 105'

### **Güneşi Gördüm (I Saw the Sun)**

Release Date: 13 March 2009

Box Office in Turkey: 2.491.754

Director: Mahsun Kırmızıgül

Screenplay: Mahsun Kırmızıgül

Producer: Murat Tokat

Music: Mahsun Kırmızıgül, Ragga Oktay, Uğur Akyürek, Yıldırım Gürgen

Director of Photography: Soykut Turan

Editing: Hamdi Deniz

Cast: Mahsun Kırmızıgül, Altan Erkekli, Demet Evgar, Hande Subaşı, Ali Sürmeli, Alper Kul, Buğra Gülsoy, Cemal Toktaş, Cezmi Baskın

Distribution: Pinema

Production: Turkey

Length: 120'

### **Hakkâri'de Bir Mevsim (A Season in Hakkâri)**

Release Date: 1983

Box Office in Turkey: -

Director: Erden Kıral

Screenplay: Onat Kutlar

Producer: Ferit Edgü, Kenan Ormanlar, Leyla Özalp

Music: Timur Selçuk

Director of Photography: Kenan Ormanlar

Editing: -

Cast: Genco Erkal, Şerif Sezer, Erkan Yüzel, Macit Koper, Berin Koper, Rana Cabbar, Erol Demiröz, Zeynep İrgat

Distribution: -

Production: Turkey

Length: 100'

### **Işıklar Sönmesin**

Release Date: 25 October 1996

Box Office in Turkey: 133.988

Director: Reis Çelik

Screenplay: Reis Çelik, Cemal Şan

Producer: Ferdi Eğilmez

Music: Mazlum Çimen

Director of Photography: Aytekin Çakmakçı

Editing: İsmail Kalkan

Cast: Berhan Simsek, Tarik Tarcan, Selmin Karaali, Tuncel Kurtiz

Distribution: -

Production: Turkey

Length: 93'

### **İki Dil Bir Bavul (On the Way to School)**

Release Date: 23 October 2009



Box Office in Turkey: 93.708  
Director: Orhan Eskiköy, Özgür Doğan  
Screenplay: Orhan Eskiköy  
Producer: Orhan Eskiköy, Özgür Doğan  
Music: Serkan Gülgül  
Director of Photography: Orhan Eskiköy  
Editing: Orhan Eskiköy  
Cast: Emre Aydın, Zülküf Yıldırım, Rojda Huz, Vehip Huz, Zülküf Huz  
Distribution: Tiglon  
Production: Turkey  
Length: 81'

**Kurtlar Vadisi: Gladyo (Valley of the Wolves: Gladio)**

Release Date: 20 November 2009  
Box Office in Turkey: 876.810  
Director: Sadullah Şentürk  
Screenplay: Raci Şaşmaz, Cüneyt Aysan, Bahadır Özdener  
Producer: Raci Şaşmaz  
Music: Gökhan Kırdar, Loopus  
Director of Photography: Selahattin Sancaklı  
Editing: Yılmaz Uğurlu, Kemalettin Osmanlı  
Cast: Musa Uzunlar, Tuğrul Çetiner, Ayfer Dönmez  
Distribution: Özen Film  
Production: Turkey  
Length: 95'

**Kurtlar Vadisi: Irak (Valley of the Wolves: Iraq)**

Release Date: 03 February 2006  
Box Office in Turkey: 4.256.566  
Director: Serdar Akar  
Screenplay: Raci Şaşmaz, Bahadır Özdener  
Producer: Raci Şaşmaz  
Music: Gökhan Kırdar, Loopus  
Director of Photography: Selahattin Sancaklı  
Editing: Kemalettin Osmanlı  
Cast: Necati Şaşmaz, Billy Zane, Ghassan Massoud, Bergüzar Gökçe Korel, Gürkan Uygun, Diego Serrano, Kenan Çoban  
Distribution: KenDa  
Production: Turkey  
Length: 122'

**Min Dît (Min Dit: The Children of Diyarbakır)**

Release Date: 02 April 2010  
Box Office in Turkey: 23.720  
Director: Miraz Bezar  
Screenplay: Evrim Alataş, Miraz Bezar

Producer: Miraz Bezar  
Music: Mustafa Biber  
Director of Photography: Isabelle Casez  
Editing: Miraz Bezar  
Cast: Şenay Orak, Muhammed Al, Hakan Karsak  
Distribution: Nar Film  
Production: Turkey  
Length: 102'

### **Nefes: Vatan Sağolsun (Breath: Long live the Homeland)**

Release Date: 16 October 2009  
Box Office in Turkey: 2.436.780  
Director: Levent Semerci  
Screenplay: Levent Semerci, Mehmet İlker Altınay, Hakan Evrensel  
Producer: Murat Akdilek, Levent Semerci  
Music: Fırat Yükselir  
Director of Photography: Levent Semerci, Vedat Özdemir  
Editing: Levent Semerci, Erkan Erdem  
Cast: Mete Horozoğlu, Gökçe Özyol, Engin Baykal, Banu Çiçek,  
Distribution: Medyavizyon  
Production: Turkey  
Length: 127'

### **Press**

Release Date: 18 March 2011  
Box Office in Turkey: 25.832  
Director: Sedat Yılmaz (2)  
Screenplay: Sedat Yılmaz (2)  
Producer: Sedat Yılmaz (2)  
Music: -  
Director of Photography: Demir Gökdemir  
Editing: -  
Cast: Aram Dildar, Engin Emre Değer, Kadim Yaşar, Sezgin Cengiz, Asiye Dinçsoy  
Distribution: Tiglon  
Production: Turkey  
Length: 100'

### **Vizontele**

Release Date: 02 February 2001  
Box Office in Turkey: 3.308.320  
Director: Ömer Faruk Sorak, Yılmaz Erdoğan  
Screenplay: Yılmaz Erdoğan  
Producer: Necati Akpınar  
Music: BÜ Gösteri Sanatları Topluluğu, Kardeş Türküler  
Director of Photography: Ömer Faruk Sorak  
Editing: Mustafa Preşeva

Cast: Yılmaz Erdoğan, Demet Akbağ, Altan Erkekli  
Distribution: Warner Bros.  
Production: Turkey  
Length: 119'

### **Vizontele Tuuba**

Release Date: 23 January 2004  
Box Office in Turkey: 2.894.802  
Director: Yılmaz Erdoğan  
Screenplay: Yılmaz Erdoğan  
Producer: Necati Akpınar  
Music: Kardeş Türküler, Rahman Altın  
Director of Photography: Uğur İçbak  
Editing: Engin Öztürk  
Cast: Yılmaz Erdoğan, Tarık Akan, Altan Erkekli, İclal Aydın, Demet Akbağ, Tuba Ünsal  
Distribution: Warner Bros.  
Production: Turkey  
Length: 111'

### **Yazı Tura (Toss-Up)**

Release Date: 24 September 2004  
Box Office in Turkey: 267.225  
Director: Uğur Yücel  
Screenplay: Uğur Yücel  
Producer: Hakkı Göçeoğlu, Uğur Yücel, Haris Padouvas, Defne Kayalar  
Music: Erkan Oğur  
Director of Photography: Barış Özbiçer, Tayfun Çetindağ  
Editing: Valdis Oskarsdottir, Uğur Yücel  
Cast: Olgun Şimşek, Kenan İmirzalıoğlu, Bahri Beyat  
Distribution: Warner Bros.  
Production: Turkey  
Length: 102'