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Serap Ruken Sengul

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The Dissertation Committee for Serap Ruken Sengul Certifies that this is the approved version of the following dissertation:

Broken (His)tories Inside Restored Walls: Kurds, Armenians and the Cultural Politics of Reconstruction in Urban Diyarbakir, Turkey

Committee:

____

Kamran Asdar Ali, Supervisor

____

Kamala Visweswaran

____

Kathleen C. Stewart

____

Shannon Speed

____

Ann Cvetkovich

Broken (His)tories Inside Restored Walls: Kurds, Armenians and the Cultural Politics of Reconstruction in Urban Diyarbakir, Turkey

by

Serap Ruken Sengul, B.A., M.A.

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Dedication

To Layê Diz and Lizard Abdullah

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Broken (His)tories Inside Restored Walls: Kurds, Armenians and the Cultural Politics of Reconstruction in Urban Diyarbakir, Turkey

Serap Ruken Sengul, Phd

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Supervisor: Kamran Asdar Ali

An old and long-contested city located in Northern Mesopotamia, Diyarbakır was multiply decimated and refashioned throughout the twentieth century. After serving as a coordinating center of the Armenian Genocide, the city became a strategic target of Turkish Republican policies of Turkifying history, space and the Kurds starting in 1923, and then the epicenter of Kurdish struggle since the 1970s. Since the 2000s, a comprehensive politics of reconstruction organized around an oppositional idiom of multiculturalism has brought Diyarbakır's distant urban historical heritage to the fore of the conflict between the Kurds and the Turkish state. In this process a wide range of actors critical of the state's denialist nationalism articulated for Diyarbakır a powerful "ancient city of cultures" image, which critically served to reclaim the city's violently foreclosed non-Turkish (Kurdish) and non-Muslim (Armenian) heritages.

However, the revelatory promise of this new representational regime was severely limited by rendering the meaning and significance of all phenomena that circulated in the city as witness to Diyarbakir's cosmopolitan cultural heritage. As a result, the disquieting histories of political violence of the recent past often remained suppressed. Furthermore,

because the city as exterior space is typically coded as male, this narrative put forward an archive of Diyarbakir's past and present as essentially male, imagined and narrated through a middle-class male gaze, experience and voice.

Based on eighteen-months of fieldwork begun in August 2006 followed by archival and secondary research at multiple sites, this dissertation critically analyzes the cultural politics of reconstruction in Diyarbakır by unpacking its gendered, classed and culturalist overdeterminations. Specifically, I take this politics as an entry point into differently embodied histories and experiences of Kurdishness, Armeniannes, and manhood involved in the processes of Turkish state-making and Kurdish nation-building in the city for the past century. I do this by tracing alternative genealogies of four gendered figures, namely *Kirve*, "the uncircumcised terrorist," *şehir çocuğu,* and *qirix*, which have effectively marked male experiences of violence, oppression and struggle from time of the Armenian genocide to the present. This work contributes to ethnography of the Kurds, Armenians and the Turkish state, as well as to literatures on state sovereignty, nationalism, gender and masculinity, and urban geographies of (post)conflict.

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Introduction

The Mystery of Stones (2004), a promotional documentary prepared for a built heritage reconstruction project implemented in Diyarbakır, Turkish Kurdistan, opens with an account on Tigris River's pioneering role in the history of human civilization. The camera moves across ancient ruins located along the river basin as the over voice records the "firsts of the Neolithic revolution in Mesopotamia" that these sites sheltered. A panoramic cut of a city wall follows, introducing it as "one of the truly magnificent structures in the heritage of human kind." It is "as if they were not built for defense," remarks the narrator, "but as works of art on their own." As the camera moves inside the walls, the role of city of walls "in humankind's adventure of civilization" is buttressed with enumerative focus on Muslim, Christian, Jewish and syncretic places of worship that it hosted as well as its bazaars, khans, caravanserais, labyrinthine street structures and domestic architecture. Conveying a strong message of peaceful multicultural and multi-religious coexistence among its peoples in the past as the historical legacy of this walled city, *The Mystery* ends by an appeal to the international community "to protect all of these structures that are now our common heritage" through the voice of a native English speaking male narrator.

Historically a decidedly mixed town with Kurdish and Armenian majorities, Diyarbakır was multiply decimated and fashioned anew over the past century; serving as one coordinating center of the Armenian Genocide, the Turkish Republican politics of Turkifying history, space and the Kurds, and a dynamic Kurdish political struggle for the past four decades. The more recent interest in Diyarbakır's civilizational-multicultural

history promoted in *The Mystery* was shaped by certain transformations in the dynamics of Kurdish struggles in the 2000s, as I detail later.

The Mystery uses the city wall, which circumvents the old city center, Suriçi, within a perimeter of three and a half miles, as a master symbol to produce the contemporary image of Diyarbakır as "an ancient city of cultures and civilizations." Since the early 2000s, the wall has been the site of various material reconstruction projects, cultural and art events, academic and technocratic conferences as well as cultural tourism schemes. In these activities, the wall is referred to as *sur*, which means "city wall" in Turkish. Across them, a highly orientalizing and anthromorphizing image of *sur* is conjured as the witness of Diyarbakır's non-Turkish-Muslim histories and heritages with its ineffaceable materiality, as well as its "mysteries," "secrets," "whispers," and "dreams."[1] Such accounts of Diyarbakır as a "city of walls" have critically served to undermine the Turkish state's ethnicist monopoly over the city's past and present. It has not only enabled a crucial space for furthering Kurdish claims over Diyarbakır, but also effectively paved the way for bringing to discourse the forbidden legacies of the city's other native peoples, of the Armenians in the first place.

However, this iconographic form of witnessing urban history, culture and space has also had critical setbacks. Let me reflect on just one paradox that cuts across such attempts of "re-imageneering"[2] Diyarbakır under the monumentality of *sur*. The history

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[1] I borrow these words from some recent topological literature on Diyarbakir; i.e. *Diyarbakır: Müze Şehir* (Diyarbakir: The Museum City) (Koz and İşli 1999); *Taşlar ve Düşler Kenti* (The City of Stones and Dreams) (DMM 2004); *Sırrını Surlarına Fısıldayan Şehir* (The City that Whispers its Secret to its Sur) (Diken 2002); *Doğu Kapısı* (The Eastern Gate) (Matur 2009).

[2] I borrow this neologism from Rutheiser (1996).

of the word *sur* hardly precedes its recent use in Diyarbakır, except for the administrative designation of "Suriçi" in the 1960s (literally, interior-of-the-wall) to refer to the old city that is encircled by the wall. This is because Diyarbakırites did not call the walls of their city *sur*, neither historically nor in everyday language, and irrespective of their ethnic, political or social backgrounds. They called it *beden*, using the very same word for the (human) body.[3] Likewise, the name "Suriçi" does not exist in the city's everyday language, as people call this old part of the town simply *şehir* (the city). If one asks any Diyarbakırite what *beden* means, s/he will point to the walls as the first thing, although there does not exist a second word for human body in the language-in-use in the city. An increasing number of Diyarbakırites have started using the word *sur* since the early 2000s, especially in public debates over Diyarbakır's historical place-identity. Yet, only a limited section of urban population joins such debates. More significantly, people tell substantially different stories, when they talk about the wall through *sur* and *beden* as two different spatio-temporal locations.

Locating the emergent discursive-cognitive map of *sur* is not a difficult task. Even though *sur* is a highly contested terrain where fights over who owns Diyarbakır are fought among the Turkish state, the Kurdish opposition and a range of actors differently situated in the city, all discourses of *sur* share the same opening premise; that Diyarbakır is "an ancient city of culture and civilization." That is, *sur* is an abstract space that

[3] "Beden" comes from Arabic, where it means "torso." It means "(human) body" in the standard contemporary Turkish. The use of "beden" for city wall is exclusive to Diyarbakirite Turkish in contemporary era. However, the Turkish-Armenian etymologist Sevan Nisanyan remarks that this use must have its origin in pre-modern Turkish, as Ottoman dictionaries of the 18th and 19th centuries defined "beden" as "tower or bulwark, constructed on the walls of a citadel." I thank Nisanyan for providing me with this information.

connects the city's present to its distant past within a narrative of "cultural-civilizational" continuum foregrounded through prominent, monumental and eventful marks of history in space.

The map of *beden* is both radically different from that of *sur* and it is harder to locate. *Beden* is the simultaneous space of the accidental and the everyday in which various individual, social and political struggles are fought and imaginaries flourish. I asked Gulistan, a woman in her mid-thirties who is a tenement dweller on the wall's eastern axis, to tell me the first thing that came to her mind when she heard the word *sur*. She replied: "You mean *beden?* ... I have lived my whole life beneath *beden*. It does not remind me of anything special." "Have you ever climbed up to *beden,*" I asked further. "Why? Am I a maniac, what is it there for me?" she replied dismissively, and added: "But this neighbor of mine did once, after she had returned from a visit to İstanbul. I guess she had learned it from the İstanbulites." "Why would you say that?" I objected, reminding her of the crowds who join cultural activities organized on the walls lately. "You know, the rich are very inconsistent," she concluded: "When I go to their houses for cleaning, they stare at me both pitiful and despising because I live beneath *beden*. But when they come to *şehir,* they are always on *beden* and do not want to come down. Perhaps they, too, learned it from the İstanbulites! For what I know, it is only the winos who hang out at *beden.*"

Sometime later I asked a group of men whom Gulistan described as "winos" what *beden* meant to them: "Grandiosity… pride… fear… shelter… trust…. turf wars." Then, I asked them about *sur*. A disinterested silence held until one of them cared to reason:

"There is no such thing as *sur*. I believe the tourists brought the word to the city. It sounds like an advertisement thing." "How come?" I asked. "How would I know," he answered.

For Zozan, a Kurdish woman activist, the first thing the word *beden* evoked was "of course, the saying *bedenalti çocuğu* (*the boy beneath beden*)." Her father used to call her that whenever he got angry with her. It was such a bad insult, especially when said to girl. For Zozan, *beden* meant, "our loneliness, I believe… our naked fear… our resistance. *Beden* is Zekiye Alkan.[4] It is her *beden*, her ashes, her word, the legacy of her struggle." "How about *sur*?" I went on. "Well," she paused: "They are the same thing, but I have not got used to [saying] *sur*, it feels alienating."

Finally, a senior figure in Kurdish politics in the city, who had given me *The Mystery* to watch in the first place, said, "Fight, for a start," when I asked him about the word *beden*. He maintained: "Childhood fights, lumpen fights, the revolutionary fight… My childhood passed fighting beneath *beden* and looking up to lumpen fights there. Then the revolutionaries appeared at *beden* as I was coming of age in the mid-1970s. If you had ever seen them walking, you would have thought that the whole world was about to collapse and form anew. *Beden* is fight to me. All in all, fight." His response extended into a long narrative about revolutionary fight and counterrevolutionary violence in the city throughout the 1980s and 1990s. In the end I asked him why none of these appeared in *The Mystery,* to the production of which he contributed, and how he thought the *beden* he testified to stood in relation to *sur*. "You caught me unprepared. Let's record from the

[4] Zekiye Alkan was a medical student who immolated herself to death on the wall on the Kurdish Newroz Day in 1990 in protest of the state's oppression of the Kurds.

start!" he replied, teasing himself and me at the same time in some deep thought. Then, "*Sur* is also fight," he said, "One may tell it is today's fight for the city's *beden* under changing circumstances." Then, the question is: Whose bodies, stories and knowledges shall give life to the *beden* of the city of *sur* - to the new old city of culture?

Increasingly replacing *beden, sur* as an icon of "culture and civilization" mediates a middle-class and male archive of Diyarbakır, which puts the knowledge of experience over the knowledge obtained through information, the distant past over the recent past, the monumental over the everyday, and the old city over the living one with a bitter sense of nostalgia. This dissertation explores multiple historical experiences of violence and struggle within the context of the politics of Turkification of Diyarbakır over the past century and by way of a critical engagement with recent reconstructions of it as an old city of walls. I am deeply sympathetic to how the image of Diyarbakır as an old city of cultures reinserts the violently foreclosed Kurdish, Armenian, and other non-Turkish-Muslim pasts of the city into discourse. Yet, I am also irreducibly critical of the spectacularizing, gendered, classed and affective registers that inscribe this narrative space. In this context, I engage with certain constitutive elements and symbols of this narrative for tracing alternative genealogies of Kurdishness, Armenians and manhood that remain unattended, if not foreclosed, in it. Below, I situate and explicate my research problem by tracing the modern historical-ethnographic context of the Kurdish issue in Diyarbakır within two representational frameworks; namely, "the city of struggle" and "the city of culture."

CONTEXTS

The Making of a "City of Struggle"

By the turn of the twentieth century, Diyarbakır was a large province in Ottoman Kurdistan. In1914, its approximately 550,000 population represented a formidable heterogeneity composed of several Muslim (predominantly Kurdish) and Christian (majority Armenian) peoples of different denominations, as well as smaller syncretic groups and Jews. The city of Diyarbakır, the capital of the province then called Amid, had been a town of strategic location for coordinating relations between the Ottoman Porte and semi-autonomous Kurdistan as well as for imperial rivalries with Iran and Russia. In 1914, Amid's population was 45,000, of which one third were Armenians. Diverse peoples of the Diyarbakır province had experienced alternating periods of peaceful coexistence and friction until the wake of the late 19th century Armenian massacres (1894-1895). The bitter disruption of this mixed composition came with the reign of the Turkist Committee of Union and Progress (Ittihadists). Over 1913-1918, the Ittihadists pursued a comprehensive ethic-engineering plan to turn Ottoman Kurdo-Armenia into a Turkish national homeland. At least 120,000 Armenians (97 percent of the Armenian population) were killed in the province in 1915. Christian death toll was around 200,000, Assyrian/Syriacs included. During the five years of the Ittihadists rule, ten thousands of Muslims whom the Ittihadists sought to resettle in order to dilute Kurdish regional concentration also died on the roads (Üngör 2005, Kevorkian 2006, Gaunt 2006, Jongerden 2007, Dündar 2008).

Demographically and physically decimated, Diyarbakır was incorporated into the Turkish Republic (1923) as a small city, corresponding roughly to the borders of former

capital Amid and inhabited almost single-handedly by ethnic Kurds – an effect of the Armenian Genocide. From the very beginning, the Republican elite viewed Diyarbakır as a center from where to coordinate the twin militant projects of "Turkifying" and "civilizing" the formerly mixed Ottoman Kurdo-Armenia that now became a predominantly Kurdish populated land. In 1924, the words Kurd and Kurdistan were erased from all books and maps and banned, while the traces of Armenians and other non-Muslim on history and space were also erased. Instead of "Kurdistan" and "Kurds" the new regime came up with the idioms of "East" and "Easterners," turning the region into the Orient of a Westernizing Turkey. The trope of "civilizing the East" formed the core of the state's space making and nation building techniques pursued in Kurdistan over the following decades, ranging from the brutal forms of suppression to ambitious socio-economic cultural modernization schemes.[5] The Republican Diyarbakır has been the privileged site of Turkifying "the East" by all means.

The Turkish Republic's colonial Kurdish policy stirred formidable resistance across the region, which included sixteen rebellions only in the Kemalist era (1925-1938). However, Diyarbakır remained outside of any oppositional Kurdish voice for quite sometime for two main reasons: First, the traditional urban notables of Diyarbakır had developed entrenched political-economic interests within the Turkish establishments since the Late Ottoman era. An illustrating example to this is was that the Sheikh Said

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[5] For instance, addressing the suppression of the Kurdish Sheikh Said rebellion of 1925, Şükrü Kaya, then the Turkish Minister of Interior**,** said: "The shock was the consequence of a collusion between the regime of the medieval spirit and the regime of civilization. As always and everywhere it was civilization which had the last word" (Quoted in Bloxham 2005: 107). Likewise, Ismet Inonu, the Republic's founding Prime Minister, described the military evacuation of the Kurdish-Alevite Dersim region in 1938 in terms of "civilizing and modernizing this zone with all possible means … against tribal chiefs [who] resisted reform" (Quoted in Besikçi 1990: 82-83).

rebellion of 1925, the first large-scale Kurdish rebellion against the new regime, was brutally defeated right outside of the walls of Diyarbakır because not only no support came from within the city, but also the city's notables largely allied with the Turkish army in fighting against it.[6] The second and no less significant reason was that the townspeople culture of Diyarbakır established over long centuries of Ottoman rule involved a strong rejection of Kurdish identity, which was associated with the city's rural, tribal hinterland (Reclus 1891).

This situation started changing in the 1960s at the intersecting grounds of the development of new forms Kurdish nationalist thought and action in Turkey and the spatialized effects of Turkish socio-economic modernization in Diyarbakır. Concerning the first was a new form of political mobilization led by metropolitan-Turkey educated second-generation youth of traditional Kurdish elite families, who demanded the socioeconomic, cultural and political development of "the East" through land reform, rural development and educational modernization. These demands found strong resonance among the masses of dispossessed rural Kurds who had poured into Diyarbakır in the post-1950 process of agricultural modernization only to join the urban poor. The most massive "East meetings" of the 1960s took place in Diyarbakır in 1967 mainly with the participation of these dispossessed groups (Gündoğan 2005). The more radical breakthrough in the trajectory of Kurdish political mobilization in Diyarbakır came in the 1970s. This was when a new generation of educated urban youth of lower classes

[6] See, Robert Olson (1989) and Martin van Bruinessen (1981) on the significance of Sheikh Said rebellion in the formation of the Republic's Kurdish policy. See Hişyar Özsoy for a critical a review of debates on this rebellion in Western, Turkish and Kurdish historiographies (2013).

articulated the question of Kurds and Kurdistan as a one of classed, feudal and colonial forms of exploitation and inequality. Their revolutionary emphasis on social justice and transformation found substantive appeal inside the city's impoverished neighborhoods. Diyarbakır became a heaven for revolutionary mobilization in the 1970s, the "little Moscow," to borrow from the Turkish state discourse of the time. In 1978, the city elected its first socialist Kurdish mayor Mehdi Zana, a member of an ordinary and poor Kurdish family from rural Diyarbakır.

This revolutionary excitement was violently interdicted by the 1980 coup d'etat in Turkey, which crushed all venues of socio-political dissent in the city. However, soon the fight between the PKK guerillas and Turkish military started in the Kurdish countryside (1984 -) putting the city at the center of Kurdish dissent against the Turkish state. Over the mid-1980s and 1990s, Diyarbakır hosted massive and militant forms of Kurdish activism as well as a draconian State of Emergency Rule instituted by the state (1979-2002). In this period, thousands joined the PKK's guerrilla forces, neighborhoods and streets became hotbeds of Kurdish political organizing, and boycotts and mass demonstrations became parts of daily life. At the same time, state-sponsored violence, torture, censure, thousands of unidentified killings, extrajudicial executions, and enforced disappearances turned state terror into a property of everyday urban existence. Besides, the massive influx of rural Kurds into Diyarbakır due to forced depopulation of the Kurdish countryside as a strategy of counter insurgency tripled the city's population and aggravated urban socio-economic inequalities and infrastructural problems at a time when formal labor and housing markets were already failing. Within a context that was

saturated with all kinds of political militancy and state violence, Diyarbakır emerged as "the castle of Kurdish resistance," and the unofficial capital of Turkish Kurdistan.

Across these almost four-decades of Kurdish political mobilization as of the mid-1960s, a powerful narrative on Diyarbakır has been articulated as "the city of struggle" (*mücadele şehri*). This narrative is primarily oriented by the dialectic of Turkish state oppression and Kurdish resistance. It is registered in vocabularies of anti-colonial resistance and revolutionary national liberation, and in symbols such as massive urban uprisings called *serhildan*, prison resistances, economic boycotts, death fasts or public self-immolations. In this sense, "the city of struggle" is essentially a story of Kurdifying Diyarbakır, which culminated in the 1990s. Yet, two significant points have to be made about the substance of the "Kurdish city" espoused in this narrative: First, although it foregrounds a Kurdish archive of Diyarbakır, by imagining the substance of Kurdishness in terms of inequality, oppression and struggle rather than the "ethnie," this narrative has been open to accommodating non-Kurdish histories of Diyarbakır such as those of Armenians and Assyrians.[7] Second, the "city of struggle" reflects a series of classed and cultural contests over identity and modernity among different sections of the ethnically Kurdish populace of the Republican Diyarbakır. In this city wherein the words "Kurd" or "Kurdish" circulated with highly pejorative connotations until the recent past,[8] "the city

[7] This notion of national identity has had its base in PKK's rejection of any idea of "nationalism" that bases its claim to legitimacy on the primacy and inherent sovereignty of ethnie as "the ideology of the petty bourgeoisie." That is why the organization has strictly avoided the term "nationalist," and for an idiom of "patriotism." See Jongerden and Akkaya (2012) for a detailed discussion on PKK's version of left-nationalism.

[8] This is well reflected in local idioms that are still alive in the city; such as "Kürtten olsa evliya, koyma avluya (Even if a Kurd becomes a saint, don't let him enter the courtyard)," "Kurd û piskilet? (The Kurd and bicycle? –what is the connection?)," "Kurd û kurm (The Kurd and the worm)."

of struggle," conjured a Kurdish Diyarbakır in key symbols of "gundi (villager)," "cotkar û karker (peasants and workers)," "keç û xorten li çîya (girls and boys of the mountains)" or Sheikh Said.

Reconstructing a "City of Culture"

While Diyarbakır is still the center of the Kurdish opposition against the Turkish state, since the early 2000s a rival imaginary of Diyarbakır is on the rise, which I have earlier called the "city of culture." This is a radically different narrative in terms of its historical presumptions, discursive elements, and class character as well as how it imagines Diyarbakır across time and over space.

The context for this image to emerge was set by three critical events that happened in 1999, substantially changing the contours of the contemporary Kurdish movement in Turkey. First, in February, the leader of the PKK, Abdullah Öcalan, was captured. In his defense before the court, Öcalan renounced the goal of national independence and territorial sovereignty, called on the PKK to suspend armed struggle for a politics of peace to be pursued with the demand of the Constitutional recognition of Kurdish identity within Turkey's territorial integrity. Second, in April, the pro-Kurdish legal political party (HADEP) won around forty municipalities in the region, including Diyarbakır. This electoral success was a landmark for the institutional representation of Kurdish opposition within Turkey's political-administrative system, which had until then remained limited to the efforts of the pro-Kurdish legal political parties periodically

banned by the state.[9] Third, in December, the European Union (EU) granted Turkey candidacy status, requiring her to undertake a political and cultural liberalization reform process toward eventual accession to the Union. The EU process has introduced new networks and vocabularies with which to articulate Kurdish opposition; such as multiculturalism, cultural rights and civil society activism.

At the intersection of these three events, Diyarbakır became the center to coordinate the new legal(ist) Kurdish politics in the 2000s, under the lead of the city's pro-Kurdish local governments. The local governments devised a comprehensive city-centered politics geared toward promoting renewed Kurdish political demands and solving the city's aggravated urban problems simultaneously with an overarching framework of "reconstruction." At the (Kurdish) national scale, reconstruction espoused a peace-oriented framework of rights-based activism, which conditioned a process of professionalization, bureaucratization and the empowering of educated urban middle-classes in Kurdish politics. At the urban scale, it entailed heavy investments into the symbolic images and structures that could render Diyarbakır's mixed past as a site of "ancient cultures and civilization." This was a form of rebranding done in conversation with global discourses of multiculturalism and cultural tourism-oriented models of urban economic growth, and was deemed fit to serve the ends of reconstruction at both scales.

[9] HADEP was the fourth in a series of legal political parties established by the Kurdish movement since 1990. The Turkish constitutional Court banned the first of these parties, People's Labor Party (HEP), in 1993 on charges of "separatism." HEP's two immediate successors, Freedom and Democracy Party (ŐZDEP) and Democracy Party (DEP), were closed down with the same charges soon after their opening. Founded in 1995, HADEP was also banned in 2003. Since then legal Kurdish politics have been pursued in three more parties upon successive closures. Currently, pro-Kurdish legal politics in Turkey is pursued under the roof of the Peace and Democracy Party (BDP). My use of "pro-Kurdish" in locating the HEP-BDP tradition is to differentiate the political position of this tradition from the Kurdish ethnicity, as a great many Kurds are represented in political parties of the mainstream Turkish establishment.

The image of Diyarbakır as a "city of culture" presented through the iconicity of the city walls flourished at this conjuncture. Throughout the decade, it was Diyarbakır's pro-Kurdish urban governments to take the lead in refashioning Diyarbakır under this image by devising numerous material restoration and renovation projects in the walled city, Suriçi, and organizing a series of culture and art events associated with the walls both by name and location. Significantly, however, local governments were far from being the only players in this politically charged culturalist turn. The Turkish state also took a dominant role here. By reasserting the Turkish Republican claims on Diyarbakır with an Islamist shade, under the lead of the ruling conservative Justice and Development Party (AKP), the state and government institutions also pursued many material and symbolic reconstruction projects in the city, while obstructing the local governments' similar efforts by legal, fiscal and administrative punitive means. Meanwhile, a wide range of others actors from metropolitan Turkey, who were somewhat critical of official definitions of the nation and culture, also took part in these processes: the pro-EU cosmopolitan-or-minority-identified metropolitan İstanbulite nomenclature, public intellectuals, civil society organizations, artists, entrepreneurs, culture brokers. The war of positions among these actors only intensified the image of Diyarbakır as a historical hub of "cultures and civilizations," while turning the urban space into a heaven of projects, discourses and signs seeking to reconstitute that legacy.

The political conjuncture that facilitated these reconstructionist visions in and of Diyarbakır proved rather volatile. The state has never responded to Kurdish demands for peace in any formal way, and the political reforms that it has passed within the context of

EU process did not go beyond few token moves that eased the ban on the use of Kurdish language. While not stepping back from the goal of peaceful resolution within Turkey, the PKK resumed armed struggle in the summer of 2005, which the state responded with habitual means of militarist repression. However, reconstructionist discourses and projects of culture prevailed in Diyarbakır for the rest of the decade (and henceforth) as a key medium of contests over identity, history and space in and over the city.

Having located the cultural(ist) turn of the 2000s within the larger context of the Kurdish conflict, I want to emphasize here that my critical focus on this process does not privilege the contest between the Turkish state and the Kurdish opposition. Such a mode of engagement would presuppose, and foreground, fixed notions of Kurdishness and its relationship to Diyarbakır as self-proximate wholes vis-à-vis the big Other, which I have little interest in reiterating. I am rather interested in the entailments of the process in renegotiations of history, identity and belonging among different constituents of political Kurdish community and the larger urban populace in Diyarbakır.

In this regard, the politics of reconstruction has provided a new semiotic order in which to reimagine Kurdish and urban identities, on highly classed and gendered terms, and beyond the political imaginaries and symbols of the city of struggle. Rather than simply being a technical and architectural transformation of the city's physical environment, urban reconstruction has been a complex battle over the control of the direction of the urban body politic, a fight between competing visions of urban culture, history and space. The imaginaries and stories of "city of struggle" still hold sway in the city, particularly inside the neighborhoods that are home to fights for survival under

precarious living conditions. Furthermore, all constituents of the Kurdish political community invoke such imaginaries, when relations between the Kurds and the state become tense. Yet, as the signs and stories of "the city of culture" increasingly inscribe urban life, there flourish new ways and forms in which people experience and imagine the city and their place within it.

"Every new time finds its legitimation in what it excludes. Recent past is excluded, yet earlier pasts…are welcomed," and the new time "builds its representational forms out of materials from these accepted pasts, reorganized by conflicts and interests formed in the present," suggests Michel de Certau (Quoted in Boyer 1994: 6). Because the 2000s' Kurdish politics of culture was offered as a passage from one form of struggle to another, the language of this new politics involved a de-centering of the keywords (such as "colonialism," "revolution" and "class") of the more militant phase of the Kurdish movement of the previous two decades. Articulated within this larger political shift, reconstructionist visions of Diyarbakır as a "city of culture" have put forward new demarcations of history, identity and space that either de-centered the corresponding demarcations of the more militant phase of the Kurdish struggle (such as "colonialism," "revolution," "class") or revised their meanings substantially.

One central revision in this regard was that the 1990s, which had formerly been construed as the epitome of struggles *in* and *for* the city, was re-signified as a destructive period of war that happened *to* the city. In the immediate extension of this displacement, sections of the urban populace who had claimed to own a Kurdifying Diyarbakır - the dispossessed and the downtrodden, women and men of lower classes and the war-

displaced rural populations - were incorporated in projects and discourses of reconstruction as sources and symptoms of a destroyed urban fabric, sociality and culture.

As the recent past and its traces on urban space turned into problems to be resolved and neutralized, the “city of culture” narrative took its references from the distant past as mapped onto the old walled city, as I have already detailed. Notwithstanding how this multicultural remapping challenged the Turkification of Diyarbakır over the past century, it could do so only within certain limits: First, by viewing history and “its events” in terms of the succession of states comprehended as episodes of “civilization,” it rendered invisible the wars, conquests and all kinds of destruction that accompanied state-making processes in Diyarbakır over centuries (more later). Second, tied to an urban economic development model of turning Diyarbakır into a center of “cultural tourism,” this narrative not only privileged representations of history and culture that downplayed past and present conflicts (as undesirable histories), but also invested in the highly commodifiable brands-names of “cosmopolitianism” and “authenticity.” Third, while the past was reconstructed according to diverse needs and desires of the present, the origins and histories of all the phenomena that have made their way into the city in one way or the other were largely subsumed under an urban narrative. That is, be it Kurdishness, the Armenians, local traditions, language or cuisine, all phenomena were accorded meaning and visibility primarily as constitutive elements of an urban culture and way of life.

But, who could represent this city, claim its knowledge, and experience its culture and way of life? Obviously, material reconstruction of the *sur*-centered “city of culture”

has been the work of urban planners, designers and architects. Yet, in the 2000s, there also emerged a new genre of urban writing on Diyarbakır, concocted almost-exclusively by a group of native, urban-middle class male literati (Diken 2002, 2003, Miroğlu 2005, Mercan 2007-2013, Ekinci 2008). These literary elites took it as their task to represent and promote the knowledge of the "old city" by writing numerous memoirs and testimonial narratives in different genres and using various media outlets such as monographs, interviews, journal articles and social media groups. This literature has had a central role in the embodiment of the "city of *sur*" as a cultural space. Therefore, I want to briefly consider its characterizing plots and tropes: First of all, despite invoking the "old city" under the iconicity of *sur*, this literature mostly consisted of idealized experiences of the authors themselves in the pre-1960 Diyarbakır; that is, when Diyarbakır was a cherished site of Turkish Republican cultural modernization and before the rise of Kurdish political mobilization in the city. Second, the "old city" that this literature created is essentially a male city, imagined and narrated through a male gaze and voice. Third, this literature is distinctly cosmopolitan-identified and claims strong affinity especially with the city's Armenian past. Fourth, and finally, the "old city" is an incurably nostalgic space in which the post-1960 Diyarbakır emerges a space of "loss." For example, one prominent product of this literature is titled, "Diyarbekir Diyarim, Yitirmisem Yanarim" (Diyarbakır is My Hometown, I am in Flames for its Loss) (Diken 2003). Another one helplessly asks in the title of one of his writings, "Neredesin Diyarbekir? (Where are You Diyarbekir?). In such narratives, contemporary Diyarbakır and the majority of its residents – recently-urbanized rural Kurds or displaced populations

- emerge only as a background for nostalgic memories of its native or original inhabitants – i.e. the authors themselves and other constituents of old city's arguably "cosmopolitan" and "harmonious" multi-cultural make up.

RESEARCH PROBLEM AND METHODOLOGY

This dissertation broadly speaks to ethnographically attuned literatures that explore socio-political reconstruction processes in urban geographies of (post-)conflict. Main trends in this critical literature center their analyses on the effects of reconstruction processes on subordinate groups – such as women, war-displaced populations, ethno-religious minorities, or on the generative forces that sustain these efforts – global capital, colonial genealogies, entrenched class, ethnic or religious cleavages in localities (Khalaf, 1993, Nagel 2000, Arif 2009, Makdisi 2006, Salamandra 2004, Sawalha 2011). While I am closely informed by these debates, politico-historical contingencies of my context prompt me to devise a mode of engagement less tried.

Rather than exploring its effects of across urban space, I engage reconstruction beyond the limits of its deconstructive potential vis-à-vis Turkish state's regimes of power and knowledge in Diyarbakır, and the larger Turkish Kurdistan. More specifically, I take the cultural politics that underpin reconstructionist visions of Diyarbakır as an entry point into differently embodied histories and experiences of Kurdishness, Armeniannes, and manhood that have involved in the processes of Turkish state-making and Kurdish nation-building in the city for the past century. I do this by tracing alternative genealogies of two gendered figures, namely *kirve* and *şehir çocuğu*, whose male-middle class nostalgic invocations are significant elements in the old city of culture

narratives. *Kirve,* is a fictive kinship term typically associated with the sponsorship of Islamic male circumcision. In current discourses on the old city, *kirve* is invoked as an idiom of claiming affinity with Armenians in a lost era of urban cosmopolitanism and harmony. *Şehir çocuğu* (Turkish for *the city boy)* denotes a particular masculine type formatively grounded in urban modernization and marginalization in Diyarbakır in the post-1950s. It figures in contemporary urban debates over nativity and authenticity in the old city predominantly as a lost masculine type. In my explorations, I first disarticulate *kirve* and *şehir cocugu* from the nostalgic images and discourses with which they are presented in contemporary Diyarbakır. Then I trace genealogies of these terms, their extensions and shadows across multiple processes and sites of violence, conflict and struggle that have marked Diyarbakır's past and present.

My understanding of genealogy in this work draws upon Michael Foucault's notion of the term. Foucault offers genealogy as a mode of historical inquiry that disturbs claims to foundations by identifying the "accidents, the minute deviations the errors, false appraisals and the faulty calculations" that lay beneath what is considered immobile, unified and consistent with itself (1998: 374-375). The promise of such inquiry is not to historicize the present in conventional sense, but to reveal the discontinuity of the present and its artifact as the effect of "substitutions, displacements, disguised conquests, and systematic reversals" (p. 378). Thus, if genealogy returns to history, it does so to metamorphize the coherence with which the present presents itself to us. With it, Foucault maintains, "the veneration of monuments becomes parody, the respect for ancient continuities becomes systematic dissociation," and "the critique of the injustices

of the past by a truth held by men in the present becomes the destruction of men who maintain knowledge … by the injustice proper to the will to knowledge" (p. 389).

While adopting the genealogical method for this work, I am also inspired by Raymond Williams' canonized work, *Keywords* (1976), and Carol Gluck and Anna L. Tsing's edited volume, *Words in Motion* (2009). *Keywords* is seen as key contribution to socio-cultural inquiry for having shown not only that the meanings of words that shape the experience and interpretation of society and culture change over time, but "that they change in relationship to changing political, social, and economic situations and needs" (Bennett at al. 2008: xvii). *Words in Motion* extends this approach into a mode of analysis which positions words as "a methodological entry into the social and political experience, by tracking their circulation as "tightly situated in time, place and process." As a particular genealogical effort, the aim here is to open up new possibilities for "social, political and moral action" by revealing relations and patterns of power, oppression and resistance that inscribe individual and collective meanings, experience and agency (Gluck 2009: 3-5).

CHAPTER OUTLINES

With such methodological approach, I trace four keywords "in motion" in four chapters: *Kirve*, "the uncircumcised terrorist," *şehir çocuğu,* and *qirix*.

Chapters one and two form a pair. Chapter One traces the genealogies of *kirve*. In the 2000s, *kirve* was deployed in politics of culture in Diyarbakır by two different actors: One of these, as I suggested, was the urban literati who conjured an "Armenian" *kirve* into their claims old Diyarbakır's cosmopolitan heritage. The other was the Turkish state, who

sponsored numerous mass-circumcision ceremonies as an instrument to repair its relationship with the Kurds by becoming their *kirve*. Notwithstanding their conflicting claims on Diyarbakır's cultural past and heritages, these two *kirve* politics shared the same understandings of the term in an essential relationship to Islamic circumcision sponsorship. I contest this understanding by tracing the formative context of *kirve* relations to the mixed-culture of Ottoman Kurdo-Armenia. I, then, locate the semantic fixing of *kirve* in Islamic circumcision in the resemanticization of being "uncircumcised" as an irreducible sign of Armenian alterity ("infidelity") in the wake of the Genocide. Building on this, Chapter Two traces a certain trope of "uncircumcised terrorist," which the Turkish state systematically deployed for PKK militants for the past three decades. I trace this trope to the context of the hailing of Armenians as "uncircumcised infidels," and assess the state's more recent interest in becoming *kirve* to the Kurds in the shadow of these histories. By tracing the shifting politics and semantics of *kirve*, and its shadow idiom, the "uncircumcised terrorist," these two chapters bring to light the sovereign phallic violence that has been foundational to the modern Turkish state in Diyarbakır and the larger Turkish Kurdistan, from the Armenian Genocide to the present.

Chapter three and four form another pair. Chapter Three focuses on multiple circulations of *şehir çocuğu* as at once an embodied type of masculinity, an urban myth, and recently an icon of middle-class male nostalgia for the culture of the old Suriçi. Critical of de-historizicing and romanticizing assumptions of this nostalgia, I trace the formation and transformations of the *şehir çocuğu* type for a genealogy of Diyarbakır's contentious Kurdification process from the registers of class and masculinity. Chapter

Four explores *Qirix*, which is a pejorative name for *şehir çocuğu* used by urban middle-classes and in Kurdish revolutionary discourses. But in Chapter Four, it is the name of the comic series that I analyze. Published in the 1990s at the peak of the Kurdish national liberation movement, the *Qirix* series is a parody of the reflections of the political struggles of the time in the life of a *şehir çocuğu* named Keko. I read *Qirix* as an entry point into the myriad individual and social experiences of the 1990s' Diyarbakır beyond the constitutive terms and discourses of "the city of struggle" that I described above.

FIELDWORK AND POSITIONALITY

For this dissertation I conducted eighteen months of fieldwork in Diyarbakır between 2006 and 2008 and subsequent historical and secondary research at multiple sites. I carried out most of my fieldwork research in the Xançepek quarter in Suriçi. Comprising the southeastern quadruple of the walled city, Xançepek had hosted the virtual entirety of urban Armenian community before the Genocide; hence, it was also called the Armenian quarter. In addition, then, small groups of Diyarbakırite Jews, native Assyrians, Syriacs and Muslims also lived there. Until the turn of the twentieth century, the quarter had a vibrant economic life as a center of artisanal production controlled by Armenians. The genocide almost completely destroyed the Armenian presence in Xançepek, though a very small number of survivors later moved into the quarter from rural areas to take refuge around the Surp Giragos Church. In the post-genocide Turkish Republican era, Xançepek, as the rest of Diyarbakır, received waves of dispossessed rural Kurdish populations, especially in the post-1950 period of agricultural modernization. The historical demography and socio-economic character of Xançepek further changed in

the mid-1960s under multiple pressures; increasing decline of artisanal production with passage to manufacture, continued state encroachment onto Armenian properties, loss of a community within which to flourish, and denigrating treatment of surviving Armenians and fewer Assyrians by their Muslim neighbors –a phenomenon starkly evidenced in the naming of the Christian -populated part of quarter by Muslims as "Gâvur Mahallesi" (The Infidel's Quarter.) The trajectories of socio-political change in the post-1960s' Xançepek were not different from the rest of Diyarbakır, which I outlined above. By the turn of the 2000s, Xançepek was one of the most rundown areas in urban Diyarbakır marked with different forms of political, structural and symbolic violence.

With these historical and present features, Xançepek received special attention of those interested in reconstructing Diyarbakır as an old city of cultures in the 2000s. In Kurdish discourses of multiculturalism, Xançepek was construed as the emblematic site of Diyarbakır's multi-ethno-confessional cultural history and heritage. In urban policy schemes, it was the site of multiple built heritage development and restoration projects which aimed to turn its walls, churches, mosques, urban architecture and infrastructure into an "attraction site" for "cultural tourism" through activities such as: clearing physical space from structures and objects considered to harm historical artifacts and obstruct their visibility, landscaping and exterior upliftment of architecture, historical, cultural and environmental consciousness raising programs et cetera.[10] Inasmuch as these schemes made visible the quarter's silenced Armenian, Kurdish and other non-Turkish-Muslim

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[10] Summarized from the project descriptions of "The Gazi Street Rehabilitation Project" and "The Yenikapi Lane Renovation Project," both implemented over 2006-2008 by the partnership of Diyarbakir Metropolitan and Sur municipalities and Diyarbakir Chamber of Industrialists, with funding from the EU.

histories, their gentrifying impulse also construed the current state of the quarter as one of destruction and pathology. Hence, accompanying these material reconstruction schemes were numerous project-based initiatives carried out by variously situated NGOs (local, Turkish, transnational) with the aim of "rehabilitating" women, war-displaced residents or the youth through short-term health, women's rights, citizenship and vocational training programs.

In this period Xançepek stirred specific interest also in discourses on Diyarbakır's Armenian pasts, cast as "Gâvur Mahallesi." I previously defined "Gâvur Mahallesi" as the name used by Muslims for the part of Xançepek predominantly populated by Christians, mostly Armenians. It is impossible to trace when this naming practice had first emerged. Nevertheless, one Armenian folklorist wrote in the wake of the genocide that it was a "bad omen" that "the Kurds recently started to address Armenians with the old Turkish word 'Gâvur'" (Şahbazyan 2005 [1911]: 82). In the 1990s, Mıgırdıç Margosyan, a Diyarbakırite-Armenian man of letters, put the name "Gâvur Mahallesi" into a highly subversive public circulation. He used it as the chronotope of a series of autobiographical short stories that he published on Armenian everyday lives in Diyarbakır over the late 1930s and 1950s .[11] Margosyan's first book *Gâvur Mahallesi* (1992) initiated a public discourse on the thoroughly silenced Armenian experiences in the post-genocidal-Republican era in Diyarbakır and Turkey. He did not openly write

[11] My representation of Margosyan's reiteration owes to Judith Butler. In Excitable Speech (1997: 41), Butler argues that "injurious speech" does not only prohibit but "opens up a possibility of agency," because speech is always beset by the subversive potential of resignification. "The word that wounds," Butler suggests, has the possibility of becoming "an instrument of resistance in the redeployment that destroys the prior territory of its operation" (163).

about the genocide or mass violence until very late in his literary career (2006), but his "Xançepek, otherwise called Gâvur Mahallesi" (1992: 62) was the quarter of genocide survivors trying to stick to life amidst poverty, bigotry, loneliness, occasional empathy, and constant laughter. It was the quarter, for instance, of circumcised Armenian fathers, Armenian mothers who spoke better Kurdish than Armenian, broke Armenian artisans, old Armenian men who made it a habit of "counting our number" in every other family gathering to find it constantly diminishing, Sunday congregations harassed by Muslim kids, dispossessed Kurdish villagers harassed by Armenian and urban Kurdish kids or the Mad Ferho, an old Jewish woman, who stayed to die in Xançepek when the Jew immigrated to Israel in 1950 (Margosyan 1992, 1996, 1998, 2006).

Within the cultural climate of the last fifteen years, several prominent cosmopolitan-identified male cultural elite in Diyarbakır appropriated the name "Gâvur Mahallesi" from Margosyan in their writings on the old city. Several minority-identified nomenclature in İstanbul and many journalists joined the former with their own imaginations of and longings for a past of provincial cosmopolitanism in Diyarbakır. Yet, their appropriations of Margosyan's "Gâvur Mahallesi" were marked by an essential displacement. What in Margosyan's stories was worlded as a space of survival was filtered into these elite's mimetic narratives as multicultural coexistence, cultural refinement, prosperity and harmony. Thus, their "Gâvur Mahallesi" was not the quarter of Armenian or other survivors, but of accomplished Armenian craftsman and artisans, men of letters and arts, connoisseurs of culture and leisure, and their comparable urban

Muslim (Kurdish or Turkish) associates (Diken 2002, 2003; Mercan 2007-2013, Arpat 2008, Ekinci 2008, Başaran 2008).

While Xançepek was my focal location of research, my actual research site included the cultural, discursive and political processes and relationships that have shaped this quarter, Suriçi and Diyarbakır in general. Moreover, as my aim was to disarticulate my research keywords from their contemporary urban configurations for alternative genealogies for the present, I followed my words across multiple histories, stories and bodies. While tracing *kirve* and *şehir çocuğu* in the words and deeds of contemporary Diyarbakırites, for instance, I also did extensive historical and secondary research on the sixteenth century Ottoman Kurdo-Armenia and the trajectories of urban modernity in Republican Diyarbakır. Other times, I followed the stories of genocide or the recent murder of an Armenian intellectual in İstanbul. Or, I frequently travelled back to the 1980s and 1990s through my own experiences and memories of the city. Travelling across multiple temporalities and spaces, my actual field was wherever my research keywords, stories, or images took me to.

My native familiarity with Diyarbakır, its political and public cultures effectively facilitated my relationships on the field. Yet my personal relationship to Diyarbakır and Kurdishness as lived and imagined sites of identity and experience shaped this research also in a more profound way. Let me start relating to this via the response that Neval, a Diyarbakırite Kurdish woman activist-lawyer, gave me when I offered her one of my research keywords; "Diyarbakır". "Being on the road," she said, and continued:

> Because of my father's job, I grew up in the countryside where life was only about petty kin and land disputes, social horizon ended at the town's borders and

> it was the boy's show on the street. We used to travel to Diyarbakır frequently, though. Each time the bus arrived at the Mardinkapı terminal, I would breathe the heavy smell of sun-bathed manure, vendors' food and human sweat into my lungs insatiably. Oh, that smell, of a home, of living and future! That was why I moved to Diyarbakır for college. I have been living here for over twenty years now. I have lived through all episodes of it. Never have I felt being in Diyarbakır as strongly as when coming to Diyarbakır in the 1980s and 1990s. Would it be ridiculous if I told you for me Diyarbakır means "coming [to Diyarbakır]"? Five minutes before the arrival.

It was not ridiculous at all. I only wished that I could have put it that way for myself before she did. In the 1980s and 1990s my destination to Diyarbakır was from the opposite direction, from metropolitan Turkey, to where we had moved right after the 1980 coup d'etat. It was an increasingly difficult time to make a home of Turkish cities that we changed once in every few years, while political Kurdishness was on the rise in our home city. The political atmosphere in Diyarbakır was a demonic thing for our fellow citizens in Turkish cities, but a promising process for us. Every year, after renting out nine-months of life for work and schools, we would go to Diyarbakır to "live" three months of summer. During those long travels, the truth of things and possibilities of life would radically change from departure to arrival points.

The Diyarbakır of 1980s and 1990s, the city of struggle, offered to many, including myself, the possibility of getting to somewhere, to belong to a community, to be something and somebody collectively in our own ways. Thinking retrospectively, probably it was my attentiveness to how signs changed meaning as they travelled, a skill I had acquired en route to Diyarbakır over those two decades, that I perceived processes of urban reconstruction in the 2000s first and foremost as a radical change in the meaning of signs and an erosion of language and possibility. In the 2000s, I also had to confront with

the constructed nature of "identity" and "home" not only a theoretical question posed in the academy, but within a concrete process of re-embodiment which tried the truths of "identity" and "home" that I had laboriously stitched as my own. This awareness took me to genealogy with two different concerns: On the one hand, I was prompted to reconnect to the contingencies of "the city of struggle" and of Kurdishness as an identity-in-struggle as relative to present. On the other hand, I was trying to trace the highly classed and gendered truths produced in the "city of culture" in the present as relative to the recent past. Beneath my curiosities and efforts as a feminist-leftist and a student of socio-cultural scholarship was my investment in what would make the substance of Kurdishness and of Diyarbakır. If these were the formative concerns that had taken me to "home" as "my field," my thought and writing process since then has also sought to dislodge the histories and representations of Diyarbakır from the domain of Kurdishness, and Kurdishness from its self-referentiality, as an ethical responsibility toward "other" histories I have traced moving across multiple sites and archives - the histories of Armenians in particular.

In all these senses, this dissertation represents an intellectual effort to critically engage with the historical imagination that underpins cultural politics of reconstruction in present-day Diyarbakır. This effort for me is inseparable from two related ones: The first is a highly self-reflexive one of coming to terms and parting ways with "home." The second involves a search for other affiliative genealogies with which to imagine a future "home" beyond the grandiose male, elite and nativist gazes and voices on the city. If in this process my deconstructivist preoccupation with male gazes and voices resulted in an

almost-exclusively male-populated (his)tory, with mine being the only woman voice circulating across these pages, that should be one failure that I have to reckon with – “five minutes before the arrival.”

Hidden here is a freak fragment
Of a pattern complex in appearance only.
What it seems to show is superficial
Next to that long-term lamination
Of hazard and craft,
The karma that has made it matter in the first place.
Lost, is it, buried? One more missing piece?
But nothing is lost, or else all is translation and every bit of us is lost in it.

James Merill, Lost in Translation (1976)

Chapter One: Kirve

In June 2007 the Seventh Diyarbakır Culture and Art Festival organized by the Metropolitan Municipality hosted Yervant Bostancı, a California-based Armenian musician. A native Diyarbakırite, Bostancı had left the city in the mid-1970s. Of this self-imposed exile, he would remark later, using a Kurdish idiom: "*B*ê *xweda dibe, b*ê *xwedî nabe… One may make it without God, but never without a patron [someone to shelter and sponsor her/him]*. We had but to leave."[12] On this festive summer night, more than three decades after his forlorn departure, Bostancı was being welcomed back to his hometown as a native Armenian artist by a Kurdish crowd of ten thousands. He opened with a Kurdish elegy about a heart ailed in pain since home had been destroyed by fate, and paused to salute the audience: "I cannot express how happy and honored I am for being here with my friends, brothers and my compatriots," he said and continued: "May *Kirve* Yervant be sacrificed [to spare you from evil]! May I be sacrificed for our country [Diyarbakır]!" The Kurdish audience gratefully reciprocated this austere salute: "***Biji***

[12] Personal interview. September 17, 2009.

(Long live) Yervant! *Kirve* Yervant!" they went on exclaiming as Bostancı sang Kurdish, Armenian and Turkish vernaculars of Diyarbakırite folk music.

Not long after Bostancı's reunion with his Kurdish compatriots as their *kirve*, Diyarbakır hosted some other visitors under the very same idiom of *kirve*, but for a quite different festival in April 2008. These were five hundred Turkish businessmen from Western Turkey, who were invited by the Office of *Mufti* and Diyarbakır Association of Entrepreneurial Businessmen for being the *kirve* of an equal number of poor boys in the city by sponsoring their circumcision ceremonies during the "Sacred Nativity Week" (SNW) - a fresh tradition invented over 2000s under the lead of the AKP to honor Prophet Mohammad's birth and his *sunna.* In his inaugural speech, the *Mufti* of Diyarbakır clarified for the Western Turkish *kirve* candidates that "according to local tradition one who becomes the *kirve* of a boy [was] obliged to sponsor him in all matters for life" and emphasized the significance of their developing "brotherly ties" with the initiates' family as their co-religionists and compatriots.[13] The event found wide coverage in the Turkish media with joyous images of the initiates in ritual attires and excited comments by Western *kirves* on their own initiation into the culture of "the East."

Marking cultural reencounters at these two events, *kirve* is the reciprocal status term of a particular fictive kinship system called *kirvelik. Kirvelik* is analogous to the well-studied institutions of *compadragzo* in Latin America (Mintz and Wolf 1950) and *kumtsvo* in the Balkans (Hammel 1968). Like these two systems, it connects two families or agnatic kin groups with prescribed duties, responsibilities and relations of gift and

[13] "Kutlu Dogum 500 Cocugun Yuzunu Guldurdu." Accessed on April 20, 2008. http://www.tumgazeteler.com/www.gundem.info/?a=2763514

taboo in exclusive relationship to descent and affinity. It, too, is usually established through ritual sponsorship, which in this case, especially in the contemporary context, generally involves sponsoring the Islamic rite of male circumcision. *Kirve*, which I provisionally translate here as *sponsor*, denotes the status of all parties in a *kirvelik* relation *vis-à-vis* one another, except for the status of the sponsee to the sponsor.[14] The term also enjoys wider dissemination in use in that it is often employed by individuals or groups as a term of address to establish situational moral role relationships of the *kirve* kind without formal (ritual) conclusion of *kirvelik*.

Kirvelik is presumably an old tradition, and a quite alive one across Turkish Kurdistan. However, the kind of public reclamations of *kirve* as a representative marker of culture, identity and belonging in Diyarbakır such as in the two events described above are only recent phenomena. These reclamations are grounded in the culturalist turn in politico-symbolic contests over the city in the 2000s, and at the contradictory pulls of two contradictory, if not antagonist, claims to the city's history and present.

Surrounding Bostancı's concert was the new sensitivity about the multicultural heritages of the city, its Armenian heritage in particular. Mıgırdıç Margosyan's work, which I discussed in the introduction, played a pioneering role also in the retrieval of the idiom of *kirve* into this space. *Kirve* figured in Margosyan's stories as a title for certain Muslim acquaintances in the Gâvur Mahallesi of his childhood, who somewhat unsettled the boundaries between the mixed public space and the confessionally organized home as

[14] There does not exist any status term for this relationship, like the "godfather-godchild" pair of baptismal sponsorship. This is not a coincidence, for it is not primarily the sponsor-sponsee relationship that matters in *kirvelik*, but the *kirve-kirve* relation between the families, as I later discuss briefly.

a "close other." Beside his stories, Margosyan used the word *kirve* in his public addresses to larger Kurdish and Turkish audiences. *Kirve* also offered the name for his column "Kirveye Mektuplar" (Letters to Kirve) in a leftist Turkish daily from where he continues to plead on Armenians, Kurds, minority issues, social justice, and Diyarbakır. This appeal found wide echo in Diyarbakır. *Kirve* was promptly incorporated into narratives on Diyarbakır's multi-ethno-religious pasts, with frequent references to Margosyan and Suriçi. It was recuperated also into the claims relatedness with Armenians, and Assyrians, in the present time.

The background of the SNW Circumcision Festival was altogether different. *Kirvelik* is virtually unknown in Western Turkey, that is, among Sunni Muslim Turks. It was the Turkish state that pioneered reclamations of *kirvelik* at the ritual ground of circumcision sponsorship in the contemporary period. The *reason d'etat* of this culturalist engagement was quite instrumental, geared toward governing the Kurdish dissent by buttressing the common denominator of Islam between Turks and Kurds. In fact, the whole state interest in *kirvelik* Turkish Army was initiated by the Turkish Army as an "anti-terror" measure soon after the capture of Abdullah Öcalan in 1999. Later, this *kirvelik* call was partially "civilianized" as part of the larger processes of "civilianization" in the country,[15] with the participation of new actors and discourses such as "healing the wounds of terror" or "brotherhood between the West and the East." The SNW Circumcision Festival was one among many such *kirve*-making festivals in Diyarbakır and the larger Kurdish region in the 2000s.

[15] I discuss this process of "civilianization" in the next chapter.

Growing up in a family that was related to another one as *kirve* for several generations, I was familiar with the social and symbolic significance of *kirvelik*. In our Sunni Kurdish context, being *kirve* meant fulfilling sponsorial roles at ceremonial occasions of birth, death, circumcision and marriage, acting as one and watching one another's name in the larger public, and the removal of sex-segregating *harem-salaam* boundaries between the families. Notwithstanding this kin intimacy, my father and Kirve Ali, with whom we had as close a relationship as with our biological paternal uncle, were also critical of *kirvelik* for its provincial (Gemeinschafft-like) quality and openness to clientelistic forms of abuse. This understanding was influenced by the left-oriented Kurdish nationalist thought of the post-1960s' (more in the next chapter). Now, with much interest, I was following two contradictory quests of *kirvelik* in the city as the performative ground of "culture" of this historico-political moment, and, admittedly, with certain discomfort throughout.

Let me start with my discomfort with the Turkish-Muslim call of *kirve*. At a general level, this was related to the manipulation of religion and the co-optation of *kirvelik* to govern the Kurdish political body. But such manipulations and cooptation have always been central to the Turkish state's dealings with the Kurds. So I had a more specific concern with this *kirvelik* engagement, which had to do with the preferred ritual ground of this rapprochement; that is, circumcision sponsorship as a medium of "fighting terror" or, optimistically, of establishing "brotherhood with the Kurds."

What I found disconcerting about the discourses on Armenian or Assyrian *kirve* was quite different. I was in fact very attentive to these invocations for their potential to

offer non-nationalist archives of community, history and space, and open the past to alternative accountabilities, empathies and future imaginaries. This was the promise of the reiterations of *kirve* at Bostancı's concert; as the word to shelter the life and well-being of one another in the face of multiple histories of violence and exclusion. This was not a singular occasion where references to *kirve* carried such a promise. For instance, an autobiographical short story that appeared around the same time, entitled "In Memoriam of an Armenian Boy: Kirve Miro" (Kan 2007), also positioned *kirve* as an idiom to bear witness to history with a similar quest. Set in the violent context of 1980 military coup in Diyarbakır, this story was about the relationship that had grown between the author, Kadim Kan, then a young Kurdish revolutionary, and the elderly and introvert Miro, a friend of Kan's father, out of a shared fear and dislike of the Turkish police - and love for smuggled tea and tobacco. At the beginning of the story, Kan introduced *kirve* as a word that he had adopted from his father, and noted: "It sounded to my ear as something like 'uncle'." As the author learned in time about Miro's experiences of the Armenian genocide, the destruction of his village, the murder of all his family with the utter indifference of their Muslim Kurdish neighbors whom they had called *kirve*, Miro's rescue by his father's *kirve,* the Kurdish Haci Bayram, and the later pillaging of Miro's home by their Kurdish neighbors, the meaning of *kirve* also changed for him and in the story. It became the screen through which history revealed itself as a time irreducibly of betrayal, solidarity and grief while the present conjured as the time for accountability and justice.

However, the issue was that most emergent discourses on *kirve* in Diyarbakır in the 2000s thwarted such critical potentialities. In this period, it was usually the narratives of urban cultural loss into which the Armenian or Assyrian *kirve* were just too readily incorporated with citational or anectodal references: For example, "Kirve Dikran had introduced fedora and gabardine suits to the city; he was an urban gentleman." "Kirve Sarkis brewed four different kinds of booze; old Diyarbakırites could differentiate these tastes." "Kirve Faik was fluent in five languages; the Assyrians were all learned men." Here, the reminisced *kirve* was rarely the subject or object of any unpleasant or confrontational experience. Certainly, these discourses were significant to explore the kind of gendered and classed anxieties over local identity and modernity in present-day Diyarbakır. Indeed this nostalgia for the *kirve* was being promoted by the male cultural elites who claimed the knowledge and experience of the pre-1960s Diyarbakır. This was a part of their claim to authenticity, to the "ownership" of the city, at the expense of later generations, the women and especially the rural Kurdish migrants, who stood as background to the loss that had supposedly befallen "the old city." Thus, they offered no promise of opening up any alternative archive of the city; but a male, middle-class and nativist one.

There were two other intriguing issues about these competing claims to and politics of *kirvelik*. First, despite their opposing visions of identity, community and history in Diyarbakır, these claims relied on the same understanding of *kirvelik* as originally an Islamic institution grounded in circumcision sponsorship. Even the writer Margosyan, who I mentioned earlier, commented to me when I asked him about the

history of *kirvelik*: “In fact, we (Christians) do not have *kirvelik* as we do not practice circumcision. But we have a status word that is similar to *kirve*. It is *kavor*, like best man. I guess this tradition [calling one another *kirve*] had built upon the parallelism of the two customs.”[16] As I detail later, this understanding, with which inter-confessional *kirve* relations could be apprehended only as supplement to an originally Islamic sociality or culture, is the end-effect of a violent deferral, even if it is hegemonic in the present time.[17]

Second, these competing *kirve* politics were unfolding in tracks that were almost totally isolated from one another. It was not surprising that the actors of state-centric Turkish-Muslim *kirve* politics turned a blind eye on the kind of *kirvelik* reclamations in Bostancı’s concert. What was surprising was that the Turkish-Muslim *kirve* politics received no visible reaction from those Kurds and others who were reviving past inter-ethno-confessional *kirve* relations. “Foreskin is fact,” says Maurice Bloch (1986). Considering the native knowledge on and cultural significance of *kirve* relations in Diyarbakır as the center of Kurdish struggle, one would assume that everyone in the city knew the seriousness of the decision to entrust one’s own kind to a certain other for circumcision. After all, at stake was the promise of kinship, and for the initiate, his manhood! Despite this, there was a typical silence in Diyarbakır on the state-centric Turkish-Muslim appropriations of *kirvelik* through circumcision sponsorship.

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[16] Personal interview. April 4, 2010.

[17] The move that I seek here is clearly deconstructive, which is guided by Derrida’s exposition on “supplement” to deconstruct dichotomies of absence and presence (original and addition) through recourse to its double meaning as (i) an addition to something already complete, and (ii) as substituting a lack, thereby completing what is already claimed as complete (2001: 266).

Finally, toward the end of my fieldwork, I attended a public talk on "Cultural Life in Old Diyarbakır." Presented by an elderly local journalist, the talk was organized around the portraits of several well-known public men, from Old Diyarbakır, which corresponded to the speaker's youth in the 1950s and 1960s. One of these portraits was Aziz Günel, whom I barely knew about, save that he was the one time Archbishop of the Assyrian Virgin Mary Orthodox Church in Diyarbakır. It seemed that Günel had also been a prolific writer, the author of "the famous nine-volume *Turk Suryanileri Tarihi* [*The History of Turkish Assyrians*];" and a "religious cosmopolitan" who had been dedicated to fostering dialogue between Christians and Muslims as well as between Armenian and Assyrian communities. Günel also had a "close relationship with [Turkish] military and civilian authorities" and "even garnered the personal praises of Cemal Gürsel, Cevdet Sunay and Fahri Korutürk [successive Turkish Presidents] for his services for inter-communal dialogue." This celebratory cast of Günel's life here was problematic. The deeds clipped from his life, from the title of his "famous" book series - which was suggesting a Turkish origin for the Assyrians - to his intimacy with the state-army bureaucracy, sounded to me as more reflective of a constant effort on Günel's part to negotiate his heavily persecuted community's conditions of survival by betting with power in the post-genocidal-Republican Diyarbakır. But it became for me all the more disturbing when the speaker went on to interpret Günel as "the best example of inter-communal harmony" He said: "Günel and the-then Commander of the Second Turkish Air Force Regiment in Diyarbakır had become the *kirve* of Günel's Muslim neighbor, Haci Bekir, in the 1950s. *Kirve*, lest anyone here does not know, means circumcision

fatherhood. It is a very honorable title that Muslims and Christian used for one another in the old city as an expression of mutual love and respect."

At the end of the talk several people in the audience expressed discomfort about Günel's over-consensualist portrait offered. I, for my part, could not hold back from commenting that offering the picture of an Assyrian bishop, a Turkish military officer and a Kurdish *bazaari* at a *kirvelik* ceremony in the 1950s as witness to any "cosmopolitan culture" or "inter-communal harmony" was white-washing histories of violence, wittingly or not. I also asked the speaker if he could comment on the Turkish army's interest in circumcising non-Turkish boys along these histories, be they Armenian, Kurdish or Assyrian. The speaker dismissed the comment by bringing to the table his "publicly-known sensitivity" about the place of Armenians and Assyrians in Diyarbakır's history and culture. He also dismissed the question, suggesting that forced circumcision of Christian boys could not be conflated with the present case of Kurds, who were Muslim after all. He added: "*Kirvelik* is the language of peace and friendship, regardless of who uses it. We may have our political criticisms [of the Turkish state], but it is not always right to force politics on matters of culture." He was wrong. The answer to the Turkish state's continued interest in circumcising non-Turkish males did not lie in the ethno-religious divide between the Armenian, Kurdish or Assyrian boys, but in the circumcision scissor that the state has never dropped in dealing with these communities since the Armenian genocide. His positing "culture" as an extra-political ground on which to come to terms with history and space was also problematic. But then this

attitude was a structuring feature of the wider culturalist turn of the 2000s in Diyarbakır and of most narratives of urban loss, including those on *kirvelik.*

Informed and inspired by such ethnographic situations, this and the next chapter trace the genealogies of *kirvelik* and circumcision across multiple histories of violence that have culminated in the constitution of Turkish nation-state sovereignty in Diyarbakır and the larger Turkish Kurdistan of today. Setting out from a deconstructive premise that the understanding of *kirvelik* as the sponsorship of Islamic circumcision – that is, the collapse of the system of sponsorship with its apparent ritual base - is itself the product of a violent history, in the rest of this chapter I explore the Islamization of *kirvelik* at demographic, cultural and epistemic registers from the Late Ottoman Armenian massacres to the contemporary Kurdish conflict. To this end, I first trace how *kirvelik* had emerged and operated as an inter-ethno-confessional institution in the "frontier culture" that flourished in the Ottoman Kurdo-Armenia. Then, I explore the transformation of *kirvelik* into Islamic circumcision sponsorship in a process that simultaneously re-semanticized being uncircumcised as a fatal mark of Christian alterity ("infidelity") in the conceiving geography of the Armenian genocide. Finally, I detail on the appropriation of *kirvelik* as a technology of governing the Kurds in the Turkish Republican era. Based on these, the next chapter focuses on "the uncircumcised terrorists" - one key sexual-racist trope that structured the topography of Turkish state's war against the Kurdish movement after the 1980 military coup. The Turkish state articulated this trope to cast the Kurdish national liberation movement as "Armenian terrorism" so as to fight against it under the guise of a religious war, which simultaneously formed the discursive ground of Turkish-

Muslim calls of *kirvelik* in Diyarbakır in the 2000s. Tracing the shifting politics and semantics of *kirvelik* and "the uncircumcised" for the past century-and-a-half, these two chapters ultimately seek to offer a phallic genealogy of violent contests over identity and sovereignty in the geography that has become today's Turkish Kurdistan.

KİRVELİK BEYOND ISLAMIC CIRCUMCISION

The understanding of *kirvelik* as a tradition rooted in Islamic male circumcision is not peculiar to the contemporary context in Diyarbakır, but shared across the wider cultural geography of kirvelik within Turkey's borders today. It has also characterized the Turkish scholarship on *kirvelik*, which has dominated the anthropological literature on the tradition (Yalman 1971, Örnek 1977, Aksoy 2007, Köksal 1991, Kudat 1971, 2004). For instance, the two ethnographic works on *kirvelik* in Anglophone scholarship define it as a form of ritual co-parenthood practiced in Eastern Turkey through the Islamic rite of male circumcision. Arguing that the relation between the mechanism of sponsorship and Islamic circumcision here is an originary one, they situate *kirvelik* as an Islamic counterpart to *compadragzo* (godparenthood) in Christian traditions (Kudat 1971: 37, 50; Magnarella and Türkdoğan 1973: 1626). This same understanding echoes the standardized definition of the term *kirve* in Turkish language as "a person who holds a male child undergoing circumcision" (Acipayamli et. al. 1967).

There is virtually no ethnography on *kirvelik* produced outside of Turkish scholarship. Our historical knowledge on the institution is also quite limited. But all that we can know about *kirvelik* outside the boundaries of contemporary Turkey, Turkish scholarship and language shows that the definition of the institution in an originary

relationship to Islamic circumcision, which implies a Turkish and Islamic genealogy for "Eastern Turkey,"[18] is severely misleading on religious-cultural and geographic grounds.

The existence of a close functional similarity between *kirvelik* and mechanisms of baptismal co-parenthood such as *compadragzo* notwithstanding, an analogy between circumcision sponsorship in Islam and baptismal sponsorship in Christianity is hardly tenable. This is because while male circumcision is prescriptively practiced by all Muslim communities on the basis of *sunna* and *hadith* traditions, circumcision does not have any canonical base in Islam, in contrast to the sacramental status of baptism in Christianity or circumcision in Judaism.[19] There exists no notion of spiritual or ritual sponsorship in the Koranic tradition and no mechanism of sponsorship such as *kirvelik* is attached to circumcision in other Muslim contexts, such as the Persian Iran, the Arab Middle East or in South Asia.

Besides, the practice of *kirvelik* is not confined to "Eastern Turkey." In fact, it has been observed among all peoples of the contiguous territory that lie between Upper

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[18] The Turkifying gesture is reflected in the toponym "Eastern Turkey," whose canonized description was offered by Sedat Veyis Örnek, a Turkish folklorist, as "the south of an imaginary line drawn between Kars and Sivas and the east of one drawn between Sivas and Mersin" (1977: 168). Micheal Chyet notes that the region in question comprises Ottoman Kurdistan (2003: 324), and I may add, plus historical Cilicia – a densely Armenian and Kurdish populated region located between the Amanus Mountains and the Mediterranean coast in Southern Anatolia (Sasuni 1992).

[19] In both Sunni and Shi'a Islam, male circumcision is associated with physical purity – and, significantly, not spiritual purity. The substance of *sunna* in Sunni schools of law seems unsure: i.e. if Prophet Mohammad had been born circumcised, if he had circumcised himself, if he advised circumcision or circumcised his grandsons Hassan and Hussein (the martyrs of Karbala) (Abdu'r Razzaq et al. 1998; Bouhdiba and Khal 2000). In Shi'a Islam, the base of this practice is found in the following *hadith* attributed to Imam Ali: "Abraham was told: Cleanse/Purify yourself, so he trimmed his moustache. Then he was told: Cleanse/Purify yourself, and he plucked the hair from under his arms. Then he was told: Cleanse/Purify yourself, and he shaved his pubic area, then he was told: Cleanse/Purify yourself, and he circumcised himself." See, Massoume Price, "The History of Circumcision in Iran." Accessed on July 9, 2011. http://www.cultureofiran.com/circumcision_01.html. The likely influence of pre-Islamic Arab culture or Jewish tradition on the Islamic practice of circumcision is beyond my concern here.

Mesopotamia in the south (today's Southern Kurdistan/Northern Iraq) and Southern Caucasus in the north – among Kurds, Armenians, Assyrian/Syriacs, Azeris, Georgians, Roma and Turkic peoples. This diffusion does not contest the privileged status of circumcision sponsorship in the topography of the institution. And yet it reveals a considerable plasticity in the institution's ritual base across Islamic and heterodox rites of circumcision and Orthodox, Gregorian and Catholic rites of baptism and marriage. This ritual plasticity has been aided by reciprocal ritual sponsorship practiced by members of different ethno-confessional groups within the making of *kirve* relations; such as reciprocal sponsorship of circumcision and baptism between Sunni Muslim and heterodox Kurdish communities, Shi'a Azeris and Sunni Turkic peoples on the one hand, and Christian Armenians, Assyrians and Georgians on the other (Raffi 2000 [1881], Egiazarov 1891, Hartford Seminary Foundation 1922, Keykurun 1998 [1924], Beridze 2003, Derlugian 2005, Grigoryan 2009).

The dissemination of *kirvelik*'s kin-terminology also displays certain plasticity from one linguistic community to the other.[20] And yet this dissemination, too, indicates a significant inter-ethno-confessional dimension to regional *kirvelik* relations. In contrast to the univocal meaning of the standard Turkish term *kirve*, the corresponding status terms in other languages are all homonyms that denote both statutory kin and changing sets of

[20] I expand on this terminological variation shortly. I would like to note here that despite this variation, I use the recently standardized Turkish terms *kirve* and *kirvelik* for two reasons: First, these are the terms that mediate contemporary discourses on the institution in Diyarbakir and the larger Turkish Kurdistan. Second, existing anthropological scholarship also uses these terms. While I follow this ethnographic and scholarly consensus, I also problematize this linguistic standardization and keep terminological variation unaltered in my discussion.

ethno-religious communities other than the self. For example, the terms *kirvo, kiriv* or *kirib* and *kewra* in Kurmanci and Zazaki dialects of Kurdish respectively denote both circumcision sponsors and Armenians or Assyrians (Chyet 2003: 324). In interactions among Kurdophone communities, it may also be used to emphasize Sunni Muslim or Alevite-Qizilbash or (Y)ezidi affiliations depending on the religious affiliation of the speakers and the hearers. The Roma word *kirvo* means baptismal godparent from Europe to Quebec (JGLS 1880: 59; Hübschmannová 2003: 1) and circumcision sponsor among the Muslim Roma peoples of Turkish Kurdistan, who use it also as the designative term for Kurds. The widely diffused *kirva* is a homonym in Azeri for circumcision sponsor and Armenians (Keykurun 1924), while in Armenian it denotes Kurds, Turks and Azeris (Ajarian 1926: 592). In Georgian, *kirva* denotes both baptismal sponsor and Muslim Tatars (Beridze 2003: 7), while the Adjarians, a Muslim minority group in the Caucasus, use the word both for circumcision sponsor and as a generic name for surrounding Christian groups. A unique case is the circulation of the term among the Turkic Muslim Meshketians of Central Asia, who use *kirva* for Christian kin acquired through ritualized child adoption (Panesh et. al: 1996).

Finally, it is crucial to underline that the term *kirve* or its local variants are not of Turkish (or Kurdish) derivation. Etymological studies about these terms have invariably referenced to related words in main languages of Eastern Christianity: such as the Greek root *kyrio,* meaning *sponsor* (JGLS 1880: 59, Dersimi 2004, Kostic 1997:16-17); the Armenian *kavor*, which is a loanword from the same Greek root and means *best man* (Dankoff 1995: 79), and the Classical Aramaic root *karev*, which means *near kin or*

relative, and also forms the root of the Neo-Aramaic (Assyrian/Syriac) term for godparent, *qariba* (Jaba and Justi 1879: 310, Chyet 1997: 288-289). The systems of status and sanctions established by *kirvelik* also indicate a strong influence of the traditions of baptismal co-parenting among Greek, Armenian, Assyrian/Syriac peoples: These include the primacy of co-parent relationship over the relationship between the sponsor and the initiate, the transmission of the *kirve* status through patrilineal descent, and, perhaps more significantly, the prohibitions on sexuality and matrimony between contracting patrilineages.

Challenging the approaches that confine or reduce *kirvelik* to the sponsorship of Islamic male circumcision, all these data suggest something else: that *kirvelik* is grounded not in any single ethnic or religious tradition, but in the contiguity, exchange and osmosis among Muslim, Christian and heterodox peoples and their traditions in the geography outlined above. In fact, the idea of *kirvelik* as a syncretic formation would not be unfamiliar to the larger historical anthropological scholarship on fictive kin systems. For instance, *compadragzo*, already referenced, has been studied as a feature of the creole culture that developed in Latin America with the advent of Catholic Christianity (Mintz and Wolf 1950: 342). Another example is the adaptation of the Slavic rite of *kumstvo* to the advent of Islam in the Balkans over the 15th century Ottoman conquests: Originally an Orthodox tradition of baptismal sponsorship, *kumstvo* turned into a kinship mechanism between the Orthodox Serbs and Muslim Bosniaks through reciprocal ritual sponsorship of baptism and the Muslim infant hair-cutting ceremony (Hammel 1968). In addition to tracing their interconfessional-cultural- influences, scholars of these fictive kin systems

also focused on historical-structural factors that mediated their development and sustenance. Investigating, for instance, the organization of political power, socio-economic life and mechanisms of group reproduction such as marriage patterns in different spatio-temporal contexts, they emphasized the role of these traditions for providing a structural outlet to resolve tensions, build political or socio-economic alliances, and facilitate relations of trust and reciprocity among the vertically or horizontally divided exogamous groups (Campbell 1973, Mintz and Wolf 1950, Hammel 1968, Cassia and Bada 2006, Brown 2013).

It is uncertain when exactly *kirvelik* emerged as a comparable mechanism of ritual kinship. Available historical data on the issue is scarce – mostly consisting of passing references in historical or literary accounts on the processes of imperial conflict and transformation in Ottoman and Russian empires in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. However, the situatedness of data as such lends an interesting understanding into *kirvelik:* Not only does it render visible the geography of the mechanism as the "frontier zone" located between the Russo-Ottoman-Iranian empires, but also it invites conception of it as a "frontier ritual". Beside this general composition, these data also support the following three arguments: First, the formative context of the institution was the regional culture that flourished at the Eastern frontier of the Ottoman-Empire as of the 16th century, which was characterized by a formidable Kurdo-Armenian mix. Second, by the late 19th century the institution was still widespread and effective in the regulation of moral and material relationships among different confessional communities inhabiting this geography, with particularly conclusive force between Armenians and Kurdish

groups of different confessional affiliations. Third, the destruction of relationships between Armenians and Sunni Muslim Kurds as of this period was a major point of rupture in the later practical and semantic transformation of *kirvelik* almost exclusively into a mode and medium of relationality among Muslims (through circumcision sponsorship). With these in mind, below I briefly trace the history and practices of *kirvelik* as an inter-confessional mechanism of exchange and association in Ottoman Kurdo-Armenia.

KİRVELİK AT THE FRONTIERS OF THE EMPIRE

The incorporation of large parts of Kurdistan and Armenia took place within the context of the Ottoman-Safavid imperial-sectarian conflict in and over the region. The Ottoman-Kurdish pact (1515) that enabled this incorporation designated the region administratively as a "frontier zone," where Sunni Kurdish dynastic emirates or tribal chiefdoms achieved autonomous or semi-autonomous rule in exchange for their support against the Safavid Iran. Following the settlement of the Ottoman-Iranian frontier (1639), the Porte implemented centralization policies here, establishing general governorates in Diyarbakır and Erzurum and administratively rearranging Kurdistan and Armenia as "Eastern Anatolia" – for the first time in history. However, soon the Ottoman-Russian border turned into a hot point of contention, which led to the suspension of centralization to maintain the loyalty of local rulers. The mid-19th century Ottoman centralization would radically revise this frontier arrangement, which had structured political, demographic, socio-economic and cultural formations in the region until then.

Two major trends characterized this process of change across the Ottoman Kurdo-Armenia: First, this frontier administration established a graduated system of sovereignty wherein an internally ranked set of power holders ranging from the smallest tribal leaders to the Ottoman Sultan sought to maximize their interests by means of direct confrontation, alliance-making or cooptation. In such a system there was quite some room and much necessity for continual negotiations for local power, authority, and resources on a contingent or ad-hoc basis. Although this system usually worked to the benefit of Sunni tribal or dynastic landowners and at the expense of other populations,[21] there were also contexts wherein it laid the ground for alternative distributions of power among different confessional groups.[22] The second was an intense process of both cultural diversification and standardization across the region due to the contradictory effects of protracted wars, forced or voluntary population movements, and increased economic and cultural exchange in times of relative peace and stability at the imperial frontiers. This cultural change materialized differently: while in regional urban centers such as Erzurum, Bitlis and Diyarbakır a shared Ottoman townspeople culture emerged

[21] The Ottoman *millet* system recognized Armenians as *dhimmi (people of the book)* together with other Christian groups and Jews, which provided them with religious freedom and protection, security of property and the right to manage their internal affairs autonomously, if not full equality with the Empire's Muslim subjects. But in the countryside of Kurdo-Armenia, where the majority of Ottoman Armenians lived, their right to property and security had to be negotiated with Sunni tribal leaders, who levied them heavily even in normal times (Sasuni 1992, Klein 2011, Gaunt 2006, Üngör and Polatel 2011).

[22] It was this system, for instance, that made possible the survival of several small Armenian chiefdoms at the heart of Armenia around Lake Van in consensual relationship with the nearby Kurdish tribes or of the mixed-Kurdish-Armenian Emirate in Sasun until the 19th century [Şahbazyan 2005 [1911]: 46-47; Sasuni 1992 [1929]: 41). The same factor was at play also in the case of Assyrians/Syriacs in the autonomous dynastic Emirate of Botan, which ruled most of Jazzira between the south of Diyarbakir and north of Mosul (1515-1846). Here, these communities had more substantive equality with Kurdish or other Muslim groups - even in symbolic terms of bearing arms and riding horses, which were banned for *dhimmi*s under imperial law- as an effect of a local arrangement of government in which the Assyrian Mar Simon (patriarch), a subordinate of Armenian Patriarchate in Istanbul under imperial law, was second to the Kurdish Emir (Joseph 1961, Gaunt 2006).

across inter-ethno-confessional boundaries, in their large rural hinterlands a greater convergence among Christian, Muslim and heterodox populations in terms of life styles, customs and values took place.[23]

Apart from these general trends, there were also localized repercussions of the Ottoman incorporation in the Armenian plateau - the part of Ottoman Armenia in the north of Kurdistan-proper. The plateau was predominantly populated by independent Armenian peasants organized in large family farms across the vast countryside along with a sizeable Kurdish population of different confessional backgrounds and agro-pastoral trades, and lesser numbers of pastoral Turkomans brought to the region in previous centuries. Soon after the Ottoman-Kurdish pact, the Kurdish Emir of Bitlis transferred considerable numbers of Sunni Kurds from the south to the inner parts of the plateau up to Erzurum and Yerevan to demographically buttress the political and military power of the newly constituted tribal emirates in this region (Sasuni 1992). The demographic balance further transformed to the advantage of the Kurds throughout the sixteenth century, as the survivors of repeated Ottoman massacres against the Qizilbash Zaza of Dersim – a central zone of convergence among the Alevite Central Anatolia, Armenia and Kurdistan whose natives typically allied with the Shi'a Safavid against the Sunni Ottomans - sought refuge in Armenian highlands; large numbers of Armenians moved

[23] This is not to set the Ottoman rule as an unprecedented milestone in the formation of mixed regional cultures and traditions. The latter was one major effect of the region's geopolitical location at the intersection of changing imperial powers since the Urartian-Assyrian empires of 9th century B.C. The influence of the Zoroastrian rite of religious initiation, that is baptism, on the Christian canon and tradition, Armenian sacrifice of sheep, Assyrian/Syriac taboo on pork, and the surviving Zoroastrian traces in rituals related to birth and burial among Armenians and Kurdish communities of all confessions are only some better-known examples to this situation (Lane 2004 [1860], Russell 1987, Avakian 1994). However, the Ottoman rule did open a new era in this sense under changed political, legal and socio-economic circumstances.

out to Iranian Caucasus due to the general climate of insecurity and instability created by the Qizilbash massacres and/or their stronger sympathy with the Safavids than the Ottomans; and (Y)ezidi Kurds of Jazirra-Botan moved northwards to escape Sunnaization (Sasuni 1992: 41-43).

In effect, the Armenian plateau radically transformed over a century on multiple grounds. With respect to socio-economic life, there were a few discernible patterns: A large class of landless Armenian, non-tribal Sunni and (Y)ezidi Kurdish tenant farmers formed here in this period who were controlled by Sunni tribes of varying size and influence (Üngör and Polatel 2011: 16-18). Most Kurdish migrants were pastoralist, which increased subsistence-based tensions as well as interdependencies with the Turkoman and the indentured or independent peasants. Meanwhile, many Armenian lineages reverted to pastoralism out of subsistence pressures or acculturation by the Kurds. Amid such socio-economic transformations, there were interesting changes in local identities and cultural formations that might appear contradictory at first sight. While the centrality of confessional affiliation in defining individual and group identities did not change much, there also emerged locality based dependencies, attachments and loyalties among members of different confessions that often betrayed ethnic categories and rendered confessional divisions secondary (Sasuni 1992, Gaunt 2006).[24] More

[24] In fact, there are two idioms in regional Kurdish and Armenian dialects, "Fila" and "Kirdatz" respectively, which show that sociological identities were more determining in perceptions of "Kurd" and "Armenian" by users of either languages than ethnic or religious categories. Appropriated from the Arabic "fellah," which means "peasant" or "agricultural laborer," the Kurdish "Fila" was the categorical name for "Armenian," "Kirdatz" is the Armenian word for "Kurd". However, there was another word in regional Armenian vocabulary, namely "Kirdatzas" (Kurdified), which was used for nomadic groups irrespective of their ethnic or religious background, including those Armenians converted to pastoral nomadism without

importantly, these demographic and socio-economic changes created in time a distinctly Kurdo-Armenian culture in the plateau based on multiple forms of cultural exchange and hybridization – e.g. conversions from Christianity to Sunni Islam or Qizilbashh heterodoxy, Armenian linguistic assimilation by Kurdish, strong inflections of Kurdish vocabulary and phonetics by Armenian, adoption of Armenian religious symbols into Kurdish folk religiosity (Şahbazyan 2005 [1911], Sasuni 1992, Asatrian and Gevorgian 1988, Asatrian 2009).[25]

The limited historical knowledge on the kind of inter-communal customary law and regimes of everyday life this syncretic Kurdo-Armenian culture created on the ground does not date back earlier than the Orientalist, nationalist or missionary writings of the late nineteenth century on the Eastern frontier of the empire. But, *kirvelik*, which often figures in these accounts as if it were an ancient practice between Kurds and Armenians, I suggest, was the product of the frontier sociocultural formation outlined above. In fact, there exists no single historical reference to *kirvelik* among the Kurds, the Armenians or between them before this period, save for a late eighteenth-century Italian-

changing their religion. It is worth noting that in the same Armenian linguistic context, the Armenians who had converted to Islam were called "Tirkatzas" (Turkified) (Şahbazyan 2005 [1911]: 10).

[25] There are a multitude of examples as to how the organization of domestic and public life among Kurds and Armenians of the region rested on converging values and traditions. Suffice it here to note how the Occidental travelers or missionaries who visited Ottoman Armenia in this period repeatedly noted with amazement and frustration the cultural difference between themselves and the Christians of the Orient; at the homology between the latter and their Muslim compatriots in terms of morality, predisposition and customs – such as gendered codes of honor, marriage life, and predilection for vengeance; and, more often than not, at how they resembled anything but "proper Christians" (Tavernier 2011 [1678], Smith et. al. 1824, Southgate 1840, Hepworth 1898, Joseph 1961). This porousness of symbolic realms did not, of course, disintegrate ethno-confessional boundaries between Kurds and Armenians, as I discuss shortly.

Kurdish grammar book, which mentions the circulation of the term *kirib* in Kurdish to refer to godfather (Ganzolini 1789).[26]

The first written reference to Kurdish-Armenian *kirvelik* relations is in Raffi's pioneering Armenian novel, *The Fool: Events from the Last Russo-Turkish War (1877-1878),* as the definitive status of the customary relationship between two of the novel's main protagonists: the Armenian Khacho, a big peasant in rural Bayazid and Fattah-Bek, the leader of a pastoral Kurdish tribe in the nearby mountains. *The Fool* is a fictionalized testimonial account on the destruction wrought on Armenians over this war. From within the Armenian revolutionary nationalist thought of the time, Raffi focuses on the deteriorating relationship between Khacho and Fattah Bek, which allegorizes the Armenian-Kurdish relationships. Raffi invests no pain in such deterioration, even before it ends in Fettah-Bek's turning into a ruthless murderer of Armenians. He describes Fettah-Bek as the intruding usurper of the hard earned fruits of Khacho's labor. Nevertheless, he also describes the pre-war state of this relationship as being "close … [despite] the infrequent conflicts that had never gone out of hand," offering *kirvelik* as the facilitating medium of this tenuous Armenian-Kurdish intimacy:

[26] There are two works in the late 19th century that offer an ethicizing definition of kirvelik as "a Kurdish custom of circumcision sponsorship" (Bayazidi 2010 [1860?]: 71-72; Jaba and Justi 1879: 310), which show that *kirvelik* was practiced among the Kurds at the time. But then, even *Şerefname* (Bitlisi 1975 [1597]), the most authoritative text on Kurdish customs and language as of the 16th century, does not mention *kirvelik* or any other comparable idiom or practice. Besides, *kirvelik* has been virtually unknown in Kurdish regions beyond the Ottoman Kurdo-Armenia; such as among the Soran Kurds located further south (in today's Iraqi Kurdistan, north of Baghdad). Thus, there is a need to take a cautious position toward the ethnicizing of *kirvelik* as a spatio-historically specific feature of Kurdish culture here. I thank Michael Chyet and Garnik Asatrian, two prominent scholars of Kurdish language and folklore, for generously sharing their ideas with me while arriving at this conclusion. Dr. Asatrian, who has expert knowledge also on Armenian and larger Caucasian languages, further told me in support of this historical argument that "kirva" entered in Armenian language only after, what he called, "the Kurdo-Armenian symbiosis" in the Armenian plateau over the 16th and 18th centuries. I would like to acknowledge here the critical help of conversations with both scholars for developing the notion of *kirvelik* that I offer here.

> Not only was Fattah-Bek a good friend of Khacho's, but as well, was also his *kirva*. He had stood as *kirva* to some of the old man's grandchildren at their christening. Khacho, in turn, had been *kirva* to some of the Bek's sons at the time of their circumcision rites. Thus, between the Armenian elderly and the Kurdish chieftain, close relations had been established (2000: 22)

Following *The Fool* closely is an ethnographic study on the Kurds of Yerevan, then a frontier town across Bayazid, by S.A. Egiazarov (1891), which makes note of Kurdish-Armenian *kirvelik* with a contrasting emphasis. Unlike Raffi, Egiazarov portrays a 'noble savage' image of (Sunni and (Y)ezidi) Kurdish nomads here, and emphasizes how as only nominal Mohammedeans and incurable materialists in living they had much more in common with their Armenian neighbors than Muslim Turks. *Kirvelik,* in this narrative, appears as rooted in this Kurdo-Armenian familiarity and resemblance. Egiazarov also notes how it established an effective bond between members of the two groups for living side-by-side and pursuing common earthly interests (Egizarov 1891: 473-474).[27]

Another body of references where Kurdish-Armenian *kirvelik* is reasoned upon cultural contiguity comes in this period from Dersim. In his late-19th century archives, Gevorg Halajian notes of *kirvelik* as the formal conclusion of relationships between the Armenian and Qizilbash Zazas of Dersim, emphasizing the sanctity accorded to this bond by members of both communities (Asatrian and Gevorgian 1988: 50). After Dersim turned into a major target of protestant missionary activities over the late 19th and 20th centuries, several missionary works described *kirvelik* as the form that baptismal co-parenthood took after Zaza's adopted the Qizilbash faith, basing the Zaza Qizilbash-

[27] I thank Dr. Asatrian once again for providing me with the content of this work, which was not accessible to me either physically or language-wise.

Armenian *kirvelik* as the affirmation of an ancient ethno-religious bond (Dagavarian 1914; Hartford Seminary Foundation 1922; Asatrian and Gevorgian 1988).

Of course all these references reflect the varied political-ideological stances of their authors, especially given the historical context of their production. This partially accounts for their contrasting descriptions of the substance of Kurdish-Armenian *kirvelik*. Yet, much of this contrast also reflects locality-specific dynamics of the relations between Armenians and Kurds as well as the adaptability of *kirvelik* to changing contexts and needs.

A good case in point is the collection of short stories Hagop Mintzuri wrote on his mixed Armenian, Kurdish and Turkish village in Erzinjan at the turn of the 20th century. Not only *kirve* appears in Mintzuri's stories as an honorific title between the Armenians and Kurds or Turks, but also three of his stories are centered on a Kurdish *kirve* protagonist. In each of these stories, the Kurdish *kirve* is differently connected to Armenian characters: In the first one, *Kirve* is a poor and (economically) opportunist peddler, licensed with his *kirve* status to roam in the Armenian part of the village and intermingle with women as the gifted provider of their unending interests in goods from the city. The second *kirve* is the head of one Qizilbashh Zaza tribe from Dersim, who offers protection to the Armenian peasants against possible threats from Sunni Kurdish and Circassian bandits, and yet squeezes the hell out of the former by heavily taxing their agricultural produce in return for his services. Finally, the *kirve* of the third story is a young porter, the son of the Kurdish clan to which Mintzuri's family is ritually connected

as *kirve,* who becomes for Mintzuri the only source of friendship and connection to home, after both migrate to İstanbul in search of livelihood (Mintzuri 2002).

Having outlined the historical context and reviewed the references to it, I would like to conclude this section by discussing how *kirvelik* repositioned confessional difference in the service of an inter-communal secular *modus vivendi* among Christian, Muslim and heterodox peoples of this formidably mixed cultural geography, between Kurds and Armenians in particular. The elements that were exchanged through *kirvelik* were not just any commodity, but the very practices that marked religious identity and difference here: While baptism is the rite of initiation into Christianity, circumcision is the only corporeal marker of religious identity among Sunni Muslims and heterodox groups alike. While these rites inscribed the initiates as members of different religious communities, the exchange of their sponsorship through *kirvelik* turned the religiously separate families or lineage groups into kinsmen. This bonding did not entail any substantive superseding of confessional boundaries. Quite to the contrary, the peculiarity of *kirvelik* rested on how it reproduced these boundaries while at the same as forging inter-confessional affinities as a particular technology of regulating proximity and distance: Each inter-communal contract of *kirvelik* entailed a reiteration of confessional identities. Moreover, as mixed cohabitation always involved the "risk" of inter-confessional sexuality and marriage, the contact of *kirvelik* buttressed compliance to confessional matrimony by extending incest taboo to the ritual kin. Notice here how the rationale for the prohibition of inter-communal marriage is creatively transposed from confessional difference (distance) onto kinship (proximity). I argue that the appeal and

effectivity of *kirvelik* reside precisely in how it thus ensured the sanctity of communities of faith while simultaneously enabling the formation of inter-confessional communities of blood for a morally or materially interdependent, more stable and more secure mode of existence. These promises were also probably the reason why the term *kirve* turned into a generic address of proximity between peoples of different confessions even without the formal sponsorship of a person or event.

Certainly, *kirvelik* did not make a heaven of inter-communal living between the Armenians and Kurds or between other ethno-confessional groups in this geography. This was especially not so in the sense of pointing to an unbounded inter- confessional intimacy, harmony or 'cosmopolitanism' as nostalgized about in contemporary Diyarbakır. In fact, *kirvelik* was a mechanism overwhelmingly grounded in the socio-symbolic order in the countryside and had little to do with any townspeople culture, in Diyarbakır or elsewhere. And, even in the countryside it hardly had any transformative effect on myriad structural hierarchies that shaped inter-communal order. Yet, even in the worst case scenario, as Raffi's critique in *The Fool* of the structural base of Khaco-Fettah Bek relationship also implies, *kirvelik,* as long as it was feasible, played a facilitating role for an art of inter-communal living - that is, communicating, cooperating, disputing and adjudicating- through, and not beyond, the communal divide –in Ottoman Kurdo-Armenia until the late nineteenth century.[28]

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[28] The following testimony presented in a recent Yerevan-based report on the Nagorno-Karabag war between Azerbaijan and Armenia in the 1990s is to the point here. It is the reply given by a seventy-two-year-old Azerbaijani man to the question of how things happened the way they did: "I don't know how everything happened. I can't lie and say that they married our girls and we took their girls, no. Everything was separate. Azerbaijanis - with Azerbaijanis. At the same time, I can say we lived with them like brothers… Us and them, we had, how was it called, "kavor"… "Kirva", that's it. We had many kirva

KİRVES INTO FOES AT THE EASTERN FRONT

With such historical background, then, how it happened later that *kirvelik* turned into an institution supposedly grounded in Islamic circumcision sponsorship, in practice as in discourse? [29]

In fact the late 19th century on which our trace knowledge of inter-confessional *kirvelik* in Ottoman Kurdo-Armenia depends was the very period when the frontier sociality and culture, which belied the viability of these relations, was dismantling rapidly. This was the effect of several major political processes, first and foremost of the process of Ottoman modernization and centralization. This process powerfully threatened Sunni Kurdish power and privileges in the frontier through steps such as the institution an all-equal (Muslim and non-Muslim) imperial citizenship system (a pillar of Ottomanism), the destruction of Kurdish autonomy, privatization of land tenure, and sedentarization. The Armenians as well as Assyrian/Syriacs supported these for their promise of legal and socio-economic equality. To an extent this promise was met: The privatization of land tenure, for instance, aided the formation of an Armenian middle-peasantry over the 1860s and 1870s. The Ottoman Porte further favored the Armenian tradesman and merchants in centers such as Erzurum and Kars in exchange for their loyalty in the face of rising

among them. When there was a wedding, we visited them, they visited us. No, no, we lived very well." (Grigorian (ed.) 2009: 53)

[29] I should note here that this transformation only applies to the context of Late Ottoman-Republican Turkey, and not to contemporary Southern Caucasia. In Southern Caucasia *kirvelik* progressively lost its ground as an inter-ethno-confessional mode of exchange and association over the course of the Soviet processes of modernization and was further undermined during the post-Soviet nationalist mobilizations (Derlugian 2005: 193); yet without any attempt by any ethno-religious entity to "nationalize" the institution. If anything, characterizing the Southern Caucasian narratives on *kirvelik* over the lat century is a marked lack of interest in discursivizing it. This may be due to the modernist agendas of national political and scholarly discourses or the ineptitude of *kirvelik*'s "visible inter-ethno-religious quality here," to borrow from personal exchanges with Garnik Asatrian, to be incorporated into the nationalizing folklore canons.

Russian influence and nationalist sentiment among Armenian youth. Yet, these developments also increased the pressures on Armenians by disempowered Sunni Kurdish tribes or Kurdish, Turkish or Circassian irregulars that flourished amid massive political and socio-economic changes in the frontier.

The promotion of religious puritanization, both in the name of Islam and Christianity, and rise of nationalist thought in this same period further transformed the ground of Armenian and Kurdish relations; and the alternative visions of society and the potentials for new alliances that accompanied these processes severely narrowed down the ground for social reproduction through *kirvelik.* In order to restore its influence on the Kurdish elites alienated through centralization, the Ottoman Porte promoted the growth of a *sheikhly* class among Sunni Kurds to maintain their loyalty to the Caliphate. Concomitantly, Euro-American protestant missionary activism intensified in the region through numerous newly established schools, churches and charity organizations. These activities produced far less numbers of Western style devout Christians than modern revolutionary Armenian nationalists advocating an independent Armenia. Nevertheless, they provided sufficient ground for anti-Christianity to become a more powerful element in the new Muslim religiosity and in the processual articulation of all kinds of political and socio-economic conflicts of interest with the Armenians in religious terms.

The Russo-Ottoman War (1878-1879) turned all these ready-to-erupt conflicts into an almost total collapse of Kurdo-Armenian relationships. Indeed, the destruction of Khacho and Fettah Bek's *kirvelik* in *The Fool* was neither the work of Raffi's novelistic imagination alone nor was it incidental. This was the first time when Armenians and

Kurds, aside from all their internal conflicts that had at times involved outright violence in the past, fought on the opposite sides of an imperial war. This enmity was further aggravated when Sultan Abdulhamid II replaced Ottomanist modernizing reforms with Islamism to reverse imperial decline and save the empire by uniting the empire's Muslim subjects. This helped the Sultan to co-opt formerly alienated Kurdish elites, a process in which he became "the Father of Kurds" (Bave Kurdan). One crucial turning point in Armenian-Kurdish relations was when the Ottoman Sultan established an army of Kurdish tribal and irregular groups, the Hamidiye Light Cavalries, as a proxy force to fight the Armenian revolutionaries, incorporate unruly Kurds and co-opt other Kurdish tribes as a check-balance force against Armenians. The Hamidiye Cavalries had a key role in the Armenian massacres of 1894-1895 (Sasuni 1992, Klein 2011).

The following two decades was a period of continual anti-Christian violence, which culminated into the Armenian genocide in 1915, and the overwhelming destruction of Assyrian/Syriacs in 1916. It was such destruction of Christian populations that turned Eastern Anatolia into a Muslim haven. Obviously, this process of fatal religious antagonisms would leave little to no practical ground for *kirvelik* to survive as an inter-ethno-confessional institution, which simultaneously set part of the context in which *kirvelik* became practiced exclusively as the sponsorship of Islamic circumcision. However, integral to the process that resulted in the destruction of Muslim-Christian kirvelik was also a radical semantic transformation of circumcision, which turned being uncircumcised into a fatal mark of Otherness. In fact, in the Eastern frontier the mark of circumcision started demarcating the boundaries of inside and outside, friends and foes,

loyalty and treason, Muslims and "Infidels," and life and death in the reconstitution of identity, sovereignty and manhood. As I detail shortly, this new semantics of circumcision played its own notorious role over the course of Armenian massacres, pogroms and the genocide.

FROM THE ARMENIAN KİRVES TO CIRCUMCISING ARMENIANS

So far I have referred to (Islamic) circumcision as a medium of exchange and reciprocity in the making of inter-ethno-confessional *kirvelik*. Let me now briefly describe how circumcision marked religious and social identities at the Eastern frontier and the Ottoman center until the processes of centralization and rise of religious antagonism in the late 19th century, before I detail on the politics of circumcision and *kirvelik* as the Ottoman Empire transformed into the Turkish nation-state.

Observed in multiple geographies since ancient times, male circumcision has enjoyed formidable polysemy across time and space. It has been the site of multiple meanings that ultimately coalesce into the making of external group boundaries and internal hierarchies, such as a religious covenant, a rite of passage into boyhood, an inscription of tribal, ethnic or religious identity, a mark of social class, a mark of nobility, purity and civilization, a mark of bondage and slavery, a sacrificial offering to increase fertility, a form of sympathetic magic to increase virility, a means to enhance sexual pleasure, a means to discipline or decrease sexual pleasure, and an inscription of sex-and-gender based hierarchies by acculturation of the phallus.[30] Yet, this semantic fluctuation

[30] In a review article, Philip Culbertson (2011) offers a non-comprehensive list of sixty-two meanings that have been attached to the practice across different cultural contexts. Also see, Dinsmuir and Gordon (1999:1-11) and Gilman (1993: 56-57).

cannot be captured by any uncomplicated notion of plurivocity or cultural relativism because a radical “dissemination” contextually structures the meanings of male circumcision according to ever shifting sets of others or outsiders (Derrida 1991).

Circumcision has had multiple meanings among Muslim and heterodox peoples of Anatolia and Kurdo-Armenia, too. While it has been closely followed as a religiously recommended practice, it has also marked religious identity externally, as mentioned before, and enjoyed a gender initiatory role into boyhood.[31] Furthermore, circumcision rituals carried out as festive communal events have been key sites for the performance of familial socio-economic power and social standing vis-à-vis others since at least the Ottoman times (Bayazidi 2010 [1860?], Remondino 1891, Hartford Seminary Foundation 1922). It is clear that inter-confessional Muslim-Christian *kirvelik* transactions would not have been possible at all without *a priori* existence of certain mutually assumed commensurability between the sacred signs and bodies of Christianity and Islam. But these meanings around circumcision also make it evident how these transactions constituted performative grounds for an egalitarian social citizenship between members of both communities, especially how they symbolically empowered Christian sponsors as entrustees of the patriarchal order enacted through the rite. These ways in which the rite of circumcision mediated the reproduction of social citizenship within the context of Muslim-Christan *kirvelik* at the frontier was in quite contrast with how circumcision marked legal hierarchies and power at the imperial center.

[31] The (Y)ezidi tradition, which is akin to Jewish circumcision performed within the first week of birth, constitutes an exception to this gender initiatory function. Yet, among the (Y)ezidi, too, the role of circumcision in corporeal inscription of sex-based hierarchies pertains.

In the Ottoman Imperial domain, where citizenship was based on religious identity (until Tanzimat, 1839), circumcision was first of all the only ineffaceable sign of being legally Muslim, the corporeal mark of Muslim-Christian inequality, and the arbiter of compliance to religious-legal order under the *dhimmi* contract.[32] In addition, it was also a powerful symbol of imperial sovereignty as reflected in two different kinds of circumcision rituals: one for the *devshirme,* and the other for the *shahzadeh. Devshirme* were the boys levied from Christian communities in the Balkans for recruitment into state bureaucracy, particularly the army. [33] From the moment of separation from their families on, the *devsirme* would go through a series of rituals until their admission into the sultan's domain. Circumcision was the final (re-integratory) step in *devshirme* ceremonies and was sponsored by the Sultan himself, in his physical presence. It symbolized the corporeal affidavit of the *devshirme'*s submission to the ruling faith and to the will of the Sultan as his *kul (slave).*[34] *Shahzadeh* were courtly princes. Their weeks-to-months-long circumcision festivities were key theatrical grounds for the staging of sovereign power as both Islamic -by such acts as hosting Muslim *ulema* from all over the world for the occasions, organizing Islamic arts and letters contests and exhibitions

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[32] Peter C. Remondino points at this legally signifying power when arguing why "of all Mohammedan tribes" it was the (Ottoman) Turks who "most fervently practiced circumcision" despite the lack of religious compulsion. Building on a 1681 French traveler's account, he adds: "The tax gatherers in Turkey are very industrious, and, as being circumcised, was, as a rule, sufficient evidence of not being a Christian, [this traveler] often witnessed scenes on the streets, wherein strangers, arrested by this tax-collectors were compelled to show their circumcision as an indisputable sign of their exemption from the [*dhimmi*] tax" (1891: 40).

[33] See, Stanford Shaw (1976) for a detailed discussion of the *devshirme* system.

[34] Although "kul" literally translates as "slave," the English translation is somewhat misleading. This is because, as William Cleveland notes, most *devshirme* became powerful "warrior statesmen, acquired vast wealth, wielded immense power, had household slaves of their own, and married women of their own choosing." Yet at the same time, "the power they possessed derived from the will of the sultan; they were his creatures, his bondsmen, and he could dismiss and punish them as he chose" (2009: 46).

(Sari et. al. 1996, Krstic 2008, Covel 2009); and phallic - as represented by the central ritual object of *nahil*s, large pyramid wooden poles kept at the center of ceremonial squares next to *shahzadeh* throughout festivities (Rahimi 2007).

In the process leading up to the Hamidian era Armenian massacres, all these signifying capacities of circumcision radically changed in the Eastern Front. The rise of Muslim-Christian antagonism did not simply undermine the possibilities and promises of Sunni Kurdish and Armenian *kirvelik.* In this process circumcision itself transfigured into a sign of irreducible Muslim-Christian alterity. This meant not only the destruction of the commensurability between baptism and circumcision, but also, perhaps more importantly, progressive abjectification of uncut foreskin in the conceiving geography of the Armenian genocide.

From the *find-de-siècle* massacres onward, Armenian men encountered circumcision as one distinguished threshold of their relation to life and death. During the *fin de siècle* Hamidian massacres, large numbers of Armenian men converted to Islam and were *circumcised literally* at the edge of the sword. Foreskin checks became a common practice in mixed Muslim-Armenian settlements or on roads to escape, thanks also to the absence of any discernible phenotypical feature that would distinguish Armenians from Muslims. There were cases where Armenian clerics were purposefully targeted for circumcision to dishonor them in the eyes of their communities by defiling their bodies. In other cases, forced circumcision of Armenian men after their confession of creed was followed by their murder as *dönme (convert*) (Jernazian 1934, Svazlian 2000, Dadrian 2004). Other times, forced circumcision formed part of Armenian men's

sacrificial slaughter, as in the case of the 1896 pogroms in Malatya, when one hundred Armenian men were first circumcised and then murdered (Dadrian 2003: 169). Across these sites circumcision had bare resemblance to what was called circumcision until then: The removal of foreskin here had little to nothing to do with religious or social acculturation. It rather involved phallic ablation, punishment or discipline. Better put, circumcision became a mordant euphemism for symbolic murder of the "other-man" over the course of pogroms and massacres; for the killing of the man in the Armenian body, no matter if individual Armenians eventually managed to survive it or not.

There emerged here another form of circumcision as a sacrificial negotiation for life in the face of persecution and death. In his recent work on religious conversion during the Hamidian era massacres, Turkish historian Selim Deringil (2009) brought up the cases of large numbers of Armenian men who, after converting to Islam "voluntarily,"[35] took it as their task to circumcise themselves and self-report their circumcisions to Sultan Abdulhamid as evidence to the voluntariness of their conversions. Deringil shows that in their self-reportages, the supplicants did not even ask for recognition of their new status, but only informed the Sultan that "'they were simply living as Muslims'" (p. 356). For Deringil, this was one protective measure the Armenians had found against the Hamidian attacks and potential charges of apostasy by

[35] Deringil ironically uses the word "voluntary" here, and so do I quoting him. The following statement that he offers from Gerard Fitzmaurice, British Vice Council in Birecik in 1896, succinctly summarizes the degree of voluntariness involved in these conversions: "I would beg here to point out and it is a distinction upon which the Turkish authorities may lay great stress, that the Moslems did not with axes in their hands invite the Christians to choose between the alternatives of Islam or death…The alternatives offered by the Mussulmans were not Islam or death, whereas the only alternatives left to the Christians were those of death or Islam. So that the Armenians, to save themselves from certain death, became Mussulmans of their own free will, if, indeed, people under such terrible circumstances can in any way be considered as free agents possessing a free will" (Deringil 2009: 370).

neighboring Muslims, next to "other ostentatious religious observance such as couples renewing their marriage wows, men performing public daily prayers" (p. 356). I suggest that more was at stake in these men's offering the Sultan their self-circumcision as a "gift". In his discussion on circumcision as a covenant relationship, Derrida suggests attending to the removal of foreskin as disavowal of phallic presence before the Law (the production of "circumcised lips," "circumcised words" and "circumcised hearts").[36] Inspired by this, I suggest, presented to the Sultan as an appendage to this Armenian pledge that lacked any plea, the forfeited foreskin sealed the statement of "simply living as Muslims" with an ineffaceable promise of submission to the will of the sovereign Sultan.

The change of power from Sultan Abdulhamid II to the Committee of Union and Progress (The Ittihadists) introduced new elements into the uses of circumcision as a mark of identity and sovereignty. The reign of the modern-secular-Turkish Ittihadists brought about a transition from the Islamist strategy of saving the state by refashioning the *umma* as "the nation" (Karpat 2001) to a strategy of saving it by "engineering" the nation ethnically (Dündar 2008). Thus, during the Armenian genocide of 1915, the Ittihadists were not going to be bound with any religious covenant as easily. In the midst of deportations to Deir ez-Zor (today's Syria), the-then Minister of Interior, Talat Pasha,

[36] Derrida offers this as part of a larger critique of psychoanalytical interpretations of circumcision in terms of the threat of penile loss. He says: "Where the foreskin no longer covers, protects itself the better because it is more exposed, through interiority, pseudonym, irony, hypocrisy, detour and derelay, whence my theme, foreskin and truth, the question of knowing by whom and by what the violence of circumcision was imposed, if it was a traumatic wound and if there are others, symbolic or not… no longer satisfies me, or only as a relay in view of another epitopomology, another stratagem of the heteromic alliance, in the 'es gibt' of the stroke of the gift with which to sew up the chain of all my texts" (1991: 135-136).

issued a special decree for the prevention or invalidation of religious conversions so that the Armenians could not escape these death marches (Akçam 2007:175). However, while ruling out the option of conversion for life, the Ittihadists still practiced a systematic circumcision policy toward Armenian children forcibly removed from their families during deportations.

Genocide historiographies note numerous mass circumcision rituals sponsored by the Ittihadists across central Anatolia in 1915, each time before the relocation of these children into the official *Dar-ul Aitams* (*The House of the Orphans*), where they would be raised as Turks.[37] The image of children survivors exhibited in these rituals as if they were trophies of a victorious war is striking, as in the following eyewitness account:

> The hundreds of orphaned children of those who had been killed were converted to Islam. Days of grand circumcision ceremonies were held for boys between the ages of five and twelve; these newly converted Muslims were paraded around the town in carriages unaware of what had happened to them (Balakian 2010 [1922]: 87).

No less striking in the Ittihadists' circumcision mission was its generativity in the construction of an unprecedented congruity between Turkishness and being circumcised across the road from the Ottoman Empire to the Turkish nation-state. To put it in other words, the Ittihadist appropriation of circumcision sponsorship involved a religious dimension only to the extent that Sunni Muslim identity, which had functioned as a form

[37] It is worth noting here that despite its significance in controlling the life and death of Armenian men for decades of violence, the issue of circumcision received only cursory attention in the existing genocide scholarship. And wherever it is mentioned, its thoroughly gendered and sexualized topography remains avoided by a single-sided focus on experiences of the universally feminized category of the "child-victim." This avoidance represents part of a larger tendency to exempt intimate violence against Armenian men from depictions of the "thick agony of the [Armenian] body" (Balakian et. al. 2010: iii); a tendency maintained also in more recent attempts at "gendering the Armenian genocide" wherein an equation of gender with women, often times women-children, seems to prevail (See in particular Derderian 2005, Altınay and Türkyılmaz 2010).

of proto-nationalism in the Hamidian era, was incorporated into the Ittihadist version of Turkish nationalism as an intrinsic trait of the secular nation (Hann 1997, Waxman 2000, Bora 1998). Nevertheless, in the period that immediately followed, the Ittihadists' interest in circumcising non-Turkish male children continued in contexts that had no relationship to religious conversion, even nominally.

The Armenian issue is finally settled, announced Talat Pasha in August 1915. This did not mean the closing of the "Eastern Front." In the following years of World War I, the Ittihadists continued their nation-engineering policy by a comprehensive plan for the resettlement of Kurds in order to dilute their ethnic concentration in what had become an overwhelmingly Kurdish Kurdo-Armenia.[38] The Russians invaded much of the same region, up to the immediate north of Diyarbakır, driving out an additional hundred of thousands of Muslim populations out of their home (Dündar 2001, Üngör 2005). The resultant degree of regional human loss left little human resources to mobilize for what took the name of the "Turkish War of Independence" (1918-1922). Then, the renowned Commander of the Eastern Front, Kâzım Karabekir, came up with a solution; a new old one. He devised a children's army project named "Gürbüzler Ordusu" (the Army of the Robust Ones), which was closely fashioned after the Imperial *devshirme* system. Only in this case, the children were not going to be levied from families, as they had already been orphaned by the deportations and war. When the project was put into

[38] In fact, the CUP had put into effect a plan for the resettlement of Muslim populations in Kurdistan and Anatolia as early as 1913, which involved the settlement of Balkan refugees in places evacuated by the Armenians, and the resettlement of Kurdish, Georgian and Laz populations into Central Anatolia. The scope of this policy was narrowed down for the Kurds starting with 1916. Only over 1917, two hundred thousand Kurdish refugee and native population from the provinces of Diyarbakir, Mamuret-ul Aziz and Urfa were dislocated (Dündar 2001: 151).

practice, circumcision was put onto the stage as the ritual medium of these children's initiation into the court of the sovereign - this time the court of the emerging Turkish nation-state rather that of the Sultan.

Recruitment for Gürbüzler Ordusu commenced at the Erzurum *Dar-ul Aitam* in May 1919. Until August 1922, thousands of war orphans were recruited from all around the Eastern Front for the project to be trained into multi-skilled personnel for the Turkish Army with a bio-political approach that integrated physical education and education in philosophy, arts and letters with vocational and military training. Dozens of orphanages, industrial ateliers and seventeen combat regiments were established, and a "children's town" was set up in Sarıkamış, right across the border of the short-lived Democratic Republic of Armenia (1916-1919). "Grandiose circumcision feasts," to quote Karabekir's oft-repeated expression, marked the opening of almost every Gürbüzler Ordusu institution over these three years with the participation of local military officers, civilian bureaucrats, notables and commons; and, strikingly, always in the same building which had hosted the Turkish War's founding Congress of Erzurum (Karabekir 1994).

The total number of Gürbüzler Ordusu recruits is not known and so is the ethno-religious profile of these children is in the dark. The recruits were never publicized and they were all registered as Turks (Özbay 1999, Maraşlı 2009). When regional demographic composition and the trajectory of human loss over the war are considered, they had to be an ethno-religiously diverse group of mostly Armenian and Kurdish children with lesser numbers of Muslim Turkish, Georgian and Circassian children. Strikingly, however, in his memoirs, *The War of Independence* (1969) and *The Kurdish*

Issue (1994), Karabekir justifies the Gürbüzler Ordusu project in relation to no other phenomenon, but the "rehabilitation of the Kurds" and of "the East" in connection with the "Issue of the Kurds" (1994: 60). I suggest that both the certain ethno-religious diversity of Gürbüzler Ordusu recruits and Karabekir's ethnic justification for the project offer a significant lens into how circumcision and its sponsorship were appropriated by the Ittihadists as a nationalizing ritual towards the foundation of the Turkish Republic, which inscribed the Law of the Turkish Father on these children's bodies following the killing of their non-Turkish fathers. Karabekir himself quite openly underlined the stake in these rituals in terms of national reproduction and the production of national paternity after one such ceremony as follows:

> On August 14, 1920, I ordered a bright circumcision feast in the large garden of the historical building which hosted the Congress of Erzurum… The deserving memory of this day [is] very much alive and endearing in our minds:
> We dressed the children in white shirts and headgears and attached a rose on their chests as it is the custom of the well-to-do-ones. And we paraded them all over the city… Then our doctors started their circumcision… The cheerful voices of dozens of children rising from the circumcision building [recorded]:
> -Long Live! Pasha Father! This first [address] was uttered in a normal voice. It would elongate and its tone would change with the pain of circumcision and according to the degree of the child's moral strength:
> -Long Liiiiiiive… Pashaaaaaaaaaaaa Fatheeeeeeeeeeeerr!!
> After everything was over, I went to their beds to greet them personally… All these fatherless kids clang to my hands and hugged me as if they had found their real father. And to me they gave the love one feels for his own children… (1994: 257-258)

KİRVELİK: INTO THE TURKISH REPUBLIC

Despite its typical infeasibility between Sunni Kurds and Armenians, *kirvelik* never fell out of the picture of inter-ethno-confessional exchange or cooperation across these processes of violence and dislocation. In fact, this period also witnessed the

proliferation of *kirvelik* contracts between Armenians and Zaza Qizilbash or (Y)ezidi Kurds as a mechanism of solidarity and protection against larger Sunni Muslim threats, which aided the survival of significant numbers of people from these communities (Kreyenbroek 1995, Kieser 2001, Jwaideh 2007). According to the Lebanese-Armenian researcher Hovsep Hayreni (2009), only in Dersim around ten thousand Armenians were saved by their Zaza Qizilbashh *kirve*s from the Hamidian era to the 1915 genocide.[39] Such alliances have been rarely recorded in the case of Sunni Kurds and Armenians (See but, Svazlian 2000).[40] However, there is one reference on this issue which raises the possibility that *kirvelik* might have played a more effective role in negotiating alliances even among these two groups. Presented by a Turkish ethnologists, Fahrettin Kırzıoğlu, who was commissioned to prove the Turkishness of "Eastern Anatolia" in the Turkish Republican period, this reference concerns a letter sent from a military commander in the Democratic Republic of Armenia to the leaders of Kurdish tribes in the Sanjak of Bayezid on March 15, 1920, at a very critical moment of the fights with Kâzım Karabekir's forces. It reads:

[39] The case of Dersim may sound somewhat exceptional due to the already noted Qizilbashh-Armenian symbiosis in the area. But Hayreni shows that inter-communal solidarity was not automatic even in Dersim, but required the labor of *kirvelik* as in the case of Diyap Agha of the Zaza-Qizilbashh Ferhanli tribe during the Hamidian massacres. He entered Cemisgezek for booty, but ended up protecting the Armenians of the town against Ottoman soldiers with his four hundred cavalrymen, when in one of the Armenian homes the newly born baby Ğazaros Zenneyan was thrown onto his laps for baptismal sponsorship (Hayreni 2009: 7).

[40] This does not mean that there were no mechanisms of alliance, solidarity, or protection between the Sunni Kurds and Armenians. In fact, there were several key customary mechanisms that facilitated the sheltering of Armenians by Sunni Kurds throughout this history of violence: such as the ethics of neighborliness or tribal principles of protecting one's subjects. Concerning this, several genocide scholars have sought to diversify the role of Kurds in the destruction of Armenians as "perpetrators, collaborators, protectors" (Kieser 2005, Gaunt 2006, Jongerden 2012) These debates are beyond my interest here for two reasons: First, I find problematic the readings of history that fix agency in ethnic-national terms, no matter in which direction, without serious historical-ethnographic and methodological consideration. Second, my interest is in the Sunni Muslim-Armenian *kirvelik*, which did mostly lose its ground by this period.

> Hey Kurds! For thousands of years, we the Armenians and Kurds have lived as brothers of soil and water. Our ancestors had been *kirve* to one another before the Turks came between us. This is a fact that no one or no history can deny. However, recently the outlander Turks came and sow seeds of intrigue between us and trapped us into being enemies; they destroyed our peace. They caused so much bloodshed of the innocent ones on both sides in order to keep up their own interests. That is why I urge you: Let no further blood be shed in vain. I call on you to hurry up, not to step on your own interests. God shall not accept the further shedding of Armenian and Kurdish blood (Kırzıoĝlu 1970: 110-111)

Kırzıoĝlu offers this letter as testament to historical Armenian "treachery" and "intrigue," and remarks that this was but one of the many such calls wherein Armenians sought alliance with the Kurds during WWI by exploiting the bond of *kirvelik*. For my purposes here, these calls matter in the sense of indicating the survival of at least a certain degree of "hope" for (Sunni) Kurdish-Armenian *kirvelik* by this time. Kırzıoĝlu makes sure that Kurdish tribes did not reciprocate these calls and allied with Karabekir instead. We would not be able to know if the fate of the Democratic Republic of Armenia could have been different had the Kurds replied such calls of *kirve* positively. What is for sure is that the defeat of Armenian forces by Karabekir a few months later, in August 1920, put a final end to the Armenian political presence in the Eastern Front.

Around the same time when Karabekir transposed the *devshirme* circumcision into the Eastern front to make Turkish sons out of Armenian and Kurdish boys, other *kurmay*s of the Turkish National forces were involved in forming *kirve* bonds with Kurds to build political alliances in the region. The pioneer of this attempt was none other than Mustafa Kemal, who, upon his arrival in Silvan, Diyarbakır as the Commander of the 16th Army corps in 1916, became the *kirve* of Sadık Agha, the head of one of the largest tribes of the area to facilitate his initiation into the socio-political dynamics in the region. Over

the course of what turned into an effective relationship for the coordination of war efforts in and around Diyarbakır throughout WWI, Sadık Agha used his best influence to mobilize the support of other Kurdish tribes for Mustafa Kemal, while his militiamen controlled secure transportation of arms and other logistics for his forces in the region.[41] İsmet İnönü, Mustafa Kemal's right-arm and the founding Prime Minister of the later Turkish Republic, used the same mechanism in Erzincan, a town of strategic significance at the intersection of Armenia and Kurdistan by sponsoring the circumcision of the son of the region's biggest landlord, Mustafa Agha (Kıvılcımlı 1979 [2010]: 154). Others followed them.

These Turkish military-bureaucratic appropriations of *kirvelik* obviously drew upon the inherent political utility of the institution; but this process was also generative of a new role for *kirvelik* - as means to fashioning national kinship.[42] Nevertheless, these practical engagements with the institution were immediately accompanied by its discursive Turkification. In 1922, just one year after inventing a Turkish genealogy for the Kurds, Ziya Gokalp of the Ittihadists, a Diyarbakırite Zaza and the most influential ideologue of Turkish nationalism, proposed an origin for *kirvelik* in the "tradition of potlatch among the shamanic Turks of Central Asia" (Aksoy 2007). The post-Republican Turkish state bureaucracy proved even more systematic in appropriating *kirvelik* in Kurdistan, now as a technology of governance, so that by the 1970s the mechanism had

[41] The descendants of Sadik Agha are still called "Ataturk's kin" in contemporary Silvan. The family always has a place reserved for state protocol in official celebrations.

[42] This mode of political instrumentalization is hardly exceptional. This instrumentalism parallels the use of the tradition of *koumbaria* in the making of modern Greece and Tito's utilization of *kumstvo* in the formative period of socialist Yugoslavia (Brown 2013: 83)

turned into "one of the two main patron-client networks along with *aĝalık* (landlordship) to structure the state of the art of politics" in the region (Kudat 1974: xx). In the meantime, the Turkification of the institution also continued inside the Turkish nationalist canon that was in-the-making. Until Kurdistan was opened to independent researchers in 1965, each and every Turkist intellectual dedicated to identifying a Turkish origin for the peoples and land of Kurdo-Armenia invented a national origin for *kirvelik* in their ecumene.[43]

Through these appropriations, all non-Turkish histories or genealogies of *kirvelik* were foreclosed, as with non-Turkish everything else, in the process of the turning of Kurdo-Armenia into Eastern Turkey; the home of Turkisness. Yet, significantly, this process of nationalization was not the same as, or did not automatically involve, the institution's Islamization through a causal link to circumcision sponsorship. The situation was quite to the contrary. At stake for this ethnicist version of Turkish nationalism was finding a pre-Islamic national egalitarian past for Turkishness in line with the Kemalist project of modern (secular) civilizationism, which was found in shamanism and Central Asia. Hence, it was possible for a racist ethnologist like Kırzıoĝlu to trace *kirvelik* to tradition of baptismal co-parenthood practiced during the Arshakid rule (66-428 A.D.) in Armenia (1993: 474), provided that he could propose a Turkish essence for the Iranian Arshakids and the country of Armenia, which he did at the sleight of a hand by defining

[43] Among these were Fahrettin Kırzıoĝlu (1953), Zeki Velidi Togan (1970), the co-architect of the Turkish myth of origin in Central Asia - along with Ziya Gokalp, Mehmet Serif Firat (1961), inventor of the much circulated theses about Turkoman origins of Zaza Qizilbashh/Kurdish Alevites, and Orhan Türkdoğan, who has published numerous studies on Turkish origins of Kurds since the 1960s and guided scholarly research on *kirvelik* as a regional expert (Kudat 1971, Magnarella and Türkdoğan 1973).

the cultural "geography of *kirvelik* between Dagestan [in Southern Caucasus] and Adana" as the "land of Turkishness" (1970: 110).

The subsuming of *kirvelik* to Islam was rather the work of post-1965 generation of scholarly-trained cosmopolitan Turkish sociologists and anthropologists who positioned "the East" as a "question" vis-à-vis the problematiques of modernization and development. These scholars were theoretically critical of the crude ethnicism of their predecessors. However, not only did they more effectively contribute to the construction of sovereign knowledge on "Eastern Turkey" as a national periphery, but also their perception of the "East" as a zone of socio-economic backwardness and religious reactionarism was so complete that whatever phenomena they studied there, they ended up pointing to feudalism and Islam as the root of the thorn. It was this interpretive scheme that structured the analysis of *kirvelik* in this more liberal phase of knowledge production in and on "the East".

Exemplary here was the work of Ayse Kudat, who had a term-setting influence on contemporary Turkish scholarship on the institution. In a series of articles and the only book-length monograph that she published on the issue as of 1970, Kudat made note of the virtual absence of *kirvelik* in Western Turkey while criticizing the attempts at finding a "national origin" for such cultural practices for their "racist underpinnings." Yet the origin that she proposed for the institution in Islamic circumcision, which I mentioned at the outset, was only possible at the expense of the construction of Eastern Turkey as an essentially Muslim geography. Hence, when referring to *kirvelik*'s non-negligible existence in Southern Caucasia, Kudat maintained that the institution's possible "link to

orthodox Christanity there" made it irrelevant to take it into consideration to understand the custom in "Eastern Anatolia." Since she was dealing with Eastern Anatolia, she wrote, she was not going to deal with that discussion (Kudat 2004). Thus, no room was left for the possibility of acknowledging the non-Muslim, say Armenian, heritages of the region, and of *kirvelik*, in this scheme, even if by way of Turkification; like the way Kırzıoğlu did. In other words, in Kudat's account, culturalism substituted ethnic racism in the erasure of *kirvelik*'s non-Turkish histories and heritages. Complementary of this was her interpretation of the reason for the present persistence of the institution in the East through a developmentalist framework. "Why" she asked, "is kirve more frequently used in some Muslim areas than in others?" With a comparative insight from Sidney Mintz and Eric Wolf's suggestion on the waning of *compadrazgo* relationships in parallel with modernization and industrialization, she answered that it had to with the "distinctly 'feudalistic' culture of those areas of Turkey" (1971: 50). Kudat, to her credit, was cognizant and critical of the extent of bureaucratic appropriation of the institution, seeing it as a barrier to the development of modern political participation in the "East." Yet, her fetishistic account of "Eastern feudalism" could not help but erase the whole histories of mass violence on which that feudalism and this appropriation of *kirvelik* grew in the first place.

Kirve, write my story as it is,
Otherwise, it might be considered a fable.
It is not a rosy nipple,
But a dum-dum bullet
Inside my mouth, shattered.

Ahmed Arif, Thirty-three Bullets

Chapter Two: "The Uncircumcised Terrorist"

Nur Yalman was the first to ever mention *kirvelik* in an ethnographic work. His research in Diyarbakır in the late 1960s was not on *kirvelik* per se. It was about land disputes in rural Diyarbakır within the context of the governments' attempt at land reform at the time. This attempt was met by certain resistance from landowning classes, which, in turn, buttressed representations of the "East" in metropolitan Turkey as a feudal-backward region under the clutches of *aghas* and *sheikhs*. Criticizing these discourses, Yalman invited an understanding of the social organization in the region and the disputes over land that it conditioned with attention to structure and function. *Agha* and *sheikh* were not "ignorant nonentities [as] they are so often represented to be by Westernized groups in Turkey," wrote Yalman. Rather, both were "systems deeply rooted in traditional forms with the weight and respect of centuries of local and Islamic culture behind them" (1971: 117-118). *Aghas* were obeyed by masses due to their rule on tribal principles of "generosity and benevolence," while *sheikhs* were "greatly respected positories of local customary law and morality" (116-118). Hence, Yalman felt the need to note for the administrators as well as social observers that "the hiatus between the legal arrangements of the nation at large, emanating out of Ankara, and stubborn facts of respected local traditions" carried the risk of "dividing the Administration from the population at large" (118). Save these threats of modernization, for Yalman, all was quiet

in the Eastern front thanks to the "remarkable cultural uniformity" that the region hosted despite its characteristic "linguistic and confessional divisions." Not only "the structure of the family, the nature of the blood feud, the concepts of honor and shame" et cetera, but "the rites of passage are also identical" between the Turkish and Kurdish linguistic groups, he wrote, and continued:

> The special customs of "circumcision kinship" (*kirve*, somewhat similar to god-parenthood) are to be found in almost all elements of the population. I established the existence of such ritual kinship by *kirve* connection as between Hanefi Turkish speakers and Yezidi (Devil Worshippers) villages around Diyarbakır. I have also met them as far north as Sivas and Kayseri. It is this fundamental identity of culture, which permits intermarriage between Kurdish and Turkish speaking elements freely. This cultural bond, established over many centuries and firmly reinforced by religious convictions, is undoubtedly the best insurance against the subtle tendencies of Kurdish irredentism which appear to be confined to some multi-lingual (largely Western educated) Kurdish intellectuals in Diyarbakır. (118)

I shall not rehearse Yalman's deeply problematic observations on the "East" or on *kirvelik* here – although the irrelevance of his reference to *kirvelik* as testament to free intergroup marriage deserves mention - or criticize the politics of his work. It is significant, however, to emphasize that Yalman's narrative failed to reflect the on-the-ground complexities surrounding the land disputes and *kirvelik*. Regarding the first, the Turkish state was very sensitive to the "sociological facts" underlined by Yalman. The clientelist concessions that the government had made to appease *aghas* and *sheikhs* throughout the 1960s rendered land reform promises practically void by the time of Yalman's research. Far more effective parties in these controversies then were the disenfranchised rural masses of previous decades whose discontents were successfully organized by the Kurdish intelligentsia in Diyarbakır into political action against "feudal

patronage" and "exploitation." The "agrarian dimension" of the Kurdish issue was a major theme in the "Eastern Meetings" of the late 1960s. It was also a major factor why, for instance, in the general elections of 1965 and 1969, the majority of rural and urban poor in and around Diyarbakır supported their cosmopolitan elite compatriots running from the socialist Labor Party of Turkey (TIP) rather than local *aghas* or *sheiks,* who predominantly supported the ruling Turkish establishment.[44]

Like most of his contemporary Turkish scholars, Yalman was at faults not only in his premises about the "East" but also in his assessment of the region's structural dynamics as well as his predictions about the cultural predicaments of "Kurdish irredentism." The 1970s' Kurdish revolutionary leftist organizing offered a more powerful critique of feudalism, which found much appeal among the Kurdish popular classes. Likewise, Yalman was mistaken not only in his premises on *kirvelik,* but also in his predictions about its binding power. If the "comprador *aghas*" and "reactionary *sheiks*" were the primary targets of the 1970s' revolutionary critique, so did *kirvelik* take its share from this critique among other traditional socio-cultural formations, as exemplified below.

A century after the publication of Raffi's *The Fool*, Siwan Perwer, a prominent figure of 1970s' Kurdish cultural transformation -and the most renowned Kurdish musician in Turkish Kurdistan and beyond - included a folk ballad named *Kirivo* in one of his unlicensed albums that appeared towards the decade's end. Sung in the alternating

[44] There were also significant exceptions to this class alliance. Among the most active popular organizers for the socialist TIP in the region were also several *aghas* and *sheikhs* whose political sympathies were more strongly with urban Kurdish nationalists in Diyarbakir than their class interests. See Gündoğan (2005) for a comprehensive analysis of class dynamics of Kurdish activism in this period.

voices of two impossible lovers, one a Muslim Kurdish boy and the other a (Y)ezidi Kurdish girl, *Kirivo* was about how both suffered because the *kirvelik* (*kirivati*) bond had forbidden them to marry. To the Muslim boy singing to his lover his helplessness before the rules of the elderly, the girl was asking to come to the (Y)ezidi Shengal Mountains to kiss her dead body, if he were not able to make it to there to enjoy the sight of her beautiful breasts. *Kirivo* was the lovers' answer to the curse of *kirivati* that befell on them as it was also their curse to it and the tradition at large. Performed in an album of otherwise revolutionary songs which called on Kurdish boys and girls to struggle for the Kurdish cause, *Kirivo* was also Perwer's and his generation's critique of a custom which they viewed as destructive of the Kurdish youth and divisive of the Kurdish nation in its complicity with feudal and religious bigotry; and it survived most other cultural productions of its time over the next two decades.[45]

Thus, despite concerted state investments into it over decades to keep the Kurds at bay as loyal citizens, *kirvelik* was falling short of fulfilling its promises of bonding at the second reincarnation of the "Eastern Question" as the "Kurdish Question" in the late twentieth century. Around the same time as the Kurdish mobilization started challenging the Turkish state in the "East," another actor appeared on the political scene and posed yet another challenge. A group of diasporic Armenian youth organized in the Armenian Secret Army for the Liberation of Armenia (ASALA, 1975-1986), took it as their task to mobilize an international awareness of the destruction of Ottoman Armenians as

[45] *Kirivo* deserves a more thorough gender analysis than I can afford here. A popular version of such analysis was made in the 1990s, when public circulations of the song were almost always accompanied by remarks about Kurdish women's brevity over Kurdish men in the struggle against traditional modes of domination.

genocide, compel the Turkish state to acknowledge its responsibility for it, pay reparations and cede territory for an Armenian homeland (Kurz 1985). In a time when *kirvelik* of the Kurds failed her, the state started manipulating these remotely connected developments –the rise of the ASALA and Kurdish revolutionary mobilization- to turn circumcision and its sponsorship into a weapon to abject and hit both groups in zones of rebellion. It all started in Diyarbakır prison after the 1980 coup d'etat.

THE 1980 COUP AND THE UNCIRCUMCISED IN DIYARBAKIR NO. 5

The September 12, 1980 military coup in Turkey took place at the intersection of a series of local, regional and global processes that radically destabilized political and socio-economic order in Turkey. In the years leading up to it, radical leftist mobilization had gained a wide popular base all around the country. At the other end of the political spectrum were numerous right-wing organizations that deployed systematic anti-leftist violence with varying degrees of state support. Meanwhile, demands for a national revolution for the Kurds started seizing the rhythm of the day in major Kurdish towns; first and foremost in Diyarbakır. In December 1978, the government declared martial law in metropolitan Turkish cities such as İstanbul and Ankara and in most of Kurdistan. Amid all these Turkey signed an agreement with the World Bank to structurally adjust its economic policy. The "January 24 Decisions," as it was called, exacerbated the political unrest across the country. But it also provided the necessary leverage to beat all sources of discontent under control by a CIA supported coup. Declared "to finish-off the communist threat," this was the third coup in the history of the young Turkish Republic. It was the most brutal one. Only in the three years of military rule, one and a half million

people (out of a population of forty-five million) were detained, hundreds of thousands were tortured and more than one thousand death penalties were issued by martial courts.

Physical terror was only one facet of the generals' rule of destruction. The junta also had an ideological component that involved the re-fashioning of Turkey's ideologically, socio-economically and violently fragmented populace along the lines of what was called the "Turkish-Islamic Synthesis" (TIS). First articulated in the 1970s among higher-educated rightwing youth circles as an ideological framework to merge Turkish nationalism with the Islamic consciousness of *umma*, TIS put forward an essential relationship between Turkish identity and Muslim identity (Dursun 2006). More precisely, it argued that not only was there no conflict between nationalism and Islam, but also being and remaining Turkish was possible only by being Muslim. Hence, serving Turkishness meant serving Islam. The secular-Kemalist junta appropriated TIS as the state ideology to reassemble an ideologically and affectively unified society and create a docile citizenry at a time of dislocating political and socio-economic transformations (Tapper and Tapper 1987, Kaplan 2006). ASALA's name was powerfully mobilized for this project.

There was no relationship between political mobilization of diaspora Armenians and the development of a nationalist-conservative movement like TIS in Turkey in the 1970s. ASALA did pose a threat to the Turkish state particularly with respect to its foreign policy discourses and priorities.[46] However, ASALA neither had any

[46] Between 1975 and 1984, ASALA assassinated thirty-seven Turkish diplomats mostly in European countries. This action strategy did serve the purpose of raising awareness on the Armenian genocide in the international arena, although it also stirred inter-state reactions against the organization especially after the assassination of three European nationals in a bomb attack against Turkey's Portuguese Counselor at Paris

organizational base in Turkey nor carried out any actions in the country until 1982. Furthermore, it enjoyed no visible support from Turkey's Armenian community (Tchilingirian 2007). Thus, ASALA was hardly a factor in the internal socio-political processes that led to the coup. This notwithstanding, the intensification of its activities in the midst of this transformation process provided the Turkish state with a concrete name of the Other. The state did not revise its denialist approach to the history of Armenians and the genocide when challenged by the ASALA. Instead, designating the organization as "a foreign-originated communist threat posed against the Turkish state in collaboration with the imperialist West,"[47] it utilized this threat as an opportunity to world a political and affective universe in which threats to the state came to be perceived as integral threats to Turkishness and Islam; thus, inculcating popular classes into the world of the TIS. If this strategy was strikingly reminiscent of the Turkism of Ittihadists in the 1910s, the Ittihadists of the 1980s also revived their own version of "historical repetition" by making constant references to "the Armenian treachery against the Ottoman Empire" as further justificatory ground for the TIS.[48]

Orly Airport in 1983. See, "Turkish Diplomats Killed by Armenian Terrorists." Accessed on December 21, 2010. http://www.ermenisorunu.gen.tr/english/diplomats/index.html.

[47] See Gunter (1991) for a review of Turkish discourses on "foreign aided terrorism" in the 1980s and 1990s in relation to the Armenian and Kurdish issues; i.e. the ASALA and the PKK.

[48] I discuss this in detail later. Suffice it here to note the following: The first Armenian action against the Turkish state after the murder of the CUP leaders in Europe in the 1920s, namely the killing of two Turkish diplomats in Santa Barbara, California, in January 1973, was announced by the Turkish government of the time with the statement, "*The Hënchaks are on-duty Again" (Cumhuriyet,* January 28, 1973). Although, the history of Armenians had been quite skillfully buried in Republican Turkey, the post-Republican generations knew the "Hënchak" reference very well. Its name, along with those of "Dashnaktsutyun" and "Kürt Teâli Cemiyeti" (Kurdish High Society), was taught throughout the primary and secondary school curricula under the generic title "Harmful Organizations Established During the First World War to Separate Eastern Anatolia from the Ottoman Empire in Collaboration with British and Russian Empires." The Santa Barbara murders were committed by a US citizen, Gourgen Yanikian, who had no known

The immediate result was provoked enmity against Turkey's remaining Armenian community. In this period many Armenian religious and cultural institutions were attacked and more than a dozen of the community's leading members were murdered in retaliation for ASALA's actions. The rise of religious conservatism forced small Armenian communities to migrate out of their homelands in the Anatolian countryside. The most massive conversion of Armenians to Islam in the Republican era took place in the 1980s. In the same period, thousands of Armenians applied to courts to have their names changed into Turkish to escape discrimination and persecution (Hofmann 2002).

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Diyarbakır experienced the violence of the coup rather acutely. It was not only the streets of the city that were smashed under the weight of the tanks, but a "whole sociality was bulldozed," as one of my informants recalled: "It was as if people regretted that they had ever known of Kurdishness and revolutionaries. It was not only the neighbors to refuse greeting one another on the streets. Fathers did it to their own sons. It was my own father who did that to me upon my release from the prison."

It was the Diyarbakır Military Prison No. 5 where violence against the intersecting yet discontinuous populations of Kurds, leftists and Armenians merged seamlessly and terror became wholesale. Throughout the coup period, "5 No'lu" (No. 5), to use its locally more notorious name, was the concentration center for Turkish and

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connections to any political organization. Yet this event soon inspired the formation of ASALA and gave the organization the name of its main targets: the diplomats. The "Hënchak" reference dominated the representations of ASALA in the Turkish state discourse and press into the 1980s.

Kurdish leftist organizations that operated in Kurdistan.[49] The director of the prison, Captain Esat Oktay Yıldıran, was pretty straightforward to tell the inmates at every morning assembly that his "military school" had only one goal: "to Turkify them" (Demirel 2009). He would spend the rest of his days experimenting with torture techniques, some of which were quite conventional, like all forms of sexual torture, and others rather creative, such as force-feeding with live mice, serving tea made with sewage water or forcing the inmates to salute his German shepherd as "Commander Joe" on sight. Of some nine hundred prisoners in No. 5, fifty-four died between 1980 and 1984. Hundreds more are yet to recover from the physical and psychological terror they went through there.[50] Yıldıran's brutality spared no one; not even common prisoners convicted of petty-theft. Yet, none of his obsessions matched his fervent hatred toward the Armenians.

There were indeed Armenian prisoners in No. 5. But, none of them had pursued, were charged with or convicted of activities related to Armenian-ness. Most were revolutionaries from the Turkish or Kurdish left. Irrespective of their political motivations and activities, Yıldıran punished all of them additionally for their Armenian

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[49] My use of the Turkish and Kurdish Left here follows the categories of leftist political culture of Turkey of the time. This distinction was not based on ethnicity, but on an organization's position *vis-à-vis* the Kurdish issue. In this parlance, "Turkish left" was a roof term used to identify the groups that approached the question of Kurds and Kurdistan as a sub-chapter of the larger problematique of socialist or democratic revolutionary transformation, while the Kurdish left argued for the relative autonomy of the national question. Otherwise, ethnic profiles of all leftist organizations of the period were mixed: The Kurdish youth offered a substantial base for the Turkish left, there were Turkish revolutionaries within the Kurdish left, and revolutionaries of other ethnicities –especially Armenians, Lazs and Arabs- were present in each and every leftist faction.

[50] Amnesty International ranks Diyarbakir Prison among "the ten most notorious jails in the world" (The Times, April 28, 2008). See, Mehdi Zana (1993) for a testimonial account on Diyarbakir No.5. See, Parry and Zeydanlioglu (2009) for an extensive discussion on this prison in English language.

descent. Their torture after every ASALA action was habitual and Yıldıran was quite blunt in excusing these practices as retaliation (Çürükkaya 2005; Kutan 2008).

As part of this prison terror, Yıldıran added circumcision to his Turkification training. He ordered the circumcision of some twenty prisoners on the racist pretext that they were Armenians. Garabet Demircioğlu, a Diyarbakırite Armenian and a member of the Communist Party of Turkey/Marxist Leninist (TKP/ML), was the first one in the row. His vaudevillian circumcision ceremony ended with an ostentatious rite of "circumfession."[51] After circumcising him in ritual attires traditionally worn by small boys, Yıldıran announced Garabet's double initiation through the loudspeakers, which were otherwise used to constantly broadcast Turkish nationalist anthems. "We circumcised Garabet and changed his name into Ahmet. His name is no longer Garabet or Garbis, but Ahmet," he declared. In the following days, Garabet's voice echoed through the same loudspeakers a few times a day until he was prostrated to the point of death: "My name is Ahmet. I have become a Muslim," he was heard saying, "I am a Turk, I am rightful, I am hardworking…" (İstanbullu 1987: 18). Then, there was Mehmet Han Erşener. He was a middle-aged Kurdophone Muslim border smuggler from the town of Lice (Diyarbakır), who was barely involved in politics. One day in the winter of 1982, a troop of soldiers raided his cell. That was when other prisoners learned that Erşener was Armenian on his mother's side:

> The soldiers lined us facing the fence and they put Mehmet Han in front of the fence facing us. They lowered his pants, tied his genitals with a rope and painted his penis with read ointment. They tied the other end of the rope to the fence… When he finally fell down on the floor, they chained his left foot and hanged him

[51] This neologism belongs to Derrida (1993).

> upside down… They asked: "Are there any other Armenians among you? Other faggots who have not been circumcised? … Like Hasan Atmaca on the third floor?" Hasan was a PKK prisoner…[52]

There were also others among the uncircumcised prisoners who had nothing to do with Armenianness on any genealogical or political ground. Few of these were possibly Assyrian/Syriac Christians, but most were simply Muslim Kurds - at least by family and upbringing. Selim, for example, was a nomadic Kurd from the nearby countryside. He had not been circumcised at the time when he was imprisoned in his mid-teens. His parents had neglected it within the hassle of nomadic life. "Nevertheless, he, too, was tortured and circumcised as an Armenian."[53] These spectacles continued with some other Armenians and Armenians-by-proxy of uncut foreskin.

Lest it be misunderstood, it is highly unlikely that Yıldıran was relying on erroneous genealogical information when targeting uncut foreskin as an evidence of Armenianness. In fact, he often boasted about having the family records of all the prisoners at his disposal.[54] This claim sounds credible because, as revealed later, the state had indeed kept the records of all surviving Armenians in Kurdistan since the genocide.[55] Then, what did it really mean to scar all the uncircumcised men in No. 5 as Armenian?

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[52] Selim Çürükkaya. 2005. "Son Ermeni." *Rizgari Online.* June 4. Accessed on July 10, 2008. http://www.rizgari.com/modules.php?name=Rizgari_Niviskar&cmd=read&id=435.

[53] Mehmet Ece. "Beni Paspas gibi yaptilar." Accessed on December 22, 2008. http://www.diyarbakirzindani.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=98&Itemid=1;

[54] Rusen Arslan. "Kirvem Mehmetcik." Accessed on May 9, 2007. http://gelawej.net/rusen-arslan/kirvem.htm.

[55] Yusuf Halaçoğlu, the chair of the official Turkish Historical Society at the time, released this information in 2007.

The answer lies, I hold, neither in any lack of knowledge on the part of Yıldıran nor in his individual psyche, despite his idiosyncrasies, not in any nationalist temperament provoked by the ASALA. It is rather to be sought in the same ritual capacity that had turned male circumcision into the mark of the Law of the Turkish Father that I discussed in the previous chapter; that is, in the ritual's capacity to sanctify male bodies in the continuum of "blessing" and "accursing" as a corporeal technique of Turkish nationalism and state making.[56] That is why even when Yıldıran's evidential site misled per blood, his circumcision sponsorship would be on target. Furthermore, that some uncut foreskin could witness facts other than being of Armenian descent would not prove Yıldıran wrong. It would only extend the semantic terrain of being Armenian. This resemanticization of the relationship between "being uncircumcised" and "being Armenian" was to gain a more systematic character and deeply shape the trajectory of the Kurdish conflict in the years to come.

"ARMENIAN TERRORISTS" IN A KURDIFYING DIYARBAKIR

No one heard much about what happened in Diyarbakır prison at the time it was happening. Only news of protests inside were whispered outside the prison walls once in every while: One prisoner had hung himself after lighting three matchsticks in allusion to phoenix. Four followed him by self-immolating to death, suggesting that "human life was so valuable as to die for it." Another four initiated a death fast promising that "human dignity would win over torture." They had won their battles (Yetkin and Tanboga 1993).

[56] I follow Freud's discussion on the dubious meaning of the verb "to sanctify" here - as "to purify" and "to accurse" (1967: 156).

When the deadly silence of the coup finally broke in the streets of Diyarbakır in the late 1980s, the children of alleyways were joyfully singing illegal songs. *Militan* was their favorite. This was perhaps because the song's economical lyrics, which lacked any complex message, also had the best rhythm and rhyme. It went like, "Militan, militan, militan/ Militan, militan Kurdistan/ Simbil qaytan dayik bi heyran/ Simbil qaytan dayik bi qurban/ Militano," and meant in straight prose: "The militant of Kurdistan with the beautiful moustache, [this] mother thinks the world of you; may she be sacrificed [to spare you from evil]." No one was ever going to contest the beauty of the moustache. Really! But, then, every day was prone to a night and the night belonged to the grown-ups. They had more complex stories to tell and fiercely differed on their views on certain other body parts.

The sacred family ritual of Diyarbakır nights in the 1980s was watching the evening news on the state-owned single TV channel TRT. In those days when reverence for the television technology had the power to magnify the awe and reality-effect of all images and words projected on to the screen, the *deus ex machina* of the news hour used to pass news of those "terrorists who massacred babies and widowed brides on the mountains of Eastern Anatolia with the aim of establishing a Greater Armenia." This *deus ex machina* also rarely failed to add that "the terrorists who were captured dead were observed to be uncircumcised." We, the children, were initially not interested in the Greater Armenia part of this story as much. This was probably because although we knew that the Armenians were not good enough, we still were not grown up enough to understand what kind of a threat would that be, and surely because we were not able to

figure out the connection between those “baby-killers” on the mountains over there and that “militant” called out by younger kids on the streets here. It was the-otherwise tabooed reference to penis, and in this uncanny, inert and “uncut” state, that filled us with a mix of fear, fascination and shame. The grown-ups expected total silence while watching the news in great seriousness, and they would often refuse commenting on them before us when it ended. Even when they were open to talking, I guess, it felt improper to ask them about anything with a hint of penis in it. But, Kirve Ali, our *kirve,* was around - more approachable and definitely more knowledgeable, as a pious Muslim, on mystical/mysterious issues than was our leftist father to ask what the deal with “the uncircumcised terrorists” was. He told us that they were not uncircumcised. Apparently, there was also not much to worry about, because they were Kurdish *militan*s.

THE KURDISH WAR AS ARMENIAN WAR

The PKK, one of the smaller clandestine Kurdish organizations before the coup, started a guerilla movement in August 1984. The organization would soon declare the Diyarbakır Prison, where most of its founding members were incarcerated under Yıldıran’s administration, as its second place of birth and the catalyzer in its decision to initiate armed struggle. Yet, just as the news of Diyarbakır Prison could not make it to the headlines for long, it took quite some time for the larger public to hear what was going on in this new conflict zone. Under strict state supervision, censure and denial, the PKK entered the Turkish public discourse as “a handful of *sans culottes* terrorists” connected to the ASALA. The most frequent evidence to support this connection was an uncut foreskin supposedly detected on the body of a militant killed here and there. ASALA

dissolved itself in 1986. But this did not stop the continuation of state discourses on the PKK- ASALA connection and the Armenian origins of the PKK.

Throughout the 1990s, state officials repeatedly underlined the uncut PKK-Armenian link as a key strategy of the counter-guerilla warfare. As the media kept airing news on the being uncircumcised of dead rebels as if it were the most scandalizing trophy from the conflict zones, the military and civilian authorities updated the public about the Armenian origins of the PKK. For instance, in July 1993, General Korkmaz Tağma, about whom Kurdish and human rights circles raised constant claims concerning his systematic practices of beheading the dead PKK militants, told the press that "every seventh PKK member [was] an Armenian and uncircumcised," and continued: "The PKK members are the grandsons of those who struck the Ottoman Empire in the back during the First World War!"[57] In 1994, the Governor of the State of Emergency Region, Unal Erkan, declared to have traced eight hundred PKK members of Armenian descent (along with some six hundred militants of foreign nationals) and added his conviction that the Armenians created the PKK "in revenge for 1915."[58] Unal's statement, which received dutiful media coverage, was interesting in that in the Turkish official discourse on 1915, from within which he was speaking, it was the Armenians who had massacred Muslims. But no one asked, then what the Armenians were specifically avenging through the PKK? In that same year, the TRT disclosed the PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan's Armenian identity as "Artin Agopyan,"[59] apparently a name made up to invoke Agop Hakopyan,

[57] Quoted in Hofmann (2002: 34).

[58] Quoted in ibid. p. 35.

[59] Quoted in ibid. More about this name later.

alias Bedros Hovanassian, the founding leader of the ASALA. In March 1997, Meral Aksener, then the Turkish Minister of Interior, not only reiterated the claim about Öcalan's Armenian descent, but she also assured the Turkish public of the country's future: "An Armenian semen dares to attempt at dividing this country. They shall not succeed this time, *either*."[60]

This genealogical trafficking in the designation of the PKK was a strategic choice to fight the Kurdish dissent with minimum cost and maximum efficiency. One may argue that it initially helped to overcome a technical problem: Since officially there were no Kurds in Turkey, or in the world, there could officially be no Kurdish terrorists. But there was no doubt that the Turkish state was fighting a war, and although it was to remain without a name, some explanation was needed as to who these people killing and dying every day were. In this context, this misidentification primarily allowed the state to fight the Kurdish dissent while maintaining the taboo on the name Kurd and the denial on the existence of a Kurdish issue in the country. Below, I detail how effectively this discourse structured the whole topography of counter-guerilla warfare in Kurdistan. But before that, let me somewhat twist the discussion here and ask what "truth" was at stake in this discourse, really. Did it simply sustain a lie about the Kurds, the PKK or the Kurdish dissent in general?

Regarding the question of truth in discourse, Michael Foucault emphasizes that the issue is not explicating if a certain body of discourse is in-itself true or false, but "seeing historically how effects of truth are produced within discourses which are in

[60] Quoted in the daily *Milliyet*, March 27, 1997. (Emphasis added.)

themselves neither true nor false" (Foucault 1980: 118; Taussig 1984: 471). There were indeed certain relations between the PKK and the ASALA. They were contingent products of intersecting world-historical processes, such as the counter-hegemony of socialist guerilla struggles and the repercussions of Cold War rivalry in the Middle East in the 1970s, with their particular national agendas. Besides sharing an politico-ideological genealogy, the two organizations had also enjoyed certain, albeit very limited, organizational relationships in the early 1980s. They had shared guerilla camps in the Bekaa Valley, Lebanon, along with the Palestinian Liberation Organization (El-Fateh), alongside whom they fought the 1982 Lebanon war. In 1980 they concluded a protocol of good faith against the Turkish state. The same year the PKK acknowledged the destruction of Ottoman Armenians as genocide (Gunter 1991). Over the next two decades Kurdish political circles in the Europe and the Middle East made numerous statements on the Armenian genocide, while Armenian circles made statements on the need to support the Kurdish movement in Turkey (Gunter 1991, Libaridian 1990) Above all, there was certainly some un-negligible Armenian presence in the PKK. There were Armenians, Kurdified Armenians or Kurdish-Armenians within the organization's ranks from the very early on.

Nevertheless, these factual relations only were minimally, if at all, effective in the production of the "truth" on the PKK's Armenian origins. Had ambiguous genealogies mattered as the base for "truth," then the fact was that the PKK had much closer and longer term ties with certain sections of the Turkish left in its formative period, and there were a considerable number of ethnic Turks within the organization's ranks, including

three of its seven founding members. While the organization continually underlined the presence of non-Kurds within its ranks drawing on the leftist frameworks of internationalism, anti-imperialism and fraternity of peoples, the state paid utmost care not to notice the PKK's "Turkish connections" to keep the names "Turk" or "Turkish" away from "the terrorist" as much as possible (Jongerden and Akkaya 2012).

Given these, reading the discourse on PKK's Armenian origins merely as a concealment of truth would be to largely miss the point. If this genealogical trafficking was indispensable for rendering invisible the ethno-political character of the Kurdish dissent in the first place, its true power lay in how it achieved a "skilled revelation of skilled concealment" [61] in producing a completely new truth about the Kurdish dissent by rearranging the latter's ambiguous genealogies into an evidence of its being an outsourced threat against religion and Muslims. A few decades after Sultan Abdulhamid II had mobilized the Kurds for an alliance against the Armenians in the name of *umma*, the early Turkish Republic suppressed Kurdish rebellions, such as the Sheikh Said Rebellion of 1925, by representing them as feudal-religious reactionaries against the new secular state. Faced now with a quite secular opposition, the Turkish state had once more decided to call religion onto task for dealing with the Kurds. As Fikri Saglar, the Turkish Minister of Culture between 1991 and 1994, disclosed much later, this strategy was decided at the very outset. In its meetings over 1984-1985, the National Security Council decided to make religious propaganda and support religious institutions wherever the

[61] The phrase belongs to Michael Taussig. In his discussion on healing rituals among the Putumayo Indians, Taussig remarks: "The real skill of the practitioner [shaman] lies not in skilled concealment but in the skilled revelation of skilled concealment" (2003: 273).

Kurds lived. The commanders of the 1980 coup took the primary initiative in this regard to secure the loyalty of Kurdish citizens towards the state in the fight against the PKK.[62]

Thus, beyond concealing the name of the Kurds, ascribing an Armenian origin to the PKK was to fight the Kurdish dissent in the guise of a religious war, and in a quite efficient way. Throughout the 1990s, this origin story was systematically preached across everyday social spaces in Kurdistan; in mosques, schools and coffee-houses, through fliers and pamphlets thrown from airplanes in the Kurdish countryside as well as in cities like Diyarbakır, Batman and Van - cities with bitter histories of religiously articulated Kurdo-Armenian controversy, the very cities that were now the strongholds of the PKK (Bulut and Farac 1999). The counter-guerilla state did not only ask the Kurds to avert the PKK for *umma*, which happened and proved considerably effective. But it also incited certain Kurdish *salafi* groups to actively fight the PKK in the name of *umma*. The "Turkish Hezbollah" was the most destructive product of these calls for a holy war.

Hezbollah was formed in the early 1980s by a group of Islamist Kurds, who, under the influence of the Iranian Revolution, set out to communicate Islam to the masses through intellectual organizing. It turned into one of the darkest counter-guerilla organizations in the 1990s. Hailing the PKK as "Partiya Kafirin Kurdistan" (The Party of the Infidels of Kurdistan), the organization murdered more than one thousand militias and/or sympathizers of the PKK over 1991-1994, claiming that the PKK was "murdering Muslims, cooperating with Armenians, serving communism and seeking to divide the

[62] Ismail Besikci. 2010. "Dün Kürtler Bugün Cemaatler." Accessed on December 22, 2010. http://www.argun.org/2010/12/15/%E2%80%9Cdun-kurtler-bugun-cemaatler%E2%80%9D-ismail-besikci/

Muslim community" (Aras and Bacik 2002: 150). More than half of these murders were carried out in urban and rural Diyarbakır. The state's support to Hezbollah in this process in the form of "training camps, arms and other logistics, and legal impunity" was so decisive and out in the open that a Parliamentary Investigation Commission on Unidentified Murders felt the need to point at it (TBMM 1995). Hezbollah retreated to the backstage shortly. The murders it committed remain "unidentified."

The Gendarmerie Intelligence Organization Center (JITEM), formed within the official Gendarmerie General Commandership under the Ministry of Interior, was longer lived. The ghastly professionalism with which JITEM carried out thousands of murders uniquely contributed to the generalization of a sense of immediacy of death in Kurdistan in the 1990s. JITEM's existence was never fully recognized by the state. But, much later, one of its ex-members, Yıldırım Beğler, told the press:

> Our headquarters prepared their own death lists… Anyone who was heard pronouncing the word Kurd might have ended up in one of those lists. Anyone who would pose a threat against some economic or personal interest of a commander or a collaborator might have been targeted… But we were the most professional of all… No one survived JITEM interrogations. Whomever we shot, we killed. Whoever we killed, we burned in the boiler room at JITEM headquarters to clear up any trace… Why did we do all of these? Well, we were close-minded back then. We looked up to the Big Brothers. Tansu Çiller [Turkish Prime-Minister, 1992-1995] used to light the match. She would say: "Come on my Turkey, Forward!" The Big Brothers would set the alarm: "Come on, cut up and terminate! These are infidels, these are Armenians; these are uncircumcised. Come on, the country is falling out of our hands!" And we did everything![63]

The effects of the PKK's ascribed Armenianness was not limited cooptation of the Kurds' loyalties or perpetuation of some of the most arbitrary forms of state-sponsored

[63] Ertuğrul Erbaş. 2009. "Soğuktan Gelen Tanık" (Interview with Yıldırım Beğler). *Sabah,* April 13-19.

terror in this counter-guerilla warfare, either. No less significant was how this ascription helped to sustain and rework the fantasy coherence of Turkishness in the face of what would have otherwise been an overwhelming threat to the sense of national identity.

I previously discussed how after the 1980 coup ASALA's name was abused to the end of re-forming Turkey's deeply fragmented populace along the TIS lines. The externalization of the PKK as Armenian terror furthered the same project rather efficiently at different thresholds of the Kurdish war: By helping to conceal the existence of the Kurds for quite a while, it provided a crucial lining for the founding nationalist fantasy that "the Turkish state, with its territory and nation, is a unified, indivisible entity,"[64] while at the same time buttressing the "indivisible integrity" of the ethno-religious essence of Turkishness. When the Kurdish dissent mobilized widespread popular support by the turn of the 1990s and made it simply non-sensical to insist there were no Kurds, the same externalization acquired even a bigger fantasy appeal. If, as a Turkish commentator put it, "the biggest shock of the last three decades for the Turkish people" was "the realization that the Kurds indeed existed"[65], the dissociation of the Kurdish dissent from the body of this newly realized species offered to the Turkish public an urgent ground to sustain the sense of a *sensus communis* - a lived idea of community and unity in contending faculties of sense and will (Zizek 1997) - despite the "shock." The following accounts by ex-conscripted Turkish soldiers, who had the most immediate experience of the war in the 1990s, are well to the point:

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[64] Article 3 of the Constitution of the Republic of Turkey. This article is non-amendable.

[65] Riz Khan. 2010. "Turkish identity at a Crossroads: Can Turkey Construct a Modern National identity without Facing its Troubled Past?" Interview with Mustafa Akyol. Accessed on December 25, 2010. http://www.aljazeera.com/programmes/rizkhan/2010/12/2010121613323430171 6.html

> I don't think the PKK people are Kurds. There are Armenians there, there are Greeks. They say, "The Kurds are a nation." I agree, but there are many nations in Turkey, [like] the Laz, the Circassian… But Abdullah Öcalan, I read from official sources, is not a Kurd, but an Armenian; so I know he will set up an Armenian government. The newspapers just make [unfounded] commentaries, but official records are objective. Some say, "Let's give the Southeast to them [the Kurds]. I cannot agree. They don't have such a demand. (Quoted in Mater 2004: 73)

> I did not know what Kurd meant. When I came of that age where I could use my mind, I learned what Kurd exactly meant. Now, Kurd, to me… All of us who live within the territory of the Turkish Republic; are we all Turks? Yes, we are all Turks. The Kurdish people that I met in the East do not have any problem with us. It is not the Kurdish people who support Apo [Abdullah Öcalan]. He does not even speak Kurdish. (Quoted in Mater 2004: 162-163)

> I duly performed my duty against those who had aimed at the indivisible unity of the country… Today my son and my daughter asked how I lost my arm. I told them I sacrificed it for the homeland… The terrorist whom we captured in an operation was uncircumcised. That is how we would understand they were not Muslims. This was the most determinate evidence that they were supported by outside powers.[66]

"THE UNCIRCUMCISED TERRORIST": AN EPISTEMIC MURK

The PKK's Armenian connection was in no need of the evidentiality of uncut foreskin. Evidence to this abounded, as detailed above, and certainly the state had much more factual information on this than had the ordinary public. It is true that the lack of circumcision mark, real or alleged, had some unique capacity to offer corporeal material for the claims on the PKK's non-Muslim origins. Yet, its "witnessing" capacity was not the only reason for the state to insist on this forensic site. The identification of Kurdish militants as uncircumcised Armenian terrorists served to construct the symbolic topography of the war by much more than simply producing religious Others.

[66] Salih Karaduman. 2007. "Vatana Feda Ettim." *Once Vatan Dergisi.* Accessed on August 5, 2010. http://oncevatandergisi.blogcu.com/vatana-feda-ettim/1241421

In societies where torture and terror are endemic, says Michael Taussig, what animates social reality is a "culture of terror" - a narratively mediated space in which "an uncertain reality" created through "the unstable interplay of truth and illusion becomes a social force of horrendous and phantasmic dimensions" (1984: 492). "To an important extent all societies live by fictions taken as reality," accedes Taussig, but it is only in "cultures of terror" where "the epistemological, ontological, and otherwise purely philosophical problem of reality-and-illusion, certainty-and-doubt, becomes… a high-powered tool for domination and a principal medium of political practice." This "epistemic murk" comes to dominate everyone in a culture of terror.

The "uncircumcised terrorist" was such an item of epistemic murk - as the condensed image of a whole range of associations on identity, power and sovereignty. Under normal circumstances, being uncircumcised could suggestively indicate non-Muslim identity. It could also imply, though in rarer cases, other things such as low-socio-economic background or paternal neglect. Yet, in neither case being uncircumcised would necessarily cause a moral or political scandal in-itself. Rather, at the intersection of the lack of a consecrating function of circumcision in Islam and cultural taboos on signifying male genitalia, being circumcised or/not would remain simply an issue not to be talked about in public.

The depiction of the militants in this period as "the uncircumcised" radically extended the signifying capacity of circumcision per politico-ideological otherness. This shift in the semantics of uncut foreskin was akin to the re-corporealization of the Armenian in the wake of the *fin de siècle* massacres. That which had become abject

during the production of the "infidel" there, turned into the abject marker of the "terrorist" here. Yet, the metonymic hailing of the male rebels after a single body part, whose knowledge could be accessed only under torture or when dead, also had a surplus capacity to denude the rebels of any wholeness or integrity, turning them into, in twisted Deleuzian terms, an 'organ without a body', a savage exteriority.

Note here the following incident as one among dozens of like cases that took place in the 1990s. In September 1992, eighteen PKK militants were killed in an armed clash in the Gole town of Kars. All exits and entries to the town were banned after the clash and the dead militants were displayed strip-naked on the streets for two days before being loaded into garbage trucks and transferred to an unknown mass-grave. The incident remained censured in the media, until the-then Minister of Interior, Ismet Sezgin, replied a parliamentary questionnaire tabled by Hatip Dicle, an MP of Diyarbakır from the pro-Kurdish People's Labor Party (HEP), about the claims raised by the locals. Sezgin briefly replied: "The corpses were displayed for identification rather than exposition. The corpses were buried collectively as six of the deceased were uncircumcised, no one claimed the bodies and there was no *imam* to perform religious ceremonies before the burial."[67] The whole terror imposed on the dead bodies and all over the town was thus bypassed by recourse to the humanistic pretext of allowing people to claim their dead, while the semantic sequence of the statement endowed the fact of some militant's being uncircumcised with a power to explain why the militants remained unclaimed by anyone;

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[67] Quoted in The Human Rights Foundation of Turkey Daily Human Rights Bulletin, Nov 6, 1992.

be it by their families, local people or religious leaders who are customarily authorized to conduct the funeral proceedings of the unclaimed dead.

Obscured in this statement was that none of the eighteen militants had been claimed – not just the six uncircumcised ones. The disavowal of dead militants was common in the 1990s within the habitual context of counter-guerilla terror extended to the families. Claiming the militants was particularly unlikely in this particular case because of the movement ban imposed at the town's borders. Yet, even under these circumstances, not only terror but also the culture of terror had its own role to play in how come "no one claimed the bodies." When I met Zeynep, the mother of one of those militants, in Diyarbakır fifteen years after the incident, she told me the following:

> I was determined not to leave him at their hands. I went all the way down to Gole with my elder brother. The soldiers stopped us at the town's entrance. One of them pointed his rifle at me and said, mockingly: "You can't go further. The terrorists are on display. Their things are all out in the open. You would be sinned to see them." "Have you got no shame to talk like this to me? I am your mother's age," I protested. I turned towards the one that seemed like their commander and said: "What religion would forgive this cruelty? Even the dead animals have dignity." Then, he started shouting: "What religion are you talking about, woman? These are all Armenian bastards!"… We were sure about ourselves [our being Muslim]. But my son had been uncircumcised. We had not been able to put things together when he was a kid, and then one day he was already grown up, you know… There, his uncle said, "Let's return home." I still resent my brother for not insisting there. But I also know what he was afraid of. They would have labeled us Armenian on the spot and dishonored him [expose him physically], too, had they located my son. I know they were not going to let us in. No way. But, the point is, we could not find in ourselves that daring to confront them. You see, they defeated us with the threat of shame. It was such a big weapon at their hands.[68]

[68] I met Zeynep at the Diyarbakir office of the Mothers for Peace, an initiative that mothers of the dead PKK guerillas and prisoners established after the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo. Zeynep further told me that she had also lost a daughter in the PKK's ranks in 1996. She concluded her remembering of both of her children with the following remark, as if to convince me or both of us and the state, her imaginary interlocutor for peace, of the irrelevance of circumcision as to the reality of war: "Was my daughter uncircumcised, was Eva Junke uncircumcised?" Junke was a German PKK guerilla whose execution following her capture had caused a diplomatic stifle between Turkey and Germany.

The Kurdish community was not the only one under the threat of humiliation and shame. The PKK's ascribed Armenianness also rendered Turkey's Armenian community the object of ever-growing cycles of racist scapegoating and slandering in the 1990s.

According to late Hrant Dink, the most prominent Armenian intellectual in Turkey's recent history, the ascribed Armeniannes of Kurdish fighters and the demonization of being uncircumcised made this period "the most torturous in terms of Armenian identity.[69] This torture rarely involved outright physical violence. However, a certain section of the community took this task to their own hands in a way reminiscent of one common sacrificial gesture of the Hamidian era massacres: self-circumcision. According to an assessment report, large numbers of young Armenian men were "voluntarily circumcised" in the 1990s before or during their compulsory service in the Turkish army, because they could not "withstand [the] mental and physical terror… [that they] faced from fellow soldiers and from superiors" (Othman 2001; Quoted in Hofmann 2002: 31).

The generativity of the trope of uncircumcised terrorist was not limited to the abjection of uncut foreskin in the production of the "terrorist", either. This trope also conjured the whole topography of warfare as a zone of phallic contestation. While

[69] Armenian National Committeee of San Francisco. 2006. "Hrant Dink and Ragip Zarakolu visit the Bay Area." March 4. Accessed on May 10, 2007. http://www.anca.org/press_releases/press_releases.php?prid=918

Hratch Tchilingirian. 2007. "Hrant Dink and Armenians in Turkey." February 23. Accessed on May 10, 2007. http://www.opendemocracy.net/democracy-turkey/dink_armenian_4378.jsp

mobilizing all the ordinary affabulations of being uncircumcised as lacking in phallic presence, it at the same time mapped power as phallic surplus in two other basic senses.

First, as knowledge rooted in visuality, it dramatized the optical ontology of sovereignty. It has been widely discussed how the dynamics of the visual and the gaze project a space of power, which is at the same time highly sexual and sexualized. This is because while it endows the seeing subject with the supposed masculine qualities of looking, capturing and ordering while he himself remains immune to sight and escapes its own logic, it turns that which is seen into a "gaze"; into the captive - ontologically limited, passive and feminized - object of the act of looking.[70] Seeing or articulating visuality involves a presencing of the phallic eye ("I") through the absent-other, suggest Derrida (1978) and Lacan (1988). Thus, fulfilled in the gaze of the exposed dead rebels here was also always the fantasy of the Turkish state and of Turkishness as phallic surplus. It is significant to note here that this sexualized war topography built not only on the feminization of rebel males, but also on an almost complete erasure of female rebels. The Kurdish movement in Turkey has been noted for the massive participation of women in all areas, especially as PKK guerillas. In this phallocentric topography of war, however, women could not feature even as "terrorists" for a long time - except being implied once in every while in features of birth control pills allegedly found next to the uncircumcised in newspapers and the evening news.[71]

[70] See, Jameson (1991), Derrida (1978), Said (2004), Lacan (1988), Haraway (1991), McClintock (1995).

[71] For a similar discussion, see Mojab (1997).

Second, in a context wherein signification of the sexed body, especially the male body, was/is socially shunned, except in the form of slander or abuse, culturally chastised, and legally sanctioned (by obscenity laws), the call of the "uncircumcised terrorist" also epitomized a phallic capacity for transgression and *jouissance* – surplus enjoyment released at the limits of what one can experience or talk about in public (Zizek 1989). In Zeynep's story presented above, the conversation between her and the patrol soldier exemplifies how the sexed body talk was employed as a medium of abuse and intimidation. Under normal circumstances, however, such a sexually-connoting talk to an elder, married and mothering woman is unthinkable without the threat of moral condemnation and social sanctioning due to the ordinary conventions of the patriarchal culture of which both Zeynep and the soldier were a part. Consider here the following testimony of another conscripted Turkish soldier in the 1990s, as another example, of how the talk of the uncircumcised supports a screen onto which to project the fantasy of a sovereign, penetrating and civilized Turkish self:

> We hear through their transceivers that the terrorists call us the "bastards' battalion." We appear when they would not expect, from where they would not expect. If a captured terrorist does not have an ID on, how do you understand if he is a Turk, if he is a Muslim? We check if they are circumcised or not. Sixty percent, seventy percent turn out to be uncircumcised. Their names are Manukyan, Katilyan, mumbo jumbo. They are Syrian names, Lebanese citizens, a lot of Armenians.[72]
>
> … Buddy-ness [in the battalion] is very special. Everyone has a nickname, mine is "Sharp." Don't take it like bragging, but [my buddies] tell "You can shoot a fly

[72] The names offered here are not coincidental, but reflect the wider fantasy framework of the narrative. Manukyan is the last name of a brothel-chain patroness (Matild Manukyan), who was famous in the 1990s Turkey as a taxpayer champion. The Turkish word "katil" (from the Arabic "qatl") means "killer," and Katilyan (with the Armenian suffix "yan"/"ian") means "from the family of the murderer." The inconsistency in identifying the names of the terrorists who don't have an ID on is beside the point here.

> at five kilometers range… I have 45 days left for being discharged and I am given a leave, an award! What I have achieved, I wondered! A head! My friend and I had taken a head [brought in a severed head]. Since the one we had killed was registered, they awarded us. I took heads like this three or four times… We were so red-blooded that we entered the caves without ever thinking what would happen.
>
> There is a lot of difference between here and there in terms of economics. First of all, they don't know exactly what civilization means. There is a television in the village, they don't turn it on… We ask a Kurdish woman, with the help of an interpreter, how many years had she been married. She cannot calculate. She says, "This is the first one," for example, but she is married for 17-18 years. She does not know, you name it, what bra, what condom is. How can she know? While in the army, I met a 24-year-old [Kurdish] guy who was uncircumcised. He is not Armenian after all! He told me that his father had refused the burden of driving to the town center. There were no doctors in the village, he was never ill, never needed a doctor. The same Kurdish woman understands what I say, though, when I say in Turkish: "Shut up or I will kill you!" (Mater 2004: 156-163)

THE MILLENIAL PEACE THAT NEVER WAS

The promises of democratization, civilization and reconstruction at the turn of the millennium did not bring any change in the culture of terror that I just discussed. When the self-proclaimed "conservative democrat" AKP came to power in 2002, it initially flagged Turkey's EU accession process in the name of furthering democracy and pluralism by breaking the secular-Kemalist monopoly over the definitions of the state and the nation. The partial political liberalization initiatives undertaken since then helped to break the taboo on public debates on the Kurds and opened some space for the public expression of Kurdish identity as well as for the emergence of counter-publics for other marginalized groups such as the Armenians – a process articulated through discourses of multiculturalism, minority rights and civil society. Across these processes, however, the government and state institutions showed utmost care to maintain a sharp-line between the reified "process of democratization" and the fetishized "fight against terror." While

presenting the reforms as requirements of “contemporary standards of democracy” that had nothing to do with the “demands of the terrorists” and criminalizing Kurdish demands as terrorism irrespective of their content, the AKP inherited the military-state’s “terror” canon in full.

For the state, Abdullah Öcalan’s capture in 1999 stood for the beginning of the end of terror. In the ensuing politics of “terror’s end,” terror’s genealogy and foreskin continued to mark discourses on and fantasies of identity, sovereignty, the license to dissent, and the deliberations over (who would remain) inside and (who would be left) outside. The only difference was that this epistemic murk gained a more hegemonic quality in the 2000s with the rise of new actors to solve the trouble, yet with not-so-new methods.

A CENTENNIAL RESOLUTION: “LET MY KİRVE BE MEHMETÇİK”

During the trial of Öcalan, the question that stirred one of the most enthusiastic debates in and outside of the courtroom concerned Öcalan’s personal genealogy. At the second hearing of the trial on May 31, 1999, a plaintiff named Ahmet Beskardes, whose son was killed in the Basbaglar massacre in 1993, testified that Öcalan was no one else other than the Armenian Artin Agopyan imposturing as a Kurd. This testimony was widely covered in the Turkish media not as a claim but as disclosure of a fact, buttressing the official discourse that Öcalan was not Kurdish, that he even could not speak Kurdish, and that he had killed more Kurds than Turks in the name of liberating them. Öcalan’s alleged Armenian name as Artin Agopyan was reproduced over and over in other official

and "civilian" terror communiqués and strategy discourses over the next decade (Demirel 2002; Sehirli 2006; Ozdag 2006).

The Öcalan case was cast in official and media representations as the crushing of the head of terror. After the trial ended, it was time to destroy the body of terror. In the summer of 1999, the Turkish army, which led the epistemic regime on the Kurdish dissent as the terrorism of the uncircumcised, launched a mass circumcision campaign across the Kurdish countryside. It was the good old *kirvelik* that the army reclaimed in this attempt under the motto "Let My Kirve Be Mehmetçik" (hereinafter LMKBM). "Mehmet," a very common male name in Turkey derived from the Arabic "Mohammad," the name of the Muslim prophet, is also the informal generic name for conscripted Turkish soldiers. Mehmetçik, with the diminutive suffix "çik" adds to this name the qualities of youth, intimacy and affection. Sponsored by local army and gendarme units, the LMKBM campaign involved individual soldiers' acting as *kirve* to each circumcised boy in these mass ceremonies, which totaled 4,317 boys only in the remaining few months of the year (TMND 2000: 60-61).

Soon the Army's renewed interest in *kirvelik* gained a wider strategic relevance. In 2000, the Turkish Ministry of National Defense (TMND) adopted a new counter insurgency strategy whose terms were laid out in a defense communiqué entitled *Beyaz Kitap [The White Book]*. The crux of this "white turn," so-to-say, was a bifurcated "anti-terror" agenda based on a binary between "terror" and "Turkish citizens of Kurdish origin" – or between "terrorists" and "citizens." *Beyaz Kitap* envisioned no revision in conclusive military action to combat the former. Its novelty was how it sought to

mobilize, or contain, the latter in the "fight against terror" through a concerted "army-nation" narodnism. Introduced under the unreserved title, "Public Relations Framework," the narodnik initiative "The Hand in Hand with the Citizens and Mehmetçik Campaign" was designed "for turning the army into an intimate element of family and social life across the Southeast" (TMND 2000: 57-60). The "Hand in Hand…" campaign adopted the LMBMK campaign buttressing that "special attention [was] to be given to the *kirvelik* of Mehmetçik" (ibid. 61). The campaign also had other significant components that commissioned the army to sponsor mass-wedding ceremonies, lead health and vaccination campaigns, and promote girls' schooling (ibid. 60-61). Yet, it was precisely the *kirvelik* affair to offer to this intimate military-civilian blending the iconic scene of its anti-terrorism.

It is difficult to know whether it was after a strategic deliberation or out of habitual institutional memory, but the LMBMK initiative inaugurated at the Erzurum Deir-ul Eytam, just as Kâzım Karabekir's "Gürbüzler Ordusu" project during the "Turkish War of Independence" eighty years ago. We do not know much about the details of this particular ceremony. But later ceremonies received zealous coverage in the Turkish media and press, which assumed the PR work for the army at some other state-operated orphanages and across the remote hill country villages located in areas where armed clashes between the Turkish army and the PKK were mundane events of the previous two decades. During the first half of the 2000s, when the PKK's unilateral ceasefire was in effect, hundreds of mass circumcision ceremonies were organized in these sites. Members of the local military and civilian bureaucracy attended each of these

ceremonies with full staff as if fulfilling an official requirement. The ceremonial proceedings involved blends of boy's games played jointly by the initiates and the soldiers – such as marble and soccer, gift-giving ceremonies, music, art and dance performances against the constant background of "hand-in-hand against terror" oratories. For example, a certain "LMBMK Circumcision Banquet" held in rural Batman in December 1999 became the promotion ground for the new "Repentance Act" (Law No. 3419). After welcoming the hundred and fifty initiates into the world of men and congratulating their brevity, the Governor of the province said: "I hereby want to make a call to the terrorists on the mountains. Today the repentance law is in effect. Come and repent. And we will forgive them."[73] Another ceremony held in July 2000 in a border village on the Iraqi border opened with a parade of the initiates with placards that read: "Enough, we don't want any terror," "Hand-in-Hand are Mehmetçik and the People, Good-bye to Terror," "Condemn Terror, Thank Mehmetçik."[74] In yet another ceremony organized during the same month in Çukurca (Hakkari), a district noted for its strong support for the PKK, the circumcision of initiates inside the District Gendarme Headquarters was concluded with a military parade into the town center.[75]

The LMKBM campaign was shortly replicated across the Kurdish countryside with sister campaigns such as "Let My Kirve Be Colonel Lieutenant," "Let My Kirve Be

[73] "Antik Kent'te Kirvem Mehmetçik Coşkusu." December 2, 1999. Accessed on October 7, 2010. http://www.porttakal.com/ahaber-antik-kent-te-kirvem-mehmetcik-coskusu-201419.html

[74] "Sunnet Solenleri Suruyor." *Zaman,* July 10, 2000. Accessed on October 8, 2010. http://arsiv.zaman.com.tr/2000/07/10/dogu/dogudevam.htm

[75] "Mehmetçik'ten Bekçilere Jest." *Zaman*, July 24, 2000. Accessed on October 30, 2010. http://arsiv.zaman.com.tr/2000/07/24/dogu/dogudevam.htm

Uncle Police," "Let My Kirve Be Uncle Governor" and the like. The campaign names somewhat varied as *kirve* agents extended beyond the army ranks, but "in unity, against terror" remained the opening and concluding reprise of national security establishment's craze of *kirvelik* into the second half of the 2000s. The national interest in *kirvelik* did not wane in the rest of the decade. Only, the scene of *kirvelik* changed form, when the myth of "uncircumcised terrorist" started dominating public representations of the Kurdish issue again at the intersection of the peculiar dynamics of civilianization in Turkey and the resuming of the Kurdish armed struggle.

THE TERROR OF CIVILIANIZATION

The strict censure imposed on the knowledge of the Kurds and the Kurdish war had enabled the military-state to also monopolize the production of the truth of "terror" in the 1990s.[76] When in the 2000s the unavoidability of recognizing the Kurds' existence combined with the EU-induced calls for civilianization – that is, the removal of military tutelage on Turkish state and society, this truth monopoly also became unsustainable. Yet

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[76] The story of one book, *Mehmedin Kitabi: Guneydogu'da Savasmis Askerler Anlatiyor*, from which I quoted all but one of the soldiers' testimonies presented earlier, is illustrative here. Edited by a leftist-feminist journalist, Nadire Mater, *Mehmedin Kitabi* brought together a series of interviews with ex-soldiers who had been conscripted at the war front in the 1990s. The book was the first instance wherein these soldiers spoke about the war without being accompanied by their superiors in front of a television camera. The anonymity that Mater provided for them had not resulted in drastically divergent narratives: Few of the forty-two soldiers who spoke in the book criticized the official terror narrative in any substantive way. Still, the book was immediately banned upon publication in 1998, and Mater and her editor were put on trial on charges of insulting and harassing the state's military forces through the press. The Office of the Chief of the Turkish General Staff, the plaintiff to the trial, claimed in its complaint that Mater had "a certain worldview, misconstrued certain events that the soldiers lived through as if there was a war, and made up the interviews" and asked her to reveal the identity of her interlocutors (Mater 2004 [1998]: 271-281). The real motivation behind these accusations was the fact that the book seriously undermined the monopoly of speech about the army and the war.

this "civilianization" of politics did not bring about any civilianization in the discourse and politics of terror.

In this period the ex-conscripted soldiers who fought in Kurdistan or the families who lost their sons to the war became publicly visible for the first time with their own stories of war. Their narratives were crucial for disclosing other experiences of loss, disruption and ressentiment that had been denied visibility as integral to the denial of the existence of a war with the Kurds. This notwithstanding, these ex-soldiers and families sought to gain visibility and articulate agency from within the same terror discourse. Every other soldier survivor who spoke, for instance, testified to have checked the PKK militants' genitalia in the midst of armed clashes and found most to be uncircumcised. The sacrificial-nationalist slogan, "May *vatan [*homeland*]* live on!" formed the normative opening statement of the stories of the dead soldiers' families, which usually ended in cursing enemies of the state and Islam. "Terror" moved closer to the intimate sphere of the Turkish home from the epic distance of the mountains in "the East." (Açıksöz 2012)

The calls for a pluralist, multi-vocal society, which rarely secured the right to free speech for the stigmatized Kurds and Armenians, opened further ground for the proliferation of nationalist publics and the privatization of the terror discourse in the free market of civil society. In 2003, one former Turkish Chief of Staff complained of the mushrooming of "terror experts" in think tanks, the academy, the media, and NGOs, arguing that "everyone with a mouth [had] started talking". Behind this complaint was no doubt a certain elite snobbishness mixed with the ressentiment for the loss of privilege to

know and to speak. Nevertheless, there was also a certain degree of fairness in the complaint in that the participation of “civilians” in the discourse of “terror” produced hardly anything but unskilled copycats of the available canon and further banalization of a racializing discourse and fantasy. The following excerpt from a 2005 social media forum on the PKK, which found wide circulation on the Internet, is illustrative here:

> Armenians have certain delineable physical traits: One of their eyebrows is always placed higher than the other one and their eyes look astray… Some of you may think, “My eyebrows are like that, am I an Armenian, too?” That is not what I suggest. But, in general, those whose one eyebrow is lifted and who are devoted to the PKK by heart are Armenian. This is because the executives of this organization and its political extensions are Armenian and carry these traits and they never allow normal Kurds into administrative positions… Look at the faces of PKK’s and DEHAP’s executives. You will notice that all of them have the same condition - primarily Apo. Check the presidents of Armenia for comparison and you will see.[77]

The “civilian” appropriation of the terror discourse took on a more belligerent and organized character in the latter half of the 2000s with the intensification of the fight between the AKP and the Kemalist establishment over state power and the material and symbolic resources of the country. There emerged in this period, for instance, a fascist formation called Ulusalci (Nationalist), which brought together the official and underground cadres of the 1990s’ counter-guerilla warfare in Kurdistan – i.e. military officers, JITEM heads, right-wing nationalist intellectuals – and the Kemalist Left in the name of fighting against the AKP government’s betraying the Republican regime and the country. However, the target of the Ulusalci were not the AKP or its supposedly “religious fundamentalist” followers. Rather, at the core of their fundamentalist

[77] “The Armenian Executives of PKK, DEHAP, ASALA and Dashnaksutyun.” May 18, 2005. Accessed on November 9, 2010. http://wowturkey.com/forum/viewtopic.php?t=14125,

nationalism, which meshed anti-AKPism with "anti-European Unionism," "anti-imperialism" and a secularist-ethnicist version of Kemalism, was a belligerent hatred toward Armenians and the proxy-Armenian Kurdish dissent. Consider the following statement by the vice-chair of one Ulusalci NGO, Kuva-i Milliye (National Forces)[78] as one among dozens of other typical statements.

> A true Kurd does not commit separatism, because he carries the Turkish blood as a Kurdish Turk, and he would not pursue enmity against the Turk, either. If he commits separatism and says, "I would rather be an Armenian than a Turk," investigate his genealogy and he will definitely turn out to be not of Kurdish origin. Even if he considers himself to be a Kurd, it will be revealed that he is only "an Armenian who speaks Kurdish…" The PKK forces the Kurds in the East to emigrate; it consciously reduces the Kurdish population so that these lands would be annexed to Armenia in the future… Why did the Christian world, which never heard the cries of the Kurds yesterday, has become Kurdlovers today? They have found a fool to exploit. In short, trick or treat, put the Kurdish Mehmet on guard duty. What difference would it make to the Armenian PKK, if the one who dies were a Kurd or a Turk?[79]

It was not only the Ulusalci or the relatively more benign secularist-nationalist groups who opposed political liberalization by deploying a corporatist anti-terror discourse from within the "civilian" sphere. The traditional Turkish-Islamist circles, who allied with the AKP in its fight with the military tutelage and the secularist Kemalist elites, also endorsed the same conspiracy anti-terrorism discourse in the face of the rising visibility of the Kurds and the Armenians:

> This nation has to know something well. That which is called the PKK is an Armenian game… It is because of the need to get the PKK lay down arms that the Government had to make an Armenian opening. This is because if America asks

[78] The organization was named after the Kemalist Army in the formative years of the Turkish Republic.

[79] Mehmet Demir Atmalı. 2007. "PKK-Asala Muhabbeti." Accessed on September 13, 2010. http://www.acikistihbarat.com/Haberler.asp?haber=7211

> the PKK to surrender and lay down arms, the PKK may not accept it. But it has to comply if the Armenians ask the PKK to do so. Why? Two thirds of the PKK militants are Armenian youth… Let me tell you: During the armed clashes, surviving militants disfigure the faces of some of their dead friends or shoot at their penises. Why? … So that they could not be identified. This Government has an intelligence service. Does it not know that two thirds of these militants are Armenian? If the dead one is Armenian, they shoot at his penis so that his being uncircumcised is not seen. I deliberated this with many officers who served in the South East. The state cannot not know this. No way![80]

As a matter of fact, there was hardly any "Armenian opening" in Turkey in the 2000s. An aborted high-level diplomatic rapprochement attempt took place between Turkey and Armenia toward the end of the decade. But domestic discourses and practices regarding the Armenians evolved in their own course. In this period, the Armenians, and to a degree other non-Muslim peoples of Anatolia such as the Jews and Assyrians became nostalgic icons of a multi-cultural heritage bygone for the cosmopolitan-identified liberal elites of İstanbul. This was only one side of the story. On the other side was even more provoked common enmity against the Armenians and other non-Muslim groups, which at times took on a fatal character as in the murder of the Roman Catholic Father Andrea Santoro in 2006, the murder of Hrant Dink in January 2007 (more later), and the murder of one German and two Turkish Christians in Zirve Publishing House in Malatya two months later.

As per several "democratization packages" opened and closed for the Kurds one after the other at the whims of the government, their wraps were far more promising than their contents. It is true that the AKP incontestably shook the army's tutelage over the state and the government. Yet it never forgot what the army had said about the sources

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[80] Bakış Açısı, *TVNet*. 2010. Interview with Kadir Mısırlıoĝlu. September 3. Accessed on December 27, 2011. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U_nDV5x74qU

and symptoms of terror. When the PKK resumed armed struggle in 2004, the "civilianized" state resumed the terror talk from where the military-state had left.

On August 18, 2007, Yusuf Halaçoğlu, the-then chair of the official Turkish History Society (TTK), issued a statement on the origins of the Kurds and terror. He said: "People we call Kurds are actually of Turcoman origin, while those whom we think are Kurdish Alevites [Zaza Qizilbashh] are unfortunately of Armenian origin. Most of the people who join separatist terrorist organizations of TİKKO and PKK are Armenian-converted-Kurds. TİKKO and PKK are not Kurdish movements as we think them to be."[81] When Kurdish and Alevite-Qizilbash organizations as well as Armenians and leftists protested this statement was for resuscitating to phrenologist denialism, Halaçoğlu made another statement a few days later. "There are over 100.000 Armenian converts in Turkey. I have a list that shows who these people are, name by name. I am not to disclose this list ever," he remarked, and continued: "But, for example, some PKK members turn out to be uncircumcised. One has to consider carefully from where terror flourishes. The state determined these converts house by house over 1936-1937."[82] In August 2010, Cemil Çiçek, the-then Turkish Minister of Justice and Government Spokesman, made a more assuring statement:

> Turkey has been confronting terrorism for the past forty years. It was ideological terror before 1980; after that it became the left-right terror… It is not only the Armenian terror; there is a close connection between the Armenian terror and PKK terror. These are blood brothers. The other [Armenian] side walked out of the picture and they brought this one forward. In fact, pardon my expression, that

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[81] Quoted in the daily *Milliyet*, August 19, 2007.

[82] "Bazı PKK'lılar Sünnetsiz," *Milliyet,* August 20, 2007.

> some terrorists are uncircumcised tells you a lot. I mean this is not rumor whatever, we know very well who is who.[83]

During the three years in-between the statements of the chief-historian Halaçoğlu and Justice Minister Cicek, revelations on terror's foreskin were repeated by diverse actors such as the Directorate of Religious Affairs, academics, news anchors, journalists, showbiz figures, et cetera. It was probably with the weariness of all this talk that Selahattin Demirtaş, co-chair of the pro-Kurdish Peace and Democracy Party (BDP) and MP for Diyarbakır, was being unfair in singling out Cicek when he said:

> The Justice Minister comes and goes and tells of the circumcision news… According to him, this people [the Kurds] do not have any problems related to their identity, culture or conscience. The whole issue is because of the circumcision problem of some PKK members. If that is the problem and you are so curious about it, let us send you to Qandil [PKK's headquarters in Iraqi Kurdistan] as the Government Circumciser and you shall solve the problem.[84]

No one visited Qandil, but increasing armed conflicts in the mountains also increased the visitors to Kurdish plain dwellers in number and variety within the scope of more "Let my Kirve Be…." campaigns, now organized more by civilian actors; such as school directorates, educational activists, philanthropists, conservative NGOs, businessmen associations, and civilian government representatives. The Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan, too, became *kirve* to a Kurdish boy in this period, like the other statesmen in the past such as Kâzım Karabekir, Mustafa Kemal and İsmet İnönü.[85]

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[83] "Çiçek'ten Ermeni PKK'lılar İması!" *Radikal*, August 21, 2010. Accessed on August 22, 2010. http://www.radikal.com.tr/turkiye/cicekten_ermeni_pkklilar_imasi-1014804

[84] "Onu Sünnetçi Olarak Kandil'e Gönderelim!"*Radikal,* August 22, 2010. Accessed on August 23, 2010. http://www.radikal.com.tr/politika/onu_sunnetci_olarak_kandile_gonderelim-1015009

[85] "Erdoğan Malatya'da Kirvelik Yaptı." July 25, 2010. Accessed on July 26, 2010. http://www.internethaber.com/erdogan-malatyada-kirvelik-yapti-275387h.htm

This diversification of the actors did not render the emphasis on *kirvelik*'s anti-terror role secondary. For example, *Orada Kimse Var mi? (Is Anybody There?),* a religious-conservative charity organization, carried out its ambitious "10 Thousand *Kirves* for 10 Thousand Children" campaign in 2008 between two national holidays promulgated in the Kemalist era; National Sovereignty and Children's Day (April 23) and Victory Day (August 30). Or, in a "Let My *Kirve* Be My School Director Circumcision Feast" organized jointly by the Foundation of Education and the Office of the Governor of Iğdır Province in July 2010, the Governor's inaugural speech recorded:

> Today, we have become the *kirve* of our children as a requirement of our religious faith and in line with our traditions and customs... This *kirvelik* shall continue for long. *Tomorrow, we will follow our children in all stages of their lives.* Perhaps, these children will become tomorrow's police, soldiers or teachers. They will struggle against those who aim to destroy the peace of this country. Let's bring up our kids in loyalty to our nation and country. Let's keep up our unity and being-togetherness.[86]

However, alongside this continuity, the symbolic scene of *kirvelik* became diversified here with repercussions of the millennial discourses and imageries of multiculturalism, intercultural dialogue and peace. Diyarbakır was a privileged target of the military and civilian bureaucracy's 'Let My *Kirve* Be…' craze from the beginning. The pro-state actors and institutions in the city turned Diyarbakır into the favored host of also the pro-culture and pro-peace *kirvelik* meetings in the process of the institution's conservative civilianization.

"The Sacred Nativity Week Circumcision Festival" in Diyarbakır in April 2008, which I briefly mentioned in the introduction of the previous chapter was one such

[86] "Kirvem Müdürüm Olsun Sünnet Şöleni." Accessed on July 30, 2010. http://www.igdirhaber.com.tr/tdpfaaliyet.htm.

occasion. Organized by the Association of the Entrepreneurial Businessman of Diyarbakır (DIGIAD) in partnership with the Provincial Office of Mufti (Islamic Jurisprudence), the festival hosted five hundred businessmen from Western Turkey who volunteered to be the *kirve* of an equal number of poor and orphan boys in the city. The speeches made during this event, as covered festively in the news media, were quite interesting in the sense of reflecting how *kirvelik* had become another item in the intermeshed national securitist, primitivist and touristic gaze over Diyarbakır by this time: In their opening addresses to the festival, the Governor and *Mufti* of Diyarbakır took attentive care to introduce the visitors to idea of *kirvelik*. Kirvelik, the Governor told, was an "ancient institution" that had "a peculiar significance in the cultural texture of the Southeast" and he made it clear for the sponsors that "according to the local tradition the one who becomes the *kirve* of a boy was obliged to sponsor him in all matters throughout his life."[87] The Mufti emphasized how significant it was that Western (Turkish) businessmen founded brotherhood with families of the initiates as their co-religionists and country folks. The initiates colored the news clips dressed up in the ritual attires bought for them by their *kirve* with National Geographic tinted smiles on their faces. All were very happy for the interest shown to them by their "Western uncles." The Western uncles, caught by astute reporters with their godchildren in their arms, were also very happy for their own part for having seen Diyarbakır and experiencing its culture,

[87] "Kutlu Doğum 500 Çocuğun Yüzünü Güldürdü." Accessed on April 20, 2008. http://www.tumgazeteler.com/www.gundem.info/?a=2763514

people and cuisine on site. One remarked, after all: "This is really a peculiar event for the bridge of brotherhood. We are like flesh and nail with these people."[88]

This metaphor of flesh and nail is a frequent element in the official rhetoric of national unity - that flesh and nail cannot be separated. The metaphor, however, does not have a dear place in the political Kurdish memory as it bitterly reminds many of Musa Anter, the most well known Kurdish intellectual in the early 1990s murdered by JITEM in Diyarbakır at the age of seventy two. Anter once commented: "Yes indeed, we are like flesh and nails. But you are the flesh and we are the nails. And whenever we grow long, you cut us." After all, has it not been all about cutting, cutting the excess from very the beginning– be it the nail or the foreskin?

CONCLUSION: THE LIZARD'S TAIL

One major discomfort that prompted me to trace inter-confessional genealogies of *kirvelik* was the reclamations of the *kirve* overwhelmingly as a nostalgic item in narratives of urban loss in Diyarbakır - such as in the celebratory cast of *kirvelik* relations among an Assyrian/Syriac priest, a Turkish Commander and a Kurdish *bazaari* that I described in the previous chapter. Critical of such depictions grounded in the romanticization of both culture and history, I have traced multiple oppressed histories, forms of violence and foreclosures as well as struggles for survival and justice that any cosmopolitanist narrative on the Armenian or Assyrian/Syriac *kirve* in post-genocidal Republican Diyarbakır has to take into account. Now I would like to conclude by

[88] "Kirveleri Batıdan Gelen Amcalar Oldu." Accessed on April 21, 2008. http://www.tumgazeteler.com/?a=2761497

revisiting the discomfort that prompted me to pursue this study, this time from the angle of the "uncircumcised terrorist," whose knowledge was a constant part of my training into Kurdishness by the state, unlike inter-ethno-confessional *kirvelik*, as a background to this work's intended word for future.

The roads of *kirve* and "the uncircumcised terrorist" did not intersect in public discourses in and on Diyarbakır even for once during my fieldwork. Yet discourses on the "uncircumcised terrorist" did circumscribe Kurdish and Armenian claims to voice, visibility and agency vis-à-vis the Turkish state and the larger Turkish public. In the case of the Armenians, disclaiming "terror," particularly any association with the PKK, remained the condition of possibility to gain voice in this period. In fact, for a long time they remained silent on the ostracizing of "the uncircumcised" in order not to find themselves in any position of as-if speaking for "the terrorist."[89] When some members of the community finally decided to come forward in protest with a press release, their critique was limited to appealing the state to separate "the uncircumcised Armenians" from "the uncircumcised terrorists." They said: "As if there exists no uncircumcised nation other than the Armenians, what kind of science, morality or conscience would accept declaring the Armenian people as terrorists based on that some terrorists are uncircumcised?"[90]

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[89] I thank Rober Koptaş, editor-in-chief of the Armenian weekly AGOS, for an interview on Armenian perceptions of the Kurds, which underlies this suggestion.

[90] HyeTert. 2007. "Halaçoğlu, Dönmelerin İsimlerini Açıklamalıdır: Milyonlar Zan Altında." August 24. Accessed on October 30, 2010. http://www.hyetert.com/yazi3.asp?s=0&AltYazi=Makaleler%20\%3E%20Hala%C3%A7o%C3%B0lu,%20D%C3%B6nmelerin%20%C3%9Dsimlerini%20A%C3%A7%C3%BDklamal%C3%BDd%C3%BDr.%20Milyonlar%20Zan%20Alt%C3%BDnda&Id=293&DilId=1

The Kurds for their own part had a more troubling relationship to the same charge from the opposite angle. The political Kurdish community did not mind being hailed as "terrorists" as much, but they refused being put on the spot as "the uncircumcised" due to this trope's denying the Kurds of political agency as well the religious and cultural taboos of both circumcision and masculinity. I became more aware of these during a conversation with an old Diyarbakırite *imam*, Mele Nusret, which started on a different issue. Mele Nusret had led the funeral proceedings of many PKK militants; "the martyrs," as he called them. When I learned this, I asked why they were washing the martyrs before the burial, although *fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence) considered the martyr as already pure and allowed their burial without washing them first. He explained:

> There are reasons… But it is also to frustrate the state. As they say the PKK is not Kurdish, it is not Muslim, these kids are uncircumcised, their funeral prayers cannot be performed and what not… Take my word as a man of religion that these kids are Kurdish and they are Muslim. Many poor people cannot afford to have their sons circumcised. The state knows this as well as I know how not all guerillas are Muslim or even Kurdish. For the sake of Allah! Most of our own children do not even believe in Allah. Do we not know this? But the stakes are different here, you see… This whole circumcision thing is not only playing with people's religious sensibilities, either. They are grandsons of *Devlet-i ʿAli-i ʿOsmân!* [The State of the House of Osman – Ottoman Empire.] Can you beat their tricks? They know you [Kurds] very well and they grab you from Achilles heel. They grab you by the balls! Is that not it?

I was enjoying more the ease and humor with which Mele Nusret was making his points, when a young man who was listening to us by the side - young enough to not take the humorous sacrilege in Mele Nusret's talk or "enjoy his symptom," stood up to leave the room murmuring half angry and half ashamed: "They don't even leave us be terrorists

with a peace of mind!" "You see?" Mele Nusret winked at me as I tried to keep modest my laughter at the young man's ressentiment.

After several months of fieldwork, cosmopolitan *kirve* narratives, "Let My *Kirve be…"* festivals, the news on "uncircumcised terrorists" started getting dizzying to follow. Then, one day I came across a newspaper article written in 2004 by Hrant Dink, who at the time was the target of an unrelenting racist campaign that had started in 2003 over the course of a trial in which he was charged of "insulting Turkishness." This article, entitled "Lizard Abdullah," was in response to yet another racist commentary in a nationalist Turkish daily paper, *Yeniçaĝ*, with the headline "Look at the Armenian!" Interpreting this hailing as the revolt of racist circles to "an Armenian expressing his existence and speaking his mind with the dignity of his Armenian identity" and making it clear that he was not going to be "the silent Armenian that they [were] used to," Dink wrote the following lived story[91] that the commentary made him sadly remember:

> The year is 1918. A village at the foot of the Süphan Mountain [near Ararat].
> He had hardly escaped what happened and it was difficult to get to the village to seek refuge near Ismail of Peltekler [the Peltek family].
> Those were the years when everyone was running away from everyone else, when everyone was holding on to one another's helplessness.
> The dark burrow where he dwelled on one side of the corral was the size of the distance between two stones in a row on a wall. He lived there in seclusion. Sometimes he would go out in daylight, go to those who could hold mercy in their heart, lend a hand to harvesting, shed sweat as much as he could, eat some bread and return to his burrow.
> Those were the times when the soil was vomiting blood, everything was to survive just a little more.
> His name for the villagers was Abdullah… "Sent by Allah".
> He was living in a hole forgotten by Allah, you know.

[91] Hrant Dink. 2004. "Kertenkele Abdullah." *Birgun*. October 10.

> Until Memo, Ismail's third son, saw him peeing beneath the corral's wall. Lowered to the floor, he [Memo] cast his dawn-bright eyes on to Abdullah's dog dead [damn] penis with a nasty smile.
> He bounced and ran at once, shouting: "Run lads… Come and look at Abdullah… I swear I have seen, by Allah, that his [penis] is shelled [uncut].
> They say Abdullah leapt from beneath the wall into the corral with a lizard's leap.
> Shortly, stones started raining on the corral. Kids and youth, grown-ups and the elderly, had gathered to stone the corral. They were shouting - "Get out infidel. We understood who you are. Get out!
> The corral's door opened.
> The first one to enter was Ismail, who had always protected Abdullah. Others followed him.
> Ismail stopped them and stepped ahead.
> "Where are you Abdullah? Come hold my hand, I will protect you."
> Ismail's hand grabbed Abdullah's extended hand, but recoiled at once.
> It had touched a piece of skin in blood.
> Ismail turned back to the others.
> "Come on; leave the poor man alone, we are leaving!"
> Then, they left alone the dignified-circumcised Abdullah… Never touched him again.
> Those of you who tried catching a lizard in their childhood would know. When you lean on to grab them, you are only left with their tail.
> The year is 2004. *Yeniçağ* threw a headline: "Look at the Armenian!"
> It seems someone is on a lizard hunt once again.
> Don't take it wrong; not that I am intimidated or boggled, of course – but now I feel like "Lizard Abdullah" myself. How about that?
> Forgive me! Being a reptile, I can't help [but to feel that way]….

My dizziness peaked as I reached the end of the article. It was the association that Dink made between Abdullah's cutting his foreskin off and the expectations for him to cut off his tongue - or the association between penis and tongue, the two locations/signifiers of phallic agency - that had structured Dink's reminisce of the lizard's tail which had struck me.

Dink did not circumscribe his words.

Barely a few weeks after Lizard Abdullah had started accompanying me in the field, one day I saw Dink on a store-display TV screen while doing wedding shopping

with my partner. He was lying flat on the ground in a street in İstanbul, his face down and his body covered with newspapers... It was as if time had stood still since the television technology had entered our lives in the post-1980 Diyarbakır… Or had it been standing still since long before?

Dink's assasination caused an outcry. Hundreds of thousands joined the funeral protests in İstanbul. The title of his last article, "The Pigeon Skittishness of My Soul," which he wrote after a serious threat from one of İstanbul's highest ranking police officers, enlivened his portrayals in the image of a peaceful pigeon in countless İstanbul-based obituaries. In Diyarbakır, his murder made him "Kirve Hrant" to many Kurds.

I got stuck in the Lizard's tail.

> Each one of them carries a chevalier in one half their bodies and a death man in the other part. The way each looks, walks and behaves stand in for all. They drape their jackets over their shoulders. There is always a butcher's cleaver hidden on their torso. They wear pointed shoes with cowboy heels and smash the back of their shoes under their heels… All of them take pride in being "*şehir çocuğu.*" Xançepek, Kore, Alipar, Mardinkapı, Bağlar…! The best *şehir çocuğu* hail from these quarters.
>
> Martı, 2006

> From one part to the other, the city seems to continue, in perspective, multiplying its repertory of images: but instead it has no thickness, it consists only of a face and an obverse, like a sheet of paper, with a figure on either side which can neither be separated nor look at each other.
>
> Italo Calvino (1974: 105)

Chapter Three: Şehir Çocuğu

Şehir çocuğu (Turkish for *the city boy)* denotes a certain type of masculinity that locates his claim to existence on being of *şehir.*[92] This type of masculinity emerged in the quarters of Suriçi in the 1960s as the bearer of a highly stylized and defiant masculine ethos that integrated values of male autonomy, honor, bravery and street wisdom with physical practices of force and expenditure. The practices and expressivities associated with *şehir çocuğu* displayed considerable plasticity across time. Nevertheless, a distinct slang, a certain gait, stylized attire, distance from formal labor, connections with the urban economic underground and a distinct homosocial culture of leisure built around city walls, movie theaters and wine and weed consumption came to dominate his image.

Shaping the emergence of *şehir çocuğu* were spatialized constellations of experience and desire that changing structures of urban life offered to a new generation of male youth situated in Suriçi's quarters. The 1960s was the period when Diyarbakır took

[92] "Şehir" translates as "city," yet in Diyarbakir it refers specifically to Suriçi, the walled city, as I discussed in the Introduction. Thus "şehir çocuğu" practically means "Suriçi boy."

on the character of a bifurcated city across Suriçi and Yenişehir (lit. the New City) following the abolition of the General Inspectorate rule and agricultural modernization in the early 1950s. In slightly over a decade, Suriçi's quarter-based citizenship structure had dismantled with massive rural-urban migration, the moving-out of middle-classes to Yenişehir and the destruction of quarter-based artisanal production. As quarters turned into marginalized residential hubs characterized by growing socio-economic informality and cultural dislocations, Yenişehir bourgeoned outside the city walls as a middle-class city breeding new life styles, cultural forms and consumption patterns.

Articulated within such an urban socio-spatial configuration, *şehir çocuğu* raised a bi-planar claim on *şehir*; at once embodying *şehir* manhood and inhabiting a defiant ethos of "being good at being a man"[93] in an unequal and decaying urban space. This endeavor was largely spirited by idealized invocation of an older type of strongman embedded in the walled city's socio-cultural make-up; namely, *kabadayı.* A highly regularized masculine type, *kabadayı* oversaw the security of trade and commerce, adjudicated disputes and fulfilled morally regulative functions in exchange for protection rackets.[94] The *kabadayı* dissipated with the advent of Turkish Republican modernization. Yet the *kabadayı* code of conduct survived this process both in more criminalized appropriations and folk-heroized invocations of "the moral tough." *Şehir çocuğu* of the 1960s appropriated this code of conduct as a powerful repertoire for crafting rule-bound

[93] I borrow this phrase from Michael Herzfeld (1985: 16), who, in comparison to the notion of "being a good man," defines it as "a stance that stresses *performative excellence,* the ability to foreground manhood by means of deeds that strikingly 'speak for themselves.'" Original emphasis.

[94] Kabadayı (a.k.a *qabaday*) was a common type across the walled cities of the Ottoman Middle East, i.e. Istanbul, Aleppo, Diyarbakir, Damascus and Beirut. See Khoury (2007) and Yeşilgöz and Bovenkerk (2007: 140) for detailed discussions on this type of masculinity in the Levant and in Istanbul.

and aesthetic masculine selves amid sweeping socio-economic, political and cultural transformations. However, *şehir çocuğu* spirit could not be reduced to a realist drama of compensation, as it was also inspired by a keen desire for the new urban modern whose items they appropriated by way of excess. For instance, they adopted Turkish language like the middle-class urbanites and yet by inflecting it heavily with Kurdish vocabulary, phonetics and syntax. They followed the new fashion of suits and leather shoes and yet wore them in stylized ways that betrayed any idea of comfort. There was also a new technological gaze, the cinema, which inspired the *şehir çocuğu* as a particular masculine body located in public cultures of the post-1960s' Diyarbakır.

The material and semiotic assemblages to shape *şehir çocuğu's* identifications changed over each decade within larger processes of socio-cultural and political change and conflict in Diyarbakır. The 1970s' generation assumed leftism as being intrinsic to the moral tough ethos that they advocated, as did their predecessors in the 1960s. The 1980 coup generation was thoroughly depoliticized, more criminalized and more morally ambiguous. And the *şehir çocuğu* of late 1980s and early 1990s explicitly identified with political Kurdishness in whatever they said and did.

No matter how accented, the place of *şehir çocuğu* in Diyarbakırite identity and modernity remained deeply contested. From the time it first figured in urban public culture, the sign of şehir *çocuğu* effectively mediated contrasting claims to the city at sexed-gendered, classed and spatial registers, which also always referenced the question of ethnic or national identity. The urban middle classes of the time strongly condoned this type of masculinity, associating it with roughhewn provinciality, ignorance, violence

mongering, uneducated tastes and bad morals. To them, with all these features, *şehir çocuğu* was a relic of Kurdishness, which they viewed as a socio-cultural property of the rural order. Thus, when contesting the *şehir çocuğu's* claim to *şehir*, they also named him alternatively as *gedê bajer* (Kurdish for the *city boy*) to symbolically relocate him in Kurdishness, or as *qirix*[95], an eccentric slang idiom which, denoting both a split and ambiguity, was meant to expose his out of place-ness vis-à-vis proper urban identity and life. The Kurdish revolutionary nationalist discourses, too, refused *şehir çocuğu* and hailed them as *qirix* with a contrasting notion of identity: Mapping the split that this signifier denoted onto Kurdishness rather urbanity, they related *şehir çocuğu* formation to the internalization of colonial, feudal and classed forms of violence and repression. In effect, tainted with images of lumpen alienation, indulgence and corruption, *şehir çocuğu* masculinity became perhaps even more suspect and progressively dissipated during the militant temporality of the 1990s, at least as a physically or socially sustainable masculine performative.

Yet, the sign *şehir çocuğu* effectively reentered into public debates on urban life in Diyarbakır in the 2000s as part of the culturalist shift in the discourses and imaginaries of the city, identity and history**,** as I discussed in the Introduction. This reentry took place much less in physical form than as a narrative of "loss" in a series of nostalgic discourses that reclaimed *şehir çocuğu*'s social defiance as cultural difference and him cultural patrimony of Diyarbakır and Suriçi - now perceived as the "old" rather than the "inner" city. Different actors crowded this nostalgia for *şehir çocuğu,* imbuing him with

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[95] See, Chapter Four for more on "qirix."

contrasting ethnic, moral and masculine qualities and agency: i.e. a rebel spirit of epic proportions, a soulful hedonist, the bearer of normative culture of urban manhood, as Kurdish (rather than Turkish) or as an urbanite defined in opposition to rural Kurdishness. What was more interesting than the answerability of the sign to such obviously contrasting imaginaries and politics was the shared sense and discourse of his being "lost."

The ubiquity of this trope of "loss" was striking, first, because there were many old generation *şehir çocuğu,* who were still well and alive and yet their existence was completely bypassed in this narrative of loss. No less significantly, the 2000s was also the period when tens of thousands of young boys appeared on the city space, inside Suriçi's quarters and in other poor urban districts, who were closely reminiscent of pictorial portraits of *şehir çocuğu* with their physical expressivities and practices. Some of these real-time boys were also claiming the legacy of *şehir çocuğu* and calling themselves by this name as part of an effort to claim the city for themselves. Yet, not only they, too, were ignored in this middle class nostalgic narrative space, but also the signifier *şehir çocuğu* lost its magic whenever confronted with its literal referents - the actual boys of the living *şehir*. These boys crowded urban discourses not with any epic or romantic conception of revolt or masculine sovereignty, but as agents of crime and delinquency, moral corruption and decay - as bodies nourishing dystopian visions of urban doom.

Tracing *şehir çocuğu* as at once an embodied form of masculinity, an urban myth and a narrative space in/through which contesting claims to the city have been made at sexed-gendered, classed and spatialized registers, this chapter explores figurations of

identity, modernity and belonging in Diyarbakır by tracing *şehir çocuğu*. I start with a personal experience that has structured my perception of *şehir* and *şehir çocuğu* within the socio-political climate of the 1990s to comparatively contextualize the *lost şehir çocuğu* nostalgia in the 2000s. Then I explore the cultural and affective work of this narrative nostalgia focusing on a certain widely circulated cultural production in this realm. I next trace the *şehir çocuğu* name as it appears in the words and deeds of different generations of men who assumed this name as the organizing principle of their subjectivity at one point or the other in their lives, detailing the story of one in particular. My aim in shifting the narrative gaze here is neither to offer an authentic account on *şehir çocuğu* by recourse to personal experience nor to disclose a condition of subalternity that is rendered silent together with the experiences associated with it. It is rather to explore how these men, who lived their lives at the margins of social legitimacy, value and the law relate to this name, what images and understandings of the city, identity and history they forge as they cohere their experiences into meaningful life stories. I return in the end to the contemporary longing for *şehir çocuğu* in Diyarbakır via a critical engagement with recent anthropological debates on the inner city or other non-hegemonic masculinities as objects of nostalgia or agents of resistance.

ŞEHİR INTERDICTIONS

Long before going to Diyarbakır for fieldwork, I had anticipated ending up confronting with *şehir çocuğu* as a research issue, even though masculinity was not among my intended objects of study and I had scant prior sense of any nostalgia for *şehir çocuğu*. This was because the sign had a key place in my experience and perception of

the place of *şehir* in Diyarbakır for a long time. Growing up in the city, in Yenişehir more precisely, *şehir,* especially the walls with which *şehir çocuğu* were identified, laid virtually beyond my independent physical mobility as a middle-class member of the female sex. Well into the 1990s, the privilege, or disgrace, of being associated with the walls belonged only to *şehir çocuğu,* who were also called "bedenaltı çocuğu" (the boy beneath *beden*) – the lonesome and troublesome tramp. Thus, *şehir* meant spatial interdiction for me from the outset, and *şehir çocuğu* were the prime suspects for this knowledge. However, a certain event that happened at a time when Kurdish mobilization was overtaking the experience of Diyarbakır changed my apprehension of this personal mobility issue (however gendered and classed) as integral to a much wider socio-political problem. It was an across the city walk that I had with Hamza -a one-time *şehir çocuğu*.

Hamza was my cousin, the favorite son of the extended family, if also the one who brought home the most trouble. He had become a *şehir çocuğu* as he turned his teens and made some name in the Saraykapı quarter, the inner side of the walls across the citadel, for his recklessness and implacable pride. He had already had several police records for street fighting, extortion and minor drinking, before he was imprisoned for stabbing a man at the age of seventeen in 1981, incidentally a few months after the 1980 *coup d'etat*. Considering himself to be a justiciar rather than a common criminal and a natural-born leftist like most of his street-trained peers those days, he stayed with political prisoners there, in No. 5. A few years later, he came out as a learned revolutionary. He first left the streets and then enrolled in the engineering faculty at a

leading university in metropolitan Turkey. A couple of years later, he dropped out and headed to the mountains.

Hamza secretly returned to Diyarbakır in the spring of 1991 with a bullet wound in his leg. He healed well. Nevertheless, physically impaired and on the run, he had to remain locked inside his parent's house for months, which was overwhelming. Finally, one evening in late July the family let him go out for a walk in the company of his aunt-in-law, his sister and two teenaged cousins. In those times, young men, too, especially this one with a snow-burnt face, a thick leftist moustache and a self-confident deportment, could benefit from a family picture to navigate the dark of the city in relative safety. Excited like a child, he pulled on a long-sleeved cotton mocha shirt and a pair of indigo Levi's jeans. He had been wearing long sleeves for all seasons since his release from prison to hide the numerous razor cuts on his arms, which he had self-inflicted in his *şehir çocuğu* days as a display of manly fearlessness. His jeans had been smuggled from Iraq. He wore them real handsomely.

He was probably less romantic on the road than my memory of him striding the streets as if devouring them in the dark. Still, it must have been an intense experience for him. After all, it was his first reencounter in years with the city where he had been born, played, fought, pained, and was then seeking to liberate. He was not as talkative that summer. I don't remember most of what we talked on the road. Though, one brief conversation stayed with me for good. It was a conversation on "borders."

We were passing through Tek Kapı, one of the wall gates that opened Suriçi into Yenişehir, or *şehir* into the new city. Hamza suddenly stopped. "You know, the biggest

achievement of the [Kurdish] struggle is to have removed the psychological border right here, the border between *şehir* and Yenişehir," he said, thumping the ground with his heels. We tended to look up to whatever Hamza would say those days. But this judgment was unpleasantly surprising, even offensive to me at the time. I do not know if this was because it was mounting a border between him and us, the family's Yenişehir dwellers, or because it simply was too ordinary for satiating a teenager's appetite for epic those days. Not mentioning the threat of kin sacrilege (perhaps, it had felt too ordinary to worth mentioning, then), I criticized the acute political myopia in his measure of "achievement" by reminding him of the forty thousand people who had protested Vedat Aydın's murder praising an independent Kurdistan under bullets barely two weeks ago,[96] and of millions of others across Kurdish towns and cities who were waking up to the day with the dream of having their "own" (national) borders by the night. He laughed away softly, possibly entertained by my juvenile radicalism.

A few days later Hamza left Diyarbakır as discretely as he had arrived. He never saw the city for another time. The rest of the 1990s brought to him another kind of fame in the city as "*Heval…Comrade* Hamza" - a *şehir çocuğu* turned revolutionary fighter. His border prophecy echoed in my ears the more loudly as years passed by and each time I passed through Tek Kapı or any another juncture between *şehir* and the rest of the city. As I looked around to see why of everything happening at the time he had reserved praise for the removal of that "psychological border" between *şehir* and Yenişehir, his

[96] Vedat Aydın was the chair of the Diyarbakir office of the pro-Kurdish People's Labor Party (Halkın Emek Partisi –HEP). He was murdered by JİTEM in July 1991. Aydın's funeral protest inaugurated the chapter of urban uprisings in the 1990s' Diyarbakır. That event was also violently interdicted: More than a dozen mourning protesters were shot dead beneath the walls by the JİTEM gunmen stationed above them.

silhouette turned into an unsettling road sign pointing to some disjuncture to follow - in movement, in direction, in posture or position, in the right to the road itself.

That evening walk left me with a certain gaze of Diyarbakır as a partitioned city (along class lines) at one end of which were the *şehir çocuğu* wandering inside the walls with wounds hidden under the folds of their clothes. It was a gaze that altered the meaning of bodies and things in the city with a different ordering. It projected "struggle," for instance, as a phenomenon with an immediate spatial bearing starting from the very surface of the body (razor cuts) or of border crossing as a practice in community making (rather than state). It also offered me a novel insight into the male-gendered trajectories of Kurdish mobilization in Diyarbakır under Hamza's very name.

Hamza was not his given name. It was the name that he adopted in the mountains. He had chosen it after Prophet Mohammed's paternal uncle Hamza, whom he knew through Antony Quinn's charming performance in *The Message* (1977), Moustapha Akkad's Hollywood epic on the birth of Islam. Watching *The Message* on the Turkish public television TRT years later for who knows how manieth times,[97] I realized with some amusement of how, of all heroes past and present, distant and close, he would of course have liked to imagine his own journey in the glamour of Hamza. Hamza was the man, after all! He had excelled in swordsmanship and lion hunting and conquered many hearts in his pagan years, and even "death was scared" when he was killed at the battle of

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[97] The TRT has broadcasted *The Message* countless times since the 1980s and in different formats: as a full movie, as miniseries, or by cutting it up into ten-minute-long episodes per day during every month of Ramadan. This official interest in the film has likely been connected to the post-1980 coup cultural politics of the Turkish-Islam synthesis (see Chapter Two). Only, the junta could not guess how "the message" might randomly backfire.

Uhud as the "lion" of the new faith. Really, was Uhud not after all a battle over a city, in fact, over *the* city, over Medina?[98]

ŞEHİR BLUES: "THAT WAY FROM FİSQAYA"

Fifteen years later, on the second day of my arrival in Diyarbakır for fieldwork, I was watching TV again and I came across a music video named Fisqaya:

As the music beats, the monochromatic camera zooms in a group of *şehir çocuğu* strolling down a narrow alley in Suriçi. Their bodies are swayed, jackets draped over their shoulders, heads tilted to the side, faces filled with exaggerated angst and apparently intoxicated. A panoramic cut of the Tigris River follows outside the walls, where stands Şoreş, the artist, at the center. Holding the Byzantine Ten Eyed Bridge on his back, he sings his debut Fisqaya (2005) gaily weaving blues on a pop-jazz base. The lyrics of the song have no narrative coherence. They are a pastiche of rhyming quibbles, colloquialisms and slang phrases cobbled in a theatrically Kurdish accented Diyarbakırite Turkish. Neither is there any illustrative relationship between visual and verbal tracks of the video, nor any physical or aesthetic transitivity between Şoreş and *şehir çocuğu* depicted in the clip. In alternating shots, Şoreş recites as he moves across Fiskaya, the outer edge of the citadel across the Saraykapı quarter:

That way from Fisqaya/ Runs the Tigris river/ My zipper breaks once in every while/ One bear, two bears/ The bears count pears/ Hey pumpkin, don't you dare move/ The butcher's cleaver slides off of my hand/ There is a pot on the stove/ The pot is empty/ Tonight Zıbo is happy/ As the bastard is squiffy… Look at this ox/What is it with this rucus?/ It is your good day tonight, you will eat a free curry/Abdo, the birdman is a

[98] "Medina" is Arabic for "city".

treacherous one/He is the watermelon son of a watermelon/After all, his grandfather is a junkie/His grandmother is cross-eyed….

Meanwhile, the *şehir çocuğu* register gestures and places. Here is one looking at a domed window rolling a rosary in his hand. There, a few lean against the wall of the Great Mosque with tough postures. Two scratch their chins in deep thought. One nibbles his tongue as he punches another one. Another one cleans his teeth with a toothpick and throws it on the ground. All walk leering at whatever is at sight, kicking whatever comes their way and harassing one another as they pass through labyrinthine alleys, basalt fortifications, Moorish arches and vaulted bridges until they fade back into a narrow alley. The final shot casts Şoreş with his hands opened to the sides with a naughtily confused expression, like a child who just lost his gene to the lamp or a magician who lost the rabbit in his hat.

Fisqaya was my first encounter with *şehir çocuğu* nostalgia in the field. That it was meant as a ludic homage to *şehir çocuğu* was obvious. What cut through my viewing was an obscene sense of claustrophobia. This sense had a lot to do with the video's *mise-en-scene* of *şehir çocuğu* wandering up and down inside the lanes that seemed like a composite *cul de sac* - especially the way it was projected through the monochromatic medium and cinemascopic lens of nostalgia. But exacerbating the claustrophobic import of that *mise-en-scene* with a sense of obscene was the video's fixation on what would normally be considered eccentric, uncivil and defunct in its representations of the *sehir cocugu* and of (their) language as an accent stripped of meaning making capacity and

reduced to pure form. Recalling Hamza, I found myself muttering at the screen at one point, "Let them move on, give them a way out!"

The story of Hamza and the knowledges it structured belonged to the 1990s, when the language of national liberation, class oppression, inequality, exclusion and alienation guided perceptions and meaning of many phenomena related to space and society, *şehir* and *şehir çocuğu* included, and their (revolutionary) transformation. Fisqaya's optics, however, belonged to the new Diyarbakır imaginary wherein *şehir*'s spatial discontinuity with Yenişehir was recast as the former's historical depth, and in which things gained meaning by moving back in time rather than over space. Thus, *şehir çocuğu*'s discrete situatedness in Fisqaya was meant to project him as an authentic marker of the old city alongside the historical material artifacts that filled in the video's image-scape; i.e. walls, bridges, mosques, *cul de sacs*. In this projection the social defiance of *şehir çocuğu* was repositioned as authentic cultural difference, and in the company of blues – a highly upper class genre and taste in this part of the world.

Fisqaya soon became an iconic product of *şehir çocuğu* nostalgia. It was a hit on local TV and radio stations. It mediated the proliferation of public talk on the *lost şehir çocuğu* and stirred a performative interest in *şehir çocuğu* expressivities represented in the clip, particularly among the middle-class adolescent youth in the virtual media. Further, it facilitated the dissemination of this nostalgia to metropolitan Turkey. Across these circulations, it was the clip's success in promoting *şehir çocuğu* as an essential feature of the historical Diyarbakırite culture and a marker of urban identity to receive the

praise. In a review, which itself acquired quite popularity as a guide to Fisqaya and *şehir çocuğu,* Şehymus Diken (2007), whom I introduced in the Introduction, noted:

> Sometimes you lose your way and traces in the desert. After a while your voice also deserts you without your noticing it. You start dreaming in that lack and loss. Dreams try to give you a direction. This is what Şoreş tries to do in Fisqaya… There is in Fisqaya [also] the reflection of the *qirix* language used in everyday Diyarbakır. The use of this peculiarly Diyarbakırite language is generally seen as a mark of distinction by the Diyarbakırites, who shame those that cannot speak it. [This] is the language of *şehir çocuğu,* who is called *gedê bajer* in Kurdish…which gives a different flavor with words and intonations incorporated from Kurdish. This is a language that says fuck to those who eat "rice *pilav*, wear fedora hats and are grounded on earth [well to do]…Of course, it is also no coincidence that the word belongs to Fisqaya… a thousand-year-old place where the whole adventure and story of the city have unfolded. Located on the basalt plateau overlooking the Tigris River... Fisqaya hosts the whole history of Diyarbakır.

Structuring Diken's account was the authentic identity of *şehir* and *şehir çocuğu,* which guided his larger body of work. According to another enthusiastic review on the clip in a mainstream Turkish newspaper, Fisqaya was introducing to Turkey "the true tough boys of historic Diyarbakır" as a welcome change from "the bloody and bleak news of terror for which the city had been known by the [Turkish] public until recently" (Halis 2007). This review was pointing to a shift in temporality - the shift from the politically tense 1990s to the temporality of culturalist discourse on the city in the 2000s.

Fisqaya and its circulation also inspired many middle-class youth, who established several virtual *şehir çocuğu* communities. The "Şehir Çocuğu Facebook Group," for example, took the clip as an opportunity to reconnect with Diyarbakır's "historic native culture." They started archiving *şehir çocuğu* colloquialisms, stories and profiles, while using the accent of *şehir çocuğu* as the language of group communication. There was a typical youthful play in these appropriations of *şehir çocuğu.* However,

according to the sixteen year-old Baran, one of the group's administrators, their initiative could not be reduced to "the youth having fun," because there was a "wish to learn and embrace those parts of our culture from which our generation have been estranged." For Baran, this estrangement was because his parents' generation "rejected everything they saw around for their political values," but the new generation was "more relaxed, more in peace with life and also with *şehir*." Yet, the irony was that Baran had rarely been to the actual *şehir*. He was living in an upper-middle class suburb where his school and social circle were also located, and he "rarely had any business there, except for going to the walls for visiting and [cultural] activities once in a while." "*Şehir* was not the old *şehir* anyways," he complained to me. It is "totally corrupt and wicked now, especially the new *şehir* youth! Disastrous! Weed, theft, [sexual] abuse… They [had] it all." Baran's longing for the "old şehir" was a case of prosthetic memory; he was obviously too young to know it. More intriguing to me was how his portrayal of the current state of *şehir* and its youth strikingly resonated with the middle class discourses that criminalize the actual boys of *şehir* in the name of a proper and good city.

There was yet another register through which Fisqaya stimulated an urban longing for *şehir çocuğu,* which was driven by the deep-seated urban modern - rural Kurdish contradiction. The words of the sixty-year-old Reşo, an old bazaar, are reflective of this register. Reşo was managing a *şehir çocuğu*-themed restaurant that had been opened in Suriçi in the mid-2000s. There was an enlarged replica of the Fisqaya album's cover hung on a wall in his restaurant. Noticing it, I rhetorically asked Reşo to what extent he thought the Fisqaya clip was true to the character of *şehir çocuğu*. "It puts forward an

entertainment side of it, but, yes, this guy did a good thing for unearthing that urban style of manhood and entertainment," he replied. When I asked why he had opened a *şehir çocuğu*-themed restaurant, he said his was a civic responsibility to restore and preserve the historical heritage and culture of *şehir* and *şehir çocuğu.* After taking a deep sigh, he continued by first declaring the death of *şehir:*

> Can you tell that this *şehir* is alive and well anymore? No, they are gone. They are no more! They were men who were trained in the culture of the city; molded in its values. Reckless, heartful, men of their words, protectors of the feeble… They had manners. They knew how to sit and walk, fight and have joy, eat and spend. See that store across the lane… He [the owner] came penniless from a godforsaken village some ten years ago. Now he owns three houses. How does it happen? Because, he sends his wife to house cleaning, his daughter works on fields, and they eat bulgur day and night… I have only one dream in this life. I will set up a mourning house for *şehir çocuğu.* Villagers and Kurds from everywhere have come and opened mourning houses at Diyarbakır's every corner [to have collective condolence ceremonies]. I will buy and restore a historical house into one [mourning house] for *şehir çocuğu.*

Structuring Reşo's sense of loss of *şehir* and *şehir çocuğu* was an exclusionary complaint of the displaced rural Kurds, who had poured into the city during the 1990s. As a "native Diyarbakırite," who regarded himself "neither as a Turk or a Kurd, but a man of the city," Reşo was not happy with the newcomers who, in his eyes, lacking the manners and ethics of genuine urban life, had also destroyed the normative ethos of urban manhood, which he was now remembering through the signifier *şehir çocuğu.* Reşo's sense of urban identity, authenticity and nativity as opposed to "ignorant" rural-ness and Kurdishness was a common feeling and thought among the old generation conservative middle-class bazaaris, who viewed themselves as the true heirs of Diyarbakır's economic and cultural resources. Hence, his fashionable dream of restoring the historical heritage of

Diyarbakır was simultaneously an effort to save *şehir* and *şehir çocuğu* from "villagers" and "Kurds," both in the past and in the present.

ŞEHİR DISSENTS: THIS WAY FROM FİSQAYA

As the lost *şehir* nostalgia became more audible in the city, I decided to trace the reflections of this sign among men who had assumed the *şehir çocuğu* name for themselves at one point or another in their lives. My intention in this was not to fix *şehir çocuğu* as a bounded object-subject that could be traced empirically or to capture his "authentic" voice. Rather, if the *lost şehir çocuğu* as the body and soul of Diyarbakırite identity was a myth spread by diverse needs and desires of certain sections of the contemporary urban populace, I was interested in seeing how these men would relate to this name as they talked about themselves; how they would talk about *şehir,* identity and the past through this name with their ways of seeing and knowing in the present. This, I expected, would reveal a better sense of *şehir çocuğu* as a tense narrative space marked by contesting experiences, discursive currents, cultural imaginaries and affective intensities. It would also help to better situate the structure, semantics and wider social relevance of the *lost şehir çocuğu* nostalgia.

However, despite or perhaps because of the easiness of hearing stories of the *lost şehir çocuğu,* it proved quite uneasy to find the actual *şehir çocuğu* talk to. This was not because they were an extinct species - far from it. Over two months of research, I reached thirty such men of different generations who were living considerably different lives at the present. But most of these men were reluctant to relate to or self-identify as

şehir çocuğu for several reasons. First, many old generation *şehir çocuğu* had turned "sober," as the expression went, in their later lives. They saw no point in unscrewing a past to which they now related in passive terms of "fate" or disavowed it as "youthful ignorance." Others hesitated to talk to a woman about the desires, pleasures, and frustrations invested in what was an essentially homosocial male world, no matter what their current relationship to this way of life was. Thus, my first formal meeting with an old *şehir çocuğu,* whose advances in Diyarbakır's underworld and nightlife over the 1950s and 1960s had entered the *şehir çocuğu* nostalgia in mythical shape, ended where it had hardly begun. He disclaimed agency for his famed toughness relating it to the "fire of being young" and declined to talk about it by asking me with a gently scolding paternalism why I was not researching "our women's many issues, instead."

Yet, by far the more significant factor structuring this reluctance was that the very practices and expressitives that animated the *şehir çocuğu* nostalgia were for these men fragments of life lived at the margins of the mainstream society and its values. It is telling here that they themselves define these experiences as being located in "gayrimeşru" (the illegitimate), which for *şehir çocuğu* denotes the legal, social and economic undergrounds as a corporate entity. Thus, not only did these men have a substantially different knowledge of what a *şehir çocuğu* life entailed in time and space, but also they had substantially different considerations, anxieties and needs when relating to this name, or not. Of concern here were not only the socially or morally contested practices, such as wine, weed or thievery, but also those ones that inspired romanesque accounts on *şehir çocuğu*'s notion of male honor and bravery. Even those

practices that could invoke *şehir çocuğu* as an unrepressed, hedonist state of manhood in nostalgic retrospection were difficult to relate to as part of a story of the self, because "life told in the context of real life first of all [had] to make sense" (Brockmeier 2001: 249). Two of my interlocutors, Cedit and Sor, related to these concerns starkly.

Cedit, a small built man, in his mid-fifties in 2007, was running a coffee house in in the İskenderpaşa quarter. An architect I had formerly interviewed about a built heritage project in Suriçi referred me to him, when he had heard through mutual friends that I was trying to contact some "genuine *şehir çocuğu.*" He said he wanted to introduce me one such man. Without contesting his wording of what I was after, I asked him what he meant by "genuine." "I mean he is as strong in his hand and as in his heart. He goes by the book," he replied, picturing a moral tough idiomatically.

However, Cedit told me a quite different story of himself, when I visited him at his place. Not being told in advance on what purpose I wanted to meet him, to my surprise as well, he asked how he could be of any help to me. "I came for you to tell me about *şehir çocuğu*," I said at once, for which he was noticeably disturbed. "I don't know. There are all kinds of *şehir çocuğu*. There are those who live for their honor and who sell everything for a penny," he responded. "But I was told that you were 'a genuine *şehir çocuğu*'," I insisted. He insisted as well:

> I don't know what that means. For me there are some values to be never violated. Devotion to one's honor, family and culture… Sincerity, keeping one's word… But I have two murders in my past and wasted my youth on alcohol and fights. No matter what the reason is, unless your opponent is in deep betrayal of national and cultural values, and that is another issue, it is not easy to live with murder. Because I have this history in the illegitimate, the mafia-aspiring youth in the quarter look up to me. You may judge me for the same thing. I say it was all fate.

Sor had come of age as a *şehir çocuğu* in the Ali Paşa quarter in the mid-1980s. He later became an urban militia of the PKK, though he was politically inactive for some time. When I approached him for an interview, he referred to a *şehir çocuğu* stanza that had acquired renewed popularity in the city:

> Fifty plus fifty is one hundred/We are Diyarbakırites
> We throw our jackets beneath/Sleep [out] on our arms
> We are who we are/Others are called bat needles
> Jail is our home/The police station is a coffeehouse to us
> The watchmen and the police are our servants/ Handcuff is the watch on our wrist
> Hey! Who would dare leering at us?[99]

When finished with reciting, Sor started on a different terrain. "Now, how I could tell you that we used to chant this while lacerating ourselves in front of the police station," he said and continued: "I should either let you think that we were madman, and not in a fun but a trashy sense of the word, or tell you why we acted like that, which would kill all the fun."

I want to offer these refusals and hesitations in people's relating to *şehir çocuğu* as an experience of the self, as revealing of the limit of *şehir çocuğu* nostalgia as a projection of the other.

This being said, it was also the case that the majority of men whom I approached eventually took the labor of talking with me about their lived experiences under the name of *şehir çocuğu.* But when they did, rather than relating to this name as a discrete,

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[99] Translation sacrifices all the rhyme in original Turkish verses, which read as follows:
Elli elli yüz/ Biz Diyarbekirliyiz
Ceketimizi atarız/ Kol üstünde yatarız
Bize biz derler/ Başkasına çuvaldız derler
Hapishane evimiz/ Karakol kahvemiz
Bekçi polis uşağımız/ Kelepçe kol saatimiz
Heeey! Var mı bize yan bakan?

majoritarian story of masculine self-making, they offered it as a contingent identity that fed upon varied spatialized, classed, gendered and contradictions as well as cultural and political currents that marked urban space in time, in their attempts at rendering meaningful and accountable life stories. In effect, what they offered was not simply different trajectories of *şehir çocuğu,* but substantially different apprehensions and images of Diyarbakır of the past and the present.

For instance, enfolding his personal life story within a communal narrative of class, Cedit defined *şehir çocuğu* as "he who does with his body what the rich do with their money." He had seen many friends "wasted away at a dark corner of *şehir*." "Therefore", he advised me per the *şehir çocuğu* nostalgia: "Forget them bourgeoisie, what do they know? Everything is a mask now. Everything is now a beautiful word to them." For an answer as to the identity of *şehir çocuğu*, Sor asked me if I had read Octavio Paz's *pachuco* in the *Labyrinth of Solitude.* Indeed, I had not. *Pachuco,* he said, was "a Mexican youth in America who, having been exiled from his culture and language, was trying to become a member of the American society by making a scandal of his existence."[100] According to him, "*şehir çocuğu* [was] the *pachuco* of Kurds."

Cedit and Sor were not the only ones to fill speech with the language of structure and ideology. Most of my interlocutors followed the same path utilizing Marxist, anarchist, or even psychoanalytical terms while relating to *şehir çocuğu* as a socio-cultural formation. For example, Sator Mecit, a well-known *şehir çocuğu* in the 1970s

[100] I did read Paz on *pachuco* eventually, but here I prefer to quote Sor's plausibly faithful representation of the argument rather than quoting from the text.

and now a barber, said: "*Şehir çocuğu* is the revolutionary omen, the anarchist before Bakunin." Seyda of the Saraykapı quarter, currently in truck transportation business, located it as "an identity of a transition process which relieved the tension between the feudal base and capitalist superstructure." Genco, an old acquaintance whose transformation from a *şehir çocuğu* to a political activist I had known of, claimed that it was "an identity instigated by the establishment to corrupt Kurdish youth after the Sheikh Said rebellion [1925]." For Özgur, a self-defined "rehabilitated" *şehir çocuğu* trying to earn a high-school diploma in his early thirties, one had to take into account "the psychological split caused by moving in-between the Kurdish-speaking households and the Turkish-speaking streets," when considering why "these boys of mostly rural origin chose to destroy themselves to make their voices heard in *şehir*." After our meeting, Sor had arranged for me a focus group interview with five men of different generations who were still grounded in the "illegitimate." As I asked these men their understandings of what *şehir çocuğu* meant while thinking to myself how much that baroque-furnished office, where our meeting was taking place, felt like a stage fixed to shoot a mob film, our host demanded an answer from me first:

> You do not think that only the revolutionaries were tortured in No: 5 in 1980 [coup period], do you? You would be ashamed of your humanity if I told you the torture exerted on common prisoners there. Convicted of petty theft, which I had committed, I endured the fascism of this State as harshly as the political ones.

These politically oriented and articulate accounts were not unexpected in a city like Diyarbakır, "the little Moscow" of the 1970s, as the Turkish state had named it, and the center of Kurdish movement - especially given how closely trajectories of *şehir çocuğu* identity had both intersected with and been intercepted by leftist and Kurdish

revolutionary mobilization in the city. Still, the degree to which my interlocutors were insistently politicizing *şehir çocuğu* was worthy of notice. As I suggested, this was very much related to the substance and social relevance of their experiences of being a *şehir çocuğu* as well as their present needs of accountability. However, running through these accounts was also a demand to keep the *şehir çocuğu* name as a node of critique of the urban social order –which was in stark contrast with the *lost şehir çocuğu* narratives whose desire for a past of communal harmony and intimacy were managed by an infantilizingly apolitical language. Thus, one of the participants of my focus group interview remarked as we were finishing our meeting: "At the end of the day, *şehir çocuğu* means being at odds; being at odds with whoever owns Diyarbakır. It is the name of not coming to rest with others, for better or for worse."

OUT AND ABOUT IN XANÇEPEK

Reimagined in the 2000s as the heart of *şehir* culture, Xançepek had a distinct place also in the whole *şehir çocuğu* debate of the 2000s. Historically speaking, Xançepek had a strong *kabadayı* culture. This was integral to the quarters' mixed ethno-religious make up and vibrant trade life with respect to both of which the *kabadayı* had assumed border-maintenance functions. The Republican period saw the dissipation of the socio-economic base for *kabadayı* in Xançepek as well over successive processes of demographic and socioeconomic decimation. Yet images and values of toughness and male entertainment associated with the *kabadayı* remained rather alive in Xançepek due to the specificity of two Republican cultural modernization institutions that were installed in the quarter in the 1930s. One of these was the city's only licensed brothel, which

remained in business until the 1990s, and the other was cinema. These institutions facilitated the turning of Xançepek into a center of male entertainment in the decades that followed. In the same period, there also grew a large market of alcohol and drug use in the quarter. As a result, insofar as the gender and sexual order was concerned, Xançepek stood for the name of a rather dubious moral space for the larger urban public for decades; at once highly looked down upon and inspiring of forms and standards of masculine prowess and expenditure.

In the 2000s, that Xançepek culture of masculinity was started to be re-imagined as the loss of an enchanted form of *şehir* manhood. A recent memoir about coming of age in the 1950s' Xançepek would be a good example here. Revolving around cultural alienation and anxiety that the İstanbul-raised author experiences after moving his "fatherland," a key theme in the narrative is an adolescent masculinity crisis that the author tells via his relationships to a fellow nicknamed Valentino, after the famous Italian actor Rudolph Valentino of the time. "A Xançepek though," all who did was to "dress up with a knife inserted into his belt and roam around the courtyard, streets and the walls cursing and fighting," Valentino got not only his name but also his performative references from films: "Valentino regularly goes to the cinema…He is in his best mood if the film had action-adventure. He will make new scenes watching those actions" (Binyazar 2000: 213). The scenes that Valentino makes with his rough talks, crude jokes and melodramatic love for a brothel girl next door turn him into the most popular boy of Xançepek and the object petit of the author's mimetic desire. "Who would not admire

such a life, after all?” (p. 211), asks the author toward the end of the memoir, which was tellingly titled, *Masalını Yitiren Dev* (*The Giant Who Lost his Fairy Tale*).

Meanwhile, the whole old city discourse of the 2000s rendered the contemporary Xançepek youth distinctly visible as symptoms and agents of *şehir*’*s* present state of ruin. It was true that there were high rates of juvenile delinquency and crime, i.e. theft, pickpocketing, street fights, alcohol and drug abuse, among the male youth in the quarter. Yet, even in the most sympathetic of these discourses, relations between such youth culture formation and larger processes of urban inequality and marginalization were severed by the former’s being related to the trauma of displacement in 1990s. A social work expert working at the Metropolitan Municipality Social Services Center told me as a case in point:

> We should not forget that these boys’ history in the city is marked with the violence of displacement. It is the lurking trauma of that experience combined with the usual adaptation problems of rural-urban migration that is behind this generational rotting, especially in that quarter.

For all these reasons, if Fisqaya was a surprising encounter at the beginning of my fieldwork, I had been warned by family and friends even before my arrival in Diyarbakır to not work in Xançepek, at least not alone on my own. Nevertheless, my first field visit to the quarter in July 2006 ended up being quite eventful due to the boys of the quarter.

With Hamza’s border prophecy, Fisqaya’s longing for *şehir çocuğu* and dystopic warnings about the present youth lurking in my mind, I was too self-conscious on my way to Xançepek that day, for the first time after about fifteen years. I was going to meet my friend Evin, a local Kurdish woman activist running a social service center in the lower quarter. She had offered to pick me up from the main street. Not only was she

concerned that I would have lost my way in the alleys, but she also believed it would have helped if people saw me in the quarter with a familiar face in my first visit. That way, especially "the boys" would have known "how to act within limits." I submitted to my aspiration of making an "entrance" as the lone ethnographer, instead. I stopped on the main street momentarily before turning to the Yenikapı lane, relaxed the muscles of my face and stepped in with what I hoped would pass as a cool posture.

I did not understand if the two adolescent boys I passed by were looking at me with such anger because they had noticed my intended trespassing or their looks had just adjusted to their impending trespassing on the main street and I happened to hit their gaze. A few steps ahead, a small boy barely ten years old approached to ask for a cigarette, if not that, then for some cigarette money. Not liking it when I refused, he moaned angrily: "What does my age got to do with it? Just say you have a scorpion in your wallet!" That meant that I was rich, stingy and manipulating. Several more steps ahead, two even smaller boys came to warn me to watch my purse. One of the two men sitting in front of the shop I was passing by cursed the boys away and told me, "This is how they trap their prey: first distract, then steal!" I asked this man for directions, perhaps as much with a concern about getting really lost in the alleys as with an intention to let someone know of my intended coordinates.

My circumstances of mobility in Xançepek turned more ordinary, as I became a familiar face around and was assigned a relatively safe "comrade elder sister" identity by the youth around. Yet, the scenes of them as I first encountered remained the same, only often to be joined by others moving up and down and right and left in frenzy, standing at

this corner or the other while smoking whatever they could find from cigarette butts to big joints, or shouting or fighting around for no apparent reason. The elements of style featured in the *lost şehir çocuğu* obituaries abounded on their bodies and voices – rosary beads or key chains, broken-in shoes, and the slang, and always the slang! They looked much like the *şehir çocuğu* staged in Fisqaya. Only, off-the-record this way from Fiskaya their impudent extravaganza manifested excess rather than loss.

Their insistence to communicate presence in the social space notwithstanding, I did not approach these quarter boys for research. Such research would have required focus on "inner city" and "youth" as analytical categories, which were beyond my agenda. It was unlikely that I would be accepted into their circles because of the sex divide between us as well as the extent of informality in their lives. And even if I could force my way into their daily routine through various connections, I could not foresee how such unlikely association would influence my presence and relations in the quarter.

Within such a context, I only traced the story of Layê Diz, a *şehir çocuğu* who has lived in Xançepek throughout the last four decades. He was a skilled storyteller, with an impressive ability to reflect on his experiences and on *şehir*. Of course, his story is in no way representative of *şehir çocuğu* past and present. I detail some of the main anxieties, conflicts, struggles and desires with which he has come to experience and talk about his life, his manhood and his relationship to *şehir*. Yet, rather than taking his individual stories as objective facts of the socio-historical process, or reducing history and social life to individual biography, I follow his navigating *şehir* in time and space to understand

subjective dimensions of socio-historical change and the forms of being and belonging he could or could not manage to fashion in *şehir.*

LAYÊ DİZ

I first spotted him when he was walking down the Yenikapı lane with a residual *şehir çocuğu* posture and wearing a properly buttoned long-sleeved shirt on a torrid August day in 2006. We came across many times over the next seven months; walking on the lane, at a mutual friend's corner store and during quarter-based political events in which he was a regular face. Many times, I attempted to start a conversation with some substance. He was convinced that all researchers "who came Xançepek were interested in stones and churches," and so he stayed away. I met him once more very unexpectedly, during a house visit to Zelal, a new woman friend I had made in the quarter. We had almost finished our conversation, when he came in. He was Zelal's husband. We both asked him to join us. I told him about my research and asked for help. "What do I know" he asked rhetorically, and continued: "Born in the lower quarter forty-six years ago to a father who was smuggling stolen antics into Syria when he named me after his sheikh so that I would be pious. I am *layê diz* [Kurdish for *a thief's son*]." That was a consenting response expressed with irony. And I continued, "Perhaps you may tell why you wear long-sleeves at all times? I knew one who did the same thing. He was trying to hide the razor cuts, you know." "I know," he said wearing a broken smile, "It feels good when you do it. Later it becomes embarrassing."

Layê Diz and I next met for an interview at a teahouse outside the Yenikapı. "A *şehir çocuğu* is who the *şehir* is," he started for one, and added: "Don't you see *şehir çocuğu* everyday here, who sniff around like mad dogs, are restive to fight like cocks, but they can't even hold themselves upright because they are either drunk or high." It was for this symbiosis between *şehir* and its boys that he was not sure what to tell me about *şehir çocuğu*, except telling the way he had known *şehir* since he had known himself. I agreed, saying that I would rather not intervene in how he wanted to tell both.

He started with a reflection on the unreliability of memory with recourse to the name of his failed father again. Sometime ago, Layê Diz and his mother Daye were talking about the "good old days" just before the latter's recent death. They were talking about how dependable everyone was in that courtyard located at a *cul de sac* down from the Gâvur Square, where Layê Diz had also been born, and this talk brought to their minds an incident that was rather sad in itself.

Layê Diz was a kid, then. One day after Daye had put the lunch tray in front of Layê Diz's father, who used to eat before them and alone, he had grabbed Daye's head and beat it against the tray several times with the excuse that the bread was stale. Daye shouted in pain. The kids used to look for a hole to hide at times like that. Younger women of the courtyard tended to stay away; scared and shamed. Then, Mother Aysel, their elderly and wise landlady, had forced the door open. She had held Daye up, kicked the tray toward Layê Diz's father's lap, and said to him: 'You, the donkey's son! Have you got no shame? You eat what you bring to her. If you are such a man, then bring better. Now, get the fuck out of my courtyard!" His father had left without a word. He

returned the other day. When he did, he apologized to Mother Aysel and others. But, he did not talk to Daye or the kids for a few weeks, during when he communicated with them by shouting from the middle of the courtyard to Mother Aysel, asking her to ask if "the children" needed anything. Daye would respond in the same way, talking to Mother Aysel in high-pitched volume. This mode of communication had upped the spirits of women and children as long as it had lasted. Remembering this incident many years later now, the mother and son laughed in tears. "You know those moments when everything turns clear," Layê Diz remarked at this point:

> I realized in the midst of that laughter that we owed even our fun to poverty and violence. Looking back, much of that frustration and anger of the moment cools off… That is not a bad thing, either. But, now I am thinking how I can tell you how *şehir* was back then, how it was like to grow up in *şehir*.

The courtyard was the central site of his experience of *şehir* as a child. It was a big house with seven independent rooms. It probably belonged to a rich family before, "perhaps to an Armenian family." But by the time the family of Layê Diz moved there in the 1950s, each room was rented to a different family who had recently moved to the city from surrounding villages, except for Mother Aysel. Men were rarely seen in the courtyard, which belonged to women and children. They spent most of their time in the coffeehouses, waiting for somebody to come and pick them for a daily job to work here and there. The boys would go out to the *cul de sac* or the lane to play, but their "adventures" to *şehir*, which was the Gâvur Square for them, would be short-lived, as the boys like him, who could not speak Turkish and were feeble, were often bullied by the bigger boys there…

His primary school was the first place where he met people outside of the courtyard. But his school adventure also ended up being short-lived because of his inability to learn Turkish, constant bullying and feelings of estrangement. His relationship to *şehir* began to change, when he started working. Almost all children worked those days on the streets, mostly as vendors. He would wake up before the dawn to get doughnuts from the bakery to sell in the morning. During the day, he would sell watermelon seeds, lighter gas, rolling papers or whatever he could afford that day. More experienced and older boys would sell bagels in *şehir*. Those boys could go "as far as to the İzzetpaşa Street," where life was quite different from their courtyard and the alleys of the quarter. This street was a boundary Layê Diz and his friends did not dare to cross. With his friend Hikmet, they intended several times to extend their business to the Fatihpaşa quarter, but for that they had to cross the street. Hikmet feared that others would give them "strange looks." Layê Diz was more scared, because they would make him speak Turkish and ruin his vending tray, when he failed. "There was no difference between us and them [the older boys]. We were poor, so were they. We lived in the same quarters. Only they were slightly older and could speak a few Turkish words. That was all. But that was enough for them to think that they were distinct and superior to us."

Puberty was the time "to build an existence in *şehir*." This was partly due to the fact that the boys were expected to leave the courtyard - the women's quarter. "The thing called society is an interesting animal," he remarked. Boys were expected to be in the likeness of a girl when in the courtyard – "obedient, pious, had a sense of shame and sharing," but it was just the opposite on the streets of *şehir*. His family didn't really tell

him “to act like a bandit”, but they made it clear that he “had to be tough out there” and “not return home beaten up.”

The journey into *şehir* had its own ways and rules. The first thing Layê Diz did in *şehir* was to throw away his tray and ruin that of those who looked like him. Then he started carrying a knife, which made him worthy of fear and respect in other’s eyes; as “the hawk-eyed.” Such recognition was so important and powerful that he felt he could kill any passerby looking askance at him. He felt the need to prove himself, to himself, to others and to *şehir* as a whole. How? “By walking against death, walking against a gun with your knife, for example.” When he earned enough fame, he began “to deliver justice” by punishing the wrongdoers. For example, he and his friends, who did not have any girl friends, would beat up the boys hanging out with girls. Or, they would “hunt down thieves or tricksters on the lane.” What they loved the most was doing “the circles.” They would draw a circle and put the thieves or tricksters in it. And they would beat up anybody who attempted to leave the circle - “to cross the line.” They felt powerful and free watching the desperate encircled boys obeying the rules they set –”a sadistic pleasure, admittedly.” For them, the ability to draw boundaries was an expression of being sovereign in a city that encircled them with multiple barriers: narrow alleys, immense poverty, linguistic and cultural barriers, shame, humiliation, fear and the like. In short, with the circles they were setting their own rules against those of *şehir*. “This might sound stupid now, but back then it felt really good. After all, life was all about circles that we were not supposed to cross.”

There was also the cinema. When Layê Diz was coming of age in the mid-1970s, cinema meant Yılmaz Güney in Xançepek, in *şehir* at large. Then one definitive quality of being a *şehir çocuğu* was embodying Yılmaz Güney.

Güney was a Kurdish actor- director, who inaugurated the social-realist film wave in the Turkish cinema and brought Kurdistan onto the white screen for the first time in the 1970s. But before becoming the internationally acclaimed "cinaeste militant" (Biswas 1999), he was famous for the gangster movies and urban melodramas that he made on predicaments of manhood under modernization, urbanization and dispossession. The protagonists of these movies were the urban outcasts who turned the grudge of poverty-stricken childhoods, ailing mothers and failed fathers into a blatant fight against the rich, their wealth and morality by embodying excess; the "virtuous mobs" whose impossible dreams of getting rich and getting the girl brought about their death; the "failed fathers" who suffered the price of their vainglorious pride by failing to protect their own women or children. They were the ones to become the law unto themselves in the city where inequality and corruption reigned and law and order were plots to protect the rich. The "rude and upright tough guy" image that Güney created on the screen in these movies was in clear contrast to the polished *jonpremiere* dominating Turkish melodramas and romantic comedies of the 1960s and 1970s, making him the "Ugly King" of Turkish cinema and the most popular star in provincial areas (Suner 1998).

It was with this image that Güney shook the cinema scene and the *mise-en-scéne* of manhood in Xançepek in the 1970s. For *şehir çocuğu*, this period, when Diyarbakır was "the little Moscow" in the Turkish state's eyes and turning into the Kurdish "Amed"

in the imaginary of the Kurdish left, was primarily "Yılolu yıllar" (the years of Yılo), in Layê Diz's words. "Yılo" was how they addressed Yılmaz Güney, a diminutive to show their affection for him. Perhaps only three of his movies would come to *şehir* per year, but they would watch each of them as many times as they could afford: "Vurguncular (Bullies), Umutsuzlar (The Hopeless), Baba (The Father), Zavallılar (The Miserables), Kızım İçin Canlı Hedef (Living Target for my Daughter)… there were many of them." This love for Yılo was because "he looked like [them], walked like [them], talked like [them], fought like [them], and loved like [them] for the sake of loving without expecting anything in return. Or "perhaps [they] were doing it the way he did." In any case, "Everyone was a Yılo unto himself."

This narcissistic identification with Yılo brought Layê Diz and his friends into contact with two different groups of people located at the other side of *şehir.* The first of these were the boys of Ofis, the most affluent neighborhood in Yenişehir. One other star of Turkish cinema of the same period was Cüneyt Arkın - the refined, blond and blue-eyed hero of many romantic comedies and a new genre of historical epic, whom *şehir çocuğu* hated*,* as they viewed him as Yılo's rival. It did not matter if there were any such rivalry between the two actors in real time; they were sure there was. The issue was that *şehir çocuğu* also hated the boys of Ofis, who in their eyes looked like "Cuno" - that's how they called Cüneyt Arkın, but this diminutive was to deny him a proper name rather than a sign of affection. The boys of Ofis had to be "Cunocu" (fans of Cuno), they figured out. So after the "game of drawing circles," they had invented this ritual of transgressing into Ofis and "beat the shit out of the Cunocu." No one knew how this

game or fight had started. But it was for a “Yılo-Cuno fight” that Layê Diz went to Yenişehir for the first time, then for a second time, then the third… It was repeated time and over. Only they would hear a rumor that “Cuno had made a mistake to Yılo” and then would run to Yenişehir.

Those fights started losing meaning after a while, when the love for Yılo brought Layê Diz in contact with yet a new group of others. It was Cinema Emek where he first saw them, one evening probably in the summer of 1976. Before the movie started, someone threw leaflets from the roof toward the seat area and ran away. There was some exciting movement in the cinema hall, incessant murmuring. This was repeated over the following evenings. He first learned their name and then their aim: They were called the “revolutionaries” and they were there “to make a revolution.” Someone told him, “Their time will end and our time will begin.” He could not really get who “they” and “we” were in this temporality. Probably “they were the rich on the Street, in Yenişehir or on in the movies.” The idea sounded exciting. He was simply taken in. Nothing would remain the same after that evening.

A few weeks later, one night they were returning to the quarter from the cinema, when they saw some shadows on either sides of the lane down the Four Footed Minaret writing something on the walls. There were several *şehir çocuğu* around, older than them, who were watching on them against the guards who patrolled the quarter. After that night, they started watching these men every night, with a fervent desire to be a part of this mystery. One night, they decided to ask them if they could “do anything for them; anything!” Their offer was accepted, probably because “the writers” coming from outside

did not know the quarters well, unlike Layê Diz and other boys, who knew the alleyways "as the creases in [their] palms." Some boys took the task of watching around. Layê Diz and one other boy became "sıtılci' (bucket carriers), carrying buckets filled with lime paint for writing slogans on the walls.

The bittersweet thing about the whole situation was that they did not know the names of these men. All of them had the same name - the revolutionaries. The dark of the night had this power of neutralizing all differences; just as "it hid the patches in one's clothes or the dirt on one's face, it portrayed all of them as just revolutionaries." Only in the mornings they would understand from the graffiti all over the quarter for whom exactly they carried the buckets the night before: DEV-GENÇ, TKP/ML, DDKD, Halkın Kurtuluşu, KAWA and many other fraction names. The city walls, outer walls of houses, mosques, churches, shops and courtyards were full of graffiti: "Kahrolsun Faşizm!" (Damn Fascism!), "Tek Yol Devrim!"(Revolution is the Only Way Out!), fraction names, and, of course, sickle-hammer figures and many stars.

After a while the revolutionaries started coming in daylight. In the quarters people called them "talebeler" (the students), perhaps because "revolutionary" was too strange a word or perhaps this name was a reflection of people's admiration for the schooled youth. In any case, "talebeler" was an honoring name. The families in the quarter did not send their kids to school beyond the primary school, but they would look up even to the seventh or eighth-graders as "enlightened men." In fact, the school-goers of the quarter regarded themselves as different - superior to the commoners. It was visible in how they carried their bodies and distanced themselves from others. These newcomers were also

"students," which made them respectable in the eyes of the families. But, their attitudes were "completely different. The way they walked, sat, talked, greeted people, their honesty, sincerity… People got used to them very quickly."

They were telling that they would free Kurdistan and its people. They were talking about colonialism, capitalism, Marx, Lenin and Mao. "Some people turned out to have heard about Kurdistan," but other terms and names were totally strange. "Nobody really understood much of them, but that was not important. Everyone found in these words something for himself/herself." One day, Laye Diz took some revolutionaries to the courtyard, two boys and a girl - all barely twenty. Only one of the boys knew Kurdish and was able to communicate with the women of the courtyard directly. The women loved them. "They sat on their torn apart rugs and without any pretention." One of them grabbed Daye by the shoulder and told that she had done the most for the Kurdish people by teaching her children their mother tongue. "Imagine it, she was poor. She was the wife of this sadist man. She was scared of leaving the courtyard because she could not speak any language [Turkish]. Now someone was telling her that she had something valuable to herself. Daye loved them because I guess they reminded her something she had long forgotten: that she was a human being."

In fact, it was precisely that sense of "being equal in being human" that they offered to everyone. For instance, Layê Diz had a friend called Sator Xêyri (Xêyri the cleaver). Xêyri was a small built, weak and fragile boy trying to cover up his vulnerability with an exaggerated tough performance. He was carrying such a big cleaver that he was an object of ridicule for everyone, including Layê Diz. One day the

revolutionary students approached them as they were hanging out at the walls. One of them asked Xêyri his name. Layê Diz went ahead and told teasingly that his name was Sator Xêyri. Xêyri was embarrassed. But, contrary to what Layê Diz expected, the revolutionary who had asked Xêyri's name did not pick up on him. He wore a softly serious expression that made the rest of the boys stop jiggling, put his arm on Xêyri's shoulder and said: "Xêyri, you have a nice name. You only need to know how to use your cleaver." "He gave the example of Imam Ali's sword, how he was using it against injustice." That was the first time Xêyri had ever seen a revolutionary. Then, he joined them. It was through such tiny gestures that the revolutionaries entered into the lives of Layê Diz and his friends. Next, came their consciousness-raising:

> You are a Kurd. You are treated contemptuously. But you don't think this has something to do with your being a Kurd. You think it is because you are poor and you are poor because it is how it was supposed to be; it is just fate. Then, someone tells you that it is not fate, but all that contempt, exclusion and poverty is because you are a Kurd. That changes the whole equation. With the revolutionaries, people came to realize that they were Kurds. There were twenty-one families in our *cul de sac*. They were all Kurds. But they were ashamed of everything about themselves and looked up to everything that was considered Turkish. Listen to this: It was the time of Turkey's occupation of Cyprus [1974]. I don't remember who organized it, but there was this huge demonstration on the lane, where people shouted in Turkish: "Çatla patla Makaryos/ Kıbrıs bizim olacak!" [Shatter into pieces Makarios/ Cyprus will be ours!] We loved the slogan. We were even using it when going to other quarters for turf wars. Do you see the contradiction? You don't dare going over to the street, where Turkish is spoken. You have no idea where Cyprus is. But you want Cyprus for Turks. That was the kind of illusionary sense of being powerful that was implanted in us through Turkishness. In the meantime you continue to feel ashamed of the language that your mother speaks, the patches in your clothes and your mother's chador. If people were not able to abstract colonialism or locate Kurdistan, Kurdistan became the name for hope of another possible world, a better world. Not a big world. Only, one in which there would be no more shame, humiliation and poverty. Yes, struggle so conceived, was a devastating hope.

That hope changed the relationship of Layê Diz to *şehir.* After the bucket-carriership career, he started going out to the street for other things – not for fighting or making trouble. He started meeting with “other kinds of people,” particularly with the leftists in other poor neighborhoods like Bağlar, but also even in Yenişehir. He realized that people out there in other parts of the city were not too different from him. “They also had two eyes, one nose, two legs.” In the meantime, the way people looked at the youth like him in the quarter started changing. When people saw them walking with the revolutionaries, they treated them, too, well. He had to watch himself in a new way to be able to reciprocate that compliment. For instance, he started seeing things like fighting and drinking inside the alleys as immoral. The lane between the Saraykapı and Mardinkapı was one traditional spot for doing such things. But after that area became full of political graffiti, he and his friends made a pact with the Saraykapı boys to not fight each other, drink or do drugs there. That was their way of “respecting the revolution.”

The spell of revolution changed his approach to women and “woman issues” as well. In the quarters, women’s being outside without any valid reason (like shopping or visiting their families) was not viewed as a good thing. But revolutionary girls could go anywhere and no one would ever look at them in any bad sense. Even the elderly men sitting in front of their shops would stand up out of respect when they passed by. His sister was ten to twelve, then. She was a beautiful budding girl and he was very harsh toward her. He had formerly beaten her several times upon seeing her outside of the courtyard alone and was pressuring Daye to make her cover her head. As he got to know the revolutionary girls, he started growing other dreams for his little sister. They knew the

revolutionary girls from their denim pants and military style coats. Whenever they saw one, they would go and ask: “Elder sister, let us take you to where you want to go.” These girls would treat them nicely, as if they were grown up friends. He started dreaming that his sister might also become a revolutionary when she grew up. Then he “would let her free to cover her head or not, wear denims and go public to mix with her people.” Otherwise, he was never going to let her “even leave the courtyard!”

For two years from 1978, Diyarbakır was “a liberated zone” – a heaven of revolutionary mobilization. Xançepek was one center of that current. All the right-wingers moved out of the quarter over those two years. The revolutionaries seized the money and mobile properties of several rich men and distributed to the people, “these things did happen!” They used to say, “We are taking from them by force what they took from you gently.” There were increasing state pressures, but that only strengthened solidarity on the ground. For example, as the police presence across the quarter increased, the connecting rooftops in the alleys became the place for meetings or secret passages during the raids; “that sense of being one.”

But this romantic unity of the people did not last long. With the martial law, the state deposed Mehdi Zana, the first pro-Kurdish mayor of the city supported by the Kurdistan Socialist Party, and disbanded the city council. The repression of the revolutionaries followed. Although they were not taken seriously in the political sense, even *şehir çocuğu* like Layê Diz became the target of state repression. He was arrested a few months before the coup. After weeks of torture in the detention center in Fisqaya, he was sent to prison No.5. He stayed there for almost three years.

Before the prison, his life was mostly the quarters of Suriçi and around the walls. The most radical way in which the prison transformed his life was a bit ironic, which also made him strangely thankful to the state. It was only in the prison that he "realized how small [his] world was" and that there were incomparably bigger fights than his fights on the streets as a *şehir çocuğu.* He learned about other cities, peoples and countries. There was a PKK prisoner inside, Ali Çiçek, who would later die in death fast in 1982. He taught him about Ho Chi Minh's Vietnam and Che's Cuba. He listened to several lectures on imperialism, capitalism, colonialism, socialism and national-popular revolutions. These "-isms" did not really make much sense to him. What moved him more was practical resistance, as he was one of the "crude practitioners," not of the theoretical kind, which was in line with "the action-oriented nature of *şehir çocuğu*." There were woman revolutionaries in the prison. There was this one, for instance, -she was also a PKK prisoner-, whom he once saw fearlessly arguing with Esat Oktay Yıldıran "as if in a battlefield". "She spat at his face in front of everyone." He learned "resistance from these women." Then he started dreaming: If he could manage getting out of No. 5 alive, he would get the necessary training and then become a real revolutionary.

However, those were strange times when things did never go as planned. When he was released from the prison, nothing was the same in Xançepek or in *şehir* at large. There was so much fear over everywhere that when he went home for the first time after about three years, what his mother did first was to close the door, windows and curtains in a rush so that no one would notice his return. When the next morning he went out for a walk, no one greeted him, even his former *şehir çocuğu* friends. He went to see his two

uncles in the coffeehouse, but both men changed their seat pretending not to know him. All were because of the fear of the police and the network of spies the junta had created in the quarter. Before the coup, “there had been revolutionaries and the state in the quarter. After the coup the state had become the father.” Not only were there no revolutionaries left, but also it looked “as if people regretted that they had ever known of Kurdishness and revolutionaries.” The large void created by the destruction of the Left in general and the Kurdish revolutionary organizations in particular was “filled by all kinds of mafias, despots and bullies.”

Amid all this violence, there was something “even more troubling than fear.” After bulldozing a whole city and Xançepek with it, the state gave Xançepek two simultaneous gifts to console the youth: porn and religion. From 1979 to mid-1980s, the NATO base in Diyarbakır distributed porn videos to coffeehouses, a main hub of political debate before the coup, where beer was also legalized now. Perhaps, it was not compulsory to show those videos, in a legal sense. Yet, “people knew they had to show them, even the formerly revolutionary bazaaris complied in apprehension.” In that context, the state also brought in “a remedy” for the social and moral disruption it provoked. It brought in *salafi* orders into the quarter via mosques. “You know,” continued Laye Diz:

> There was a brothel here in Xançepek. There were also mosques. After the coup, the quarter was an open range brothel and open range mosque at the same time. Men lost all face to look at one another and to women, and women to men. But at the same time an extremely bigoted and moralistic culture spread around. With all that naked fear, loneliness, betrayals… between collective porn and collective prayer… I reverted to my *şehir çocuğu* life. But one is what one’s environment is, as I said before. This time, I became extremely barbaric, constantly doing drugs,

> lacerating myself in the open, using the weight of my prison history for scaring people, for extortion, acting like a pure bastard…

That continued until "the return of revolutionaries" in the late 1980s. It was in 1987 exactly, when one day a few men knocked on his door. He looked out from the window, and thought they were his friends from the "illegitimate." When he went out to meet them, what he saw were his friends from prison, one with the nickname "Ernesto" among them. He, then, knew he had to put his life in some shape. It took time in the quarter for all that "violent forgetfulness, social resentment and the dirt to heal." But "as bullets were fired, people started to overcome their fear, to feed hope again. By the 1992-1993, Xançepek became a patriotic Kurdish quarter."

Layê Diz stopped there, at the epiphanal moment of the shooting of the Fanonian bullet, which purified Xançepek and turned it into one unified body again. I waited for quite a while for him to continue. When he did not, "Then," I asked. "Then… It is today," he replied.

We ended the teahouse interview by asking for the bill. I intended to pay the bill. He refused remarking teasingly, "You resurrected the *şehir çocuğu* in me. Don't you now come up with the equality of the sexes!" I insisted that he let me pay if not for the equality clause, then to send the "deceased" back away, as he did not sound like missing him much. He corrected me as he paid the bill: "One misses one's youth. I also miss my father since he is gone. It is normal. So when he comes to me, I say 'May Allah's mercy be upon him' and look ahead," and continued after a momentary pause: "But… There is not much left to see looking ahead. What I truly miss is having that anticipation for future. It is daring to have that sense. Now, I feel we have played all our cards…"

As we were walking back to the quarter, we saw a group of young boys sitting around a fire outside of Yenikapı and looking quite wasted. I commented to Layê Diz that perhaps the boys were possessed by *şehir çocuğu.* "You may call it that. I call them zombies of peace," he commented back. Then, he stopped momentarily again, and said, looking at them:

> You know, the [Kurdish] struggle took the alleys to the streets. It gave us that courage. Now [legal, institutionalized Kurdish] politics wants to contain us inside the alleys. In the past we were ashamed to go on to the street. Now, it seems like friends are ashamed of seeing us there. It seems like our friends think that people [commoners] are good for struggle but dangerous for peace. But what good would come out of the peace of those who wear a tie and talk beautiful Turkish? I am only thinking.

That was how Layê Diz concluded a forty-something year long story of growing up to be a man in *şehir,* by going back to where he had started in the gaze of a group of boys of *şehir,* who were wasting themselves at a dark corner beneath the walls, because, he believed, they could not dare go out on to the street when sober. Life for *şehir çocuğu* was always about going to the street. Perhaps, everything in-between was a parenthesis.

CONCLUSION

This chapter traced the conflicting images of city, identity and history that *şehir çocuğu* nourishes as a nostalgic sign and an embodied idiom of masculine self-expression in Diyarbakır. I first discussed how the *şehir çocuğu* narrative emerged among the marginalized *şehir* youth as a claim to the city over Diyarbakır's contentious urban modernization process. Then, locating the *şehir çocuğu* nostalgia in the cultural climate of 2000s, I showed how the sign was resituated as an image that provokes the fantasy of the old city as a space of cultural authenticity, a fantasy screen that sustains a past of

corporate communal intimacy and an object of transference that responds to classed anxieties about identity, manhood, and sex-gender order in the present-day *şehir*. If many could find in different projections of this image their own sense of belonging to a community, this was predicated on the dispossession of the post-1960s' *şehir çocuğu* the story they had produced amid multiple conflicts and struggles to claim presence in Diyarbakır. I suggest that it is these conflicts and struggles for cultural, social and political survival that are avoided or rendered invisible in the *şehir çocuğu* nostalgia, a process that detaches *şehir çocuğu* from its formative referents and rearticulates a story of conflict and struggle as one of authenticity and difference. With such understanding, I presented narratives of *şehir çocuğu* as an experience of the self not as a litmus test to gauge the accuracy of the *lost şehir çocuğu* as a story of the other, but as a unique trajectory to trace processes of structural, symbolic and political change and conflict in and over Diyarbakır.

Here, I would like end by briefly relating to the relevance of this ethnographic debate to the wider contemporary interest in comparable masculinities in other classed, racialized, postcolonial and post-conflict contexts. Certainly, the romance of culture invested in the *lost şehir çocuğu* in Diyarbakır is not bound with the contingencies of the local context. Similar affective and epistemic investments shape the perceptions and representations of non-hegemonic, marginalized, "ethnic" masculinities across different contexts; such as Irish, Black, Caribbean masculinities in music, cinema and fiction writing (Popoviciu et al. 2006). Literary theorist Michael Bernstein relates the fascination

with such actors to a rather universal modern cultural mythology that he calls “the abject hero” and describes as follows (1991: 385):

> The outsider and the outcast who turns his dispossession, victimization and ressentiment into an uncompromising propensity to excess enamors “straight men” both as a line of flight and a promise to not to be completely overtaken by the anonymizing rationalism and tedius knowability of the quotidian, prosaic world, with its undramatic practices and relatively unanxious values.

I had this mythology in the back of my mind while trying to understand *şehir çocuğu* as the converging site of multiple relations of violence, displacement and desire structured in dominance; partially with a self-reflexive urge to resist being overtaken in my sight by its romantic appeal. However, there is a scholarly counterpart to this romance in recent studies on “subaltern masculinities,” which cast as “alternative moral universes,” “sites of agency” or “acts of self-fashioning” that which used to be interpreted in former master narratives (of modernism, nationalism, revolution) as symptoms and effects of classed, colonial, racial, and sexual violence and repression. Suffice it to recall here the debates on Chicano *pachuco*, the Jamaican *rwuud boy,* and black and Latino masculinities in urban America (See. Paz 1990, Smethurst 1995, Scott 1999, Bourgeios 1999). Such scholarly faith in these formations as inherently subversive of power or deconstructive of the grand narratives of their societies has also been criticized for privileging a moralist conception of agency or for exonerating the political, structural and symbolic forms of violence from their socially and morally disruptive effects by portraying hygienic and saintly figures of struggling heroes (Newman 1999; Gill 2000; Wacquant 2002). More recently, the Bataillean notion of “sovereignty as expenditure” has joined the transgression-oriented interpretations of marginalized masculinities, which

finds wisdom and hope in the turning of whole ranks of racialized, ethnic or lower class young men into individually and socially expending bodies by reading them into "anti-moralism" or "anti-power" (See, Mbembe 2001; 2005). These interpretative frameworks, I hold, are not to be counted only to the theoretical advancements in understandings of power, subjectivity and agency. They also carry persistent traces of the "abject hero" myth within the first world-elite and heterosexist male-dominated scholarship on the issue.

With these larger debates in mind, I would like to state a position here that I might have failed to work out analytically in the course of my discussion. My main concern with the nostalgic icon of *şehir çocuğu* had to do with that it was built upon the effacement of myriad inequalities and exclusions that have mediated the *şehir çocuğu* defiance, ressentiments on which it has accumulated, the horrors that accompanied it, and the real life tragedies that grew on its soil. Lest my own representation of *şehir çocuğu* as an idiom of self-expression may sound like another story of abject hero, enwisened by marginality and oppression and deconstructive of middle class urban and Kurdish imaginaries of identity, history and space in Diyarbakır, this should not be my intention.

"Today, at least in academia, to celebrate the Apocalypse is to be entirely conventional and in facile harmony with the ethos of the day," suggests Bernstein, and compels us to think "more cannily about what is at stake when we make identificatory and cultural evaluations" about the "bitter carnivals" of the "abject hero" (1991: 385; 1992). On a different plane Lauren Berlant points to the danger that "embracing 'ordinary language' and 'safe knowledge' as things good in themselves [would] distract us from

engaging the impossible, ambitious, and always failing activity … [of] the poetry of future" (1994: 132). I keep thinking about Layê Diz's losing of anticipation for future, of the contemporary *şehir* boys' head-on claims to the city, of the myriad classed, sexed-gendered and spatialized borders that interdicted my communication with these youth, and acknowledge all these, as well as the nostalgia for *şehir çocuğu*, as the actual space of the coming struggles and communities to shape urban life in Diyarbakır.

Just as Satire derives from Tragedy and Mime from Comedy, so does Parody derive from Rhapsody. Indeed, when the rhapsodes interrupted their recitation, performers entered who … inverted and overturned everything that had come before.... For that reason, these songs were called parodious, because alongside and in addition to the serious argument, they inserted other ridiculous things. Parody is therefore an inverted rhapsody.

G. C. Scaligero, in Giorgio Agamben, Profanations (2007)

Chapter Four: Qırıx

Figure 4.1: Keko and His Social Universe.[101]

First serialized in the daily *Özgür Gündem* (*The Free Agenda*) over 1992-1995, the comic strip *Qırıx*, by Doğan Güzel, was a parody on the reflections of the Kurdish struggle of the 1990s in Diyarbakır in the life of a neighborhood tough named Keko.

As Diyarbakır is captured by a spellbinding and frightful confrontation between

*A slightly different version of this chapter was published as "*Qırıx,* An 'Inverted Rhapsody' on Kurdish National Struggle, Gender and Everyday Life in Diyarbakır," in Everday Occupations: Experiencing Militarism in South Asia and the Middle East, Kamala Visweswaran (ed), Pennsylvania: University of Pennysylvania Press, pp. 29-59.

[101] Doğan Güzel kindly drew this image for this work. All other images used in this chapter are reproduced from the *Qırıx* album (Istanbul: Avesta, 1997) with the consent of the author.

the Turkish state and the Kurdish movement, Keko, the erstwhile pompous authority of home and the streets, is faced with an existential dilemma. The process of national revolutionary struggle, or just the *process*,[102] deprives him of the conditions for realizing himself as the "keko" ("older brother") of the inner and outer milieus. Since the streets have begun to swarm with Turkish police, informants, and Kurdish revolutionaries, gone are the days for Keko when a single stroll in his flaunted gait was enough to fill the open city with awe and fear. The more the *process* takes over the rhythm of the city, by ideological determination for some and out of practical necessity for others, the more the days when Keko was a source of inspiration and admiration for his peers and younger generations are increasingly a thing of the past. "Because the relationships on the streets determine the relationships at home," as Keko himself concludes at one point, he can no longer maintain his older brother bearing even with his own siblings, let alone those outside. In fact, Keko, too, is charmed by the national political cause, not to mention the social recognition and respect conferred upon its "political elder brothers." However, he does not want to give up on the joys and privileges that he inherited by convention or earned by style as an urban elder brother, either at home or outside. The upshot is that in a city whose social imaginaries are dislodged by national revolutionary utopia and whose streets are occupied under draconian forms of state violence, to covet both tradition and revolution, continuity and change, past and the future at one and the same time is to risk total social and political alienation. Keko tries hard to remain himself and to remain

[102] I use "process" as the translation of the Turkish word "*süreç*." In the political vocabulary of Kurdish struggle of the time, "process" denoted "the time of Kurdish national revolutionary struggle." In this chapter, the *process* refers to this temporality of struggle.

relevant to this life by any means necessary. Alas, neither can he escape casual interdiction on the streets by the Turkish police for being a “terrorist” or by the revolutionaries for being an “escapist,” nor can he find any peace “in this topsy-turvy world” at home where “even Eyşo,” his primary school-aged sister, “believes she has a right to kick [Keko] out” for his “feudal” ways.

Keko is a parodic double of *şehir çocuğu*, hailed in the eponymous comic strip as *qirix.* I previously discussed how *qirix* was used as an alternative name for *şehir çocuğu* in urban modern and Kurdish political discourses. Let me further note here that the idiom in fact had its origin in the *şehir çocuğu* slang. Constituted by the enunciation of Turkish word *kırık*, literally *broken*, with an accentuated Kurdish intonation, *qirix* was used in the *şehir çocuğu* parlance for those who assumed this identity only by appearance and without living up to its moral ethos; who, thus, bore a split between his image and essence, his words and deeds. In its Kurdish revolutionary appropriation, *qirix,* was meant to denote the *şehir çocuğu* as a lumpen proletariat, an ambiguously located non-agent with a split (or double) consciousness.

It was in this revolutionary parlance that *Qırıx* cast Keko as a *qirix*, for a humorous, at times satirical, critique of *şehir çocuğu* (hereinafter *qirix*) in terms of his lumpen ambiguity vis-à-vis the terms and imperatives of the political process of the 1990s. Nevertheless, putting a *qirix* hero like Keko and his lifeworld at the center of a story about this process was also an ironic enterprise. It had the capacity to destabilize while simultaneously naturalizing its apparent pedagogical terms when extending the truths of the *process* across the profane and discontinuous registers of everyday life. As

Qırıx drew Keko's political ambiguity across the open *şehir* and his home, it also worlded the 1990s' Diyarbakır as a wildly contradictory of space of emergent utopias and dismantled lifeworlds, hopes and failures, commitment and opportunism, tenacity and trickstery.

Qırıx had an immense popularity among the political Kurdish community in Diyarbakır in the 1990s, during which time I, too, was a fan of the comic strip. A decade later, my research experiences prompted me to revisit *Qırıx* with two divergent concerns: First, a cultural product of the 1990s with its associated dominant imagery of Diyarbakır as the "city of struggle" - and *qirix* as a lumpen formation within it, *Qırıx* was a reference point for me to trace the *şehir çocuğu* nostalgia of the 2000s to the new imagery of Diyarbakır as a "city of culture." Beside this, as in the course of my research I myself utilized the "city of struggle" versus "city of culture" distinction as a heuristic device to juxtapose the cultural and discursive climate of the 1990s' with the 2000s, *Qırıx*'s knowledge also kept me cognizant of and concerned about my own retrospective totalization of the socially experienced temporality of the 1990s under the organizing terms of the Kurdish revolutionary movement.

In this chapter, I seek to (re)apprehend the everyday experiences of political conflict and struggle in the 1990s' Diyarbakır as they were worlded in *Qırıx*. Critics have pointed to the hybrid word-and-image form of comics as being uniquely equipped to challenge dominant modes of storytelling and history writing (Chute 2008: 456). This is because whereas narratives form choreograph time and space in a linear, sequential fashion, comics "fracture both time and space, offering a jagged, staccato rhythm of

unconnected moments" (ibid. 455); thus, proliferating temporalities and spatialities on a single page (space). While I assume this genre quality given here, I explore *Qırıx*'s world(ing) by focusing on the comic strip's utilization of humor as a critical venue to read and write about socio-historical experiences of the time. In the militant context of oppression and violence, as that which surrounded *Qırıx*'s production, speaking about humor invites a dialogue with a large body of scholarship on humor's force as counter-discourse. Therefore, I begin with situating the reading that follows by briefly revisiting scholarly debates on humor and existing readings of *Qırıx*'s humor that have been produced in Turkey. I then briefly describe the context that shaped *Qırıx*'s production, bringing to the center the discursive idiom of *process* and the location of the *qirix* question within it. Next, I offer a reading of the comic strip with attention to its characters, event composition, and narrative strategies. In the end, I return to a reassessment the socially experienced time-space of 1990s' Diyarbakır as it is conjured in *Qırıx*, and consider the work's critical cultural input to the understandings of the process of Kurdish struggle with a focus on its struggle with ambiguity by means of parody.

HUMOR IN THEORY AND CONTEXT

A dominant strand in socio-cultural analysis treats humor as a remedy to false sublimations that structure the (re)production of violence and subordination. Humorous discourse, characterized as it is by arbitrary mixing of the otherwise strictly separated languages, bodies and gestures through pun, pastiche and parody, destabilizes, we are told here, absolutist claims to language and reason allowing thereby the emergence of an earthly reality of multiplicity, heterogeneity and antitotality (Mulkay 1988, Stallybrass

and White 1986, Hoy 1992, See. Lang 1998 for a critical review). This essentially Bakhtinian liberatory approach (Bakhtin 1984) has also had its critics who brought into discussion the licensed limits of humorous inversion as well as the often idealist notions of power and moralist conception of agency that underlie such analysis (Bernstein 1983, Eagleton 1989, Mbembe 1992). However, very rarely are these critiques reflected in works that engage with humor in relation to the everyday forms of oppression and resistance (See but Mbembe 1992).

I suggest that shaping of this non-reflection is a shared interdisciplinary investment in the redemptive potential of the everyday; be it the dichotomies upon which official public discourses depend by hosting “difference”, “multiplicity”, “ambiguity” and “contradiction” or the reaches and determinations of disciplinary power in its capacity to provide a zone of “flight”, “escape” or “evasion” (Vanegeim 2003, de Certeau 1984, LeFebvre 2002). Thus, often when analytical interest in humor and the everyday converges, the former’s liberatory promise is kept intact, through interpretive templates such as “weapon of the weak,” “subversive laughter” or “fugitive insubordination” (Jenkins 1994, Scott 1985, Goldstein 2003)

My reading in this chapter is closely informed by approaches to humor as counter-discursive practice. However, I also believe that assigning any such stable, inherent meaning to humor is highly problematic, especially when everyday life in militant contexts of violence and transformation is in question. First, in these contexts, the humorous split in the language of reason has an increased possibility of attesting to a deeper destabilization of language and reason as a structuring quality of everyday life and

its subjects.[103] Secondly, the "critical intentionality of humor" rarely builds upon humorous statement alone, but is effectively mediated by the "ironic process of reading" (Lang 1998: 282). In situations where processes of meaning-making and judgment undergo militant contestation, interpretations of humorous discourse may reveal less about the social contexts of production, than about the values and priorities operative in the time-space inhabited by the reader(s). Finally, and in a related vein, the theoretical certitude of humor's counter-discursive essence has the capacity to simulate context and condition an ethnographic disinterest "to know and speak and write of the lived worlds inhabited by those who resist (or do not, as the case may be)" (Ortner 1995: 187-188)

A good case in point here is the existing reviews of *Qırıx* produced in Turkey which related the comic strip's popularity among the Kurdish community with respect to its counterdiscursive force to expose both the Turkish state's repression of Kurds and the vanguard logos of the 1990s' Kurdish movement. In a fairly early review in which he celebrated the sagacity of *Qırıx*'s humor by likening its "resilient gaiety" to the "robust pessimisms of Haseck, Brecht, and Beckett," cultural critic Orhan Koçak (1998: 5) defined *Qırıx*'s theme as the "light dimension of a decade-long dirty war," and he suggested: "Güzel's line focuses on what goes on out there; while showing what goes on despite everything, it points to what has to go on despite everything… Güzel seems to say to [Kurdish] 'political truth' that it can derive a source of life only by acknowledging, or at least by registering, these [lifewords] whatever their contents are" (ibid. 5-6). Recently, sociologist Mesut Yeğen (2007: 89) assigned *Qırıx* a seat "within the 'unforgettables' of

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[103] See Achille Mbembe and Janet Roitman's (1995) discussion on the "subject of crisis."

Turkey's popular culture." Locating *Qırıx* "almost-totally within the orbit of Kurdish national problematic," Yeğen delineated the series' "definitive characteristic [as] a keen attention to representing the internal heterogeneity of the Kurdish national-cultural field" and suggested that *Qırıx*'s "magic" lay in "its characters being full of defects, ambiguities, and ambivalences both in everyday life and toward the national question that runs through it" (ibid. 94-95). For Yeğen this was a reflection of the "plainly inconsistent, indecisive… neither this nor that (both this and that) position the inhabitants of Diyarbakır (the characters in the comics) occupied at a time when they were caught under "two grand calls, two summonses; that of the [Kurdish] 'nation' and the [Turkish] state." "Keko," maintained Yeğen, is "Diyarbakır in-between these two summonses" (ibid. 98).

Both readings offered strong insights into *Qırıx*'s force to unsettle the given terms of debate about the Kurdish conflict in the 1990s, including the limits of the Kurdish political discourse to represent the lived realities of Kurdishness in the 1990s. However, I also suggest that they were misguided in their analysis of *Qırıx*'s "main problematic"; that is, the "dirty war" or "being caught in-between two summonses." This misinterpretation was due to how both authors delineated that problematic by reducing "what was shown" in *Qırıx* to "what went on out there," while ignoring the comic strip's own interdiscursivity and performativity at large.

The irony in it is that the production of *Qırıx* was immanent to the Kurdish movement, as I have already implied, and so was its circulation, (largely) at the time it was serialized as a newspaper comic strip. As one Diyarbakırite critic put it more openly (Varol 2006: 27-28), "*Qırıx* was born from inside the Kurdish political movement, it was

published in a newspaper that belonged to this tradition"; and it told the struggle that this movement waged "through the story of a native hero... whom its primary readers knew very well but by no means identified as one of their own, mocked, perhaps even hated if only for this reason." In fact, it was the same identificatory sympathy with the Kurdish movement as "our struggle" that continued to characterize the public circulations of *Qırıx* in Diyarbakır's at the time of my fieldwork. In this context, notwithstanding the nostalgic reappropriations of *şehir çocuğu* as a cultural icon of the "old city," *qirix* still denoted an "other" for most of the self-avowed political Kurds of the city as a political non-agent, or at best an ambiguous one. Yet, it was the very same group of people who responded to my self-inclusive question, "why did we love Qırıx?" almost uniformly and with an almost ever-present solemn laughter: "Because it was telling our own lives!"

With this historical-ethnographic sensibility, this chapter moves the exploration of how *Qırıx* related to the experiences of the 1990s' Kurdish movement away from an uncomplicated notion of "uncovering heterogeneity" toward a consideration of how it allowed a conjuring of the "sense of homogeneity" that is reflected in and upon the performatives of "our struggle" or "our life" through the power of humorous discourse. In other words, it attempts to explore the critical cultural work that *Qırıx* performed with attention to what kind of facticity of "our life" the comic strip offered for its (primary) readership beyond the limits of legibility and sayability set forth by the formal discourses of "revolution," "struggle," or "resistance." Such an attempt, however, cannot do away with seriously engaging with the ethnographic and discursive contexts that shaped the text's production. Guided by the interpretive approach of "reading formation" offered by

Tony Bennett (1985: 8), I also “attempt to think of context as a set of discursive and intertextual determinations, operating on material and institutional supports, that bear in upon a text, not just externally, from the outside in, but internally, shaping it, in the historically concrete form in which it is available as a text-to-be-read, from the inside out.”

THE *PROCESS* AND *QIRIX*

The imagery and experiences of Diyarbakır as the “city of struggle’ were not pre-discursively given in the degree of Kurdish political militancy and the Turkish state’s counter-guerilla violence in the city in the 1990s. As a definitive abstraction, this image was also effectively refracted through a counter-hegemonic notion of temporality, the *process*, which the Kurdish movement relied on to fill in the chronological 1990s with the presence, principles and experiences of national liberation struggle. What determined the essence of the *process* structurally was struggle against Turkish state domination. Yet, determinative in the internal constitution of *process* was the revolutionary transformation of Kurdish sociality as integral part of this struggle.

Fashioned after the anticolonial and neo-Marxist teachings of its formative era, the PKK’s revolutionary pedagogy deeply contested existing sociocultural formations among Kurds as constitutive sites wherein individuals were tied to the “establishment”[104]: The Kurdish landed classes and bourgeoisie, for instance, were enemies of people no less than the Turkish state was; traditional religiosity (represented by sheiks and imams) was

[104] The overall logic of PKK’s national revolutionarism was an exemple of what David Scott (1999: 201) calls “the Third World narrative of liberation:” A teleological mode of construal that progressively links “(through such generative tropes as Repression, Alienation, Consciousness, Awakening, Resistance, Struggle and Realization) a past and a present of Domination to an anticipated future of Freedom.”

the best gatekeeper of the status quo that fed on people's ignorance; the family was a "feudal-backward institution"; romantic-sexual engagement was the ground of women's patriarchal enslavement; attachment to money, women, alcohol, or conventional forms of leisure were to seduce men into corrupt existence; overinvestment in formal education was a petty-bourgeois contradiction, to name but a few of the prevalent claims.[105]

I have mentioned time and over the relevance of this revolutionary discourse of transformation to the individual and social experiences of struggle in the 1990s Diyarbakır. As I quoted from Layê Diz in the previous chapter, "struggle, so conceived, was a devastating hope." It offered the underprivileged, the poor, women, country folk, heretofore-unimagined possibilities of experience and becoming. However, if this was true, it was also no less true that this discourse also provided the limits of the intelligibility and speakability of human experience in this time-space. As the *process* ordered all experience teleologically—relegating thereby the ground of experience from the domain of "space" and "present" to "time" and "history"—a myriad human experiences that could not be easily read into the intentions and directionality of national struggle were either ignored as constitutive of the *process* or representations of these experiences were subsumed under the prefigurative binaries and moral authority of the revolutionary discourse.

[105] Note in this sense the following books authored by the leader of the PKK, Abdullah Ocalan, as elementary political training material: *Sosyalizm ve Devrim Sorunları* [The Problematic of Socialism and Revolution] (Istanbul: MELSA, 1992); *Kürdistan*'da *Kişilik Sorunu* [The Problem of Personal Character in Kurdistan] (Trollhattan: M. Kurdi, 1992); *Din Sorununa Devrimci Yaklaşım* [Revolutionary Approach to the Question of Religion] (Istanbul: MELSA, 1993); *Kürdistan'da Kadın ve Aile* [Woman and Family in Kurdistan] (Koln: Ağrı, 1993); *Halk Savaşında Militan Kişilik* [Militant Personality in Peoples' War] (Koln: Weşanên Serxwebun, 1994): *Nasıl Yaşamalı?* [How Ought to Live?] (Koln: Weşanên Serxwebun, 1995); Abdullah Öcalan and Mahir Sayın, *Erkeği Öldürmek* [Killing the Man] (Istanbul: ZELAL, 1998).

The revolutionary nationalist casting of the *qirix* question is quite illustrative of this constitutive foreclosure. Regarding *qirix* as lumpen proleteriat, the PKK saw this class of men as a potentially significant ally of the revolutionary struggle - an interpretive strategy shared across neo-Marxist movement in other Third World contexts.[106] Accordingly, resituating *qirix*'s "dilemma" at the interfaces between "establishment and struggle," "tradition and revolution," "purposeless revolt and conscious resistance," the organization put emphasis on his mobilization into revolutionary overcoming in Diyarbakır from the late 1970s into the 1990s. Despite, or together with, this active on-the-ground organizing agenda, *qırıx*'s representations remained troublesome for the political elite for most of this time. As a case in point, as late as 1990, Yılmaz Odabaşı, a preeminent local political poet and man of letters, was half apologetically remarking in his essay on the *qırıx* of Xançepek (1990: 63, 75):

> I received stern reactions from some friends when writing this piece. They told me to "leave these psychopaths alone and write about serious things." They told me to write about "those who resist!" As far as I was concerned, writing was not a matter of writing only about "those who resisted." In fact, I believed one had to consider the primary significance of writing about those who did not resist, those who could not resist. …After all, men would not be emancipated unless the cities were liberated.

Nevertheless this ideological censure was also going to change by the mid-1990s following the strong induction of the *qırıx* into the ranks of political struggle; and a new perception, a new representational type of *qırıx* as the subject-object of revolutionary transformation was going to take effect. The following biographical piece about an *Özgür Gündem* reporter who later died as a PKK guerrilla is quite typical of these later

[106] On the question of the lumpen in these traditions, see, Arrighi and Saul (1969).

accounts; hence I quote it at length:

> Mehmet Şenol was a sharp and split *qırıx* of this city…. The process of national-social movement in his country was soon to shape his fate. Instead of tabloids he would start reading Mao and other leftist classics. When meeting his friends at the coffee-houses beneath the city walls, he would now, using Marxist theories tell them how great the Chinese leader was. The omnidirectional revolt in his heart was finally reaching harmony and he was attaining an ideology from the pages of books…

At this point, the narrative shifts from a description of Mehmet Şenol, the man, to one of his sociological location:

> The *qırıx* of Diyarbakır had an instinctive revolt against the establishment. Their heart was too delicate to take any injustice. Their emotions were sharp as the *sator* [*butcher's cleaver*] hidden under their arms. When the dark of the night hit the sky, these orphan boys of the city would take the streets with their wine… When the sun rose, they would abandon the city to its owners. When the rebellion poured onto the streets and smeared the nights with danger, both the *qırıx* and the law of *qırıx*-ness left the streets to more unforgiving laws... The rebellion swept away the wine-red *qırıx* nights. And it sculpted their wine-smeared, dark-headed anger like a patient architect. It recovered their stolen identities from the pothole of the establishment. It returned their own notes and voices back to them. They continued gathering in the dark and consigning their secrets to the nights. They were still angry and anguished. Yet it was no more wine which made them drunk, but a new love that enlightened their hearts. And Şenol was now a rebel in love with this city… Amidst all the dust and flame, he started working in *Özgür Gündem*. (Dağlı 1996: 17-24).

Thus, finally was a harmony achieved between *qırıx* and the city in the *process*. However, this epic resolution, as it incorrigibly would be, was essentially anachronic, if only because it had as its condition of possibility the very negation of *qırıx* (as the negation of negation). In other words, the revolutionary discourse preserved intact the founding split denoted by *qırıx* while casting "being *qırıx*" and "being in the *process*" as located at two distinct planes of existence, experience and speech. Speaking "seriously"

then, insofar as *qırıx* remained to be *qırıx,* he could hardly represent anything but an irreducible "otherness" to revolution, struggle, or resistance in Diyarbakır for much of the 1990s.

Qırıx, the comic series, began to appear in *Özgür Gündem* in the early 1990s, when the Kurdish movement was seeking to promote its counter-hegemonic reach in Turkish Kurdistan (and any resolution of "the *qırıx* question" was still due). *Özgür Gündem* had a crucial role in the collective administration of the *process*. In a context in which the Turkish state systematically censored the production of any public information on the Kurdish issue beyond the "terror" trope, the newspaper was the only institutionalized medium through which a Kurdish account of war and struggle was publicized on a daily basis. Hence, it was also the target of an unremitting campaign of state violence and terror. This terror included the killing of seventy-six of the paper's staff (thirteen of whom were distributors in their early teens or younger), the systematic detention and arrests of its editors and contributors, the bombing of its headquarters, countless police raids into its offices, periodic banning of the paper's distribution in Turkish Kurdistan, and casual policing and harassment of its readers, particularly in this emergency-ruled region. With these features, the readership of *Özgür Gündem* was also as definite. Most of them were those Kurds who recognized their subjectivity as being in the *process*; who tried, or would have liked to think themselves to be trying, to organize their lives and selves according to the principles and imperatives of the national-political

struggle.[107]

Qırıx's author Güzel was a Diyarbakırite cartoonist, an insider to both the city's public cultures and the culture of the Kurdish movement. Güzel was also a permanent *Özgür Gündem* contributor, and yet in *Qırıx* he offered for his readers a quite distinct *process* story, in at least two senses: First, while the framing structure of daily newscast was, as a rule, the polarization between Turkish state oppression and Kurdish resistance, Güzel was predominantly interested in navigating the day with a focus on how Kurds negotiated their identities and selves inside their own changing social space. Second, in contrast to the rest of Kurdish cultural productions of this time, Güzel's attention was not on the historical movement of the *process* or its teleological unfolding. Instead, *Qırıx* was an exploration of the everyday possibilities and predicaments of the process of struggle through the possibilities offered by humorous discourse. In line with the general terms of debate about *qırıx*, Güzel also had his *qırıx* hero's resistance or, better, "resistance to resistance" during the *process,* as the driving theme of his portrayal of Keko. However, rather than setting him as a self-contained, discrete figure at the margins of society and history (recall the phrases "psychopath" and "orphan boys" in the quotations above), he emplotted Keko and his dilemmas and ambiguities within a too ordinary everyday domain of the *process*.

THE STORY OF *QIRIX*

Qırıx is set in any familiar Suriçi quarter in Diyarbakır with its narrow alleys,

[107] The only other definable group to form part of *Özgür Gündem*'s readership in this period was limited numbers of leftist activist and intellectuals in metropolitan Turkey who were in solidarity with the Kurdish movement at some distance.

homosocial coffeehouses, and city walls. Its characters bear a close similarity to the city's cultural stereotypes, and all native characters in the comics but one speaks a brazen Diyarbakırite Turkish. The story time of *Qırıx* is the immediate present, the "here and now," in Diyarbakır in the 1990s. The symmetry between the fictional time and outside reality is sustained across the comic strip's episodes by frequent references to real-time political events and agendas: A government ruling, an armed clash in the guerilla bases, a boycott or demonstration organized by ERNK,[108] the PKK's political wing, or a (Turkish) official or a (Kurdish) "national" day; like the Turkish Republic Day, the Kurdish New Year, Newroz, or the anniversary of PKK's foundation on August 15. The Turkish state exists in *Qırıx* with all its sovereign institutions and capacity of intimidation, yet with its grandeur consumed in the breath of two letters; as "T.C.," for Türkiye Cumhuriyeti, the Republic of Turkey. Alongside this are the multiplied ideographs of the *process*; *Özgür Gündem,* "Kurdistan," "ERNK," "patriotic," "establishment," "revolution," "feudal," "lumpen," "guerilla," "dilemma," "contradiction," "perspective," "objective conditions," and "subjective circumstances."

Qırıx's narrative center of gravity is Keko; hence the strip's name. But this eponymy between the work and its main protagonist also belies its multiple significations from the outset: Each character in *Qırıx* brings to the surface a different dimension of Keko's ambiguities vis-à-vis the terms and principles of the *process*, while also giving life to *Qırıx* through multiple ways of being in the *process*. Humor is wielded in *Qırıx* with a parodic intercepting of the traditional and the ordinary with the political. My use

[108] Eniya Rizgariya Netewayi Kurdistan [National Liberation Front of Kurdistan].

of parody here builds upon Giorgio Agamben's (2007) discussion of it as a form of telling that builds on an out-of-place split inserted into the very activity of narration. *Qırıx* pursues this strategy both in its character composition and event development while keeping up a systematic split between the situations in which it portrays the characters and the corpus of significations that it entrusts to their use to interpret and act upon these situations. Below is the story of *Qırıx*.

Keko is an empathetically portrayed stereotypical *qirix* with his social background, practices, and expressivities. Meticulously dressed with a jacket draped over his shoulders, heels of his shoes smashed in as he walks, a *sator* (butcher's *cleaver*) hidden on the right side of his torso and rolling a rosary in his hands, he would like to perform roles of supervisor of justice, social extractor, and moral protector of the streets. This is the reason he has long been a frequenter of the police stations as a common criminal, and hence also his big fear of the police. Keko is perennially unemployed with few prospects and no apparent plan to find a job, unless one counts the idea of running a coffeehouse or selling lamb-liver kebabs sometime in the future a proper plan. As of now, he is totally dependent on his humbly surviving family to get by, but at the same time he is also particular about his claim to fame for masculine prodigality in the world of men. If what distinguishes a man is having style also in his joy and sorrow, Keko is also a heavy wine drinker, a most loyal consumer of Marlboros (the most expensive cigarette brand available), a folk dance genius, and the virtuoso of unrequited platonic love. (Figure 4.2). The name of his beloved is Leyla. She is a typical urbanite college girl from the next neighborhood and Keko calls her "davam" ("my cause").

Figure 4.2: Keko, the Qirix
At a wedding Keko performs a folk dance whose moves he had studiously rehearsed in advance. Spectators' comments read: "Spectacular moves", "Excellent", "How aesthetic"," Folklore genius".

Were the objective circumstances conducive, Keko would not have wanted more as a daily routine than to supervise the social order in the coffeehouse where he hangs out with his *qırıx* buddy Çeto starting at dawn by punishing nonconformists on the streets, then chasing Leyla on her way from home to college, and after all is done, playing checkers with Çeto at the coffeehouse or sharing with him a bottle of wine, albeit a cheap one, inside the lush Hewsel gardens or beneath the tranquil city walls of Diyarbakır. Alas! Since the *process* started changing the dynamics of fighting on the streets, the circumstances became quite unfavorable for him to do as was his wont. What is worse is that since then, Keko's fickle heart has fallen for a new "cause": He wants to "hang out a little as *siyasi* [political by nature]."[109] (Figure 4.3)

[109] "Siyasi" literally translates as "political." I prefer using the original term because "siyasi" does not have any connotation of calculation or manipulation that comes with "political." It univocally means, "pertaining to politics."

Figure 4.3: An Existential Dilemma
I. Keko chases Leyla.
II. I have had too much fun. Let me hang out a little as *siyasi*.
III. Keko chasing a (Turkish) officer's son dreaming of punishment with his sator.

So Keko makes *siyasi* friends, starts reading *Özgür Gündem* and charges himself with leading the political transformation of his coffeehouse and family. Yet being *siyasi* is nothing like chasing Leyla, platonically and without reciprocity. First, one has to be ready to take the full brunt of the state. Keko is very much scared of the state. Second, "being *siyasi*" demands a full time commitment in one's words and deeds. Keko simply wants to have it both ways; he wants to remain a *qırıx* and "be *siyasi* a little bit." This is a plain contradiction in terms, and would be quite dangerous. As they say, "He who cannot take sides is in a fix."[110] Thus, the more Keko fails to choose between "being *qırıx"* and conforming to the requirements of "being *siyasi*," the more he becomes physically and socially vulnerable.

Qırıx is a close-up on this emergent crisis in Keko's life that builds on his desire for being "a little *siyasi qırıx*." The story revolves around how in this attempt Keko

[110] This is the translation of a Turkish proverb that reads: "Taraf olmayan bertaraf olur."

constantly navigates between the contradictory languages, practices, and identifying symbolisms of "being a *qırıx*" and "being *siyasi*" according to changing sources of opportunity and threat as he moves across the streets, the coffeehouse, between his *qırıx* and *siyasi* friends and his home during the *process.* There are many characters in *Qırıx* located across the sites that make up Keko's social universe. There is Çeto and Leyla, who have already been mentioned as the protagonists of Keko's usual *qırıx* life. There are secondary *qırıx* in the story. There are also, of course, the "gestapo" police and soldiers. Finally, there are a few of those whom Keko calls "the student-minded," who are very thrilled that Diyarbakır "feels like the France of Resistance and we are the resistance fighters." But of all these characters a few stand out with the intensity of their role in shaping Keko's life and experiences within the *process*.

One of these characters is Siyasi Abi (literally "Political Elder Brother"), who is the most stable indicator of the revolutionary *process* in *Qırıx*, and also of Keko's irreducible ambiguity within and to it. Another is Ramazan Usta, a sheltering yet also opportunist *bazaari* who runs the coffeehouse that figures in *Qırıx* as the main public site, save the partitioned streets, of everyday social and political encounters. Family emerges in *Qırıx* as the site where the ordinary articulates with the political in the most gaily dynamic and contradictory ways, and all other characters of significance in *Qırıx* are Keko's family members: His primary school age siblings Quto and Eyşo who are both enchanted by the *process*, his politically antagonist father whom all the kids call "the police at home," and his mother who would curse the PKK in her children's presence to protect them from the dangers of political involvement while building for herself a

serious career among her neighbors as the primary agit-propagandist of the PKK. All these characters and their relationships pass into one another across the street, the coffeehouse, and home over the course of *Qırıx*'s episodes. However, there are also different leitmotifs that drive Keko's relationships with each of these characters and complete the trajectory of the story.

Let us first consider the streets where Keko is the most visible in his familiar *qırıx* life with Çeto and Leyla; or, better, where the difficulty for him in remaining a typical *qırıx* is starkly visible during the *process*. On the streets, there is first the problem of constant police presence. Keko does not even need to do anything anymore to agitate the police, because the police are always already agitated in the *process*. They perceive every moving thing to be a "terrorist" and try to take all movement down with constant ID checks and generalized violence. These checks scare everyone, but more so Keko because he is absent without leave (AWOL). Every possibility of being detained carries in it the danger of him being presented to the Turkish army to perform his compulsory military service.[111] The impending police prosecution has an additional "incredibly destructive effect on Keko," who, as Çeto suggests, "has made it a part of his character to distribute justice in this city." Motivated by a primary instinct for survival, Keko cannot confront the Turkish army even when its officers' sons beat up his brother Quto, let alone cope when the police harass people in what used to be his turf.

Keko has to navigate his way on the streets not only with the police, however, but also the full-time *siyasi*. On the rare occasions when Keko manages to outwit the police,

[111] Military service is compulsory in Turkey for all men twenty years old and above.

he then has to confront an interdiction by a revolutionary *siyasi* or sympathizer for being a “dodger” of the national (PKK) military service that awaits him on this side. More often when Keko manages to fix an occasion to carry out his street fights for justice or honor away from the police, he comes across those who invite him to leave behind feudal-lumpen aggressiveness for the revolutionary line. Keko and Çeto always have to hide their drinking escapades from the revolutionaries, for whom such indulgence also indicates a lumpen deviance. If they manage to outwit the revolutionaries in pursuit of some alcoholic solace, they often find their leisure spots zoned off by the police or the army. This is the reason Keko has largely become a shadow fighter on the streets with Çeto, and is constantly on the run (Figure 4.4).

For all the dangers that they breed, however, the streets are also the main stimulants for the growth of Keko’s political consciousness. If, for instance, the police beat Keko for fighting with another *qırıx* in the middle of the night over some petty “sugar in the tea” issue, Keko knows that “the State has been reduced to its institutions of force. What is left of Kemalism is only its violent face…” Coming across a

Figure 4.4: Scarface
I.Fresh out of a street fight, Keko strolls proudly showing of his scar. II. (Upon noticing Siyasi Abi passing by) Oops! Si..Si..Siyasi… III.(Taking refuge behind a tree) Good Lord!..What a pain is having to hide the scar that I had acquired with such effort. Whereas once upon a time…

schoolboy in tight jeans and punk-styled hair, Keko and Çeto now recognize that the boy's "petty-bourgeois tendencies" are not because he is corrupt, but because "he is a victim of T.C.'s politics of corruption as a weapon of warfare." More than anything or anyone else, it is his changing experiences with Leyla that give Keko's political consciousness a sufficient maturity in the public eye. If, say, a Turkish officer starts chasing Leyla and Keko cannot dare to confront him, he inescapably understands how "it is truly a fact that unless one's country is liberated, one's honor cannot be protected." Other times, the desire to impress Leyla with new sources of masculine charm turns Keko into an implacable political agent. When, for instance, he is seen by Leyla while being slandered by a police officer who calls him a "Savage, vagabond!" Keko will not disappoint the aggressor as to his true identity: "No Savage, no vagabond!" he will shout back at him, "A Kurd is what I am!" Other times, he would hold a copy of *Özgür Gündem* out in the open while chasing Leyla although "it is too dangerous… the State or counter-guerrilla may show up at any moment." It is not that Leyla cares about any of these because she believes they are "all a shameless pretention to impress her." But Keko does not lose faith in the power of his *siyasi* charm to attract Leyla, even though he himself spends most of his time trying to escape the dangers invoked by that same charm.

The closest *siyasi* around is Siyasi Abi. Siyasi Abi is a militant, probably an ERNK cardre, who does popular front organizing in Keko's neighborhood. He is a respected and even-tempered man of reason in his thirties with thick eyeglasses and a stereotypically large leftist moustache. Besides these, his only other distinguishing trait is his being totally bereft of contradiction. It may be a sign of this intactness that he is also

the only Kurdish character to speak a flawless Turkish in the comic strip. Even in that language Siyasi Abi does not talk much, and rarely does he offer any political discourse. This is because Siyasi Abi's significance in *Qırıx* does not lie in what he tells. His presence "here and now" is enough for the emergence of revolutionary truths over the surface of others' words and deeds, Keko's in the first place. Keko and Siyasi Abi frequently meet on the streets or at Ramazan Usta's coffeehouse. Keko holds Siyasi Abi in deep respect and affection, so much that one day he beats a guy up in the coffeehouse when he unknowingly sits on Siyasi Abi's usual chair when the latter was under detention. But whenever Siyasi Abi is around, Keko is also the most pained. Siyasi Abi would like Keko to attain proper political subjectivity but Keko's "habitat is not at all congruent with the political line."[112]

So Siyasi Abi gives Keko "political books," yet Keko cannot read any of them beyond eighteen pages, no matter how hard he tries. Keko smokes Maltepe, the cheapest cigarette brand, and plays chess, "like all special people do these days," when Siyasi Abi is around only to change them with Marlboro and checkers in his absence. If Siyasi Abi asks Keko to punish police informants, Keko consents. But because he would not dare speak of the political essence of his act, not only would he would invent an excuse of "honor infringement" when beating up the culprits, but he would also use his lumpen *sator* to carry out the task (though Siyasi Abi had asked him long ago to drop it). Keko

[112] I borrow this statement from an interview that I conducted with a *şehir çocuğu* during my fieldwork. Diyarbakır, September 2007.

Figure 4.5: Pedagogical Revolutionarism
Oh! The books that Siyasi Abi had given me to read!.. They are all here… How many there are! Oh! A lot…A lot… Hundredsof pages…Thousands of paragraphs…. Tens thousands of…

would also gird himself with his *sator* to protect *Özgür Gündem* distributors against possible counterguerilla attacks on the streets, without any request made by Siyasi Abi for such an act of bravery. Yet, if Siyasi Abi asks Keko to host PKK militia men in his home, Keko will body search them to make sure they do not have any illegal belongings or blindfold them on the way home, like he did with Feyzo, as he is scared that police may be driven toward his home if PKK militias visit often. Keko would never want to let affronts to honor go unpunished if, say, Leyla or the daughters of a certain Aunt Makbule are harassed by street vagabonds. But if Siyasi Abi criticizes "fighting over women in these times," Keko would feign innocence and assure him in that "it will not happen again as our people are getting more aware." Using politically correct language always has purchase for manipulating Siyasi Abi for good or bad. Once, for instance, Keko tells Siyasi Abi that he is taking off with Çeto "for seeing a play in the Culture Center," when

in fact the two buddies were planning to have a drink somewhere. Another time he tries to convince Siyasi Abi to join in a soccer match in the neighborhood by telling him about the "classed dimensions of this match." But even if Keko tries to evade Siyasi Abi at every other moment, he can neither escape his influence upon him nor can dare forfeit his recognition. That is why if Keko's every step toward Siyasi Abi involves two steps backward from what he represents, all his evasions of Siyasi Abi also wind up being circumvented by his field of influence. (Figure 4.5)

Driving Keko's relationship with Ramazan Usta are other dimensions of Keko's life as "a little siyasi *qırıx*" within the *process.* At one point Ramazan Usta is a person whose life has recently been incredibly burdened with the turning of his café into a meeting spot for the police, soldiers, political militants, sympthatizers, *qırıx*, and others; and all at once. Ramazan Usta never sells out his political customers to the police. His role in the *process* actually goes beyond this. As he put it once in talking to himself after being patronizingly put to task for some political issue first by Siyasi Abi, then Keko and Quto, "No one would be able to do any fucking politics were it not for me." At another point Ramazan Usta is a typical highly crafty *bazaari* who knows how to manage relationships in order to minimize risks and maximize returns. For instance, if he would not dare charge the police for tea, he would immediately compensate for the disturbance this gesture would cause other customers by treating them to better "smuggled tea" while complaining of the sore throat he got from having to drink that "crummy Turkish tea" in the officers' presence. Or if he dares to bill the police in a way theatrical enough that others would notice, he would be thinking how this brave gesture would make it easy for

him to “raise the tea prices without popular opposition.” On a day of political demonstrations, like the Newroz (New Year) celebrations, when neither the *siyasi* nor the police or soldiers show up, Ramazan Usta is relieved to “get back the coffee-house of [his] dreams.” At other times he cannot help dreaming about the fortune that this war has brought him as the coffeehouse overflows with increased numbers of the displaced rural people.

Of everyone Ramazan Usta has to manage in this process, perhaps the most difficult is Keko. He both forces Ramazan Usta to be an accomplice of his *qırıx* underground and opts for being Ramazan Usta’s Archangel for revolutionary revelation. While he counts on Ramazan Usta to hide his and Çeto’s wine jugs from Siyasi Abi, or to shield his whereabouts from revolutionary militias when necessary, or simply to shelter inside the coffeehouse when violence escalates on the streets, Keko also becomes the most astute critic when it comes to exposing the latter’s political opportunism and ambiguity. For instance, if Ramazan Usta’s dreams of “being made rich by T.C. out of this war” are not thwarted by intermittent catastrophes like the ruin of all the café’s tables and chairs by an unexplainable rain on a sunny Sunday morning, or the sudden bombing of the coffeehouse, Keko becomes the one to enforce the truths of the *process* on him by pointing to his “objective complicity with the war” by way of his *bazari* position. Whenever Ramazan Usta tries to keep the police calm with freshly brewed tea, Keko

Figure 4 .6: The Men with Moustache
(In the Coffee House)
Keko: Damn it! We are sitting right next to the police. And we have been taking about the *process* for the past one hour. Çeto: On top of it… Many *siyasi* passed by us; and they all had moustaches.Keko: We have to get rid of the pall of suspicion over our table. Ramazan Usta!
Ramazan Usta: See who is gambling! I am sure they have a valid reason.

organizes the coffeehouse against him to voice the "needs" or "sensibilities of my people." If once he would have Ramazan Usta let him gamble at the coffeehouse so that "the *siyasi* pall" over his table would dissipate, yet another time he would accuse Ramazan Usta of having no respect for "political agency," when the latter asks him to read his "political books" in the closed section reserved for hiding gamblers in case of a police raid (Figure 4.6).No matter how ambiguous Keko is about talking the talk and walking the walk of the *process* in public, he is consistent in posing *siyasi* militancy toward his family members. Yet if the *process* destabilizes Keko's presence and power on the streets, it hits him even worse on the home front. The biggest blows to Keko's standing and authority here come from his siblings Quto and Eyşo. Quto, as his name suggests, is a tiny boy (in fact, he is so tiny that Mother does not let him bathe on his own). He is Keko's copycat in some respects, as in his affection for smoking and cowing

strangers to the neighborhood. Yet that is as far as the resemblance goes. Born right into the *process*, Quto does not have any of Keko's political ambiguities. Quto is a full-time militia of the *process*. He attends school only for the purposes of political activity such as enforcing ERNK's boycotts, forcing other kids to escape the official flag ceremonies, or for writing the graffiti "Biji Kurdistan" ("Long live Kurdistan"). He finally "succeeds in making his primary school *siyasi*," which he realizes with much excitement when one day the police occupy it like *siyasi* high schools. (Figure 4.7) If he is not at school, he is working as a street vendor to contribute to the family budget instead of the unemployed Keko, Quto refuses to sell water or watermelon seeds to the police or pees into their teacups before serving them if he is helping Ramazan Usta at the coffeehouse. On the days when *Özgür Gündem* is banned in Diyarbakır (in real-time) Quto drives the police mad by selling the daily's older editions on the streets. Quto's unforgiving attitude toward the establishment is so unblemished that he even resorts to charging his father with being a "feudal police collaborator," when one day the latter talks him out of risking detention.

Figure 4.7: Quto
I have succeeded! Finally, I have made it! My activities at school have started to bear fruit. Ours is also a *siyasi* [school] now!

Such firm revolutionary commitment and resourcefulness earns Quto a well-deserved public respect, which becomes the main source of Keko's shattered sense of self- and social-worth For example, once Siyasi Abi and Çeto go the police station when they hear "Keko was detained for a political activity" only to find Quto coming out of the building with his right hand raised with a victory sign, while Keko follows him behind, head lowered, for he was also detained, but in connection with a common crime. Another time, Keko's dream of showing off at the coffeehouse with traces of blood on his head from a street-fight turns into a nightmare when he finds others immersed in listening to Quto's story of how he was beaten by the police. The fact of the matter is that in the new world of manhood in Diyarbakır, social respectability is no longer based upon how one beats up others, but upon why one fights, and gets beaten in the process. Even Keko cannot escape the fact that he is no longer able to maintain a legacy even through his own brother: As one day he tells Çeto in tears after the buddies are abandoned by Quto who rejects their offer to "step into the world of adults" by joining their wine-and-dine ritual, "Nothing will ever be the same because of this slut *process*." The foregone symbols of his masculine prowess shall only bring pain and humiliation for Keko. (Figure 4.8)

The youngest, Eyşo, is no more comforting. Like Quto, Eyşo is a dedicated member of the revolutionary front. At school, she is a diligent disciple of her younger brother who has taught her how to escape the flag ceremonies on the very first day. The rest comes habitually: when the strategy of being late to school to eschew the morning oath-taking ceremony becomes unviable when noticed by her teacher, she has the school watchman let her inside the school building at dawn. She refuses to do any homework

Figure 4.8: Disclamations
Keko: Nothing will ever be the same because of this slut *process*… How proud I was when my elder brother first invited me to participate in this.

assigned about Atatürk, the founder of Turkish Republic, despite this stubbornness resulting in beatings by her teacher and parents. Keko could have even taken pride in his sister's public activism, had she not played soccer with boys. Yet if Quto's rejection of his lumpenism gives Keko hell outside, Eyşo's objection to his "feudalism" destroys the one bit of comfort that Keko can enjoy at home. At home, Eyşo is the ultimate woman's freedom fighter created by the revolutionary moment. She may not yet have acquired the power to turn down Keko's unending demands upon her, but she excels at mobilizing her new ideals by shredding Keko's political façade at every chance. Once Keko orders her to make his tea, iron his jacket, and prepare his food while at the same time forcing himself to read the book *Kadin Sorunu Uzerine* (*On The Woman's Question*) at Siyasi Abi's request. As Eyşo notices what Keko is reading, she asks him with ultimate mockery, repeating a well-known revolutionary slogan: "'Women get beautiful through struggle.' You will be able to get that, right?" Eyşo can be so blunt that she does not even hesitate to pour salt on Keko's feudal wounds. As Keko is well aware, he lives in a

culture of “huge moustache-fetishism,” but he has a very sparse beard. Once, when Keko orders her to learn how to make tea and tidy his room and so forth because “these will be her jobs not his,” Eyşo joyfully mocks him by asking if he would ever tell her to bring his shaving set, forcing him to leave home out of humiliation. At other times, she would not even resort to tactics, but simply tell him to “get out!” leaving Keko perplexed that “in this topsy-turvy world, even Eyşo believes she has the right to kick me out of the house” (Figure 4.9).

Figure 4.9: Eyşo
You want a feudal male sovereignty, huh? I will fight you with your own weapon.

Such intense humiliation by his siblings, however, never discourages Keko from assuming the task of transforming his parents in line with the revolutionary agenda. Keko’s father, who “defends the state as if it were his own father,” as Keko tells it, is a conservative-religious man who is against the *process* as a matter of faith, and due to a belief in the impossibility of defeating the state with all its “tanks, mortars, soldiers and guns.” He is the only earning member of the family and firm enough to stand against his

kids' presumptuous rebelliousness, and yet, as has been implied, his home patriarchate is being shaken in tandem with the power of the bigger patriarch outside. Keko's mother, like all traditional mothers, has the primary task of "balancing the intra-familial power relations"; that is, acting as the mediator between the father and the kids. Her biggest ordinary trouble on this account is making a case for Keko's needs, particularly money, since Father regards Keko as quite lowly for being the "idle vagabond" that he is. So, for instance, if she would manipulate Father into giving Keko stipends with made-up stories of someone's son's losing his job "because the economy is so bad" or some young man's suicide attempt "because he was penniless," in Father's absence she would scold Keko for his laxness with added details about someone's son who has found a job or became rich or set up a family. As the *process* unfolds, the power relations that she needs to balance multiply, and so does her deftness at and vulnerability to manipulation.

With no change in the reasons Father disapproves of Keko in the first place, Keko declares a war against his "dictatorship at home" within the terms of the *process*: He will not "recognize these feudal relationships anymore!" He still has to gauge carefully when to fight with Father; he will do it, for example, while Father is performing daily prayer and thus cannot talk back; but definitely not after sunset, because if Keko is kicked out of the house at night, there is more danger with a bigger probability of ID checks by the police. One day Keko learns that Father had registered him on his birth certificate as being two years older than he actually was so that he could do his military service earlier. People used do this in the old days so that boys could finish with it early on and find a job and marry sooner. But that time is over, and now Keko accuses Father and Mother of

being “objective traitors” for go having done so.

Of everyone, Mother is the one who takes Keko’s *siyasi* identity most seriously. She often persuades Father to let Keko come home by threatening him that “if the police detain Keko, they will come home and find the political books.” She is usually taken in when Keko pretends *siyasi* radicalization. So, once for instance, she alarmingly steals some money from Father for Keko when she overhears him talking to himself of the need to join the guerilla: “Ohh God! It is only because of this T.C. that I live like a parasite….This is not fate; this way of life cannot be accepted. Struggle is a must… The devil says….” She misses, of course, when Keko thinks to himself “mission accomplished”: “One needs to make use of the backward structure of the institution of family.” However, Mother is also far from being helpless with Keko. Whenever the heat on the streets permits, she kicks Keko outside of the house despite “[Keko’s] proud street fight victories” at such times. Mother is the “fastest of all to deploy ‘operasyons’[113]“ against Keko’s (and Quto’s) “Ahaa, terrorist!” books given to them by Siyasi Abi. In the meantime, she even “overcomes sexual taboos,” as Keko sees it, for in her “operations she exterminates only the political books,” leaving his porn magazines and the Conan series untouched. Mother is frightened “if there comes a day when none of the nude magazines will be there and only the terrorist ones will remain.” Thus, she increases her political disciplining of Keko with other means, if she fears that Keko is getting serious. Denial of recognition is always the best strategy: At time of the general elections of 1995

[113] The Turkish word “operasyon,” unlike its English counterpart, “operation,” is a heavily militarized term.

(which the Kurdish movement boycotted in real-time), when Keko tries to convince Mother to support the boycott against "the fake-Muslim kontra-parties,[114]" she turns her back on him saying: "Go and earn a few pennies first. You can make politics later!" After Keko leaves, she rehearses his boycott propaganda almost verbatim to her neighbors, as she always does. But Keko too misses Mother's revolutionary revelations at these times. Once Mother decides to "equip [herself] politically" through a neighbor's daughter in order to convince Keko that "The period of national liberation struggles is over in the post-Cold War era. The Russian Government collapsed, now there is only America. The world is globalizing!" However at other times, "when it suits [her] interest" (as Keko says) she tries Keko with the supreme judgment of the national liberation struggle at hand to keep him away from what is in her traditional-religious world is sinful: wine. Thus, one day when Keko returns home gaily drunk, she challenges him by holding Eyşo at her side, remarking "No no!" disparagingly: "My pretentiously patriotic son violated the ban on alcohol use, huh. What a terrible contradiction, son!" (Figure 4.10)

Figure 4.10: Revelations
Mother: Does he ever mention the Kurds? They are fake Muslim *kontra* parties. The others are working only for their families! If they had had any honor they would have withdrawn. If that is it, than boycott it is! Neighbors: Yeah by Allah! Boycott!

[114] "Kontra" is a colloquial shortcut for counterguerilla.

Nevertheless, if contradiction is inescapable at home, so is a sheltering compromise inevitable. The whole family is alarmed whenever Keko forgets to take his ID with him when going outside. They, too, are up whenever Keko awakens to nightmares of being arrested by the soldiers. Even Father will compromise. On a day of heavy police siege, he comes home with *Özgür Gündem*. "What a brave gesture." Despite this, Quto is dismayed that Father risked such peril just to read out to him of "ERNK's decision to lift the boycotts in primary schools!"

If compromise is necessary at home, so would contradiction be inescapable outside: One day the police beat and humiliate Father very badly while threatening him that "he should not trust that his old age would save him." That night Keko overhears how Father angrily reacts to a state news broadcast about "seventeen terrorists who were caught dead," by saying "Get lost you rascals. All lies! This is all your doing!" Unaware of what happened earlier in the day, Keko concludes happily: "Oh my God! I guess I have succeeded in transforming my family."

In fact, Keko concludes incorrectly; yet again. Neither is Father really transformed, nor does Mother turn into a devout patriotic mother. Ramazan Usta never ceases to shelter the growth of revolutionary activity in his coffeehouse while at time same time he never gives up on his dreams of immense war profits despite intermittent catastrophes, natural or man-made. Keko, above all, never ceases to be *qırıx* in his *siyasi*-ness or *siyasi* in his *qırıx*-ness. Even when one day he finally throws his *sator* into the Tigris River, it is not because Keko turned firmly *siyasi*, but because "[the *sator*] has become too political. I mean, in a way it also lost its former innocence." Keko intends to

take it up again “when it gains its feudal-lumpen character back.”[115] Even Siyasi Abi knows that now. Never mind, though! The more the *process* rocks (their) lives in 1990s’ Diyarbakır, the better the story rolls (Figure 4.11).

Figure 4.11: Mourning for *Sator*

I. As if it wasn’t enough that it irritated my patriotic people by assuming a counterrevolutionary guise.
II. II. Now, with the revolutionary identity that it has earned, it has attracted the hatred of T.C.
III. III. It has become too political… I mean, in a sense, it has lost its former innocence… It has been contaminated…
IV. IV. It would be better also for me if it stays in the waters of the Tigris until it regains its feudal-lumpen character.

[115] This particular episode referenced to the Turkish Hezbollah’s use of *sator* in most of the around a thousand murders it carried out against PKK members or sympathizers (See Chapter II). The PKK always opposed the symbolism and use of *sator*; yet it could not control its use in random acts of retaliation.

CONCLUSION

What was *Qırıx* telling us then about the lived social temporality of the 1990s in Diyarbakır by allowing its protagonists to continually misappropriate its sacred truth of the *process* with suspicious interpretations to dubious ends; by having its readers witness a *qirix's* mourning for his *sator* while criticizing the contamination wrought upon its becoming "too political"?

Perhaps the point to start with is the constitutive structure of the *process* in *Qırıx,* starting with what the comic strip made of Keko's *qırıx*ness. The idiom *qırıx,* as I suggested*,* primarily represents a social masculine type. Yet as Keko moves across *Qırıx*'s episodes, the eponymy acquires a surplus meaning: it becomes the name for the organizing principle of Keko's political subjectivity. This is an irreducibly split subjectivity that cannot be fixed a priori. Keko remains consistently *qırıx* in *Qırıx*, that is, consistently inconsistent in his relationship to the terms and principles of the national-revolutionary struggle. Yet through this strange consistency he occupies an inconsistent multiplicity of subject positions in the *process* that shifts from him being an "opportunist" to a "wise fool," from a "trickster" to a "hero," from a "victim of police violence" to a "victim of vanguard bigotry," from being "naïve" to being "leery," back and forth across the sites and relationships that make up his social existence.

However, Keko's split subjectivity is not unique. It is but the determining feature of most everyday subjectivities and situations. Of all the adult characters in the story it is only Siyasi Abi, who stands for the logos of the *process*, whose words and deeds are self-proximate. If Quto and Eyşo are also bearers of such integrity in what they say and do, then the split is ingrained in their very existence; in the contradiction that they embody as

revolutionaries who lack reflective faculty by virtue of being children. All the other characters-including those to whom this chapter could not do justice- cite the language of the *process* arbitrarily as they live their ordinary lives. At a different level, *Qırıx*'s subjects depend on these arbitrary engagements simply in order to secure daily physical and social survival because there remains little ordinariness to inhabit in this violently disrupted emergency space, be it within the family, among friends, or in the streets.

Being split is, thus, also the quality of everydayness in *Qırıx*. It is important to note, however, that the "splitness" of the everyday is not limited to the words and deeds of actors, but involves also a generalized disjuncture between the practices that bring it to life and the knowledge and effects of those practices. To put it differently, if the everyday provides in *Qırıx* a zone where the actors evade the state as well as the logos of the *process*, it also features as a zone which escapes the logic of its actors. No matter how Keko and others evade the orders and confuse the borders in their everyday conducts, they rarely can control the results of their actions. In fact, it is the contradiction between political (instrumental) reason and the political-effect that provides continuity across *Qırıx*'s episodes. An evasive action more likely ends up turning its owner into an agent of the *process,* or a principled dialogue with the *process* fails to produce politically desirable results. 'Reason' and 'action' also articulate contradictorily in the formation of political (*siyasi*) agency for the latter feeds on multiple factors that diminish ideological or moral commitment to the level of insignificance.[116] Specifically, it feeds on the desires for and pleasures of social recognition or on the promise of being *siyasi* as being something out

[116] My discussion here presupposes an understanding of (political) agency as an "end-effect" of embodied and situated practices rather "residing" in moral subjects (Butler 1990).

of the ordinary.

What kind of a *process* story is this, then, which encounters life in a continual split between surface and depth, the part and the whole? If such split was *the* definition of *qırıx* in the first place, then *Qırıx* is the story of an intrinsically *qırıx process*. One of the series' episodes casts a naïve teenager, a side character, as profoundly confused upon seeing Siyasi Abi and Keko walking together on the street. He says: "If I hang out with Keko, my homefolk object. They say he is a *sator*-monger, a *qırıx*. Very dangerous. They are also against Siyasi Abi. They say he is dangerous, too. He would dupe me and send me off to the mountains. One should not hang out with this one, either. But how come these two are always together? I cannot understand. Oh, what a strange time!" The *process* is in fact "a strange time" in *Qırıx* inhabited at the convergence of determinacy and ambiguity; thus ambiguous throughout (Figure 4.12)

Figure 4.12: A *Qirix* Process
But how come these two are always together?
I don't understand. Oh, what a weird time!

That is to say, all in all, *Qırıx* brings back to the center of the social time of revolution that which was supposed to attest the unfolding of revolutionary time only by (its) negation. This humorous split that it opened in formal Kurdish national discourse is, undoubtedly, deeply destabilizing of the latter's capacity to represent given and immutable "truth" both in and of itself and with respect to the totality of individual and social experiences in the 1990s Diyarbakır, that is, in the "city of struggle" and, possibly, across the Turkish Kurdistan. I suggest that subsuming this work of unmasking under a framework of truth-oriented counter-discursive exposure would both be reductionist and unanswerable to comic strip's own truth-effects. It would be reductionist because I argue that what *Qırıx* brings to presence is something much beyond the 'suppressed' or 'silenced' "others" of the revolutionary discourse. What it reveals at large is that the prefigurative terms of this discourse were chronically deficient for addressing the formation of "us" and "here" of the Kurdish struggle of the time.[117] It reveals, perhaps more significantly, that the facticity of "revolution" or "struggle" in this time-space lay not in the ideological truths that sought to transform life collectively. It rather lay in the practical everyday actions that effected transformations in life through the myriad subjective appropriations of those truths. In this sense, if *Qırıx's* critical work needs to be thought in relation to "truth" at all, then, I suggest, it is better perceived as a mode-of-truth making whose power and significance lies less in how it "destroyed the secrets" of the Kurdish struggle than in the ways in which it brought to light those experiences which

[117] In a way this failure to own the knowledge of its experience is a structural quality of discursive thought in general, especially in times of radical transformation. Michael Holquist remarks (1984: xiv): "It is in the nature of revolutions that no one can be an experienced citizen of the new order they bring into being. Those who fought for change, as well as those who resisted it..."

structured this process secretly, from the underground.[118] Otherwise, there would be little ground to address how a work of parodic fiction came to stand for the "real" of "our life" or "our struggle" among the political Kurdish community, as I argued earlier. With this in mind, let me conclude, then, with a few points that I believe may help in making sense of the production and sense of a "struggling collectivity".

The first, and perhaps the most obvious, point relates to the possibility that *Qırıx*'s parodic split sustained an opening up to sustain the project of counter-hegemony against the Turkish state by proliferating resistance and the fantasy of resistance beyond the limits of serious (as opposed to humorous) discourse and thought. *Qırıx* did this through the power of punning and absurdity: that is, by calling the state T.C., casting the refusal to drink "crummy Turkish tea" as revolutionary patriotic resistance, refusing to love Atatürk, selling *Özgür Gündem* on the streets on the days when it was banned in Diyarbakır, and peeing into the teacups of the police. What such representations offered was not only a textual desecration of state symbols, but an affective surplus which promised to demystify the state and its intimidating capacity by releasing the readers from the pietism of commonsense and the demands of rational thought.

The second point relates to how the performative reiteration of the terms and symbols of the *process* intensifed the presence of political truth in language and social life; and helped further the semiotic and affective interpellation, through what Achille Mbembe (2001: 165) calls "the interface of fantasy and lack of fulfillment." At one point

[118] I have in mind Micheal Taussig's discussion of Walter Benjamin's reading of Plato's *Symposium* in formulating this suggestion. Taussig says (1999: 2): "Truth is not a matter of exposure which destroys the secret, but a revelation which does justice to it."

it matters less what the protagonists of the story were doing with these signs, how they inverted or subverted them in their individual modes of appropriation. What matters more is that the capacity of political truth to have a say in the world of phenomena was multiplied by being inserted into the most ordinary modes of signification. If parodic cutting destabilized the claim of the revolutionary discourse to command the absolute truth, then in so doing it extended the reach of the same discourse into the minute details of everyday practice as an inescapable judgment. *Qırıx*'s reiterations had quite real-time effects among the political Kurdish community of the 1990s' Diyarbakır: Eyşo provided, for instance, the voice for dealing with real time *keko*s, and Marlboro use sank into the social underground.

Finally, I would like to point to the surplus this parodic split released in itself. "Something so strange emanates from the wound of sacrilege wrought by desecration," remarks Michael Taussig (1999: 2-3), the defaced object acquires "its greatest illuminating power." Akin to the philosophy of Dada cinema, this is because " 'it is the cut as the montage principle that makes the energy in the system visible and active." I believe that it was at this point, more than anywhere else, that *Qırıx* provided a source of energy to the Kurdish struggle. While cutting through the *process* with a structuring ambiguity, it was able to recuperate ambiguity itself as a resource for struggle and a zone of inhabiting it rather than posing it as a point of disruption or a point blank. Perhaps, therein, lay the "magic" of *Qırıx* for what Keko would call, its "siyasi" readership. It gave them a space, in a place of multiple emergencies, to face their experiences and realities in the plain contradictoriness of "our life." This meant a space for them to be able to laugh

while looking at themselves falling into a mirror, of not being mesmerized by their "wound" (Kurdishness) or scared and ashamed of their scars (being not-quite correctly so). It meant also a space to keep an openness to recognizing their loss at moments when they thought that they had succeeded the most: when primary school boys finally "succeeded" in making their schools *siyasi*, when religious mothers had to overcome their "sexual taboos," when conservative fathers came only to realize the truth of the state through the pain of torture, or when the *qırıx* finally dropped their *sators* into the river.

Do not drink water inside the Citadel, friends,
Beware, blood flows from its fountains
Bedros Dağlıyan (2011)

Conclusion: Of Stones and Bones

İç Kale, the Citadel, is located on the northeast arteries of the walls of Diyarbakır. This is where the city was originally built, some seven thousands years ago according to archeological findings, and it was fortified in 330 AD by the Roman Emperor Constantine as a frontier military station in Roman-Sassanid rivalry. Throughout centuries of successive Arab, Kurdish, Turcoman, Persian and Ottoman rules, the Citadel remained as the city's administrative center. In 1880, when a separate Governor's Office was built outside the walls, it was turned into a military-court-prison complex (Reclus 1891: 219, Blair 2000: 492).

The Citadel remained in that use until the end of the 1990s. It was in the middle of *şehir*, between Fiskaya and Saraykapı. Yet, surrounded by armored vehicles, military jeeps and prison transit cars, and guarded by armed gendarmes, it was a country on its own. Officially, it was where the Provincial Palace of Justice and women and juvenile prisons were located. On the ground, the Citadel was also the headquarters of Gendarmerie Intelligence and Counter-Terrorism (JITEM). As such, it was the black hole of the 1990s' counter-guerilla warfare. Hundreds of Kurdish politicians, activists, human rights advocates or other civilians were seen taken to there, mostly in a white Taurus brand car, and were never seen again.

In the spring of 2000, I was a researcher at the Human Rights Foundation of Turkey in Ankara, the capital city of Turkey. I was working on a story of "the white

Taurus" based on testimonies of those who had lost relatives in unidentified JITEM murders, when the news hit the papers that the Gendarme surveillance tower overseeing Fiskaya was demolished as a first step of the evacuation of the Citadel. It was a symbolically significant event. In the following days, crowds of Diyarbakırites poured into Fiskaya to see the debris of it. Many were photographed picking up one heavy stone from the debris only for throwing it to a few feet away as their own way of taking part in the demolition.

Later, in 2000, the Turkish Ministry of Culture announced a built heritage preservation initiative, namely "The Diyarbakır Walls and the Citadel Protection Project," under the joint supervisions of the (State) Council for the Protection of the Artifacts of Culture and Nature and a Turkish NGO (Foundation for the Protection of Environment and Cultural Life - ÇEKÜL). The aim of this project was to "protect historical artifacts from the various risks and reclaim them for tourism." Soon, the Diyarbakır Metropolitan Municipality, then run by the pro-Kurdish HADEP, also became a partner of the project. Matters and artifacts of "history" and "culture" were obviously too significant to let the Kurds have a say in their reconstruction or protection inside the Citadel. Thus, Municipality's authority was limited to clearing the Citadel's surrounding from "harmful" and "unqualified" constructions outside of it. And yet the Municipality took the most active part in the promotion of this project as a means to influence its course vis-à-vis its own visions of reconstruction.

The original project was expanded into a more comprehensive one in 2004; the Citadel Museum Project. Devised with a "vision of making the Citadel an archeological

museum of world standards", the goal was to transmit a heritage of humanity that had the character of a world heritage to future generations, help to develop research "on history of Turkey and the world"… and raise the consciousness of protecting cultural artifacts, and promote "Diyarbakır's capacity as a center of cultural tourism." With this project, the historical-cultural inventory of the Citadel was also made public: The Viran Kale Mound from the sixth century B.C., a Roman bath and amphitheater, an Artukid (Turkoman) Palace, the Saint George Church from the third century A.D., a *caravaransarai, and* the like.

*

I first peeked at the interiors of the Citadel while watching *The Mystery of Stones* documentary, which I described in the Introduction. Early during my fieldwork, I also visited the site once. It was dark, deep and empty. The emptiness of crumbling stone buildings exacerbated its darkness and void. On the two buildings facing one another at either sides of the main the square were the still hanging plates "Ceza ve Tevkif Evi" (Punishment and Arrest House) and "Adliye" (Courthouse). Truth be told, I would have wished both plates be preserved there forever, but obviously that was not going to be the case. Those two buildings were parts of the JITEM complex. According to the project, the first one, which had originally been constructed as n Artukid *caravanserai,* was going to be restored as the "Museum Exhibition Building" and the second one as the "Excavation Artifacts Exhibition Building." The third component of this complex, the Army Corps Headquarter, was going to be the "Museum Education Unit and Café-Restaurant." I did not stay there for long.

During my fieldwork, I passed by the Citadel many times while walking around the walls, and one time with Layê Diz. It suddenly occurred to me that I had asked many people about their notions of *sur* and *beden*, but not to him. “Why I have not heard of the word *sur* from you? One would have used it even for once for Allah’s sake,” I said, teasingly. “That stone and church stuff you do with your friends, I told you. *Sur* does work for me,” he said and continued:

> You know what they say? They say Melek Ahmet Pasha (17th century Ottoman Governor of Diyarbakır) massacres fifteen thousand people as he enters the city from here. Then, he has all their dead *bedens* thrown into Tigris. Some say he does not throw them away, but has a soup made of their bones to give the city’s remaining residents as his charity. They say that is where *kelle paça* [lit. *skull and leg;* a dish][119] comes from. I don’t know. They also say this is where they played the sword game at the time of *qafle* [a local Kurdish idiom for Armenian deportations]. You have not heard of it? ... The soldiers take position beneath *beden* holding their swords upwards and people throw Armenian girls onto those swords from the tower. I don’t need to tell you about what JITEM did here and all…

I was struck by graphic cruelty of the images by which Layê Diz rendered history of the Citadel through the wisdom of “they say” there, though I should admit that I did not think these were factually true stories. But to encourage him tell more, I commented: “What wrong the poor *kelle paça* has done in here? The swords game at *qafle*… It must be a myth, right? It does not sound possible according to laws of physics... Why do you try to bleed it so hard?” “No, I am not trying it by myself,” he said back: “If the wound is deep, it needs to be bled from inside in order to cool off a bit. *Sur* does not do that for me. It is *beden* [pointing to his body] to us, need I say more?”

*

[119] *Kelle paça*, made by slow boiling cow or lamb skulls and legs, is considered a delicacy in Diyarbakirite cuisine.

Sometime after returning to Austin, I recalled this conversation upon reading some news on the Citadel Museum on the internet. A curiosity took me to look up for *kelle paça* and "sword game." What I found about the first one was ironic: Apparently, what we called *kelle paça* in Diyarbakır was a dish authentic to Armenian cuisine called *kas'h*. Thanks, I thought, this means at least that Melek Ahmet Pasha did not have any connection to it. What I ended up finding about the second one on Google archives put me down completely. It was a witness testimony published in 1917:

> In the morning when the sun was up, we saw something that made our blood run cold. This is one of the favorite sports of Chechens…There was made a long row of swords and there was a girl put between each sword and a Chechen came on horseback galloping full speed, took a girl and flung her high into the air and down on the upturned blade of the sword… (El-Ghusein 1917: 256-257)

Then, I started digging for the Citadel before the JITEM started using it:

Bulgarian revolutionaries had been incarcerated there in the 1830s.

In April 1915, the Diyarbakır Governor Mehmed Reşid of the Committee of Union and Progress locked six hundreds Armenian notables and artisans from Xançepek in there with the help of the city's Kurdish notables. When the prison got overfilled with prisoners, the caravanserai was evacuated. Every day several dozens of prisoners were locked up, and tortured to death there, as Reşid boasted in his memoir.

In 1920, Ephraim K. Jernazian, an Armenian pastor from the neighboring Urfa, was sent to there, "from where no one returned since 1915." Luck had it that, he met a Kurdish Agha in the prison distrusting the "cruel Turk" who arranged for his escape into safety.

In 1925, forty-seven leading figures of the Sheikh Said rebellion, including the Sheikh himself, were imprisoned in the citadel. Tried by the Republican Court of Independence of treason, and convicted of treason there.

…

Back to the process of digging that was underway for the Museum in the present. I found out these:

The first robot of the world was invented in the Artukid Palace.

The walls of the citadel were expanded during the Ottoman Emperor Suleiman the Great, the epigraph at the Saraykapı revealed…

The Fountain of Lion was from the 19th century. Its triangular bed had a slivered vault structure which allowed water to flow from the Lion's mouth.

In 1917, then the Commander of the Second Army, Mustafa Kemal Pasha had stayed in the building, which became Commander Atatürk Museum and Library.

The Open Air Citadel Museum was going to be named after Atatürk.

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Finally, the excavations to restore the citadel and turn it into a museum started.

On January 11, 2012, I was surfing on the Internet, this time in my home in Michigan, when I read a news titled: "Six bones were found: The excavations in the Citadel, which is under reconstruction and will be turned into an open air museum yielded six skulls."[120] It happened on the very first day of excavations at the JITEM complex. The next day the number of skulls reached eleven, and twenty-eight more

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[120] "6 Kişiye Ait Kemik Bulundu." Accesed on January 11, 2012. http://yeniyurtgazetesi.com/haber_detay.asp?haberID=3520

separate bones were found. Archeological excavation was stopped. The Office of the Public Prosecutor in Diyarbakır zoned the site for criminal investigation with a note of confidentiality. Dozens of families of "unidentified" JITEM victims applied to the Diyarbakır Office of the Human Association (HRA) to file complaints at the Prosecutor's Office to have the bones tested for identification. More bones were announced to have been found over the next few weeks. No one other than state authorities knew any detail about the bones due to the confidentiality put on the investigation. The activists kept asking questions: Whose bones were they? When did they die? In what shape were they found? Did they have any clothes on? [121] The state officials responded: "There are animal remains among them," "They were not buried according to the religious procedures,"[122] "The bones may be archeological,"[123] "We will solve the bags of bones like a puzzle and make a satisfactory explanation to everyone."[124]

As "the mystery of the stones" turned into a mystery of bones, dozens of more families applied to the HRA. "Even if it is bones, ours is seeking hope from hopelessness," told one of the applicants who could not have found any trace of his father since he had been kidnapped in a white Taurus on February 28, 1997.[125] One was

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[121] "Diyarbakır'da Faili Meçhul Kazısı: 'İğneyle Kuyu Kazıyoruz.'" Accessed on February 3, 2012. http://www.bianet.org/…35829-igneyle-kuyu-kaziyoruz

[122] "Mehmet Mehdi Eker, Diyarbakır İçkale'de İncelemelerde Bulundu!" Accessed on Jan 22, 2012. http://emlakkulisi.com/mehmet-mehdi-eker-diyarbakir-ickalede-incelemelerde-bulundu/7171

[123] 'Arkeolojik Olabilir.' Accessed on January 23, 2012. http://haber.gazetevatan.com/arkeolojik-olabilir/426340/1/Haber

[124] "Çuvallar Dolusu Kemiği Puzzle Gibi Çözeceğiz." Accessed on February 1, 2012. http://www.stargazete.com/politika/calismalari-star-a-anlatti-haber-420494.htm.

[125] http://www.ozgurgundem.com/?haberID=29684&haberBaslik=O%20karanl%C4%B1k%20d%C3%B6nem%20ayd%C4%B1nlans%C4%B1n&action=haber_detay&module=nuce

"praying that the bones belonged to [his] son," who disappeared in 1993. Another one was looking for his nineteen-year-old brother who had been taken away in a white Taurus in 1995. "Of course," he "wanted that these bones belonged to [his] brother." Still another one was looking for his father, who had last been seen one day in 1997, again in a white Taurus. He was "hoping to have at least a grave to pray over."[126]

As the number of applicant families increased, lawyers from the Diyarbakır Bar, who were among the few to have seen the citadel from inside in the 1990s, felt the need to make a statement. They said that it was very unlikely that the bones belonged to those murdered by JITEM, because the excavation spot where the bones were gushing out had been the women's prison in the 1990s. Hence they concluded that the bones had to be from a previous period. "Perhaps they were from 1925," and thus belonged to Sheikh Said and his friends, whose graves were missing, "or from 1915," and thus belonged the Armenians. "These lands have seen so much," the Chair of the Bar said, and added:

> The Viran Tepe Mound is 150-200 meters away from that spot. That is a dark spot fit to bury the unidentified murder victims… There is also a spot behind the [Saint George] Church, they should also dig there. The Citadel is founded on twelve acres of land. They should dig all of it. That place belonged to state institutions throughout history. No one can enter bury any one there [but the state]. It has always belonged to the state.[127]

Finally, the official statement came at the end of February 2012. The Institution of Forensic Medicine claimed that the bones were lying in the earth for at least one hundred

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[126] "Beni Jitemde Arayın." Accessed February 1, 2012. http://www.ozgur-gundem.com/index.php?haberID=30930&haberBaslik=BEN%C4%B0%20J%C4%B0TEM%E2%80%99DE%20ARAYIN&categoryName=Haber&categoryID=2&authorName=Taylan%20%20ESMER&authorID=174&action=haber_detay&module=nuce

[127] "Diyarbakır İçkale'de Kazı Alanı Genişletilirse Toplu Mezar Çıkabilir!" Accessed on January 29, 2012. http://emlakkulisi.com/diyarbakir-ickalede-kazi-alani-genisletilirse-toplu-mezar-cikabilir/8156.

years and some of them belonged to animals, yet they revealed no findings that would clarify the reason of death for human remains.[128] The Turkish state and media were satisfied. The families of JITEM victims returned home, although they have not withdrawn their applications to the HRA. On the contrary, the number of applicants has increased as new mass graves were found in excavations at other historical-cultural heritage sites in or around Diyarbakır. The bones found at JITEM excavations were transferred to *şehir* cemetery, where the unclaimed dead are buried. No one could claim them after the forensic report, because in order to do that one had to be able to claim blood kinship. It was highly probable that the bones were remains of the Genocide.[129]

In Diyarbakır, a city with multiple histories of violence over centuries, archeology is a risky business. The dream to turn the citadel into a museum as part of transforming Diyarbakır into an open-air museum was almost coming to realization. But the excavations revealed an opposite truth, shattering the image of Diyarbakır as an ancient city of cultures and civilizations, a cosmopolitan city of multicultural harmony, peace and tolerance. Although nobody knows for sure to whom they belonged, the bones were testimonies of a rather different history of the city. Every piece of human remains excavated was the possibility of an opening to different and scandalizing chapters of the history of Diyarbakır, not a civilizational history of a cosmopolitan and authentic city, but multiple histories of violence (and struggles for survival) that have remained invisible in

[128] Ayça Söylemez. 2012. "Bones in Mass Grave 100 Years old? Experts Doubt it..." March 1. Accessed on March 2, 2012. http://www.bianet.org/english/human-rights/136589-bones-in-mass-grave-100-years-old-experts-doubt-it.

[129] Interview with attorney Reyhan Yalçıdağ from the Diyarbakir HRA Office.

the shadow of the grandiose monumentality of city walls. Tainting the shining image of Diyarbakır, that city of culture, tolerance, harmony and peace, the bones were particularly disturbing for the state authorities in charge of the citadel project, as material traces and evidence of a history of stinking blood of deep wounds.

It was ironical how the bones and the histories they unintentionally brought to the present disrupted the continuum of history (Benjamin 1968) by deconstructing the civilizational mythology on and around the mysteries of the stones of *sur*. It was as if the bones were waiting somewhere beneath *sur* to blast at a very inconvenient time. The cultural politics of monumentalizing *sur* has relied on a particular rendition of history that selectively connects the present to the far distant past while rendering invisible or decentering the recent past that was marked by unending episodes of violence, conflict and struggle, especially over the last century. The bones were pointing to a different history of the present, one that might do better justice to those oppressed peoples and subjugated stories in the city, both in the past and in the present.

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