

UNMAKING AND REMAKING EVERDAY LIFE IN DİYARBAKIR:  
FREE SCHOOLS AS A DECOLONIZING PRACTICE

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UNMAKING AND REMAKING EVERDAY LIFE IN DİYARBAKIR:  
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## DECLARATION OF ORIGINALITY

I, Hazal Ilgaz Dölek, certify that

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## ABSTRACT

### Unmaking and Remaking Everyday Life in Diyarbakır:

#### Free Schools as a Decolonizing Practice

This thesis is grounded on my fieldwork in Diyarbakır carried out between October 2015 and April 2016. Considering the city as a space of colonial occupation, it examines the broad scale dynamics of the ongoing war as well as the unmakings and remakings of everyday life under siege. It traces the ethnographic sentiments and sensibilities of war and the intimate sites of power production and insurgency. In addition, it also focuses on the mother tongue-based education practices in one of the Free Schools. Free Schools provide a counter space where the already existing colonial ways of learning, knowing and being introduced by the Turkish education system can be decolonized. Therefore, I argue that the alternative philosophy of education they provide to struggle against the assimilationist, capitalist and patriarchal way of life is itself a decolonizing practice.

## ÖZET

Diyarbakır `da Gündelik Hayatın Harap Edilmesi ve Yeniden İnşası:

Bir Dekolonizasyon Pratiği Olarak Özgür Okullar

Bu tez Ekim 2015-Nisan 2016 tarihleri arasında Diyarbakır'da yaptığım saha araştırmama dayanmaktadır. Kenti bir sömürgeci işgal mekanı olarak düşünerek, bu tez savaşın geniş kapsamlı dinamiklerini ve işgal altında gündelik hayatın harap edilmesini ve yeniden inşasını inceler. Bununla beraber, savaşın etnografik duyarlıklarının ve iktidar ve direnişin üretildiği mahrem alanların izlerini sürer. Dahası, bu tez aynı zamanda anadil temelli eğitim pratiklerinin uygulandığı Özgür Okullardan birisine odaklanır. Özgür Okullar Türk Eğitim sisteminin beraberinde getirdiği bilme, öğrenme, ve var olma biçimlerinin özgürleştirilebileceği bir karşı alan sağlamaktadır. Bu nedenle, bu tez de Özgür Okulların asimilasyoncu, kapitalist ve ataerkil yaşam biçimine alternatif olarak sunduğu eğitim felsefesinin sömürge karşıtı bir pratik olarak görülmesi gerektiğini tartışıyorum.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

This thesis is grounded on my fieldwork in Diyarbakır carried out between October 2015 and April 2016. Considering the city as a space of colonial occupation, it examines the broad scale dynamics of the ongoing war as well as the unmakings and remakings of everyday life under siege. It traces the ethnographic sentiments and sensibilities of war and the intimate sites of power production and insurgency. In addition, it also focuses on the alternative mother tongue-based education practices under occupation. Based on my ethnography conducted in one of the Free Schools (*Dibistana Azad*), I argue that Free Schools provide a new philosophy of education alternative to the assimilationist, capitalist and patriarchal way of life structured by colonial occupation and for this very reason, should be considered as a decolonizing practice. Above all, this thesis is a call for and an attempt to raise further questions in the field, hoping to expand the conversation on neocolonialism within Kurdish studies as well as on decolonization.

#### 1.1 Methodology

In this seven-month period, I kept an ethnographic journal as detailed as possible on daily basis. I wrote down the daily conversations, encounters, the names of places as well as the geographical layout and socio-political structuring of the neighborhoods I had been, the songs, sayings and voices I heard, the numbers; how many checkpoints I had passed, how many days I was not able to go out and so on. I lived next to the Koşuyolu Park in the district of Bağlar, which usually functions as a gathering space for protests since it is only 5 minutes walking distance to the city center. The park also has a symbolic value because of the human rights monument in it, built after the

bomb explosion took place in the park in 2006. I benefited a lot from my journal throughout the thesis.

In addition, I spent the last three months of my fieldwork in one of the *Dibistana Azad* (Free Schools) where education in mother tongue (Kurmanci) has been provided for Kurdish students for the first time in Turkey. There, I used several ethnographic research methods including participant observation and conducting semi-structured in-depth interviews. I visited the school every twice a week, participated in classes including the music, painting and Zazaki courses (as secondary language). I also followed the activities took place in the school such as the Festival of Kurdish Language, school picnics and end of period activities of students.

In the past decades, there was paradigm change in the Kurdish Movement, a shift from a nation based separation model to a radical democratic form of autonomy. Free Schools, appear as the educational pillar of the *democratic autonomy*. They adopt a completely different philosophy of education than the current national education system by prioritizing gender equality, ecology, cultural differences and communal life. By the time I was in school, I tried to participate and have a sense of communal philosophy guiding the school as much as I can. So, I cooked for lunch, washed the dishes afterwards, cleaned the school together with teachers after classes and also helped preparation of school materials.

In the last month of my fieldwork, I conducted semi-structured in depth interviews with 7 of the 13 teachers. I addressed them questions related to their personal and occupational background, thoughts on the conflict and its affects on both personal and educational life as well as to Free Schools. They all stated that they didn't know Turkish when they started to the school, therefore, I also collected their

oral histories of schooling in Turkey. In addition, I also conducted interviews with the two of the representatives of the Kurdish Movement in order to gather more information on the historical and political background paved the way for Free Schools as well as the future expectations.

Lastly, I got in touch with the parents during my visits to the school in order to grasp the way they think of and imagine Free Schools. Especially in the school picnics, I had chance to chat with many of them and addressing some questions. On the other hand, many of the families had very difficult moments in trying to answer my questions such as “ How did you hear about Free Schools?” What I thought to be a very simple question turned out not to be for them. In explaining to me why they chose Free Schools, they felt a need to mention their relationship to the Kurdish Movement; how many martyrs there are in their families, who are in prison or, get lost. After one of the mothers started crying, I decided to stop addressing questions directly and just tried to wait and listen whatever they told me in the course of time. For the very similar reasons, considering how difficult living in war times has been for the children and my lack of any training on pedagogy and anthropology of children, I preferred just to play with the students. Therefore, their voice is not included in this thesis. Lastly, I cared a lot for the anonymity and safety of my informants. I did use neither names of the people, neighborhoods, and places nor mentioned personal details or physical arrangements. Contrary to many of the beautifully written ethnographies providing thick descriptions, I had to write as less detailed as possible.

## 1.2 Situating the chapters and the dynamics of the field

I grew up in an ethnically mixed Alevi neighborhood in Istanbul, where the main community bound was being Alevi. We moved out of the neighborhood when I started to middle school and, one of my friends from our ex-neighborhood kept texting me. However, I could have never fully understood the messages as they were written in semi-Turkish so, I asked my mother's help to write back. She looked at the message and said, "It is not for you". Only after five years over this "misunderstanding", I was able to make sense of the social configurations of the neighborhood I grew up and of my friend's text written in half Kurdish.

The questions raised in this thesis are actually the questions I was not able to ask myself for a long time. That's why, I have seen the writing process itself also as an opportunity to reflect on an intersecting question, how come, through which sites of making of histories and subjects, they did not appear to me as questions at all. Why is it so easily, commonly and almost self-assuredly told among Turks that "the birds have a language, the Kurds don't"?<sup>1</sup>

It would not be wrong to say that the questions of chapter 2 are born out of the encounters in my life. My first visit to Diyarbakır was to attend the Sociology Students Conference took place in 2010. In my visit, I came to realize the literature on colonial geographies I have been reading as a sociology student on far-away countries may not be that far at all. When I came back to Diyarbakır to do my fieldwork from October to April 2016, therefore, kept my trust in "encounters" and try to give them a space in my writing as well. In short, chapter 2 methodologically derived from the field encounters, my ethnographic journal, literature review of the theories on power and violence from colonial/postcolonial critiques as well as a brief

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<sup>1</sup> The original saying in Turkish is "Kuşların dili var, Kürtlerin yok".

media monitoring. By field encounters, I usually mean the small chats at the grocery store, waiting in the queues, places I have been present by coincidence and the overhearing. For example, in the chapter 3, I do mention how the burst of rumors in the city provided a new source of knowledge under the rapidly changing conditions of excessive violence. The grocery store downstairs of my place was one of spots where I was able to gather those rumors.

Chapter 2 begins with a theoretical discussion on the new modalities of power in the late-modern colonial occupation. The question of how subjugation of life to death, massive destruction of people, other living beings and space and by doing so, the creation of death worlds in the modern world challenges the already existing analytical tools. To put it more fully, the fact that the power to kill and of death keep ramifying in the neocolonial geographies forces us to reconsider the contemporary theories of democracy and law as well as the notion of biopower (Mbembe, 2003). To look at the press release of one parliament of CHP (the main opposition party known as a “social democrat” one), I think gives a lot of clues on how only some groups would be included in the body politics.

This is neither Cizre nor Sirnak (referring to the districts in the Kurdish regions under curfew by the time). This is the Republican city of Artvin. I hope that not even a single person's nose would bleed in Artvin. If the people of Artvin get hurt, I am telling you, they cannot pay the price for it. They are just mixing Artvin with other cities (Bayraktutan, 2016).

He gives this speech at a protest in Artvin, while trying to prevent police intervention to the protestors. I believe, it is a very symbolic declaration of the very simple fact that the colony is distinct from metropole in the sense that, for the latter, what we see is a strong articulation of the state of emergency and the state of siege. At this point, Mbembe points out a peculiar terror formation called *necropolitics* and *necropower*

in order to identify the late-modern colonial occupation, which is a concatenation of biopower, the state of exception, and the state of siege (Mbembe, 2003).

In the first section of the chapter 2, I have tried to think the writings of Achille Mbembe (2003), Walter Benjamin (2007) and Giorgio Agamben (1998) on the politics of violence together, aiming to grasp the roots of not only the power to kill but also the violence intrinsic to modern law operating in the Kurdish regions and marking the categories of life and death. Then, the following section draws on the argument that Kurdistan is a space of colonial occupation, which indeed informs all the chapters that follow. İsmail Beşikçi, for example, would be the first person spring to one's mind who analytically discusses the particularities as well as colonial resonances of Kurdistan geography. He argues that the colonization of Kurdistan creates a different context in colony-colonialist relationship since in almost all colonial contexts there was not any attempt to transform the native population into the colonizer (Beşikçi. 2004, p. 28). Besides, I also briefly mention how the argument has been tackled in the political agenda of different political actors operating in the Kurdish regions.

After providing a closer analysis of Kurdistan as a colony, on the other hand, I move toward portraying the city of Diyarbakır and the colonial dynamics of the way it has been compartmentalized. I introduce the term *discourse of lack* to interpret in what ways “the civilizing mission” has been operating to keep the distance required for occupation and its justifications. The term actually refers all the things the southeastern part of the country thought of not to have. In Turkey, “the east” is coded as a geography of poverty, illiteracy, crowded families, making too many babies, a social life organized around the kinship relations rather than “rational individuals” of nuclear families and, feudalism. From this viewpoint, I briefly reflect



on the colonizers -who remains as a stranger- and colonized –people of whom Kurdistan lives in their the minds and hearts-, with a footnote that these categories are not just given as we tend to treat, but the different positions and dissonant voices inherent in them demands our ethnographic sensitivities (Stoler, 1989).

Moreover, throughout the second chapter, I use the terms military zone and death zone in order to portray the way Diyarbakır divided in two. The former includes the barracks, boardings for the families of soldier, teachers and bureaucrats, the office of the governor which are usually built next by or closed to each other, very well-protected with high technology cameras, riot control vehicles and armored cars and, are not open to access of the rest of the city`s inhabitants. The latter, on the other hand, refers to a hostile territory where the sovereign power can be exercised to the core as a result; no one has security of life protected by law/citizenship.

Furthermore, in the last section, I raise the questions of is this a thirty-year long war between PKK and the Turkish State or, should it be trace back to Ottoman Empire? Is it an internal war getting worse day by day? If not, is it a colonial occupation, in the sense that the war is not in this country (in Turkey) but somewhere else (in its colony) as much as the Algerian war did not take place in France (Benlisoy, 2015). Considering the theoretical framework of this thesis, I offer to use the term occupation. Another reason why I have chosen the term is that occupation does not allow treating the situation as a security issue but examines it as a matter of the takeover of land and resources, assimilation and racism. Lastly, I introduce the term *re-occupation of Diyarbakır*, referring to the time period started in summer 2015 and resulted in intensification of violence in a war without ends form.

Six months later of my arrival at field, on the other hand, I started rereading my ethnographic journal for the first time, feeling lost and hoping for some tracks to

come back to the surface. Back then, I realized how much I had been hungry for and obsessed with the details of “what happened, where, why and when”. I had been desperately trying to write down every single detail in my journal, mostly about the technical details of the rule of oppression and atrocity that which once again surrounded the city of Diyarbakır. One day, for example, I note that

The ongoing curfew at the X, Y, Z streets of the Sur district was lifted today. However, there left two more neighborhoods under curfew so the Z road is still closed but W is in use now. So, Q number of injured people was to be reached today but the families are still waiting in front of A to be able to get the death bodies of their beloved ones... (personal ethnographic journal, 2015).

A couple of hours later, the curfew that was lifted in X, Y, Z declared again so, I kept writing down the details of which parts of the city are completely out of reach for how many days, what happened to whom and when, over and over again. One may of course think that part of my “ambition” was about a young researcher’s first time arrival to the “field”. I discovered, however, that it was more about the unmaking of life in war times. The immense destruction of war and the unevenness of violence also damaged my already existing capacities to inhabit in the world, to make it familiar and livable.

My fieldwork took place in a time period that the armed conflict between the Turkish military forces and PKK (Kurdish guerrilla movement) moved into the city centers. The clashes took almost four months and, turned the city of Diyarbakır to a death zone. In the meantime, I had been making a hopeless effort to hold the shattering world in details. Henceforth, today I know that it is what happens at war times, you lose the track.

In the seminal book *Fieldwork Under Fire*, many ethnographers working on different manifestations of violence mention passing through a similar stage qualified as “existential shock” (Nordstrom and Robben, 1995). Each of them comes up with

their own creative response to the “absurdity of war”, “everydayness and incomprehensibility of violence” as well as its “contradictory realities” (Nordstrom and Robben, 1995, p. 5-10). I have gained valuable insights from the book, especially the reminding that ethnography of violent geographies should count on the everyday manifestations of violence in the responses, drives, actions of the people exposed to it including the anthropologist herself.

War, rebellion, resistance, rape, torture, and defiance, as well as peace, victory, humor, boredom, and ingenuity, will have to be understood together through their expression in the everyday if we are to take issue of the human construction of existence in earnest. A too-narrow conceptualization of violence prevents us from realizing that what is at stake is not simply destruction but also reconstruction, not just death but also survival (Nordstrom and Robben, 1995, p. 6).

In her article *War on the Front Lines*, Carolyn Nordstrom describes how she has struggled and continues to struggle with the senselessness of the violence inflicted on the population of Mozambique (Nordstrom and Robben, 1995, p. 18). She faces a similar existential shock witnessing that the excessive violence shattering people's sense of family and community. Her situation and writings underlines that anthropologists themselves, like the people whom they work with, “[...] cannot remain removed from the impact of witnessing tragedy but must struggle with the implications of working in a context where violence throws core questions about human nature and culture” (Nordstrom and Robben, 1995, p. 18). From this vantage point, chapter 3 particularly looks at the unmakings and remakings of everyday life in Diyarbakır, taking also “my/self as a resource” into consideration (Collins, 2010), what the unbearable rage of war did to me while writing this ethnography. Herein, I am very much in line with the scholarly discussion on the possibilities and implications of including personal memories and experiences to our ethnographies. I agree with Gallinat that anthropologist rely on their personal memories and

experiences both when “writing down (their notes)” and when “writing up (their ethnography)” (Gallinat, 2010). Being reflexive and open about the role of ethnographer as informant in doing and writing anthropology just make “the ethnographic research more transparent, honest, and illuminating about the nature of humanity” (Gallinat, 2010, p. 40).

Furthermore, inspired by Ann Stoler’s book *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power* (2002) in the third chapter, I followed the sensibilities and sentiments of war, the fear of death, the guilt of survival, the voices and stories. I traced how war haunted and hovered the mundane. Therefore, chapter 3 argues for a deeper engagement with everyday life of war, how life permanently gets cut and in return, shapes both the movings/non-movings and imaginings of the space and life.

The fourth chapter, on the other hand, is written with the belief that a critically engaged scholarship should also consider decolonizing strategies. It is based on the school ethnography I did in one of the Free Schools providing Kurdish children with mother tongue education. In doing so, chapter 4 begins with a brainstorming section on the promises gathered around being able to speak Turkish for the Kurds. I wrote that section so as to provide insights on the outcomes of neocolonial education policies of the Turkish State and on the urgency for alternative, decolonizing spaces of knowing, learning and relating to ones identity and culture. It is followed by a section giving further information on the historical background of the politics of language have long carried out by the Kurdish Movement and, in the last decade, formulated around mother tongue education.

These two sections aim to portray in what ways colonization of geography brings along the attempts to colonize minds as well. I introduced the term production of negative values to delineate the role attributed to the national education system

and language policies in the creation of spiritual, cultural and linguistic poverty for the Kurds living in Turkey. In the long-term, “the unequal colonial relationship is eventually naturalized [...] via the mental domination of the colonized who comes to believe in the ‘naturalness’ of his/her subordination” (Abdi, 2012, p. 2). These naturalization processes, more precisely, the psychological, educational, cultural and political dimensions of the colonial relationship extensively narrated in the writings of the two anti-colonialist thinkers, Steve Biko (2014) and Albert Memmi (1965) and I benefited a lot from their writings throughout this thesis. I argue that the schooling processes including the very nationalist curriculum have played a significant role in the production and reproduction of this neocolonial vocabulary and legacy in Turkey.

In the following section, bearing also in mind the dangers Free Schools likely to face with, I reflect on the potentials they could have namely, the prevention of language endangerment and identity affirmation. I argue that Free Schools provide a counter space where the already existing colonially inherited ways of learning, knowing and being can be decolonized. Therefore, the alternative philosophy of education the schools provide to struggle against the assimilationist, capitalist and patriarchal way of life structured by colonial occupation should be seen as a decolonizing practice. Different interpretations and imaginings of what “free” means exist among teachers and representatives of Kurdish Movement, and I elaborate on that in the section called Free Schools or Kurdish Schools? Overall, however, in a context of violence, war and constant humiliation, these schools symbolize what we can hope for and are capable of indeed.

In this thesis, I investigate the Kurdish regions in Turkey as a space of colonial occupation beyond a political claim. It can be read as an attempt to provide this argument with a theoretical, analytical as well as an ethnographic grounding.

Yet, what are the advantages of offering colonial/postcolonial literature as a relevant interpretive framework for Kurdistan? What does it enable or, reorient? I argue that this framework can offer conceptual and political possibilities for the ongoing war in the Kurdish regions today, while eliminating the risk of inducing the subjection of Kurds to the perspective of nation building with its discrepancies for minorities. Moreover, equally important, it brings Turkey into comparison with cases such as Israel-Palestine, France-Algeria etc., which I believe, can provide much-needed, creative and collaborative discussions enabling to move beyond the already existing literature on nationalism and to focus more on occupation as well as to start up building decolonizing strategies.

## CHAPTER 2

### THE GEOGRAPHY OF OCCUPATION

#### 2.1 Life under siege

The *state of siege* is itself a military institution. It allows a modality of killing that does not distinguish between the external and the internal enemy. Entire populations are the target of the sovereign. The besieged villages and towns are sealed off and cut off from the world. Daily life is militarized. Freedom is given to local military commanders to use their discretion as to when and whom to shoot. (Mbembe, 2003, p. 15).

The state of emergency and everyday violence in the late-modern colonial occupation challenge the already existing mostly Western oriented theorizations of power and violence. The question of how and why the power to kill, of death keeps ramifying in neocolonial geographies enforces us to ask new questions on the politics of violence.

Regarding nineteenth century, Foucault mentions a remarkable change in the existing modes of governing namely sovereign power. A different logic of power penetrates into the old one whose internal logic can be summarized as “take life or let live”. Foucault calls the new logic *biopower* -make live or let die -which puts emphasis on the wellbeing of the population. However, given that this power's objective is essentially to make live (Foucault: 2003, p. 222), how power of death can be exercised in a political system based on biopower is a conspicuous question. At this point, Foucault thinks that racism intervenes and functions as establishing a biological relationship between one's own life and the death of the other. A certain truth regime; the idea that the death of the other will make contribute to society in general and make live healthier, makes “the let die” part legitimate (Foucault, 2003,

p. 225). Therefore, Foucault considers racism as the precondition/justification for exercising the right to kill.

The quotation above is from the article *Necropolitics* where similar questions to Foucault are raised, however, this time critique comes from a non-White thinker. In *Necropolitics*, Achille Mbembe traces how and under what conditions the sovereign right to kill has been exercised practically. After all, “Is the notion of biopower sufficient to account for the contemporary ways in which the political under the guise of war, of resistance, or of the fight against terror, makes the murder of the enemy is the primary and absolute objective?” (Mbembe, 2003, p. 12). He argues that the colony, just like the detention camps, does not fit the Western oriented theorization of politics and power. Rather, it represents the site “where sovereignty consists fundamentally in the exercise of a power outside the law and where peace is more likely to take on the face of a “war without end”” (Mbembe, 2003, p. 23). It is because all manifestations of terror and hostility that had been marginalized by a European legal imaginary find a place to reemerge in the colonies and falsify the very basic assumptions of the philosophical discourse of modernity, especially the democratic theory and modern law.

Mbembe mentions a peculiar terror formation in the late-modern colonial occupation that is a concatenation of biopower, the state of exception, and the state of siege (Mbembe, 2003) namely *necropower*. By seeking for maximum destructions of people and “the creation of death-worlds”, necropower transforms the relationship between the sovereign and subject. It leads to the emergence of the status of “living dead” for vast populations (Mbembe 2003). Therefore, only the Foucauldian notion of biopower would be insufficient to account for politics of death /necropolitics and for the contemporary forms of subjugation of life to death.



Throughout this second chapter, I will use the term death zone in order to underly this peculiar terror formation in the late-modern colonial occupation as well as to refer to a territory where no one has security of life protected by law/citizenship. Death zone is geography of lawlessness where the tortured bodies can be tied to the back of a police car and displayed in public.<sup>2</sup> Last autumn, for example, the Turkish military forces circulated the naked and tortured body of a Kurdish guerrilla woman in the streets.<sup>3</sup> There are many sayings in Kurdish expressing the insight that modern law does not apply to them. *Rom b  bexte*, for example, is used to emphasize that you can never trust the rule of state, neither its politics and law nor its promises.

In a similar manner, working on the counterinsurgency practices of Israel and other powerful state militaries, Laleh Khalili identifies three Israeli zones namely, the seam zone, special security zones, and a Gazan death zone (Khalili, 2014). She underlies that the zones as well as the Israeli apartheid wall should have to be situated in a longer historical continuum with colonial practices, while also reflecting on the settler-colonial specificities of their present form (Khalili, 2014). The seam zone refers to area expropriated for the Wall complex whereas the security zone is much more commonly used, referring to wherever the Israeli military goes. Finally,

In addition to the formalized regime of spatial variegation, there are the death zones of Gaza. Brigadier General Zvika Fogel, the former head of Southern Command, explained that after the Second Intifada, the Southern Command unofficially declared death zones in Gaza, where anyone entering could be shot: “We understood that in order to reduce the margin of error, we had to create areas in which anyone who entered was considered a terrorist” (Khalili, 2014).

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<sup>2</sup> To see the video of Hacı Lokman Birlik:  
[http://www.cumhuriyet.com.tr/video/video/381422/iste\\_Lokman\\_Birlik\\_in\\_polis\\_aracina\\_ba\\_glanarak\\_metrelerce\\_suruklendigi\\_an.html](http://www.cumhuriyet.com.tr/video/video/381422/iste_Lokman_Birlik_in_polis_aracina_ba_glanarak_metrelerce_suruklendigi_an.html)

<sup>3</sup> To see the report of Human Rights Foundation on the case: <http://www.ihd.org.tr/kader-kevser-elturk-ekin-van-olayina-dair-inceleme-raporu/>

In sum, what is happening in the death zones force us to reconsider the categories of life and death as well as the politics of violence and, I found the questions posed in Walter Benjamin's short but intense article, *Critique of Violence* helpful in doing so. Can we think of the legal sphere and sovereign power without considering its relation to violence? What is seen as violence at all? Is there any other possible definition of violence other than its juridical understanding based on the formulation of means and ends? If there is, how can we open new descriptions of violence to discussion without problematizing the violence of law itself; growing in the heart of the state and providing legitimacy to sovereign power?

Rather than assuming a legal sphere purified from violence, Benjamin reminds the founding act of sovereign power; a process of great violence in which identities get fixed and certain identities are excluded in the first stake, as we know it from its most crystallized form, the constitutions of nation-states. He introduces a new conceptualization referring to violence lying at the roof of foundation of legal sphere namely, *law-making* and *law-preserving violence* (Benjamin, 2007). These two fundamental operations of violence play an important role in the maintenance and legitimization of sovereign power. At this very point, by not restraining the discussion on violence to the discourse of law, he allows us a space to account on lawlessness. For example, the collapse of the difference between law-making and law-preserving violence is present in one institution of the modern state, the police. "[...] the law of the police really marks the point at which the state can no longer guarantee through the legal system the empirical ends that it desires at any price to attain" (Benjamin, 2007, p. 287). Its formless "intangible", "ghost-like" power penetrates every aspect of live in the modern state.

Besides, it is not only about the rule of violence and lawlessness in display but also, people who perpetuate the violence know that nobody is going to be held responsible or punished for her extra-legal actions. Recently in Turkey, a new law called “the armor of immunity” in the media<sup>4</sup>, granted immunity from prosecution to security personnel and civil servants involved in “counter-terrorism activities” in the Kurdish regions. Yet, in the neocolonial geographies, this toxic knowledge - no one has security of life protected by law/citizenship- deeply affects the meaning of life and death and greys the boundary between the two. As it is the case for the suicide bomber, the boundary between one’s body and weapon disappears and we see the body as a weapon, as a source of life and death at the same time.

In this respect, in Kurdish society, being a guerilla, facing the death in the name of life, is considered as the most respected position a human being can achieve. A student from the high school that I have been visiting time to time, for example, told me that she hates all Kurds except the guerilla (personal communication, 2015). Her family used to live in Sur district and during the conflict they lost their house. They moved to her uncle's house where ten people had to live together. Her school also remained closed for two months, the only place outside of her house she is allowed to spend time. Therefore, by the time we talk, she was upset and angry for not being able to make sense of the situation, and asked me “What is going to happen to us?” and the friend next to her added, “Do you think they can kill us all?” Furthermore, in the most important social events like weddings, Newroz celebrations and funeral ceremonies, guerrilla costume is worn. There are also several guerillas who explode a hand grenade and kill themselves when they run out of bullets or are

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<sup>4</sup> To see the news: <http://www.imctv.com.tr/askere-dokunulmazlik-zirhi-getiren-kanun-komisyondan-gecti/>

trapped. In their case, once again the boundary of life and death is violated so as to prove that “you cannot make me surrender”.

Moreover, with a focus on the intersection point between the juridico-institutional and the biopolitical models of power, Agamben’s analysis also provides a historical account on how life has been subordinated to the law. In order to analyze the ways in which power both operate and legitimize itself, he mentions two different meanings of the word life (Agamben, 1998). In Greek the word *zoe* connotes “the simple fact of living common to all living beings”, the simple natural life which is excluded from the polis. Unlike *zoe*, however, the word *bios* is used to indicate a qualified, proper way of living which belongs only to human beings. Agamben argues that the fundamental dichotomy of Western politics is rooted in these two different interpretations of life namely, bare life and political life. In addition, “at once excluding bare life from and capturing it within the political order, the state of exception actually constituted, in its very separateness, the hidden foundation on which the entire political system rested” (Agamben, 1998, p. 127). Therefore, the politicization of bare life makes the codes and the boundaries of sovereign exception visible. As I have already discussed, in Benjamin terms, the modern law is inherently violent both in its foundation and preservation. Agamben, on the other hand, points out that the state of exception extends this violence beyond the boundaries of law by making it possible for extra-legal actions to acquire legal status. It explains how the lines drawn between legality and illegality can very easily be collapsed for the security reasons.

The ontology of the modern state is marked by the struggle of the state for the monopoly of power and to do that it has to eliminate every-counter power having the potential of perpetrating violence. Benjamin’s article reveals the fact that monopoly

of power emerges as a historical dialectics of violence and, law-making and law-preserving violence are intrinsic to this process. Therefore, it is not a coincidence that the founding act of the modern nation-states relies on this sort of violence.

Concordantly, every constitution has its particular definition of citizenship based on the principle of homogeneity. The maintenance and legitimization of sovereign power, thus, depends on its capacity to either assimilate or eliminate the identities that does not fit into this definition. In Turkey, state of exception (though perhaps not declared in the technical sense) has long been the dominant governmental paradigm, enabling the state to deal with counter-violence and also to reclaim its power by subjugating life to law. Yet, when the Kurds –whose identities, cultural rights and language have long been excluded from constitution- are at stake, the curtain hiding the roots of sovereign power falls down, they remind us of the founding violence that made the Turkish state possible. In this section, I argued that the insights we can draw from Agamben`s, Benjamin`s and Mbembe`s writings are very much helpful to comment on the case of Kurdistan, where the state of exception still appears as the dominant governmental paradigm.

## 2.2 Kurdistan as a colony

In the following sections, I will aim to reflect on some very broad and loaded conceptual terms such as war, occupation, and colonialism. My hope is to enkindle a deeper discussion on the familiar but unpacked claim that Kurdistan is a colony, a political claim likely to echo and find support in the political and activist circles in Turkey. I argue, on the other hand, it remains almost unattended in the academic literature.

Since the 1970s the nature of the relationship between Turkey and Kurds has been an issue of debate especially between the left wing parties and PKK. The left argued that the political struggle should take the form of class struggle whereas PKK emphasized the colonial nature of the Turkey's domination over the Kurdish regions, marked by military occupation, assimilative politics and economic exploitation (Jongerden, 2016). With the current shift of paradigm in PKK's political agenda critiquing nation state form, the process of decolonization is linked to the right to self-determination revolving around the ideas of democratic autonomy and democratic confederalism. In his article *Sömürge Kurdistan Teorisi Doğru Bir Başlangıçtı*, the leader of the movement Abdullah Öcalan states that Kurdistan as a colony is the right starting point, however, the liberalization and decolonization of Kurdistan geography lies far from the mentality of nation state (Öcalan, 2015).

It would not be wrong to say that Kurdish Movement is the strongest movement in Turkey Kurdistan right now. On the other hand, there are other legal and illegal groups and parties with different political agendas. In the party program, for example, PAK (Partiya Azadiya Kurdistan) adopts the perspective of Kurdistan as an international colony divided into four pieces by Turkey, Iraq, Syria and Iran.<sup>5</sup> PDK Bakur (Partiya Demokrat a Kurdistan-Bakur) shares a similar view and declares their main goal to end the colonial occupation in all parts of Kurdistan and, to fight for the Kurds right to determine their future.<sup>6</sup>

In the academic literature, one of the first people who provided an in-depth investigation and grounded the claim was İsmail Beşikçi. He suggested that the colonization of Kurdistan creates a different context in colony-colonialist relationship. It is because in almost all colonial contexts there was not any attempt to

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<sup>5</sup> To see the full party program: <http://www.pakname.com/details.aspx?an=242>

<sup>6</sup> Ibid. <http://www.pdkbakur.org/turkce/3060-kurdistandemokrat-partisi-kuzey-program.html>

transform the native population into the colonizer (Beşikçi, 2004, p. 28). The “civilizing mission” implied that that, once the native population would be made “civilized” and the economic, political and administrative structures of the colonies are reinforced, the colonial administration would be canceled. The Kurds, however, has never been considered as Kurds rather tried to be assimilated and the colonization of Kurdistan was intended to be permanent (Beşikçi, 2004).

Bearing in mind these ongoing discussions, some of the questions I would like to pose in this section are, violence and assimilation have been intrinsic features of nation building process so why the perspective of colonialism? Moreover, we know that violence has always been constitutive and present in the colonies so, how should we interpret the ongoing war in the Kurdish regions? Is there any possible demarking line between the terms violence, war and occupation or, is war just a matter of intensification of violence?

The colony is argued to be a “wretched” (Fanon, 2001) and “discouraging” (Memni, 1965, p. 67) geography. Calling into question of the colonial situation requires challenging the system of values leading us to describe the colony as such. The particular style of Ottoman imperialism and, the Turkish nation state born out of it has borrowed a lot from the discourse and ideology of *İttihat ve Terakki*. The mission was to restructure the population in Ottoman Empire around the Turkish and Islamic constituents. In this respect, Kurds wished to be assimilated into Turkishness and, since they are Muslim it was hoped to be easy (Beşikçi, 2013). Baris Ünlü (2016), for example, introduces the metaphoric *Türklük Sözleşmesi* (Turkishness Contract) in order to capture the founding social contract of the Turkish Republic. Three fundamental conditions of this contract and how much one performs them closely determine one's possibility of continuing to live in Turkey safe and sound.

First, you have to be Muslim and Turkish or, Turko-phonized. Secondly, you wouldn't talk about or, even remember what was done to the non-Muslim communities. Thirdly, you are also not allowed to mention or oppose to what has been done to the Kurds. In this sense, Turkishness Contract proves how cultural domination, racial exclusivity and violence made possible the modernizing nationalist projects of the Turkish State.<sup>7</sup>

In addition to the politics of annex, denial and assimilation, the Turkish State has adopted a very colonial vocabulary with regard to Kurds and the Kurdish regions. In order to legitimize its domination, it put a discourse of lack into play, emphasizing the backwardness of the region in terms of economics, cultural diversity and its adjustment to modernity. According to the hierarchical reasoning of this discourse, the eastern part of the country lacks all the positive attributes of modern life such as infrastructure, well-educated manpower and economic development that the West was able to achieve through the nation-state building. Those negative judgments are always stated with reference to the mother country, to the metropole, to the West (Memni, 1965, p. 67). Just like Africa is “the dark continent”, the term “east” has long been coded as a geography of poverty, illiteracy, crowded families, making too many babies, a social life organized around the kinship relations rather than “rational individuals” of nuclear families in Turkey. The Turkish State benefited from very similar justifications the “civilizing mission” provided the colonizers with. The State simply is just there to “educate”, “modernize” Kurds and to “develop” Kurdistan as part of homeland and the Kurds were expected to come out of their feudal milieu and become disciplined citizens of the nation.

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<sup>7</sup> The information provided on Turkishness Contract is referred from Barış Ünlü's talk at İsmail Beşikçi Association, 9 April 2016. To see the whole talk: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cmZhIIYd2dA>



In line with this “civilizing mission”, the terms modern, modernization, contemporary are very often used by different foundations in civil society, especially in the assimilationist educational campaigns targeted the “integration” of Kurds. One of the first organizations coming to mind, the Association for Supporting Contemporary Life, assert their goal as “to protect Atatürk’s principles and revolutions, to reach contemporary society via contemporary education for contemporary people and to carry Turkey above the contemporary civilization level”.<sup>8</sup> It was not a coincidence, when one of my informants who co-worked with Turks as a teacher in the Western cities said, “every time I hear the word contemporary, I get goose bumps. It is always about them, about their superiority complex” (personal communication, 2016). Furthermore, another informant considered “the arrogance which Turks can never overcome” as the biggest obstacle on the way of peace:

The main issue is an emotional phase, their arrogance. Somewhere in their minds there is always “but Kurds...” They always have their guards up to find your lack. All those things enforced under the umbrella of modernization, even for very small missings, they would criticize you and by doing so, prove their superiority. If this wasn't the case, we could have voiced the peace more loudly (personal communication, 2016).

On the other hand, I have encountered a different manifestation of the discourse of lack among the Kurds as well. According to my informants, there exist several interpretations of what the lack is and a hierarchical sorting of what needs to be done about it. However, they all looked to be agreed that something is missing. During my fieldwork, I heard sentences starting with “You know what Kurds do not have?” a lot. “Don't count the PKK for a moment, what else do Kurds have?” (personal communication, 2016). “We don't have our own teachers, no education

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<sup>8</sup> To visit their website: <http://www.cydd.org.tr/pages/about-us-2/>

materials, no money. How are you going to provide education in mother tongue for all children in Diyarbakır (personal communication, 2016)”.

Not surprisingly but remarkably, most of the time it was about lack of a superstructure that can protect them from state violence. “If we have had our own state, whatever you may call it a state or something else, people would not be tortured and displayed in public. We wouldn't be killed so easily” (personal communication, 2016). Another informant says:

Even if we have everything, we don't have an assurance. The best example to this is Kobane. They had everything; the land, food and they were speaking Kurdish. However, they did not have the structure protecting these. It does not necessarily have to be army forces. It can be a constitutional arrangement, citizenship with equal rights. Otherwise, ISIS comes and takes all of these in one night. Without this guarantee you can lose everything (personal communication, 2016).

The famous song of Ciwan Haco, a well known exiled Kurdish singer, *The Patriot*<sup>9</sup> also deeply explores this feeling:

Step by step you climb the top of mountains  
How long our homeland will remain divided as such?  
We are all weak and broken on this land  
Don't be afraid! It is not bearable anymore (Haco, 2016, own translation).

To conclude, the discourse of lack introduces very much of a colonial vocabulary emphasizing the backwardness of the Kurdish regions in terms of economics, historical and cultural heritage as well as their adjustment to modernity. I should also note that these lacks are always discussed in comparison with the metropole, affirming the superiority of the West.

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<sup>9</sup> The original lyrics belongs to the famous Kurdish writer Cigerxwîn.

### 2.3 A Portrait of Diyarbakır

“The colonial world is divided into compartments [...] the colonial world is a world cut in two” (Fanon, 2001, p. 29).

The geographical layout of Diyarbakır very much reveals the line of forces it has been shaped by. It is a city cut in two in a colonial manner, compartmentalized both in terms of the space and its inhabitants. Almost half of the city is allocated to military quarters, compressing it from North and South. The figure 1 shows the military zone, its footprints and, how as a result of that the new city expands in a horizontal direction from East to West.

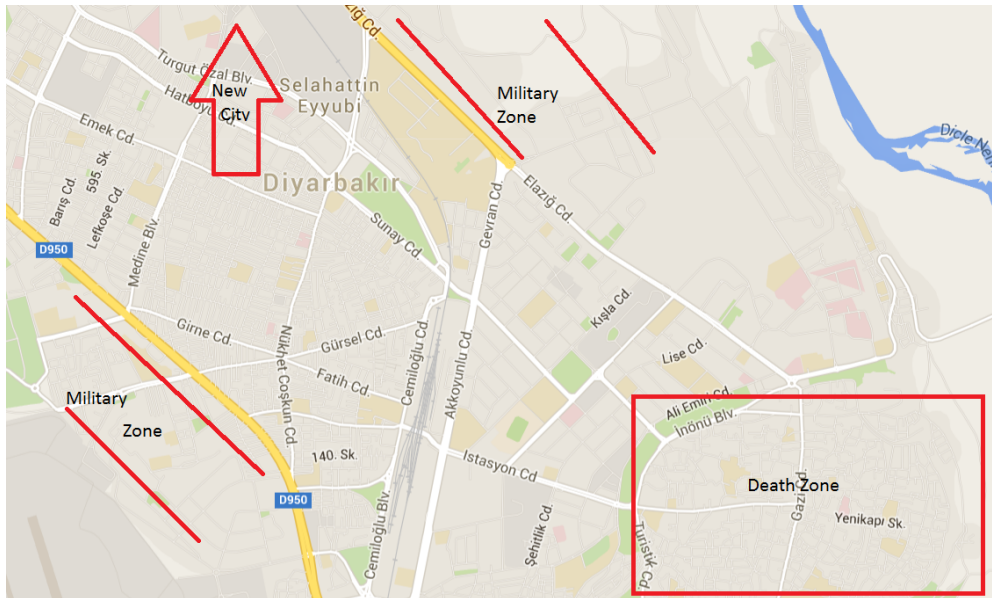


Fig. 1 The geographical lay-out of Diyarbakır

During my fieldwork, I was able to enter one of the military lodgements via a friend whose ex-husband was a soldier. We visited her friends living in the lodgements together. When we reached at the door, our identities checked and asked for the reason of our visit. One of the soldiers called our friend and asked her to come to gate to pick us since otherwise guests are not allowed in the military boarding. After almost half an hour we were finally inside of the ultrahigh and thick walls, which from outside you cannot help but keep wondering what is behind. I had

a very fancy brunch in the dining hall arranged for daily gatherings inside the barracks, with the wife's sit around the table in a hierarchic line in accordance with their husbands' military ranks. In small chats, I was asked about how come I end up in Diyarbakır -as a well-educated woman obviously not Kurdish- and not afraid of living in a “not even rich”, “crowded”, “chaotic”, “dangerous” part of the city. To me, the ironic side of our conversations was, none of them neither knew the neighborhood I live in nor anywhere else in the city. They barely go out of the barracks. However, they assumed that I am not Kurdish, therefore, there is no point of me being here. One lady told me that she is in Diyarbakır for six years now and went out of the barracks a couple of times. “I do not need to go out. We have everything here” (personal communication, 2016). There are lodgements, gathering halls, markets -many things cheaper than outside-, swimming pools, public and private schools in primary and high school levels, everything... “We only do not have a shopping center but I do online shopping so, it is fine” (personal communication, 2016). I was surprised to see that they have been in the city quite long time and know almost nothing about it, indeed have no interest in learning.

In Diyarbakır, the military personnel and PÖH including their families do not hang out freely in the public especially in times the war between PKK and army is tense. Throughout the thesis, I use the acronym PÖH to refer to the special police forces (Polis Özel Harekat Kuvvetleri) assigned to fight in the Kurdish regions. They do not look like the police forces you would see in the Western cities, are more like RoboCop in their steel vest, faces covered and carrying heavy weapons. In Diyarbakır, you encounter them in the checkpoints, regular home invasions, behind the barricades made by sand bags or, inside the armed vehicles passing by. In the last eight months, a police lodgement, several police stations and buses carrying military

personnel have been targeted. That's why, my friend and I were both surprised while we were sitting his grocery store and a sergeant stopped by. He looked civilian in his jeans but still my friend very easily recognized that he is neither from Diyarbakır nor Kurdish. Your accent, attitude, apparel or anything else can peach on easily in the eyes of people of Diyarbakır and my friend was definitely not convinced:

“- Sir, May I ask your job?

-I am a teacher.

-Really? I do not think you are a teacher Sir. Tell me your real job.

-Well, yes. I am a specialist sergeant.”

After his answer, there was a long moment in silence. Then, it was the sergeant's turn to ask:

“-What you guys think about the situation in Sur?” (Referring the most historical neighborhood of Diyarbakır where there was an ongoing armed conflict between PKK and Turkish military forces by the time) (personal communication, 2016).

My friend answered:

“-Look sir, you and me can have a political debate on any issue but I don't think it is necessary. I just want you to know one thing. Who do you think are the people fighting in the streets of Sur right now? They are the people I know. Either my friend, my neighbor, someone from my family or someone I live in the same city and breathe the same air is now fighting there. Who are you then? You are a person with no connection, no ties to this city. So, the answer is clear to me. I will obviously support them, not you” (personal communication, 2016).

The sergeant bought two earrings for his wife and left the store. The same day, a video shot in Diyarbakır hit the YouTube, an old lady, very angry, shouting at police:

“This is Kurdistan. I am a Kurd. Don't we have a right to live? What do you want

from us?” In the video, you do not see the police but hear the answer: “What Kurdistan? This is Turkey”.<sup>10</sup>

The encounters I came across during my fieldwork gave me insight on the colonial resonances of the way life is compartmentalized and, the domination of a group over the land and resources including the inhabitants of the city. Researchers like myself, human right activists and journalists happen to pass by Diyarbakır time to time. Other than these groups of people, Kurds living in other cities and people who have an economic interest to be in the city; hired by the government, I haven't encountered anyone else mention to live, settle or visit the city. At the heart of the colonial relationship there lies “the idea of privilege” and that privilege is not solely but fundamentally economic (Memni, 1965). Bearing in mind that the economic privilege has been a founding base, in this chapter, I will follow the footsteps of Steve Biko (1987) and Albert Memni (1965), both of whom adopts a self-reflexive method in describing the cultural deprivations and the daily subjugation of the colonized. Memni says:

I was Tunisian, therefore colonized. I discovered that few aspects of my life and my personality were untouched by this fact. [...] To observe the life of the colonizer and the colonized is to discover rapidly that the daily humiliation of the colonized, his objective subjugation, are not merely economic. Even the poorest colonizer thought himself to be --and actually was--superior to the colonized. This too was part of colonial privilege (Memni, 1965, p. 4-8).

Similarly, South African writer and activist Biko clearly states that every aspect of his life including his thinking has been “carved and shaped” within the context of colonial separation (Biko, 2014, p. 40). Preoccupied with the “spiritual poverty” introduced by colonialism he raises the questions of “what makes the black man fail to tick? Is he convinced of his own accord of his inabilities? Or is he simply

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<sup>10</sup> To see the video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dn-Be57S0qs>

a defeated person?” (Biko, 2014, p. 40) He concludes, “the logic behind white domination is to prepare the black man for the subservient role in this country” (Biko, 2014, p. 40).

Besides, people who are not local inhabitants of the city, either they are scared or do not find the need to breathe the same air with locals, they go out of their spatial units and communities as less as possible. They simply do not interact and keep the distance which, I argue itself very much colonial. Partha Chatterjee mentions the vital role of *the rule of colonial difference* referring to the preservation of alienness of the ruling group in shaping and reproducing of power relations (Chatterjee, 1993, p. 18). He claims that since the rule of colonial difference is “part of a common strategy for the deployment of the modern form of disciplinary power”, the history of colonial state is of crucial in grasping the roots of the modern state (Chatterjee, 1993, p. 18).

In addition, Fanon calls settlers “the governing race” and reminds that they are always foreigners who come from elsewhere (Fanon, 2001, p. 31). In the Kurdish regions, settlers do not come from overseas but from the Western part of Turkey and, remains a foreigner. In addition to moral and cultural aspects of domination, they - bureaucrats, teachers, entrepreneurs, religious officials- are likely to have an economic interest of being there. They are strangers in the city in the sense that first they don’t interact with the people, don't have any interest in participating social life but wait until their compulsory service period gets over. Secondly, they are considered as strangers/representatives of the Turkish State by the locals and, get easily identified and marked in the public space. Moreover, not surprisingly, they claim a right on the land and administration as a part of the homeland. In sum, they represent the state -people of Diyarbakır always add Turkish to the beginning when

they use the word state-, whose rule is imposed and can only be maintained by means of force; guns and war machines. In a similar manner that Fanon reminds us the colonial world is a world cut in two (Fanon, 2001, p. 29), the city of Diyarbakır is compartmentalized both in terms of its geographical lay-out divided between military zones and death zone and its inhabitants.<sup>11</sup>

In the most moderate case, if we were to consider the position of teachers coming from the West, they never come to teach in the Kurdish regions as their first choice but assigned by the state when the only available staff position is there. Almost all parts of the region are considered as involuntary service regions that which every teacher has to serve between three to five years. They are expected to remind and spread the word of the “national ideology” which has been shaped by over a century long assimilationist policies and social engineering and, molded the education system in Turkey.<sup>12</sup> There is a section in the fourth chapter focusing particularly on the assimilationist and nationalist aspects of Turkish education system. At this point, I just want to note that in Cizre, a district of Sirnak almost completely destroyed during the war, 1300 teachers who are originally from the West were texted and called back by the Ministry of National Education, just before the armed conflict started.

Other than public officials, the direct representatives of the state appear to be the police and army. At this point, it is necessary to underline the ambivalent position of the soldiers doing their compulsory military service in the Kurdish regions. Every

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<sup>11</sup> While violence is a routine in the Kurdish regions in Turkey, Turkish State also uses other strategies outside those regions, in the West such as cultural and linguistic assimilation, forced migration and economic pressure results in labor migration.

<sup>12</sup> See the works of B.Fortna, E.Rogan and A.Akpınar on *Asiret Mektepleri*, special schools targeted at children of the Muslim minorities and the primary aim of project to train ‘good’, ‘loyal’, ‘educated’ citizens who would help strengthening the clans’ commitment to the Ottoman Empire. See also Serhat Arslan several works on the boarding schools (YİBO) as reflecting the assimilationist logic underlying Turkish education system.



man older than the age of 18 are obliged to military service, the estimated time and position of this service usually depends on the persons level of education. For example, men having a bachelor degree can serve 6 months whereas a high school graduate would be had to serve 18 months. As neither public service nor the right to conscientious objection is recognized by the State, every man living in Turkey including the Kurds has to serve in the army. The only possible way to skip compulsory military service would be to do paid-for military service which is available only at random time periods and for certain age groups also requiring to around 7000 dollars to be paid to the State. For example, in his press speech one of the PKK commanders stated that soldiers are the poor children of this country, therefore, they don't actually want to fight with them.<sup>13</sup>

On the other hand, the figure 2 below is from one of very few limited reports co-written by human right organizations, providing background information about what happened in Cizre during the 79 days long curfew between 14 December 2015 and 2 March 2016 (Cizre Gözlem Raporu, 2016).

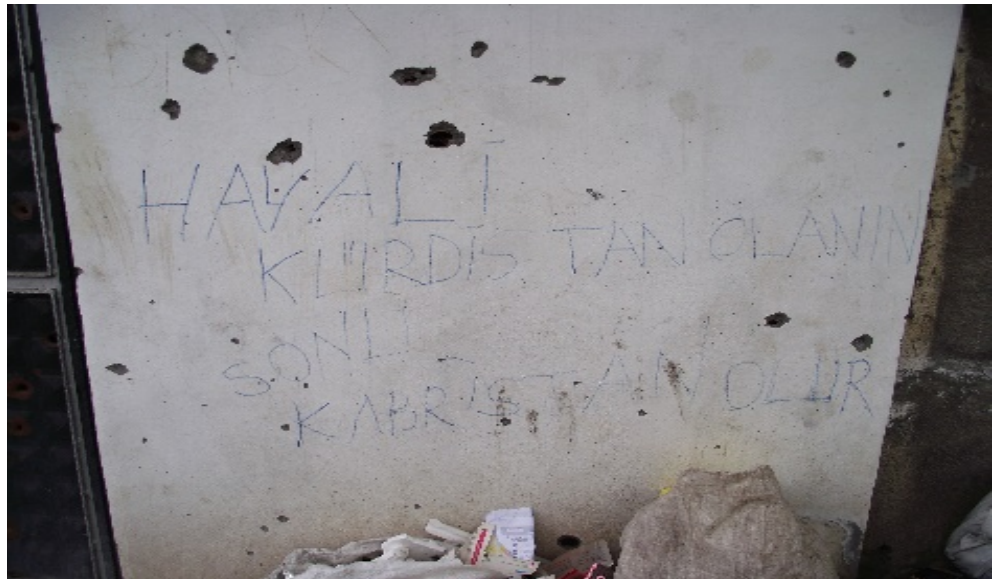


Figure 2 Those of whom imagine Kurdistan would end up in graveyard

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<sup>13</sup> To see the news: <http://siyasihaber3.org/bayik-askerler-yoksul-halk-cocuklaridir-onlarla-savasmak-istemiyoruz>

Indeed this graffiti can be read as a confession of the army forces that wrote it on the streets of Cizre. It gives a fruitful insight on the fact that people living in the Kurdish regions are “natives” of some place that is not Turkey. Kurdistan, however, unlike Gaza as colonial space of occupation does not exist on the world maps. However, it does exist in the minds and hearts of its people.

Furthermore, police barricades and stations in every corner, the armored vehicles passing every five minutes, checkpoints always present in the street of Diyarbakır, they all speak the language of domination bringing violence “into the home and into the mind of the native”(Fanon, 2001, p. 29). As the figure 3 shows an ordinary street, they constitute the dominant symbols of social order.



Figure 3 A Street of Diyarbakır

An informant also suggested that “if you move the flags and the army out of Diyarbakır, there is no State here” (personal communication, 2015). All the police cars and tanks carry Turkish flags and, at least once a day play a very nationalistic song “Ölürüm Türkiyem (I Would Die for My Turkey)”. Since it was played it on

loudspeakers as when the cars drive around, I learned the lyrics by heart during my fieldwork:

I set my mind on my Turkey's path

I die for its facilities and challenges

For centuries long I watered my horse

I die for the flow of its rivers (2016, own translation).<sup>14</sup>

As an informant puts it, “they are playing *Ölürüm Türkiyem* all around the city. This proves that it is not only about the Sur district and the people fighting there. It is about all Kurds and Kurdistan” (personal communication, 2015).

#### 2.4 Death zone

My fieldwork came across to a time period that the armed conflict between the Turkish State and PKK moved in the city centers and, the Kurdish movement declared self-governance in several districts in the cities. Governmental strategy of declaring on and off curfews enabled the Turkish State to cut the outside connection and the access to basic needs such as food, electricity, water etc. of these districts.

People who lived there were forced to leave, the ones who refuse to do so were criminalized as terrorists in the eyes of the West and killed. According to the report of Human Rights Foundation of Turkey, between the dates August 16, 2015 and April 20, 2016 there had been 65 officially confirmed, open-ended and round-the-clock [all day long] curfews in at least 22 districts of 7 cities in Southeastern Turkey. At least 1 million 642 thousand residents affected by these curfews and according to the statement of Ministry of Health on February 27, 2016, at least 355 thousand

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<sup>14</sup> To listen the song: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Dbgk3O\\_71N0](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Dbgk3O_71N0)

residents were forced to leave the cities and districts they lived in and at least 338 people lost their lives.<sup>1516</sup>

Within this period, I argue that the city of Diyarbakır divided in two and introduce the terms *military zone* and *death zone*. The former includes the barracks, boardings for the families of soldier, teachers and bureaucrats, the office of the governor which are usually built next by or closed to each other, very well-protected with high technology cameras, riot control vehicles and armored cars. All the public housing allocated for government officials are surrounded by walls with wires on top of them and signboards stating that the area belongs to military and entrance is not allowed. Immediate presence of the police and military, on the other hand, proves that no one needs to hide the oppression. On the contrary, the ordinary language of life is pure violence, the violence of the settler. In the recent period, there has been built many checkpoints and portable police stations, as the figure 4 below shows, which can either target or be the target itself. In the recent period, everyone has become a target in Diyarbakır.

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<sup>15</sup> To see the full report: <http://en.tihv.org.tr/fact-sheet-on-declared-curfews-between-august-16-2015-and-april-20-2016-and-civilians-who-lost-their-lives/>

<sup>16</sup> By the time I was writing this thesis, there were still many districts under curfew which made it impossible for human right activist, political parties etc. to document and report the damage of armed conflict in cities and state crimes. Because of this lack of knowledge, the term “at least” is very often used in human right reports. Recently, United Nation's Human Rights Committee stated that they want to make an investigation on what happened in the city of Sirnak during curfews and stated that there are testimonies saying more than one hundred people burned to death by Turkish army forces. <http://www.ozgurgundem.biz/haber/166140/ciz-r-vahseti-icin-bm-devrede-100den-fazla-kisi-canli-canli-yakildi-incelemek-istiyoruz>

It is also argued that as district of Sur has been under curfew, evidences of state crimes wiped out. <http://bianet.org/bianet/toplum/175173-sehir-plancilari-sur-sokaklari-delil-kalmayacak-sekilde-temizlenmis>



Figure 4 Portable police stations everywhere in the city

One winter day, I was trying to protect myself from the cold so, walking quickly my hands in the packet of my coat and, I stopped at the traffic jam to cross the road as I always did on my way to home. After a few seconds, a police car stopped just in front of me and someone shouted at me inside “Take your hands out from your pocket!” I was not able to see inside of the car but there was the colonizer and colonized, reciprocally created in the encounter itself. I was highly visible, alone on the street, while they were invisible, safe behind the steel of their car. I once again recognized how the front lines much more volatile and inchoate than I used to think, with these categories permanently constructed, negotiated and reshaped as both the colonizer and colonized try to define and control over the world they find themselves in (Nordstrom and Robben, 1995). I may do what I have been told to do. I may resist, try to run away or do nothing. They may shoot me and say that I was a terrorist or just pass by. It does not matter at all. All of a sudden, I became the target;



my own identity did not matter. My ethnographic self or “I” became simply part of the “we” – the suspect, the target, the colonized. The death zone, contrary to military zone as a territory of prosperity, wealth and security, is defined and marked by the power to kill and of death. It can be a bomb attack, you can get hit by an armored vehicle<sup>17</sup> or just by a bullet bounced. The figure 5 powerfully tells the daily display of the conflict. People living there know better than their name that they can be killed at anytime anywhere.



Figure 5 The daily display of the conflict

State violence has always been present in the streets of Diyarbakır and in the lives of its inhabitants. In the last period started with summer 2015, on the other hand, I argue we witness an *intensification* of this violence in a “war without end” form. We have faced re-territorialization of the space by turning many districts into death zone where each and every rhythm of the social life is marked by a

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<sup>17</sup> To see the news: <http://sendika10.org/2016/04/diyarbakirda-zirhli-arac-bir-kadini-ezdi-tepki-gosterenlere-polis-saldirdi/>

particular knowledge; the fact that everyone is killable. The politics of death in the Kurdish regions and sovereignty expressed as the right to kill proves a clear resemblance to the late-modern colonial occupation in Gaza and the West Bank and the specific kind of power emerging there as *Necropower* (Mbembe, 2003). The figure 6 below is from the Sur district of Diyarbakır that which became a fabric producing and scattering the death around as well as normalizing and making the knowledge of death public for the rest of the city.



Figure 6 The district of Sur

## 2.5 Re-occupation of Diyarbakır

In the Sur district of Diyarbakır, the most historical part registered to UNESCO world heritage sites and known as the heart of the city, the armed conflict took 103 day between 28 November and 2 December 2015. By the re-occupation, on the other hand, I refer to the time period begun with the end of peace negotiations, afterwards of 24 July that the armed conflict between the Turkish State and Kurdish army forces has started to take place in the cities. During that period, the police and soldiers used

and stayed in the local houses, hotels and left their marks in the streets. When the curfew was lifted, the racist and hateful language of the state, once again become visible in the streets of Sur. In the previous section, I focused on the mundane symbols of social order in Diyarbakır arguing that they reflect the neocolonial legacy of the Turkish State seeking its sovereignty to be visible, perceivable and tangible. Its exhibitionist attitude, in this sense, operates not only in symbolic level of social life but also brings the struggle over the organization of the space.

With the sudden end in the peace negotiations between the Kurdish movement and government in the last year, the armed conflict has started more intensely that which is possible to argue that the war moved to a new phase. The notion of *hendek*, ditches has entered the political literature and became a symbol of resistance in the Kurdish side. Ditches, beyond the holes in the land, they represent and mark the collective will of insurgency. At this point, the graffiti's carved on the walls and the racists video clips shot by the military personnel and served to the media, gives us important clues on the how the state imagines and twists the space in the Kurdish regions. "If you are Turk be proud, if not obey" or, the figure 7 below says "JOH (special police soldier forces) came Sur to educate. The subject is obedience" were some of them.





Figure 7 Police soldiers left a mark in Sur

In their article, Sandal and Arslan (2015) suggest to read the street writings as outpourings of the colonial heritage. In the neighborhoods of self-governance, the State responded to the signature put to space by ditching streets, with the riddled buildings and street writings of the police left behind (Sandal and Arslan, 2015).

Meanwhile, in the Western part of Turkey, many attacks and lynchings targeting Kurds took place. Those who live or work mostly as seasonal plantation workers or navies were frightened of the present and future. For example, in the city of Kütahya the barracks where the Kurdish building workers stay were set fire.<sup>18</sup> Both the players and executives of the football team of Diyarbakir, *Amedspor*, faced to racist attacks and were beaten during the Turkey cup. I took the figure 8 from a newspaper in which the opponent team unfurls a banner at the start of the game saying “those of us who die are martyrs and who live are soldiers, but those of you who die are carrions and who live are traitors.”

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<sup>18</sup> To see the news: <http://www.imctv.com.tr/kutahyada-kurt-iscilere-linc-girisimi/>



Figure 8 Flow of racism in Turkey cup

Racism, “essential to the social construction of an otherwise illegitimate and privileges access to property and power” (Stoler, 1989, p. 137), has long been the symbol of fundamental relation uniting the colonizer and colonized (Memni, 1965). Almost everyone I got in touch in the field told me different levels of discrimination they face “because of being a Kurd”. One day, I asked for the address to an old lady and while walking together to the bus station, she started tell me the story of her daughter going to the West to study at university and she could not even find an apartment. “Nobody gives their houses to Kurds but we don't do the same when they come here.” It is necessary to note that the quality and intensity of racism vary in different contexts and at different historical moments (Stoler, 1989). In the fourth chapter, I do mention how speaking “proper Turkish” promised different things in the context of East and West. On the other hand, in this thesis, I treat racism as a central organizing principle of Turkishness, of differentiating between ruler and the ruled as it was the case in many other colonial contexts.

It has been discussed that the ongoing war in the Kurdish regions represents the Turkish State's politics of collective punishment of all Kurds (Cörüt, 2015) and labeled "İsraillilesme" (becoming Israeli likewise). While agreeing on these discussions, at this point, I would like to introduce the term *re-occupation* to understand the new phase of the war and in. However, before doing that, I should first clarify why I pick up and keep using the words war and occupation. Is this a thirty-year long war between PKK and the State or, should be trace back to Ottoman Empire? Is it an internal war getting worse day by day? Or, is it a colonial occupation, another conquest and rule technique? Then, as some argued (Benlisoy, 2015), the war is not in this country (in Turkey) but somewhere else (in its colony) as much as the Algerian war did not take place in France.

Obviously, these questions do not have a one simple answer. The term war implies a struggle between minimum two parties. In my semi-structured interviews, I specifically asked my informants how they name and describe the current conflictual situation. I did not specify any time period and try to use a vague description "conflict" to hear how they actually call it. All of them named it as war, a very long one indeed.

I consider the situation as war. The reason why people don't call it war is because civilians don't use guns. It is present as if like a conflict between "a group of terrorists", "people either deluded or insurgents" and "the army and police forces trying to secure public safety and territorial integrity. It is an ongoing war in all aspects. You could realize it cultural, educational and economical politics targeted Kurds as well (personal communication, 2016).

In addition, two of my informants stated that Diyarbakır should be seen as a space of *işgal* (occupation).

The term war, however, does not tell much about the reasons/nature of the "conflict". In this chapter, I did only used to term in times of referring to the last year

of conflict took place in the cities for practical reasons. As we know violence has always been present and founding in colonial geographies. However, the recent period of war as an intensification of violence requires more attention. I time to time applied the word war to be able to distinguish this new phase. I also introduced the term *re-occupation* to analytically grasp this period. In general, on the other hand, I have looked at it from a perspective of colonial occupation. Therefore, I preferred to use the term occupation for two main reasons. First of all, it fits more of the theoretical substructuring of the theses in which I benefited a lot from colonial/postcolonial theory. Secondly, it shifts the heavily prevalent discourse of terrorism by reminding the strangeness of the ruler. In other words, the term occupation does not allow you to treat it as security issues but as a matter of the takeover of land and resources, assimilation and racism. In the rest of this section, I will elaborate on the *re-occupation* of Diyarbakır and its apparent analogue in the colonial discourse *fetih*.

The Arabic word *fetih* means to conquer a city or a country by war. Especially in the Ottoman political imaginary, it was often used to refer to the politics of conquer. In the current discourse AKP, it is possible to find references to the same vocabulary, trying to recall “the soul of fetih”. The fetih of Istanbul”, for instance, is celebrated every year with million dollars budgeted organizations. This year, whole city was covered with pankarts of “joy of fetih” synchronically with the ongoing war in the Kurdish regions, escalated to a point of destroying entire towns within a matter of days. The figure 9 below shows the level of destruction and “the soul of fetih”, soldiers hanging flags everywhere and playing *the Mehter Marşı* which is originally the Ottoman military marching song.



Figure 9 Nusaybin June 2016

The discourse of fetih, “as a site of production” (Stoler, 2002, p. 13) makes reference to a particular history at time, the Ottoman Empire. The justification for the bloody war taking place in the Kurdish regions in the eyes of Turks is produced by recapturing the nostalgia of good, old, powerful days of the Turkish nation. No need to mention that, it accumulates other familiar, therefore, dangerous discourses of nationhood and Islamhood and by doing so, gets stronger. At the end of the day, to be a Turk requires to celebrate the soul of fetih for the sake of nation. In this period, for example, different occupational groups sent Turkish flags and Koran to the military forces “fighting against terror” in the district of Sur.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> To see the news: <http://www.memurlar.net/haber/562148/>

In his speech to prospective teachers, on the other hand, the president Tayyip Erdogan says:

We cast lots (for places of duty). In the lot, you got East or Southeastern part. We are in trouble if some of you are in a flap of coming back to the West. This land, 780 square meters is our homeland. Right, there are some parts in trouble. But we have all those martyrs, don't we? Why is that so? To make these lands our homeland again.<sup>20</sup>

These interwoven terms, fetih and making homeland are used interchangeably in the neocolonial discourse of Turkish State. As all those street writings seeking for betrayal tell us, they substitute for occupation and subjugation.

To conclude, in my research, the literature on power and violence from colonial and postcolonial theory (i.e Fanon, Memmi, Mbembe, Stoler) was very helpful understanding the subordination and current situation of Kurds living in Turkey regarding the racist and assimilationist projects of the Turkish State. It was not my intention, however, to explore the claim of Kurdistan as colony in all aspects but to include the analytical categories introduced by colonial literature to the discussions on the Kurdish regions, which can hopefully provide us with new entry points for further research. It is clear to me that the multi-layered nature of domination and assimilation over the region dating back from Ottoman Empire to the establishment of Turkish Republic and, the various local, regional and international actors involved in the region requires more researches in the field. In this chapter, one of my aims was to show how my thinking has been informed by my contact with some work on colonial geographies.

Here are some of the questions demanding more ethnographic and sociological research to be done in the field: How does the relationship of the colony to the metropole take place, considering the vast majority of the population of Kurds

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<sup>20</sup> To see the whole speech: <http://www.haberturk.com/gundem/haber/1193439-erdogan-iki-ozel-harekatcidan-resimli-mesaj-geldi-cok-duygulandim>



living in the Western metropolises in Turkey? What are the histories of making distinctions between ruler and ruled, and how are categories like Turkishness or Metropolitan identity constructed in line with it? How do the social policies of the Turkish Republic articulate as well as resolve with specific visions of Ottoman Empire? Last but not the least, I have mentioned a very large scope of people, from low level public officials to bureaucrats who have economic interests to be/work in the Kurdish regions. However, considering the plurality of positions and dissonant voices rather than assuming a coherent category, colonizer (Stoler, 1997) how each particular group participate, benefit from and make sense of this conquest and rule remains as a remarkable question worthy of our academic endeavor.

Inspired by Fanon's words "The colonial world is divided into compartments [...] the colonial world is a world cut in two (Fanon, 2001, p. 29)", in this chapter, I reflected on the geographical layout of Diyarbakır which I believe, very much reveals the line of forces it has been shaped by. It is a city cut in two in a colonial manner, compartmentalized both in terms of the space and its inhabitants. Calling into question of occupation, on the other hand, the following chapter traces the intimate sites of production of colonial politics. It focuses on the affective interplay of the categories of life and death as well as of power and insurgency in the unmaking and remaking of everyday life in Diyarbakır.

### CHAPTER 3

#### REMEMBERING, RUMOR AND AFFECT

#### IN THE REMAKING OF LIFE

In the previous chapter, I examined the configurations of necropower/politics in Diyarbakır, how it divides the city between the military quarters and death-worlds. My focus was more on the broad scale dynamics of the conquest and rule in Turkey Kurdistan which I have shown that the literature on colonial/postcolonial theory resonances in many ways.

In the chapter 3, however, I will turn my focus more on the microphysics of power; on the interplay of life and death and, the intimate sites of production of power and insurgency. Such theoretical analysis to grasp various practices of the state invading intimate spaces; *the affective grid of colonial politics* already exists. Stoler uses that term to refer to each and every pattern and rhythm of the colonial rule (Stoler, 2002). In her analysis of colonial Indonesian society in the early twentieth century, she searches for the connections between the broad-scale dynamics of colonialism and the intimate sites of implementation as she thinks that domains of the intimate; marriage regulations, childrearing practices, family life were so prominently in the perceptions and policies of those who ruled (Stoler, 2002). I will borrow the term and use it in another direction. Rather than the intimate sites of power production, I will trace the sensibilities and sentiments, the unmakings and remakings of everyday life in Diyarbakır. In other words, I will try to look into the intimate sites of production of life, where life permanently get cuts by the immediacy of violence and reassembled. The ethnographic insights made possible this chapter lies in the suddenness and inevitableness of death, in the unrecognized



voices and uncanny spaces of war, the feeling of uncertainty marking the present and, in the different levels of guilt feelings.

### 3.1 The Apprehension of death

To witness death, not only hearing the detailed stories of people get killed in different ways but also getting exposed to the images of their tortured bodies, all in all, to become a target yourself, knowing that you are killable as much as someone else is, accompanies you in Diyarbakır. They indeed, cut life into pieces. In the previous chapter, I elaborated more on the spatial dynamics and theoretical implications of death zone. In this section, I will look at the cuttings of life, how death, in all possible ways, haunted and hovered the mundane life.

The stalking of death first got stick to me at my plane to Diyarbakır. Two suit up and well-shaved men speaking “high Turkish” with confidence sat just behind my seat and yelled to the hostess: “Did you emplane the weapons? You did, right?” Who were them? What were their jobs? Were they the cleaners? By the time, the mainstream media in Turkey has not captioned the military invasion of cities in the southeast as “cleaning operation” yet. So, I still had the terminology of 90s in my mind, “the dirty war” in which Turkish state heavily relied on counterinsurgency and paramilitary groups in its fight with Kurdish struggle. They took part in torture, unidentified murders and forced disappearances (over 17.000), usually never taken into the court, even if a few of them were put on trial recently, never got punished.<sup>21</sup> A couple of months later upon my arrival, I encountered a similar situation in the news; six man claiming themselves as police want to carry a bag full with weapons inside the cabinet. The personnel at the plain refuse it as it is against the transport

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<sup>21</sup> For more information on the forced disappearances in 1990s:  
[http://hakikatadalethafiza.org/kaynak\\_tipi/yayinlarimiz/](http://hakikatadalethafiza.org/kaynak_tipi/yayinlarimiz/)

rules in Turkey.<sup>22</sup> I remember these two men persistently talking about and asking for weapons and it was the first time I felt *apprehension* which, later on I came to realize that, is a collective feeling in Diyarbakır aligning bodies and the space, dominating the mundane and reshaping the intimate attachments to the categories of life and death.

In the upcoming days, passing by a military vehicle every ten minutes while you walk in the street or by a checkpoint at every corner became a daily routine. Going out alone and staying out after darkness falls -it was at 5pm in the winter days- were considered as “dangerous” and “insane”, therefore, very few people were out in the streets. As I argued in the previous chapter, the district of Sur turned into a fabric producing death and distributing it to the rest of the city. So, calculating the safety of a place depended on its distance to Sur, the more it is far away the more you were likely to have some mobility. I encountered many conversations trying to estimate how far a bullet or a rocket can reach out from Sur so as to figure out whether it is a safe spot. Meanwhile, “the safest” places became the five shopping centers located in the new city started to build after 2000s. I took the picture, figure 10 below, in the new city that which with its fancy cafes, shopping malls, cycle routes and gated communities represents the manifestations and aspirations of middle-class lifestyle on space.

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<sup>22</sup> To see the news: <http://www.evrensel.net/haber/270363/diyarbakir-ucagindaki-silahlarin-sirri>



Fig 10 A picture from Diclekent, 75 district

There it was possible to have some mobility and “normalcy” during the daytime. By “normalcy”, it was meant to be able to go out and work. In this district, I visited many houses where furnitures in front of windows were removed to feel safer.

One of my informants was living in Diclekent and working as a teacher in a high school in Sur.<sup>23</sup> Almost all of the schools in the district either completely damaged or had been inaccessible during the war. His school, however, was one of the three schools which were not in the curfew zone. Yet, there was no education for two months in the fall semester since 90% of the students were residents of Sur and couldn't make it school. Nevertheless, the Ministry of National Education, obligated teachers to come to the empty school, one street further than the places the armed conflict took place.

I accompanied the teachers working there a couple of times. In those days, we left the car outside the walls -entrance was allowed only for pedestrians- and, walked to the checkpoint. We were asked to show IDs and searched for twice, both on the

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<sup>23</sup> In Turkish Sur means the walls surrounding the city in the ancient times.

entrance and the way out. There was a heavy smell in the air, I wasn't sure whether coming from the uncollected trash everywhere or the dead bodies couldn't pick up. Almost all the houses in the neighborhood looked empty, some were damaged, the others were left. The shootings were so close by the time that once, in the teacher's room, people prostrated and waited until it was over. We barely spent one hour in the school, my informant signed that day's paperwork. I asked the teachers how all these goings-on affect them.

Lately, I leave the home in the mornings without knowing if I can ever come back. This makes having a future plan impossible, even for very simple individual ones like keep going to weekend matches with your friends. It hinders you from planning, from dreaming the future. In order to dream, you need to give yourself a minimum guarantee that you are not going to die now. It is the war, a mood of fear and apprehension. You cannot think of what you are going to do, where you want to live, what kind of a world you imagine... It cuts all of these (personal communication, 2015).

My wife is having psychological problems right now. She wants to leave Diyarbakır but I cannot do that because of my work. Other than that, there is the physical destruction of war. You know that people die every day, leave their home, the neighborhood I grew up is destroyed now. Once again a fear of state and death found its way into our lives (personal communication, 2015).

On my way to school, I am harassed physically and verbally every day. I have to pass through a police cordon, people aiming their guns towards me. They put Turkish flags everywhere and play the weird songs which they think would irritate us (personal communication, 2015)

Those of whom were willing to talk to me among teachers were Kurdish. Besides, there were a few non-Kurdish teachers working in the school whom were doing their compulsory service and, I was able to talk to only one of them.

I am divorced and living alone with my daughter. I am here because I have to. Yesterday evening, I cried for hours when I saw my daughter trying to walk on her hands. She said her nanny told her to do that when there is a noise outside. I just didn't do anything and cried when I saw her like this (personal communication, 2015).

After a while, the conversation moved to everyday jokes, who gets always searched and who is likely to just pass by at the checkpoint with her "blonde hair", "western

look”, “ID stating that she is from Trabzon” (a city from the Black Sea region). On our way back, on the other hand, my informant and I were patted down and the police told to my friend “you don't look like a teacher. You look like a terrorist.”

Everyone I had a small chat with during my fieldwork mentioned how “uncanny” the streets are and “dangerous” to be out of home.

In Freud’s view, the uncanny involves the familiar becoming strange. Sitting in an ordinary place where one is apparently safe –such as a cozy house—one feels exposed to inexplicable terror, about to witness the appearance of things felt to be “too terrible to bring fully to light”. The uncanny is something which ought to have remained hidden but has come to light (Martin, 2009, p.1).

In Diyarbakir, this inexplicable terror can be bomb exploitation, you can get shoot or find yourself in the middle of a gunfight. You can get arrested and lost in custody or, in the worst scenario the armed conflict can leap to your street. These all happened during the eight months I was in Diyarbakır. We all learned one thousand possible different ways of dying and killing. Therefore, in this section, I tried to explore how the apprehension of death deeply rearranged the domain of social, redefined people's attachments to category of life and, created certain movings and non-movings.

### 3.2 Voices and the uncertainty

“Ji qewmé pezkoviyan re xew heram e”<sup>24</sup>

I landed to a military airport in Diyarbakır, the city did not have civilian airport back then and, the whole entrance was circled with police barricades. It was forbidden to take pictures inside and around the airport, stated in four languages except Kurdish and, you could have seen the warplanes on your left side, taking off at anytime of the day. In the upcoming days, I noticed that they especially leave the ground towards

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<sup>24</sup> A line from Rénas Jiyan’s poem *Janya*. The word pezkoviyan means mountain goat in Kurdish. So, the translation would be “for the tribes of mountain goats -always uptight and timid- there is no sleep”.

morning, wakes you up till the next moment of silence to go back to sleep. Everyone living in Diyarbakır knows the particular, sleep-distracting voice/noise of the warplanes. It is the background music of life; a music that you just expose, have to listen and cannot move to the next song as long as the war continues. The song you hear anytime anywhere during the day, reminding the people living on the ground that they are just up there ready to bomb. Indeed it is a part of the repertoire of war.

During my fieldwork, there were many times I wasn't able to hear the person next to me because of this noise, we had to wait until it passed by, so that we could continue our chat and, The moments of silence were always followed by a couple sentences, interpretations, and sometimes even by jokes about the situation. "Every time they land off I imagine one of them crashes. Inshallah they crash. (personal communication, 2015)". "Today must be intense (referring to the war) they have not stopped even for a moment (personal communication, 2015)". "Kandil<sup>25</sup> take your guard! They are coming (personal communication, 2015)."

I arrived at Diyarbakır "in a complicated time" as my taxi driver put it. The two and half year long peace process was over and, both sides were getting ready to back in fighting, this time in the cities. There was the gloomy uncertainty of waiting in the air and the heaviness of the question what would happen next in the minds. It was a time of inbetweeness, of moods shifting from optimism (flourished with the peace negotiations toward future) to pessimism of a collective post-war memory (especially extracted from past experiences of 1990s).

I wondered how many different voices could there possibly be after all? Fireworks, guns, bombs, artillery shootings, armored vehicles open fire, warplanes

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<sup>25</sup> The name of the mountain in the border of Irak-Iran, many of the PKK camps and high-level managers of the organization are settled there.

get off and land the ground... What does it mean to recognize and to be appalled by all of them? What happens when you cannot distinguish one from another?

Along with the apprehension of death, voices of war also cut into life between the moment you hear certain voices and its afterward. “Bombings are anytime of the day, especially in midnights it never stops (personal communication, 2015).”

Every morning when I woke up for three months, the first thing I did was to open the curtain and check the sky if the helicopter was flying. The moment I left home, when I heard the helicopter flying on top of me, I felt like I was going to watch one of the famous war movies. I mean I was going into a psychology of war and, going to school thinking whether I would have to be to use a gun, how I could stay alive and so on. You become aggressive, nervous and restless. You hear different stories of how people get killed every day. There is no reason for you not to be died or killed (personal communication, 2015).

In accordance with the voices of war, different survival strategies had been developed such as prostrating, not sitting close to the windows, trying to figure out the quietest place in the house to be able to be sleep.

War, beyond and beside its other evil aspects, brings a new, self-indulgent language in its wake. The repertoire of war is self-indulgent in the sense that it invalidates all other languages you have encountered, learned, spoken, imagined etc. so far and, penetrates into the routines of life. It includes but not limited to, voices, causalities, stories of war, the names and brands of different styles of guns, which one is suitable for what purposes such as for long distance firing, uncertainty of the present as well as the past and future, are very much inherent to this language.

During my fieldwork, sometimes by chatting with people, sometimes by walking around and smelling the mood in air and mostly in the moments of silence, I learned this new language. Every morning when I wake up for six months, I did online search in order to figure out which roads are open, which ones are closed,

which neighborhoods, streets and main roads are under curfew etc., and what would be, the most importantly, safest and sometimes fastest way to go from a place to another one under the daily changing circumstances. The main road going to the only public university in the city with some other important places was closed for three months. The alternative roads you had to take added at least half an hour to the time you need to spend on road depending on the traffic. Some days I completely relied on what I would call “the public newspaper/bush telegraph”. I just went out and asked the people for the latest news in the city, where I am not allowed to go today, which roads are safe, whether there is protest today that means there would be more police, checkpoints and crash.

All those conversations remind me the time I spent in West Bank where I went during my graduate study to see a zone actually described as occupied. There every day I used to check the news to see where I may not be able to go and to calculate how many checkpoints I have to pass. Then, I will go to the closest local bus terminal and ask people there. Then, three and four people immediately come together and start to discuss which would be the shortest at the same time the safest way to go from one place to another. I am talking about 20 minutes far away distances and the typical sentences would be like:

-If you take X road, it is shorter but there is Y checkpoint there and sometimes they (Israeli soldiers) close the road or search the bus.

-You should take Z road, you will change two buses but then you only pass Qalandiya (the main checkpoint between the northern West Bank and Jerusalem) and at this time of the day, there is not much queue.

On the other hand, most of the time we cannot come a final conclusion so, I just decide to try and see between the roads allocated for Israeli army, settlers and



Palestinians. What I am trying to explain here is, such uncertainties -roads, voices, future plans etc- have nothing to do with your knowledge of the place. Rather, they are very much the dynamic of life in occupied territories. In colonial geographies, in other words, what you see in the Google maps -in a similar manner chapter 2 argues for the enforcement of law- never fits the reality you deal with.

### 3.3 The guilt feelings

“I wished to be in prison, to be de facto inside the walls. Only then, maybe, I could have some relief (personal communication, 2016)”.

Learning the language of war, deeply and irreversibly affects one's relationship to her own body, to the people around, the places she like to go and her daily routines.

Witnessing the immense destruction of living and nonliving beings, at the same time, brings back the questions on the position of the witness. These are usually the questions asked by the survivors on the notion of surviving itself. Is it really possible to witness to the destruction of war? If so, does witnessing always require ascribing a meaning to the goings-on? Could the act of writing on “what happened” itself be a form witnessing? How and for whom? Even if some sort of witnessing can be possible via performative, autobiographical or testimonial forms of writing, could what is written be heard? I, myself struggled with similar questions in the process of writing this thesis.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Zabel Yesayan, for example, as a representative of the Aid Committee was sent to Cilicia after the massacres of Armenians in Adana in 1909. In her chronicles *Yikintilar Arasinda* (Among the Ruins), she eye-witnesses the destruction of Armenian community and neighborhoods in a very literal language. Yesayan clearly states that she wants her writings to show inhumanity of what happened in the homeland (Ottoman Empire) (Yesayan, 2014, p. 31). Throughout the book, she seems to believe the promises of equal right-based citizenship over nationalism. Her line of thought proves that she keeps the hope, once the Turkish citizens of the Ottoman Empire feel the pain of the victims in their heart, they would eventually realize the injustice.

On the other hand, Nichanian argues that just by doing so, she attributes meaning to not only her act of writing/witnessing but also the destruction itself (Nichanian, 2014). A couple of years after she completed her book, destruction of the whole Armenian

In my fieldwork, I did trace the different ways and sentiments of to bear witness to the war. “What you see, the stories you listen are horrific. It is like an earthquake happened in Sur (personal communication, 2016)”. Many of my informants, in different words, implied that the feeling of guilt and self-blame is inherent to their witnessing. “I sit at home, I feel guilty. I go out, I feel guilty. I go to a movie and feel guilt. I couldn't feel something else in this period (personal communication, 2016)”.

At this point, it is important to note that I encountered different levels of guilt interwoven with disgrace. The first level is about witnessing a war against your “values”, “your nation”, “your existence” and not being able to do anything or, not being as involved as the ones fighting with their guns.

You become a party in war. I personally could neither get involved nor stay away and this returned to me as self-blaming. This was the biggest price I paid for in this last six months because you were expected to go and fight. Either you fire a gun or there is no alternative to it. How else you could take part in war! (personal communication, 2016).

War has a price for you to pay as it puts you in of no use position. I know for what reasons these people are getting killed. What is under attack is the language, identity, history and the culture that I also feel attached. It is also an attack to the world I imagine, I want to create (personal communication, 2016).

Here, I should note such level of guilt was more common among the people who support or, have sympathy for the Kurdish Movement. For example, it appeared as a main theme in the interviews I conducted with teachers of Free Schools. They also

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community, the Armenian genocide takes place. Therefore, as Nischanian fairly asks “Let say, Yesayan was only wrong for a century. Are they going to listen her today?” (Nischanian, 2014, p. 25).

Furthermore, in contrast to Yesayan’s efforts to witness with her writings, Agamben traces witnessing from the point of *lacuna in testimony*, the cut of the unaccountable in testimony. “[...] testimony contained at its core an essential lacuna; in other words, the survivors bear witness to something it is impossible to bear witness to (Agamben, 1999, 13)”. Even the survivor, in other words, cannot bear witness completely and, in those moments, the language of testimony give way to the non-language to show this impossibility (Agamben, 1999, p. 38).

used the term “paying the price” which was itself a recalling of guilt. They deeply found themselves guilty for “not being involved to the struggle”, believed that they are paying the price for “being useless”.

In addition, some of my interviewees described the guilt as a form of unchanneled anger you feel toward the destruction and injustices of war.

Anger, not being able to do anything resulted in guilt feelings in us. We say that we are of no use anymore. Even if I have been teaching for the Free Schools, it seems meaningless. To fight in the cities, mean normal people would be involved and some of them did. The rest, however, had lived a life far away from the reality of war (personal communication, 2016).

Diyarbakır imagined as the capital of Kurdistan and known to be very political, as one of the cities of resistance in Turkey’s Kurdish regions. In this last period, however, the city lapsed into the silence where the only voice you could hear was the voices of war. Nowadays, when you go to Sur, the perpetrators (killers) welcome you first. The line demarking death (you can't pass the checkpoint) and life (you pass it), they decide which one it is with their irritated looks and guns pointed at you. Once you are inside the walls, this time the silence of postwar welcomes you. It is the silence of ruins and of the lacuna of witnessing (Agamben, 1999).

In this time period, the self-indulgent language of war made it impossible for the people of Diyarbakır to resist by familiar means. Protests lasting for days, marchings, throwing stone or molotov at police became the old ways of resisting. And this resulted in deadlocks in the flow of everyday, revealed the guilt feelings, anger and disgrace. “It is a stage of vulnerability to be left nothing to say, no soul to scream. How come a person becomes ashamed of talking? (personal communication, 2016)”

On the other hand, not all my informants were fully aware of or, more precisely, able to link their testimonies to political motivations. Rather, the feeling of guilt appeared as an everyday unmaking of life firmly captured by the uncertainty.

We forgot about our long-term plans and started living for one day. Every morning I leave the house saying goodbye to my wife. I used to kiss my kids before I leave for work, in this period, I try not to see them. Every time I look at them, I feel the pain of the kids dying in the streets. I don't want to love them, don't want to look at them. My wife planned how she would continue her life without me in case something happens to me (personal communication, 2016).

You don't want to have a moment of happiness; you feel pangs and remorse when you have such a moment. They are so young (referring fighters at Sur). You don't want to have the taste of food, you can't laugh. I have to call a 15 years old kid martyr. In the days conflict is intense, I wake up with the bombardments and cannot do anything (personal communication, 2016).

Here was the second level of guilt feelings at stake. The guilt of survival mixed with disgrace is more of related to the fact that life goes on for the survivors despite all the deaths, loss and destruction.

Moreover, there were two times during my fieldwork, I felt like people wanted me to be a kind of witness to what happened. First, it was the day I visited a high school in the district of Sur. On my way back to the entrance gate five minutes walk further, I slowed down my steps in order to spend more on the only main street by the time was not under curfew. I was holding my mobile phone, hoping to be able to take some pictures but couldn't find the courage as the police barricade was just a bit ahead of me. In the entrance, they clearly stated that cameras and taking picture are not allowed inside the walls of Sur. Meanwhile, a man who may felt my hesitation, approached to me and said, "Take pictures! Take the pictures of the trash and ruins everywhere!" I just said "ok" and kept walking while feeling like I was strolling among the ruins.

The second time I was asked to witness was a couple of months later when the armed conflict was over in Sur. By the time I was taking the picture of the graffiti says, “Cundullah Team<sup>27</sup> was here”, a lady from her balcony shouted at me and pointed out the places of other similar graffiti. She said: “Take pictures of those, too.”

During my fieldwork, my ethnographic self was captured by guilt feelings as much as my informants were. On the 11th of January I wrote to my diary:

What are the residues of war? Maybe I should think about that. Since I am here, every day I say it is not going to worse and it gets worse. It is the 44<sup>th</sup> day of curfew in Sur. In Saturday, there was almost not any conflict. I went out. It was crowded and sunny. For a moment, it seemed like life was going on. I told to myself: “This is a normal day.” I don’t know what a normal day is but it felt so. Then, on the Sunday morning, I wake up to the voices of bombardment at 7am. Since I wake up early, I thought of going for a walk but I couldn’t. People were dying and I thought of going for walk... (personal diary, 2016).

For a very long time, I wasn’t sure about how I could possibly talk about what I had eye-witnessed, all that speeches seemed like collection of dead words so, I remained silent.

### 3.4 The Burden of remembering

In Diyarbakır, I always walked in the streets with similar questions on my mind. What does it mean to be alive under the conditions of constant war, humiliation and struggle? What happens to the category of life itself under siege? And the most tentatively, how one (I) could research, write, reflect on, witness to in sum, how could war be included in an academic piece of writing?

While dealing with these questions, I started to collect stories especially the ones clustered around shoes. In Diyarbakır, shoes give you insight on the thirty years

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<sup>27</sup> Nobody knows who were the Cundullah Team but in the curfew zones, similar street writings giving references to some religious and ultra-nationalist groups were found out.

long struggle between the Turkish State and Kurdish guerrilla movement. The above story belongs to an informant who was born in late 1980s in a small village of Diyarbakır. Therefore, like anyone else in his generation, he has many memories regarding the village raids at the beginnings of 1990s. In our conversations, he repeated several times with a strong enthusiasm, willing to be sure that I get it right, that Kurdistan is under occupation. Later on, I asked him to tell me more on what occupation means to him. He preferred to write down *My Mother's Home*:

### My Mother's Home

For my mother, on the basis of her life experience, the world consisted of her village and house. My mother's house was bigger than the world, full of memories in its every corner that which she tried to hide, protect from everything and everyone. She spent almost all her life in her village. Her love, respect, dignity was that house. She carefully safeguarded it from footprints, voices, and strangers. My mother's country was under occupation. In her village, the stories of combat boots<sup>28</sup> started to be told. The jaws broken by boots, the shattered faces, the broken doors... We started to be scared of everything and everyone. One-day soldiers beyond measure encircled our village. They came with their boots. Streets and courtyards were a sea of mud. My brothers and me were cuddled with fear. After a while, there started to come unclear noises from our courtyard. Open the door! Open the door! (I came to realize deep inside what these words mean later on in my life). When my mother opens the door, soldiers breezed into the house with their guns pointing us. My mother resisted only by two words: Solé xwe bixin, sole xwe bixin! (Take your shoes off!). That day, I don't know how many bloody, muddy boots walked inside my mother's house. We were afraid but my mother... My mother was hurt, humiliated and broken. Entering her house without taking off your shoes was a sin. It was insult to her lifetime efforts. Despite the ice-cold winter day, she set out to brush the carpets once the soldiers left. I don't know how many more winter days she did the same later on (personal communication, 2016).

It is a very familiar, almost generic narrative that which is possible to hear many other ones when people want to tell you the horror of what happened to them. It provides a very vivid, lived memory of the 1990s “dirty war” took place in the Kurdish regions, state violence, forced migration, unidentified murders,

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<sup>28</sup> In Turkish called *postal*; the particular, heavy, dark green shoes weared by the military personnel.

assassinations and torture, marking lives of the next two generations. In his article *Violence and Freedom*, Haydar Darıcı (2011) explores how the repeated stories of state violence transmitted to the children of forced migrant families in Adana whom have not directly experienced the 1990s provide *a collective repertoire*. He argues that the perpetual circulation of these stories opens up a narrative space shaping the children's understanding of Kurdishness and being Kurdish (Darıcı, 2011). My informant has directly experienced both state violence and forced migration in 1990s. However, Darıcı also displays how the post-memory of war keeps affecting the next generations; not necessarily breaking up subjects, on the contrary, constructing them by providing a repertoire "conveying them experiences they would not be able to recount personally" (Darıcı, 2011, p. 15).

There are a few guerrillas walking through the top of mountain and their footprints on the snow. I have never forgotten this picture was on the cover of a magazine. I saw the guerrillas for the first time in my life. They were wearing Make-up (personal communication, 2015).

On the one side there is the military boots made of leather, green, harsh and enduring. There is, on the other hand, also the Make-up<sup>29</sup>, the guerilla shoes, simple and cheap, nothing special about it. The only feature making Make-up desirable is that it is perfect with its non-slip base for walking in the winter. In a similar way of shoes, life is cut in two, in between the suddenness of state violence and the hope of insurgency. The quotation below is from the day with a friend of mine I passed through a showcase and saw Make-up. My friend tells me the story of Make-up and of how he hears about the guerilla movement for the first time in his life. Make-up known as guerilla shoe is considered as evidence of "being a member of terrorist organization". Therefore, my friend used to hide his Make-up when soldiers came to

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<sup>29</sup> Make-up is the name of the particular brand of shoe, known as guerilla shoes and very famous among Kurds.

his village. He joyfully describes me the man who was making special wooden cabinets under sofas in order to hide Make-ups with other “criminal” things.

The Stories Told by Shoes as the way I call it, are very much about how life has been captured, suffered and resisted in the Kurdish regions. In other words, residues of war and struggle get accumulated in those stories. On the one hand, the occupation gets crystallized and visible in the footprints left by the combat boots. Tracing the colonial resonances of domination over land once again shows that it could have only made possible by violence and force. On the other hand, they also enable us to look at the affective domain of the intimate, at the remakings of life through resistance.

War, not only with its voices, uncertainty and apprehension but also with its stories circulates among us. I agree with Darıcı that circulation of certain traumatic stories not necessarily split the subjects as many trauma studies have suggested (Darıcı, 2011, p. 10). Rather, the interaction and transmission of postwar memory stands in the intersection between politics, insurgency and generations. It provides people the possibility to attach meaning to the present constantly interrupted by different forms of violence such as poverty, institutionalized racism, difficulties of adapting the life in forced migrated cities and also to the history of Kurdish struggle. In other words, it enables what has been unmade to be remade in everyday life.

On the other hand, during my fieldwork, I came to realize that what emerges is a particular subjectivity burden with remembering:

While struggling with all those problems I myself became a problem. It is constant feeling of waking up in yesterday. Some people die, others get arrested. You discuss what could it be done about it, you feel sad, self-despair and intimidation. Then, you wake up to the same things. It is like every new day waking up to yesterday (personal communication, 2015).



Even if the voices of war may be gone, life doesn't just simply resume. It is because the remade subject knows where the warplanes fly toward and why or, have an idea about where the gunshots possibly come from. This is the sense of the uncanny, the fear that the darkness might return to light. The memory of war, massacres and death is kept alive and, repeatedly evoked in those stories. As one of my informants puts it: “you never hear the voice of ambulance for normal reasons in Kurdistan” (personal communication, 2015).

For the New Year, I was invited to a friend's house for dinner. Winter had been the harshest time of war, everyone looked fine that day though. We kept talking about the turkey for a while, how you cook it, which part of it is the best and so on. In a moment of silence, however, I couldn't wait longer and raised the sensitive question: “What do you think is going to happen?” Everyone left their knives and forks on the table. My friend Mehmet was the first one to speak. “We are trying not to think about it indeed. However, by avoiding talking about it or, acting as if there is no war going on, we betray ourselves”. Ahmed sitting next to him said: “The spring is coming. This time something real is going to happen”. In those winter days, everyone was somehow waiting for the spring to come. It was because when weather conditions get better in the mountains, the guerilla gains mobility. That's why, people believed that “the real war” in the cities will take place in the spring. Merve said: “You know what Hazal, I am 30 years old and, this is the only topic talked about in the crowded family dinners since I was a kid. ‘What is going to happen?’ I am tired of listening to all those stories and scenarios over and over again.”

There was one more friend who remained silent throughout our talk, but when she finally spoke, she told us how her family had to move to Antalya, how her brother got arrested there, and all difficulties her family had to face. “My nation has

had enough of pain. I used to imagine that my brother would be released one day and, the whole family would come together again around a dinner table like this one. I don't even think about this anymore” (personal communication, 2015). In the upcoming days, her brother asked her to send a pair of Make-up brand of shoes in his letter. She hesitated at the beginning, as she didn't want him to have trouble in prison but then, we go and get the shoes for him. I also met with “the mothers”, a group consists of people whom someone from her family stays in the same prison. They, every once a month, come together, share the travelling money and go to the city of Gaziantep to visit their beloved ones. It took a while to go back to our food and when we did nobody at the table was joyful anymore. The burden of memory that we were able to forget about for a moment maybe, because of the turkey which we all were unfamiliar and hesitant as a choice of food, lying in the middle of the table or with help of us gathering together. So, the feeling of wholeness we were able to capture for a moment soon tear apart. We went back to the fragmented, uncertain, obstructed mood of life. I wished not to asked the question so that we could have the moment longer. I was in regret.

My encounters in the field and the stories I collected made me realize that the knowledge of what is done as well as what could be done to you, to the people you cared for, to your home/land get articulated in the postwar memory. That is how, in every cut, the subject burdened by remembering can easily go back to this repertoire and tell about her direct/indirect experiences of violence and struggle that which may, otherwise, wouldn't find voice. An informant (28) says she remembers the 1990s not personally but from the memories of family members she used to listen.

This is the worst period my generation has eye-witnessed. I was kid in 1990s. I can't remember much but I have fears inherited from that period. My generations have its own consciousness and memory now. I am a 30 years old woman. In this period, I know very well what war means. I feel it in my body

and soul. Things that you wouldn't believe in a film scenario have come true. Death bodies remained in the streets for days and people who went to pick up them also killed. I cannot forget those (personal communication, 2016).

Until the next voice you hear or memory you call back, all the conversations take place in the uncertainty of present under siege. The oldest person in Diyarbakır remembers the Armenian genocide whereas the youngest remembers the 1990s and lives through the ongoing colonial occupation.

Agamben reminds us the Greek word *martis* (to witness) itself derived from the verb meaning “to remember” (Agamben, 1999, p. 260). “The survivors’ vocation is to remember; he cannot not remember” (Agamben, 1999, p. 260). Here, the question burdens me is, isn't it war is the point where all walls fall down and a smoky cloud covers over everything, makes you forget the right and wrong, the truth and lie? To put it differently, under the immense destruction of war, what is left to witness other than the gunshots and the smell of gunpowder? What is there to be remembered among the ruins after all? Like many anthropologists paying attention to “the puzzling contradictions of lives perpetuated by violence” I have suggested that “through violence, people forge moral understandings about the implications of their actions, stand up in the face of brutality, and develop forms of resistance to what they perceive as insufferable oppression” (Nordstrom and Robben, 1995, p. 8-10). In this section, I tried to explain the relationship between violence and memory in everyday life, and to elaborate on the double-functioning of the term “to remember”. The remade subject is burdened by remembering in the present, while on the other hand, the act of remembering helps her to make sense of the collective past as well as the present marked by violence.

### 3.5 Rumors

Many ethnographers working in violent geographies run across a good deal of rumor and gossip and, assure that these can also be an important source of knowledge, sometimes the only one available to them under the rapidly changing circumstances of excessive violence (Nordstrom and Robben, 1995, p. 15). Anna Simons, for example, describes how the conflicting rumors outburst in different social networks by the time of street violence in Somalia. She argues that rumor provided people with “a perspective on an unstable situation” (Nordstrom and Robben, 1995, p. 15). In the last section of this chapter, I would like investigate the role of rumor in the period of intensified violence in the cities. I argue that rumor as one of the significant intimate reaches of people’s lives, absorbs the uncertainty, the feelings of danger and apprehension that have long been dominating the mundane. By doing so, it helps to credit and make sense of everyday life unmade by violence.

The conflict took place in the heart of Diyarbakır made the daily routines such as going work or for a walk, shopping for dinner, making plans for the weekend unattainable. As I have shown in the previous sections, everyday life has been captured by colonial state of emergency secured via force of death, the voices and uncanny spaces of war, the uncertainty of present as well as future, and the guilt feelings. Arbitrary electricity and phone line cuts, checkpoints, military controls and concentrations, on and off curfews, they all stopped life short in different ways. At this point, the outburst of rumor and the bush telegraph which I also had no chance but to rely on time to time, become a new source containing a particular kind of knowledge which is both reliable and unjustifiable at the same time. In other words, the otherwise inaccessible knowledge on what happened, what is happening now as well as the survival strategies under the rapidly changing conditions circulated via

rumors without having a final source of information. This lack of confirmation, on the other hand, has done nothing to the rumors' credibility and potential to move people in accordance. On the contrary, under the perpetual cuttings of life and censorship on media, they were the only available, to a certain degree reliable and sometimes enjoyable source of acquiring knowledge.

To put it more fully, the expensive question of what is going to happen to us –to the people who aren't dead yet- has been relieved by replacing it with -what is going on now- which indeed, rumors provided a volatile content. In this sense, rumors functioned as source of news. However, although all the foreign journalists deported from Kurdish regions, I should note that there remained at least two central source of news. First of all, there is the state controlled, therefore, censored private media. By the time of war, their reporters were the ones who had some mobility and access in the region, allowed to take photos and so on. I did a brief media monitoring for my second chapter, therefore, had chance to follow a couple them. They did not wrap the actual news as one could expect. Rather, most of the time they just completely lied and did black propaganda. They contributed to the rise of racism in the Western cities and helped the State justifying the ongoing war. As a part of the psychological war going on between the two sides, for example, many state controlled sources announced that 8000 PKK militants were killed in the operations<sup>30</sup> whereas PKK itself declared the number of militants they lost be around 750<sup>31</sup>.

The second active media source has been the TV channels and newspapers funded by or known as closer to the Kurdish Movement. Their reporters were targeted of constant police harassment, imprisonment and, a few of them were shot.

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<sup>30</sup> See for example, <http://www.ahaber.com.tr/webtv/gundem/analiz-kimler-terore-destek-veriyor>

<sup>31</sup> See the link: <http://www.ozgur-gundem.com/haber/170490/karayilandan-10-aylik-savas-bilancosu>

Yet, they also lost some credibility among people of Diyarbakır. An informant of mine working for this second type of media stated that he was asked to go live and say that people living in the İdil district refused to leave their houses and were ready to defend their neighborhood. By the time he made such news, however, İdil was like a ghost town and people suspecting another curfew to be declared were already left the region. Many other similar news suggested that the insurrection was getting deeper day by day and more people were getting involved.

Under these circumstances, a new source of knowledge that can spread and get consumed fast and in return, less likely to be censored emerged. I argue that the outburst of rumor in Diyarbakır by the time of armed conflict had two reasons: the lack of reliable resources under rapidly changing circumstances and the shattering of life under excessive violence. As a consequence, rumors “[...] infused the political confusion with an unending flow of seemingly credible but immediately discredited rationales” (Nordstrom and Robben, 1995, p. 15).

In the course of my fieldwork, every day different rumors circulated in public. They were most of the time about the conflict. “There are also ditches in X, Y neighborhoods but the state does not interfere”, “the police has been searching for the PKK’s heap at Z”, “9 people taken into custody before, were executed today since they might be confessed to the police”, “YPS (Civil Defense Units) has been forcing people to leave their houses to build tunnels allowing to move between houses from inside”. The grocery store under my place, for example, was one of rumor gathering spots. Every time I went inside for 6 months, I listened to different stories.

On the other hand, the fifth of March when the armed conflict leaped to the district of Bağlar, which was also my neighborhood, was a remarkable day in terms

of rumor telling. In the late afternoon, young people their faces covered and holding bazookas on their shoulders closed the main road in the neighborhood, almost all cars in the street were either set into fire or used in barricades. The whole “thing” took until the next day's morning. Till then, we didn't have chance to receive any information on who they were and how serious the situation was. After a couple of hours, the electricity was gone and we just sat inside the house shaking every time a rocket was launched.

Bağlar is the most crowded neighborhood in the city with a population of 400.00 not including the people who left Sur -majority of them indeed- and moved to Bağlar because either they have relatives living in the neighborhood with whom they can share the house or the fact that Bağlar was the only affordable option. Therefore, although there had been rumors that ditches were “ready” and that Bağlar would be the next place of war, everyone was shocked and didn't know what to do when the time arrived. In the coming week of, curfew declared in some parts of the neighborhood and once again after Sur, people started leaving their houses without knowing when they would be able to come back. As far as I am concerned, the moment I felt that it is safe outside, I went to our grocery store to figure out what was going on. All in all, I learned that it was a one-night event. I could never have the chance to check either this one or, the other different versions I came across later on. Still, it was some kind of information, indeed the only one available at that time, and it provided some relief.

Another secretive event that gathered lots of rumor and speculation was the very big, unidentified explosion of a track filled with explosives in one of the villages of Sur. The boom was felt almost all around the city and, was a shocking even for a city facing with destruction of war, stuck with the dilemma of not getting

used to all those inhumane killings and bomb attacks and, of have to do so in order to survive. This particular explosion left a huge pit on the land, human body parts scattered around and lots of rumors. It was not clear how many villagers died but 60 kilograms of remainings belonged to 13 people was collected. For what purposes the track was filled with such a huge amount of explosives? Who were the villagers exactly? How did they get the guns? Is it true that they caused the track to explode by opening fire to it? How did they get the guns? Were they forced to follow the track? All those questions found volatile answers in rumors.

The second type of rumors, on the other hand, had been more about the myths of insurgency. The names of “Jager Roza” and “Commander Ciyager” have taken its place in the collective memory and in the narratives of resistance and valor. Roza, for example, is known as a woman guerilla having excellent sharp shoot skills and also fought in Syria. During the period of armed conflict in Sur, every day a new story of Roza popped up and immediately told the people around starting with a sentence like “Did you hear what Roza does?” How many people did she kill, what were their military rankings, whether they were high ranking officers -- these were all included in the rumors. She is respected a lot for “wasting not even a single bullet”. Roza was a real person and later on, many pictures of her circulated in the media. In those pictures, she was always smiling and grasping her gun. Meanwhile, she becomes a metaphor for all the woman fighters in the Kurdish regions. Commander Ciyager, “a university student”, “used to study math and quitted” also became famous in this period. It has been spoken about that he came to Sur with his troop and “stayed to the end”.

When I first arrived in Diyarbakir, rumors were already in circulation. The guerilla stories; how they resist, their war strategies, new tactics, who was likely to



be promoted inside the movement or get arrested soon and how, what is written in someone's juridical file, what someone says in their own defense, and many other rumors were part of the daily conversation. However, with the intensification of violence in the cities these rumors became the conversation itself, constituting the main source of information in social life. There has been an outburst both in quality - the expansion in the intensity of daily circulation and also the immediate consumption of rumors- and in quantity -basically the amount of rumors you would be exposed-. Some examples would be "There are underground tunnels in the entire city". "They started to use fertilizer in the making of explosives last year and since then, 2 tons fertilizer stored up in Sur".

Besides, through the circulation of these mythical rumors, the insurgency achieves a quality of narrative totality. In other words, it becomes something other than the dispersed stories of death, pain and humiliation around. The stories of who survived, fought against, resisted as well as the life stories of which we don't have access otherwise, find a place in the narrative via rumors. It is because the moment people start to tell about the war, they include the courage, dignity, commitment, sacrifice of those insurgents, their past histories and present braveries. They are imagined and constituted as "martyrs of the nation" fighting against the enemy "for your future", "in the name of you".

Rumors one way or another related to insurgency were the ones told the most loudly, enthusiastically and heartily. One of my informants said "Roza today hit the bull's eye again" (personal communication, 2015) with sparkling eyes. It does not matter how mythical they sound or can be, the second type of rumors I mentioned had long been the only conversations created excitement among the participants, contrary to the self-indulgent language of war on death, human suffering and

uncertainty they enabled a narrative space for insurgency. By doing so, they provided a momentary emotional and mental relief.

Some of them could even bring back the humor -the most powerful source of remaking everyday life- among the ruins. One day, for example, the story of a man who, after one of the successful bomb attacks organized by PKK, cannot help himself and, jumps in his car and tours around his neighborhood while playing the song “Like the Pigeons Waiting for the spring” very loudly. I already mentioned what the reference to the upcoming spring meant in the times of winter in Diyarbakır. According to the hearsays, after a couple of tour police stops his car and beats him severely. Despite the dramatic ending, however, this one was one of the rumors that had long been told just for the laughter.

To conclude, trying to avoid attributing any reason or function to violence, in this chapter, I aimed to look at the microphysical production of the categories of life and death as well as power and insurgency. To do that, I traced the unmakings and remakings of the everyday in Diyarbakır, in a space shattered by violence. I argued that the apprehension of death, uncanny places, voices and uncertainties of war and the guilt feelings born out of witnessing/living through the war, they all played significant roles on that. I also proved that in the intimate reaches of people's lives, just like the burden of remembering, storytelling and rumors can also be meat for the sliding ethnographies of the experienced and encountered.

## CHAPTER 4

### EDUCATION UNDER OCCUPATION

In the previous chapters, I aimed to provide insights on Diyarbakır as a space of colonial occupation and what is more, the everyday rhythms and routines of war in a period of intensified violence. That being said, colonization of geography brings along the attempts to colonize bodies and minds as well. In other words, the conquest and rule simultaneously switches to the production of the negative values on the colonized communities in order to maintain and justify domination.

In the fourth chapter of my thesis, I will be concerned with the role of national education system and language policies in the creation of spiritual, cultural and linguistic poverty for the Kurds living in Turkey. Moreover, based on my three months ethnographic research in one of the Free Schools, I will investigate the schools from the perspective of decolonization as for the first time in Turkey, Kurdish children are provided with the opportunity of mother tongue education.<sup>32</sup>

#### 4.1 Promises of Turkish

Through the Turkish Republican history, languages and cultures except than Turkish have been considered as a threat to the national integrity. The state-building process of Republican Turkey, borrowed a lot from the ideological inheritance of *İttihat ve*

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<sup>32</sup> Throughout the chapter I benefited a lot from Şerif Derince's (2013) dictionary for researches on the use of mother tongue in education in *Çokdilli Eğitim Yoluyla Toplumsal Adalet*. He offers the term "use of mother tongue in education" to allow space for multilingualistic education models in mother tongue-based education. However, in this thesis, I keep using the term "mother tongue education" since the model of Free Schools I had looked at aim to provide curriculum in Kurdish as the language of instruction, in addition, offers gradual achievement in other languages and dialects of Kurdish. The current model would offer Zazaki and Turkish language courses as secondary/tertiary language. This, however, may vary from region to region. In the city of Urfa, for example, where the ethnic composition consists of Arabs, Turks and Kurds, the secondary language courses could be in Arabic.

*Terakki* in Ottoman Empire, based on the denial of minority rights including the cultural and linguistic rights, the right to self-determination and mother tongue education. As the metaphor of *Turkishness Contract* I referred in the second chapter very well explains Kurds as “religious fellows” were donated a different status than other minorities and expected to assimilate into Turkish culture education. In fact, Muslim non-Turkish communities have never considered as minorities in Turkey, therefore, they lack the rights that some non-Muslim communities (Armenians, Jews and Orthodox) recognized as minorities were secured under the Treaty of Lausanne (Dündar, 2014). Rather, they were roughly seen as masses to be Turkophonized.

In such nation-building process, very likely to sound similar to other worldwide nation-state forms especially in Latin America, the spread of “the national language” was a part of a large-scale social engineering. More precisely, Turkish as a central pillar of nationalism has been undertaken the mission of Turkophonizing the non-Turkish population (Ibid.). For the sake of this mission, the campaign “*Vatandaş Türkçe Konuş!*” (Citizen, Speak Turkish) was organized (Aslan, 2007), in the Kurdish populated regions it was banned to use Kurdish in state institutions and public spaces (Beşikçi, 1991) in addition to the Forced Settlement Law which aimed to change ethnic composition, “to connect the Turkish culture and race” at the expense of forced migration and displacement (Dündar, 2014).

In his article *Measuring Assimilation: ‘Mother Tongue’ Question in Turkish Censuses and Nationalist Policy*, Fuat Dündar (2014) raises the question of why the Turkish State needed to measure something which indeed it politically, juridically, and administratively denied and, concludes that linguistic questions on mother tongues and second language had been asked to measure assimilation also, to survey the dominance of Turkish language (Dündar, 2014). There is quite a literature

analyzing language policies linked to Turkish nationalism and the formations of national education system in line with that. However, there is a very limited literature on the problems posed by lack of use of Kurdish as mother tongue in education.<sup>33</sup>

In the scope of this chapter, my intention definitely is not to revise them. One thing strikes my attention, however, they all approached to the current problems as the outcome of the assimilationist nation-building processes Turkish Republic had gone through. “[...] the existence of a Kurdish problem in Turkey is a by-product of the political ontology of Turkish nation-state that has excluded all non-Turkish peoples of a vast geography across Thrace, Anatolia and Kurdistan” (Derince, 2013). I argue that this is a partially true but a deficient perspective. It is because any question related to Kurdish language disregarding the fact that spatial dynamics of colonial occupation would be insufficient to capture both historical continuum of the problem dating back to Ottoman Empire and the Kurds demands for self-determination in the present. It dangerously leaves the Kurdish and Kurdishness vagrant indeed. This is not to pass over the significant role nation building played in language endangerment. Yet, “the nationalism discourse” does not enable us to further our analysis toward a critical scholarship meditating on decolonization strategies. Why do people talk about the Kurdistan -sometimes using the words

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<sup>33</sup> See Coşkun, Derince, Uçarlar (2011) *Scar of Tongue: Consequences of the Ban on the Use of Mother Tongue in Education and Experiences of Kurdish Students in Turkey* and, Derince (2012) *Anadili Temelli Çokdilli ve Çokdialektli Dinamik Eğitim: Kürt Öğrencilerin Eğitiminde Kullanılabilecek Modeller* provides some field research on the experiences of Kurdish children as well as starts up the discussion on the possible mother tongue based multilingual and multicultural education models which can be applied in Turkey.

See also Can, Gök, Şimşek (2013) *Toplumsal Barışın İnşasında Öğretmenlerin Rolü* based on the field researches conducted with teachers and families in different cities, looking at reflections of the conflict in education as well as the potential role peace education could play in peacebuilding processes in Turkey.

These reports all stated that mother tongue education is a fundamental linguistic human right. With references to the international laws and human right declarations which some were also signed by the Turkish State as well, they called the State adopt a more democratic, multicultural and multilinguistic rule of government and education system.

Kurdish and Kurdistan interchangeably or, followingly- in today after all?

Considering the political, ideological, nationalist as well as colonialist framework

Turkish language has long been in operation, in this section, I would like to ask a different question. What does speaking Turkish promise to the Kurds?

I am aware that this a huge question needed more research sensitive to both gender and the geographical differences -Kurds living in different parts of Turkey including the metropolises migrated before and after 1990s, big cities in the Kurdish regions which allowed migrants from nearby villages and, cities closed to the borders of Syria, Iraq and Iran where Kurdish appears to be in use more common in social life- to be done in the field. Yet, I do still want to make a few points I found significant in grasping the colonial/neocolonial production of spiritual and linguistic poverty that I mentioned at the beginning. At this stage, I will rely on my field observations; daily conversations and especially my visits to a high school in Sur district, chats with my Kurdish friends who had to deal with one of the most nationalistic submersion education system in the world. In addition, all the teachers I interviewed stated that they did not know Turkish when they first started to primary school. Therefore, I also collected their experiences and stories by including some questions on the language acquisition and the current education system to my interviews. I asked how many languages they speak and how they learn them, what their mother tongue is and their experiences of schooling.

National education system as a pillar of neocolonial legacy in the Kurdish regions, on the one hand, has sorted out the reasons for your poverty, backwardness and hunger and, presented itself as the way out of all on the other. In other words, the ideology of national education has functioned double sided. It has not only produced negative values regarding Kurdish identity and culture but also promised that one can

*get rid of herself* with the help of schooling. In other words, one can learn Turkish/Turkophonize and by doing so, keep up with the modern values of the nation. The underlying logic simply has been that you need your colonizer for your own sake, for your civilized future.

As the ex deputy Prime Minister Bülent Arınç concluded, “Kurdish is not a language of civilization”. The colonial discourse is illustrative -which languages belong to the civilization and which aren't-, explanatory and conclusive one -Kurdish is definitely not one of them-. Another insightful example of such discourse would be one of the recent columns titled *Kurdish Movement's Sickness of Autonomy*.<sup>34</sup> Declaring Kurdish struggle for self-determination and autonomy, as “sickness” provides not only the necessary justification for domination over land, resources and souls but also clues on the sovereign obsession with diagnosing (Aktan, 2015).

Within this context, speaking Turkish opens a door for Kurds. The national education system in Turkey precisely promise to eliminate negative values/spiritual poverty one gets exposed, internalizes and hope to pull away as the colonized. The first and foremost step to this *reborn*ing would be to learn Turkish. At this point, we can say that life one more time gets cut; before and after you learn to speak Turkish. For example, some of my informants said those of whom left their villages mostly for schooling, after a while they just adjust to Turkish-speaking environment and culture and, when they come back never speak Kurdish again (personal communication, 2015). This language attrition resulted from linguistic homogenization enable them to put distance between them and the villagers and, to feel liberated. They, as competent speakers of Turkish, seem to succeed in getting rid

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<sup>34</sup> To see the column: <http://www.radikal.com.tr/yazarlar/ezgi-basaran/kurt-hareketinin-ozyonetim-hastaligi-1495927/>

of the negative values associated with the community they were born in or, at least keep the distance.

In the course of my fieldwork, I heard of many cases that students face with crash of indigenous values and, the dominant language and culture after schooling. They become less willing or, embarrassed of speaking Kurdish and of their parents who speaks Kurdish. Therefore, they start to have problems in familial relations, may feel anger and resentment to their parents. One of my informants who is also a teacher stated that her primary school teacher used to like the students who speak Turkish well more. Therefore, everyone in her class was trying to speak Turkish better to gain the teacher's approval. Another informant said that he was so embarrassed when his father visited him in boarding school. His father did not know Turkish so, he just said to teacher that he was the shepherd of his village came to bring him something. Similarly, another informant said that:

One day before I leave the home for school, the TV was on and I heard a Turkish word. I went to the school and the teacher asked something which nobody in the class understood. I just remembered the word I heard in that morning so, repeated it. The word was Çarşamba (Wednesday), imagine that the teacher made the whole class acclaim me just for knowing the day (personal communication, 2016).

The report *Scar of tongue: Consequences of the ban on the use of mother tongue in education and experiences of Kurdish students in Turkey* (Coşkun, Derince and Uçarlar, 2011) also dwells on the feeling of shame playing an important role in the lives of Kurdish children:

Once we reached a certain stage in Turkish I began to feel alienated from my surroundings and my village. It was as if they were all behind the times. It's as if we were second-class because we were Kurdish and when we spoke Turkish we acquired a new self-confidence. We had learned Turkish. The first time I read and understood a book I was so happy. It was as if I had achieved great success. I felt like a new person. That's when the ties to your own language are severed. Our own language is a simple, outdated language. I don't know if this was instilled in us by our teachers... That's what I thought. I thought that my language was a kind of eggy peggy: it doesn't



mean much and we are not referred to anywhere. We don't have any sources, the books sent here are in Turkish, story books are in Turkish. The heroes in the stories are Turkish. They are brave, this and that... The stories you read are in Turkish. When everything was in Turkish, Kurdish was of no value anymore. Kurdish or speaking Kurdish is not that important... I could see that whenever possible I was saying these things to my family too (Coşkun, Derince and Uçarlar, 2011, p. 52).

In sum, Turkish promises to give what you are in need to get rid of yourself; backwardness, poverty, tendency to commit violence, ignorance, and all the negative sticky values produced via and through the colonization processes.

As a key opening door to dominant culture and its advantages, I should also note that the promise of Turkish slightly differs from metropole, the West to the colony, the East. In the Western cities, there is an already existing institutionalized racism and lynching culture, which means speaking Turkish is a must to survive. It is the only way for Kurds to make a life in the West, to find a job, housing, to participate social life. In the summer 2015, a young Kurdish boy was killed at the center of Istanbul because he was “speaking Kurdish in the street”. By the time, many of my friends get warned and asked not to speak Kurdish at their work places. As an informant puts it “Turkish had meant two things until I finished high school. First to avoid get beaten or insulted by the teacher or someone else and second to have job with a better income” (personal communication, 2016).

The word *Kiro*, for example, has long been used to humiliate the people who forcedly migrated to the metropolises after 1990s. It contains many of the reference points of racism in Turkey, including to be a newcomer in the city, to carry village attitudes with yourself, the gaze of urbanity, to not being able to speak proper Turkish, to speak with accent and so on. So, the ethnic and class issues always get mixed and, to speak proper Turkish means even if you are Kurd, you are well integrated to city life, received higher education. You might be one of the “good

Kurds” indeed. For the Kurdish children living in western cities, therefore, Turkish also promises to climb the social ladder.

To conclude, an important role has been attributed to the national education system in the Turkish State’s neocolonial, assimilationist nation-building project. It has often discussed that education as one of the ideological apparatuses of the state has been heavily relied on producing qualified laborers and reproduced the already existing inequalities in society (Spring, 2014, Althusser, 1995). Differently from the “promises” of the national education system’s to a poor Turkish child, for the Kurds, the precondition of sharing the same promises is first and foremost to speak Turkish. What it is promised to a Kurdish child is to molt indeed, to get rid of her backwardness in order to achieve the privileges and comfort of Turkishness.

Lastly, I would also like to mention my observations and random meetings with the teachers and students in a high school in Sur district. To my knowledge, there is a very limited source of school ethnographies focusing on Kurdish students experiences<sup>35</sup> and none of these researches are done in the Kurdish regions. In my visits to the school, I came to realize that many students suffer from double semilingualism<sup>36</sup> resulted from submersion education in Turkey. According to the data I gathered from teachers, the linguistic composition of students is very hybrid.

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<sup>35</sup> You can see Alev Güneş’s (2013) unpublished master’s thesis argues that silence becomes a forms of resistance in an ethnically mixed neighborhoods of Istanbul for the Sunni Kurds as the latecomers as well as for their children in the school.

You can also see Oktay Ay’s (2013) ethnography with children of migrated families in the City of Mersin who, despite their families attempts to keep them in schooling, see the school as a space of struggle. In addition, Haydar Darıcı (2011) also mentions Kurdish children experiences and imaginings of the school as well as the complex and intertwined process of their becoming political subjects.

<sup>36</sup> I use the term in the sense Derince (2013, 515) suggested. In the submersive education systems, minority children get exposed to education in the sovereign language by mostly monolingual teachers. They are expected to forget their mother tongue and shift it with the dominant language and culture. Some of these children may acquire the dominant language to a certain degree whereas the others may never be able to fully express themselves. They either forget their mother tongue or there is language attrition, therefore, they become double-semilingual.

There are students who only speak Turkish, who are bilingual and understand Kurdish (Kurmanji) but cannot write and read and, who speaks Zazaki (another dialect of Kurdish) and Turkish. Although the students who speak Turkish well are a bit more successful than others, almost all students have developed only basic communication skills and, can express themselves both in Turkish and Kurdish but do not have competent language skills. Since they have not developed cognitive academic language proficiency either in Turkish or in Kurdish, they cannot understand and interpret complex textual materials, read books or, provide semi-academic writings for composition tasks given to them.

The history teacher gives me an example proving the severity of the situation. She asks for students to write down “the reasons” for First World War in the exam. Then, she goes to school next day and students are angry with her for asking questions on the topics that she does not teach at the class. So, she gets surprised and starts checking student notebooks to see whether she misremembers what she has taught and, realizes that while she teaches the topic in the class, she uses the word “causes” of the First World War. Students don't recognize that reason and cause are synonyms, therefore, could not answer the question. She looks at me so sadly while telling me this story and says, “I don't know what to do. I am desperate” (personal communication, 2015). In that vein, the English teacher told me that before she was appointed to high school, she used to teach in a primary school in West and, even then she was teaching more complex topics to the students. On the other hand, the majority of the teachers in the school are originally Kurdish. One of the few bilingual teachers in the school says “One day I taught the class in Kurdish just to see if the situation gets better. I can say that their eyes (students) were sparkled, when I spoke

Kurdish. Yet, it does not matter which language I do speak, they don't understand” (personal communication, 2015).

Almost all teachers agree that their students are “a bit idiot”. It does not matter how many times they teach the same topic, “They just don't get it”. There had been made many jokes and complains in teacher’s room about “the stupidity of students”. Only one of the teachers I have contacted suggested that this might have something to do with the lack of opportunity to achieve mother tongue-based education. The same teacher also said: “students sometimes find me closer to themselves. They know that I am a Kurd as well. One day they asked in class: ‘Professor do you think that we all are dirty or, thief or, violent? You are not from Diyarbakır but you are also Kurdish. We believe you can have an objective answer’. I couldn't know what to say” (personal communication, 2015).

From this vantage point, we know what Turkish and national education system does/promises. At this point, a critically engage scholarship should also consider what Kurdish does and the use of mother tongue can possibly promise? With this motive, in the rest of the chapter I will look at Free Schools and discuss whether they could be seen as a decolonizing practice.

## 4.2 The historical background

“We had to either Turkhonize or will get destroyed”

In this section, I would like to turn my attention to the recent history of the struggle to assimilation paved the way for Free Schools. The quotation above belongs to one of the persons took responsibility in the establishment phase of Free Schools. He is very active in the Diyarbakır branch of Kurdish Democracy Culture and Solidarity Association (Kurd-Der) which organize Kurdish language courses at different levels,

holds training programs for Kurdish instructors as well as prepares language learning materials and the textbooks for Free Schools. In our interview, he suggested that the linguistic and cultural rights of Kurds have been under attack in the four pieces of Kurdistan for long time, the situation is worst in Turkey Kurdistan though. He referred to Celadet Bedirxan who born in 1893 in Istanbul and died in Damascus as the person who prepared the first grammar book in Kurdish. Furthermore, as a resistance the nation-building aspirations of the Republic, he sees the Kurdish struggle as a “rise of political consciousness”. “Kurdish does not provide you a social status. It does not eat yours fill, on the contrary, causes trouble (personal communication, 2016).

As briefly portrayed at the beginning, it was forbidden to speak Kurdish in public spaces in 1990s. It took ten years of struggle until for the first time, Kurdish language courses started to given within the body of unions in the Kurdish regions. On the other hand, in 2005, the Turkish state was agreed to take some democratic steps on its way to accession to the European Union as a member. One of the requirements for this membership was removing restrictions and reservations on linguistic and cultural rights for minorities, therefore, the teaching of Kurdish in private language courses became possible. In addition, in 2006, Kurdi-Der as a legal association, today has more than 40 branches, was opened. It has been providing not only free language courses but also training the future instructors.

The state wanted us to confine ourselves with private language courses and schools without any legal guarantee. However, neither the existing curriculums in faculties of education, lack of bilingual teachers nor the current constitution enable this. Besides, people shouldn't pay for to learn their mother tongue, to get education. The right for mother tongue education cannot be restricted in private schools (personal communication, 2016).

Soon after, it becomes clear that the danger of language endangerment Kurdish language faces is much more deeper than thought to be and, worsening day

by day. It was understood that dissemination of Turkish and withdrawal of Kurdish by native speakers couldn't be stopped only with private/public language courses. Therefore, after 2000s, "previously concentrated on more political demands, the PKK, legal Kurdish parties and local NGOs started more effective campaigns in the field of cultural and linguistic rights (Derince, 2013, p. 5)" and, in the last decade of struggle, these demands have been formulated around mother tongue education.

Political gains of the Kurdish Movement were not corresponding to the linguistic rights. By the time, our aim became clear. We said that we should open schools, provide education in mother tongue and also should prepare the required infrastructure for these. As a movement we wanted to be ready when the time comes. Rights are not given but taken by indeed. Therefore, we de facto opened up Free Schools (personal communication, 2016).

In our interview, the representative of Kurdi-Der clearly expressed that Free Schools were opened as a political move, in order to force the Turkish State to take action. In other words, the given message is that if the state does not take the necessary steps to provide mother tongue-based education then, the Kurdish Movement would open its own schools and, constrain the state to recognize them. The first schools were open in Yüksekova, Cizre and Diyarbakır in 2014. By the time I was doing my fieldwork, the schools in Cizre, Yüksekova and Nusaybin were closed down due to the ongoing conflict and curfews in those regions. Here, I should also note that Free Schools were opened in the mild atmosphere of peace process while the negotiations were going on.

The only "improvements" in the language policies of the Turkish State with regard to recognizing linguistic human rights were the Kurdish TV broadcasting, opening of graduate Kurdish language programs and, the elective Kurdish courses in secondary schools. These are offered from the fifth grade onwards, under the name of "living languages". On the other hand, it has been reported that many troubles occur in practice such as the school managers don't want to open up Kurdish classes,

the students and families aren't informed about this possibility or, not sufficient number of bilingual teachers exist (Can, Gök and Şimşek, 2013). To conclude, these limited reforms regarding the last few years “do not constitute a break with conventional state policies; rather they perpetuate the same Turkish hegemonic domination by other means (Derince, 2013, p. 7)” since they happened “only through a process of decontextualizing Kurdish demands, presenting the reforms as the state doing favors to the Kurds and instrumentalizing these for its political agenda (ibid.)”.

#### 4.3 Free Schools

My first visit to one the Free Schools was on the report card day of the first semester in February. There were 160 excited children running around, as the figure 11 shows an example, holding their colorful reports.



Figure 11 The semester report using forbidden letters of the Kurdish alphabet

The school I did my fieldwork takes its name from an Iranian Kurdish teacher and activist who was executed on 2010 with charges against national security. It is located in one of the poor neighborhoods of Bağlar where contrary to many other neighborhoods in Diyarbakır, you are likely to hear Kurdish in the streets. On my

way to school that morning, I first passed by the famous Diyarbakır prison, the main torture center of 1980s. Then, I walked through the women from all ages, chatting in front of the *tandır* and making bread. Tandır is a special oven made for the traditional way of cooking bread that, when the Kurds left their villages carried with themselves to the cities. In this sense, it is a unique symbol of the struggle against graying the Kurdish identity and belonging. Later on, I regularly visited the school from March to May, followed classed, interviewed teachers as well as other curators and, participated the school picnics and activities such as celebrations of mother tongue and Kurdish language.

Currently, there are around 20 schools, 13 primary schools and 7 kindergartens in the Kurdish regions. Within this period, many of them faced with getting shut down, police raids and threatening. I encountered many stories related to the grand opening of the schools. “One week the police were coming to seal the door; next week we were going to open it back. The first two months passed like that (personal communication, 2016)”. “There were armored police cars waiting in front of the school. They tried to scare the students and families (personal communication, 2016)”. “People looked after the school, especially the families. We kept watch in the school garden for one week otherwise, they would have shut down (personal communication, 2016)”. One of the representatives I got in touched was stated that for the next year (2017), the plan is to increase the number to 25.

Another intriguing aspect coming to mind would be regarding the training of bilingual/multilingual teachers. There are no available courses in the faculties of education or programs provided by NGOs in order to train multilingual teachers, aware of worldwide different multicultural and mother tongue education models and,



can combine these with the dynamics of the local.<sup>37</sup> Moreover, all teachers I have interviewed so far, independent of whether they are currently working in a public school or in Free Schools stated that the pedagogical training they achieved in education faculties was “very superficial”, “meaningless”, “inadequate” and “didn't prepare them for working at multicultural and multilingual contexts”. “University education did not contribute to my teaching at all. The perspective of education was just to provide students with employment” (personal communication, 2016).

Teachers of Free Schools are offered training programs organized by the Kurdish Movement including workshops on pedagogy, national history, education model samples chosen from different countries and gender. Currently, although there are a few high school graduates, most of the teachers working for Free Schools are graduated from education faculties. Yet, they may not be teaching at their own subject since the oldest students of the school would be third grade next year requiring primary school teaching. An originally Turkish literature teacher says:

Everything I do I am the first one. Next year, I will teach to third grade students which would be the first time. Last year the first grades was the same and I found primary school teaching so difficult. I don't know how to teach in Kurdish. It is because neither I was taught in Kurdish or taught how to do so nor somebody else teaches in Kurdish before and write down her experiences. In my first year, I tried so many different methods. I am trying to read more on critical pedagogies and improve myself (personal communication, 2015).

Besides, one of the representatives suggested, “To have a degree from education faculties is not a must. At the end of the day, we, as a movement find education faculties authoritarian, sexist and capitalist. Therefore, what is more important to us is the person's eager for self-improvement and Kurdish (personal communication, 2016)”.

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<sup>37</sup> To my knowledge, Diyarbakır Institute For Political and Social Research (DISA) is the only organization providing alternative education models certificate programme, not necessarily based on mother tongue education and also done field researches to prepare pre-school education materials in different dialects of Kurdish.

In addition to the alternative teacher training programs, the philosophy of education has given birth to the Free Schools is also contradictory the state dominated educational agenda in Turkey. In my interviews with teachers, I addressed questions on the notions of education and teaching to reveal their ideas and imaginings of an alternative education system. The first question was simply formulated like “What the do you think about the term education?” Interestingly, several teachers made a distinction between education (eğitim) and teaching (öğretim). They suggested that the latter is more of about the content of the education, what you are going to teach and in this sense, not a big deal. Education, on the other hand, in the way they defined it, means “to develop terminal behaviors and skills”. They all found the mainstream interpretation of the term problematic and suggested that education should seek for guidance, introducing alternative and critical ways of knowing and living. In line with that, teaching finds a different meaning involving “to guide children”, “to arouse their curiosity”, “to help meditate on their existence and let them be who they are”. “Teaching means learning together. We have a living space in the class, which is also a world where we can create things together (personal communication, 2016)”.

In the Free Schools, the philosophical agenda is to provide students with an education, which help them to develop critical literacy as well as to become authentic individuals in return. Radical education theories argue that despite all the authoritarian, standardizing and homogenizing tendencies of worldwide education systems, critical education and radical pedagogies can contribute to build (Spring, 2014). Sharing the same beliefs, Free Schools aim to not only to provide mother tongue education that which is a linguistic human right Kurds have long been denied, but also to raise authentic individuals who would build decolonized worlds. Contrary

to the conventional role attributed to the schools in providing qualified, hierarchical labor power for the market that is disciplined to obey the authority both at work and social life. Free Schools aim to raise individuals who are sensitive to communal, ecological and gender-neutral life hoped to be constructed day by day. In this sense, they can be considered as the educational pillar of the *democratic autonomy*, the Kurdish movement proposed solution to the Kurdish conflict “which foresees the establishment of several locally governed autonomous administrative regions in Turkey, including one or more autonomous Kurdish regions whose official language will be Kurdish along with Turkish as the national language (Derince, 2013, p. 5)”.

The language of instruction is %100 Kurmanci dialect of Kurdish, therefore, I have kept using the term mother tongue education instead of mother tongue-based education or the use of mother tongue in education. The curriculum consists of the courses Social Studies, Math, Kurmanci and Gym classes. I participated all these classes and, what took my attention the most was the student centered education model. Students are not required to stand up when the teacher comes into the classroom. They act freely during the class time, can stand up, sit down, begin to speak whenever they want to participate to the discussion and leave the class in case of need with the permission of their tutor. The teachers have a semester based lesson planning co-prepared with Kurdi-Der but it is not a strict planning. They can make changes both in time schedule and in the content, add new materials or skip some parts accordingly to the needs and performance of the class.

I attended the lessons of one of the three second-grade classes in the school. In the social sciences class, the subject was “our differences” for three weeks which students talked about diverse physical characteristic, gestures and postures and, emotional states. They were taught to respect and enjoy differences in life as well as

taught to gender equality in an introductory level. In the Kurmanci class, they had read examples of poems and fables of Kurdish literature as well as some translations. There were music and painting lessons two hours per week. They went to the workshops where they sing and dance together, learn the basic musical notes and the names of different instruments, painting techniques. The music teacher one a two weeks asks students to share a song or story they learnt from their parents in class on voluntary basis, which allow them to bring the communal forms of knowing and heritage into the classroom. In both of these workshops, they benefit from the communal materials; pencils, instruments, painting materials and so on, therefore, students do not have to buy things for their school education. They were always encouraged to participate in class, to express their opinion, to share the communal materials with their friends. For example, one of the students in painting workshop did not want to give the red pencil to her friends and the tutor spent the rest of the class explaining children the underlying logic of the commune. She told them that nothing in the school belonged to one person but belonged to the commune. Everyone uses the commune's materials for a while and then shares. She also discouraged the students to use some possessive suffix. "Don't use mine. It is ours." In addition, students prepared postcards for a woman they would like give on the Woman's Day. They were free to write or paint whatever they like and, the figure 12 below shows some examples.

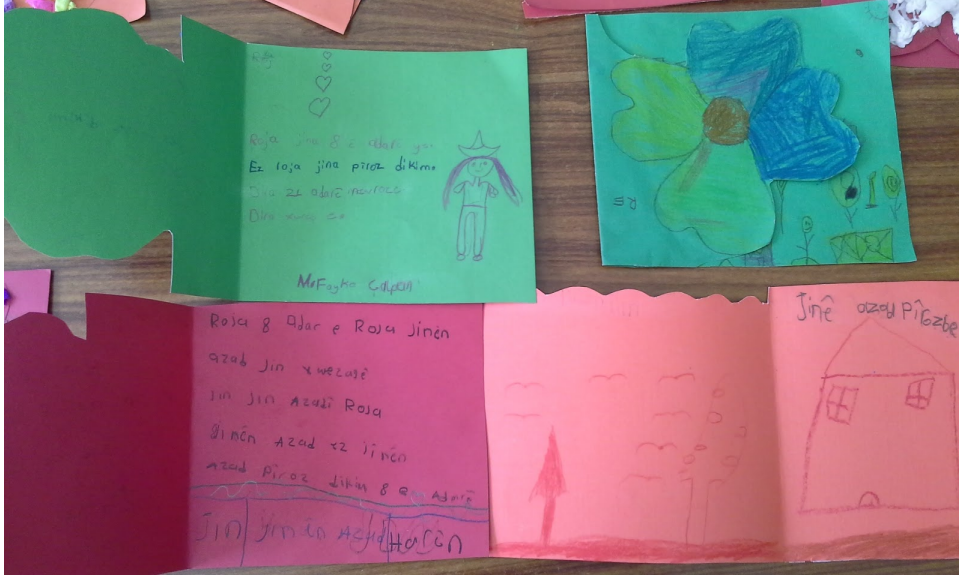


Figure 12 Examples of postcards prepared by students on Woman's Day

In addition, Zazaki lessons in speaking level started to be given for secondary-grades and would be continue in the third-grade in writing level. One of the persons working in coordination of the schools said, “The Kurds living in the Diyarbakır region speaks two dialects, Kurmanci and Zazaki. Language is one of the pillars of national union, therefore, we wanted children to learn both of them (personal communication, 2016).” In the fourth-grade, on the other hand, Turkish language course in speaking level is expected to start.

I can say that the roots of the relationship between the tutors and the students lie in love, responsibility and sharing. First of all, teachers avoid any attitude based on gender discrimination such as mixed order of seating in class, choosing games all students can play together and addressing students with gender-neutral words like friends or, kids. In addition, they don't prolong the logic of prohibition and the absolute authority of teacher in the classroom that the national education system mostly maintained upon. They call students “hevalno” meaning friends in Kurdish and try to include the students in decision-making processes. For example, if the class wants to have the gym class first which is the last class in the schedule, the

teacher may let them. By doing so, they avoid introducing students the idea of authority behind the rule which they are expected to recognize and obey and which is also the biggest obstacle on freeing minds; raising critical thinking able to take responsibility and question to possible the reasons for individual and collective action (Spring, 2014). They also do not apply to awarding or punishment as reinforces of education. The fact that there is no assessment and evaluation at the end or, final examination makes it easier to abandoning such authoritarian attitudes. Rather, they try to observe and keep an eye on each student's improvements and needs on individual basis, without subjecting him or her to a competitive final grading. They also aim to explain the reasons for them for asking students to do or not to do something, the possible outcomes of their actions and their responsibilities toward not only each other but also toward the nature. They don't force or threat students to do something but try to convince them. They don't use sayings like "because it is a rule", "you can't do this because it is forbidden". I had observed this attitude also outside the school, in school picnics and events. The school picnic was, for example, close to the waterfront which can be dangerous for the children. The teachers only explained them why they should not go there and, the students took care of each other. The picture of figure 13 below, similarly, shot in the Kurdish Language Celebration Day in which teachers and students negotiated and decide together which songs to say, what to wear and so on.



Figure 13 The Kurdish Language Celebration Day

Parallel to this, teacher's own between seek to build communal relations and values. For example, there is not a separate teacher's lounge in the school but a common room open to use of everyone. In the lunchtimes, the teachers cook and eat together there. From cleaning of the school to the preparation of assignments are done collectively and, all the training materials and school related documents are kept in an online archive that everyone has access. In addition, teachers always engage in dialogue on how to improve things and increase students' performances. They come together in *meclis* (assembly) meetings on weekly bases in order to exchange ideas, discuss problems of the school and make decisions. Two people in charge of the organization -one woman and one man- are to be selected by the assembly. They aren't seen as school managers, as we first tend to think, but as people who take temporal responsibility in coordination of the school management and work only until the next elections. Lastly, almost every needs of the school including the stationary supply and daily meals are meet by the communal economy.

#### 4.4 Free Schools or Kurdish Schools?

Teachers working at the school and the representatives of Kurdish movement I had conducted semi-structured interviews, they both mention more or less the same the philosophical and political perspective underlying and inspiring the Free Schools. They suggested that these schools as a resistance to the assimilation and denial politics are part of the Movement's attempt to realize ecological and gender neutral ways of living. On the other hand, the time I spent in the school as a participant observer made me realize that there is not a single, homogenous perspective with regard to how the schools are imagined, expected and hoped to function by different people. I had chance to trace the small divergences and discussions related to the present and expected future of the schools which I would elaborate around the question of Free Schools or Kurdish Schools? Before that I should note that many people including teachers and families refer to the school as Kurdish School conversation implying that the rests, especially the public schools are Turkish. At this point, the language of education as a demarking factor informed me about a deeper tension on how mother tongue education is imagined and negotiated among people.

According to some people whom there are also teachers among, what is important and should be given the priority is teaching the Kurdish language at least at this stage. It finds voice in deep discussions as well as small talks that “Kurdistan is under occupation” and “our language is disappearing day by day”, therefore, under these circumstances, “our priority is to learn, to teach, to free Kurdish”. There had been also some teachers formulated the mission of the schools as to teach “Kurdishness”, “Kurdish values”, “the great history of the movement”. They, for example, wanted to celebrate the birthday of the Movement’s leader in the schools



and brought this subject to the assemblies' weekly meetings to be voted. Similarly, a teacher whom I specifically asked whether he uses term Free School or Kurdish School answered:

I use Kurdish School. You can wear whatever kind of clothes you need at a particular time. On the other hand, the skin is our authentic clothe that we cannot take off. Learning Turkish or English depends on my need whereas Kurdish is my real clothing. It is a must (personal communication, 2016).

The same person also added that it is too early to say something about the schools since the education in secondary, high school level hasn't started yet. Another informant, on the other hand, suggested that "I don't it is possible for a school to be free. It needs to be eliminated from all kinds of ideologies and beliefs which we haven't achieved (personal communication, 2016)". In this perspective, the danger of conceptualize the school as a place of ideological formation remains, this time with the difference that it is not the state's ideology. As one of the teachers stated "What I understand from the word free is become free of the state, of the current education system (personal communication, 2016)".

The reflection of this perspective in school resulted in students to get warned by teachers in times they speak Turkish in class or to each other. They were asked why they speak Turkish. After a while, students replicating their teachers started to warn other students or, to even complain about them to the teacher. Once I came across to a student complaining about her parents to her class teacher since they speak Turkish at home. Another weird moment for me at school was, one day I was talking with one of the teacher at school garden and holding some books, a student approached to us, looking at my hands just asked me whether I am a Turk. I was a bit surprised and couldn't answer at first blush. Then, he said "I know you are a Turk, you are holding Turkish books!"

Yet, the second approach to Free Schools shared by some of the teachers and the representatives of Kurdish Movement tend to consider the school more of a place of liberation from not only the state but also authority in general.

The system always makes you believe in the authority and, the state justify itself with the help of the education system and family. In family we know about the role of man. In the school, on the other hand, it seeks for doing the same with the absolute authority given the teacher. In other words, the state wants you to believe that there would always be an authority in life that you have to recognize and obey. This could be your father in your family or, your teacher in the classroom. The already existing education system is to create docile bodies debarred of critical thinking (ibid).

From this perspective, education requires a rethinking and redefining of the term. In the previous section, I have already mentioned some of the conceptualizations of education and teaching as well as the distinction made between the notions of educating and teaching. In this sense, education is more likely to be a process of obtaining self-knowledge, identify your culture and developing critical literacy.

Children have training in these schools would be a generation in future. I don't know what would happen from today to tomorrow or. What stage we are at now. However, I know that if these children continue their education, they would be a generation sharing, opposed to violence, sensitive to the environment, critical of the world. Such a generation would not harm anyone. I believe they would change the world, make it more beautiful (personal communication, 2016).

In sum, the aim of the Free Schools portrayed as to build a social fabric consists of free individuals obeying neither the rules of market capitalism nor the authority. "In Free Schools, the aim is something more than to teach language. It is to provide a space where an individual can feel free and to spread the seeds of what we call *free life*, ecological and gender neutral (personal communication, 2016)". From this viewpoint, not many but some teachers think that a bilingual education models, having courses taught in both Turkish and Kurdish could have been a better option at this point. One of them, for example, suggested that "not every Kurdish child have to

receive education in Kurdish, Besides, Turkish, Arab, Syrian children can also come to Free Schools. This model, what we offer can be revised and applied to different regions. People should have the right to be educated whatever language they want (ibid.)". Others concluded, "Neither Free School nor Kurdish School, we wish to have Free Kurdish Schools (personal communication, 2016)". "Education starts to be provided in Kurdish. Free Kurdish School, there you should put a comma after the word free. What we mean here is not the freedom of Kurdish but the school itself is free. Therefore, in such an environment, Kurdish inherently becomes free (personal communication, 2016)".

As far as I could observe in the teacher's meetings and daily conversations, tensions over the goals and achievements of Free Schools within the Kurdish Movement are not at the stage to interrupt the collective decision making processes. On the other hand, how long this tension usually getting accumulated around whether the schools should be seen as Kurdish Schools providing not only mother tongue-based education but also ideological formation training children for the future fight for autonomy, can be overcome within the Movement remains as a question. Such disagreements within the Movement on how Free Schools are imagined results in different interpretations of the term "free" as well. According to the one of shared views, as long as the occupation continues and "Kurdish language and identity are under threat", the priority should be given to "teaching children the language, culture and values of their own community (personal communication, 2016)". "When I say free, I mean being liberated from the current system. This is what I understand. In the end, none of us is free. On the one hand, there are the norms of society, on the other hand, there also the impositions of the State. We are trying to operate between these (personal communication, 2016)".

The second group of teachers, on the other hand, interpret the philosophy of education gave birth to the schools more of radical one: “I imagine ‘becoming free’ and ‘liberation’ as no submission to any kind of authority and, an education system that there would be no rules except the universal human rights (personal communication, 2016)”. Lastly, some of the teachers implied that the fact that they operate outside the Turkish State not necessarily mean that they are “free”. “We are trying to teach the children something that we ourselves have not succeed to realize yet (ibid).”

I think it is a bit early to call “Free” Schools. It is because only time will prove to what extend the schools would be free. In the end, we were all raised by an authoritarian education system also, how democratic it would be the system it is replaced. Lets let the children we raise to decide, to give a name to the schools. I don’t think a couple teachers calling the schools free means a lot (personal communication, 2016).

As different interpretations and imaginings of Free Schools and of the term free suggest, there is not a single, homogenous perspective on regarding the functions of the schools as well as the future aims.

#### 4.5 Possibilities and dangers

After briefly discussing the philosophical and political motivations underlying Free Schools, in this section, I will turn my focus on the difficulties and potentials they have been implied. To begin with, all these sentiments and constraints that cut into life that I mentioned in the previous chapter go for the education life as well. The fact that the city of Diyarbakır has turned into a place of war and death zone has leaded to a problem of security in and outside of the school. In an environment of conflict none of the students had life safety. When the armed conflict moved to the district of Bağlar, the school had to remain closed for a week. Especially the students used to live in Sur deeply affected by ongoing curfews, some left their homes, and moved to

the available temporary accommodations. There were also family members got injured, arrested, humiliated or fell out of work due to conflict related reasons.

Besides, providing the security of life was also difficult inside the school, since it could be an easy target for other armed groups in the city or, could be raided by the police and shut down. Therefore, the apprehension of death and uncertainty had penetrated into the atmosphere and suspended the education life as well. By the time I was in the school, the questions of whether the conflict would leap into the neighborhood again or, the police raid the school, what we are going to do if these happen, how to protect children were in the minds and hearts of everyone. On International Mother Language Day in February, one the three schools in Diyarbakır, Ali Erel was shut down for the reason of “providing education in Kurdish in primary school level”. This file has taken to European Court of Human Rights and still under consideration. Yet, it spread the burden of uncertainty among the teachers of other Free Schools, wondering when their turn may come.

First times can be painful. I don't see the lacks of the school as a problem. Our biggest problem is not the uncertainties in the curriculum or material preparation. The real problem is the State pressure, we are not free in the school, can get arrested at any moment. I have come to realize that without we, ourselves getting free we wouldn't be able to provide a free education (personal, communication, 2016).

Derince (2013) argues that the discourse of ‘living together in fraternity’ has left its place to “increasing distrust toward the state, promoting the sense among many Kurds that Kurdish language rights can be achieved only after a political and administrative status is secured (Derince, 2013, p. 5)”. In complete agreement with him, I suggest what had constantly been interrupting the education life in Diyarbakır was not the current state but the lack of political sovereignty which can be a guarantor of the economic, cultural as well as educational acquisitions of the Kurdish struggle. Such lack of a political status brings the feelings of uncertainty toward

future with it. At this point, we have to imagine an atmosphere of that nobody knows what would happen or could have plans for the next six months. This resulted in hesitation for families to send their children Free Schools that no one knows how long they will remain open.

In addition to the security problems, lacking a legal status and recognition of the State also had disrupted the education. It is because even if the schools are open for the next years, without the schools achieving a legal status and equivalency with other schools, some very important issues will remain a question marks; how do children continue their education in the forthcoming years? Would they have to be transferred in “Turkish Schools” at some point? Or, would they be able to take the centralized examinations required to continue high school and graduate education in Turkey? Would they achieve professions like their peers?

Accordingly, the Turkish State finds ways to keep and benefit from the uncertainty in dealing with the insurgency. It, for example, many times aimed to decontextualize the demands of Kurdish Movements as a governmental strategy. In the recent period, I observed a similar attitude adopted by the State regarding the Free Schools. All state officials including the governor of the city knows about these publicly open schools. An informant said to me that, in 2015, the names of the teacher, the curriculum and everything else related to school was documented and delivered to the governor.

On the other hand, regular police raids, threats, and the question “From whom do you get permission?” were regularly addressed to the constituents of the schools. For example, Ali Erel tried to be shut down for other funny reasons such as “the size of the school garden is not appropriate” and opened back by people. The police, when they came to close down the school in February 2016, announced a reason

related to mother tongue education with a signed official document that also allowed the case to be taken to the AIHM. Later on, I also heard that another unofficial message was delivered to the representatives of the school, saying that if they gave up on the court case, the school would be allowed to remain open. At this point, I argue that the Turkish State adopts very paternalistic form of ruling by refusing any rights for self-determination with a father likewise attitude, which can be summarized as “I know what you need better than yourself and I will give you what you need according to the right time and amount to me”. In this respect, there is the real possibility that, the State will legally recognize the Free Schools and to do so, impose other rules with regard to the assignment of teachers and preparation of the curriculum. Then, there remain the danger of replacing the radical movement of Free Schools with a somehow mother tongue education. As an informant very well puts it, “If I have to learn the mainstream history, it does not really matter in which language I would be taught of it (personal communication, 2016).”

The exhaustion of three decades long war and the uncertainty marking present as well as the future, peace becoming more and more a slender chance with the intensification of violence in the recent period would be other factors would keep affecting the politics of language and the future of the school. “Our education cannot set future targets as we are living in a constant state of emergency. In theory, everything is ready but in practice, it has to be education system shaping accordingly with these extraordinary conditions (personal communication, 2016). On the other, in the course of my fieldwork I tried follow the festivals, panels, workshop related to cultural and linguistic rights, politics of mother tongue and use of Kurdish in education. What caught my attention was that mixed feelings of disappointment and belatedness are circulating and aligning many Kurds. The common belief that Kurds

have been too delayed to become a nation, and that therefore Kurdish sovereignty is under the threat of extinction finds voice in many discussions. For example, in the questions section of one the panels, a participant complained about the fact that people speaking different dialects of Kurdish do not understand each other and underlined the urgent necessity for a standardized Kurdish spoken in the four pieces of Kurdistan. Such “urgency to become a nation soon” greatly politicizes the missions loaded on Kurdish language as the pillar of this process. As a result, it also affects the future of both the content and aims of mother tongue education models.

Furthermore, how these schools, teachers and the preparation of education materials are going to be funded remains as a relevant question. I addressed this question to several people and got different answers. I can say that there is no existing budget planning or, secured source of funding available yet. This leads to an instability increasing the concerns about the future of the schools. All the families I got in touch to ask questions on how they heard about the school and whether they think of continue this type of schooling for their children immediately started asking me questions. Their questions all formulated around the feelings of uncertainty including what would happen next year especially if/when the schools aren’t guaranteed legal status, whether they would remain open and so on. I realized that the relationship between the teachers and school managers are not transparent and informing enough. Moreover, some families also complained about the lack of discipline in the school. As a significant component of the education process, however, parents need to be informed more about the philosophy of education in Free Schools and the aims of current education model. They should be able to participate in discussions and decision-making making process.



Despite the portrayed dangers and obstacles on the way, I argue that Free Schools is a decolonizing practice. Here, I use the term decolonization in the sense Linda Tuhiwai Smith offers, involving a knowing of the colonizer and mediating on recoveries, an analysis of colonial occupation and a struggle for self-determination (Smith, 1999, p. 1-7). Inspired by her, I tried to situate my thesis in a decolonizing framework, thinking through the potentials Free Schools can have. To put it more fully, I aim to construct fieldwork as a space addressing social issues “within the wider framework of self-determination, decolonization and social justice (Smith, 1999, p. 4). In this sense, Free Schools can be seen as a response to the dominant constructions of knowing, teaching and living introduced by the discourse of lack as well as the national education system. By doing so, they provide a decolonizing space affirming communal values:

I have a fear of education deep inside because education means self-denial and self-loss for Kurds. So, there is the education I am afraid of on the one side and the one want to replace it on the other. I want these kids to feel attached to their culture, prioritize to discover themselves. I want to teach them how people used to live in these lands before the war. I want to raise children who know this geography very well including the names of every stone and landscapes (personal communication, 2016).

In addition to identity affirmation, the schools can also prevent language endangerment that Kurdish language has long suffered from. “Kurdish schools means that children would be able to speak the language of their grandmother`s and grandfather`s well. To learn your ancestors language and history is also a form of freedom. It is a spiritual freedom (personal communication, 2016).

As I briefly tried to capture in the section of *The Promises of Turkish*, the current education system in Turkey is based on assimilation and production of negative values regarding the Kurdish language, culture and identity. As an informant puts it, the national education system falls you back to “the stage of

conception”. “It zeroes my personal development and vocabulary by denying everything I achieved till the age of seven (personal communication, 2016)”. Another informant states that there are many words in Kurdish he cannot write down anymore such as the way he used to shout at the herd since he starts to speak Turkish well. Therefore, any attempt to decolonization needs to consider the protection of Kurdish language and production of positive values with regard to Kurdish identity. Steve Biko refers this process of negotiating and acquiring positive values toward your culture and identity as *Black Consciousness*, an inward-looking process trying to “make the black man come to himself; to pump back life into his empty shell; to infuse him with pride and dignity” (Biko, 2014, p. 40).

The school bell *Zimane Kurdi* gives an insight on these potentials that Free Schools carry with themselves. The lyrics emphasize the positive aspects of Kurdish language, calling it “sweet” and “the language birds sing”. In a similar manner, the walls of the school are donated with little posters underlying the importance of mother tongue for human well-being and the relationship between the land, language and identity. The figures 14, 15 and 16 provide some examples of it.



Figure 14 Kurdish language is as bright as a red rose March 2016

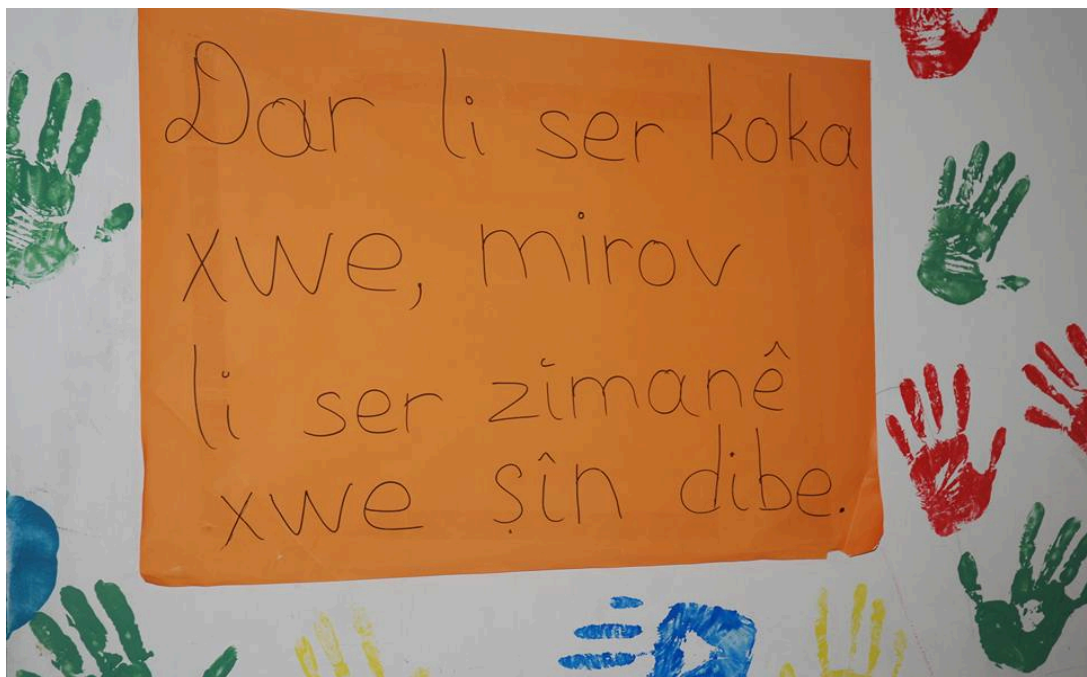


Figure 15 Human beings exist with their language just like trees do with their roots March 2016



Figure 16 Kurd, Kurdish, Kurdistan March 2016

Identity affirmation attempts to tell the community that its culture, language, worldview in other words, way of learning, knowing and being matter and are valuable. Free Schools try to do that by barricading to assimilation. “I see Free Schools as the self-defense to cultural assimilation (personal communication, 2016)”. In addition, according to Biko, Black Consciousness neither “merely a methodology” nor “a means towards an end” (Biko, 2014, p. 50). Rather, it seeks to “produce at the output end of the process real black people who do not regard themselves as appendages to white society” (Biko, 2014, p. 50).

To conclude, in the making of nation its true subject, assimilation has been the first and foremost criterion by which racial membership was assigned in Turkey. Moreover, Turkish language appears as sorting the cultural criterion that who would be distinguished truly Turkish and accessible the ticket to full citizenship and more importantly, the national education system has been one the central pillars of neocolonial legacy of the Turkish State. In this context, Free Schools provide a

counter space where the already existing colonial ways of learning, knowing and being introduced by the Turkish education system can be decolonized. Therefore, in this chapter, I argued that the alternative philosophy of education they provide to struggle against the assimilationist, capitalist and patriarchal way of life structured by colonial occupation itself is a decolonizing practice. I particularly focused on the prevention of language endangerment and identity affirmation as the possibilities they could bring along with. I also gave a space to the different understandings and imaginings of the Free Schools as well as the term free among people. Overall, I believe, in a context of violence and constant humiliation Free Schools symbolize what we can hope for. That's why, despite the rapidly changing conditions of war and, on and off curfews in Diyarbakır, in the school I conducted my fieldwork, all teachers hold on to the school and did their best to carry it into future. There were times when all the shops in the neighborhood were closed down while the education continued. Lastly, I also argued that the fieldwork itself could be thought of as a decolonizing practice. A fieldwork involving a knowing of the colonizer and mediating on recoveries, an analysis of colonial occupation as well as a struggle for self-determination (Smith, 1999) can provide a critical space for re-evaluating the continuities of colonialism.

## CHAPTER 5

### CONCLUSION

That Kurdish regions should be considered as colonial spaces, is a political claim that has been a topic of serious conversation and debate among the activists and scholarly circles (i.e Benlisoy, Beşikçi, Jongerden, Öcalan). This thesis, however, investigates Diyarbakir as a space of colonial occupation beyond a political claim. It can be read as attempt to provide this argument with a theoretical, analytical, geographical as well as an ethnographic grounding. What are the advantages of offering colonial/postcolonial literature as a relevant interpretive framework for the Kurdish regions in Turkey? What does it enable or, reorient? I argue that this framework can offer conceptual and political possibilities for the ongoing war in the Kurdish regions today, while eliminating the risk of inducing the subjection of Kurds to the perspective of nation building with its discrepancies for minorities. Moreover, equally important, it brings Turkey into comparison with cases such as Israel-Palestine, France-Algeria etc., which I believe, can provide much-needed, creative and collaborative discussions enabling to move beyond the already existing literature on nationalism and to start up building decolonizing strategies.

Above all, this thesis is an attempt to raise further questions in the field, hoping to expand the conversation on colonialism/neocolonialism within Kurdish studies. I would like to repeat some of the questions raised throughout the thesis demanding more ethnographic and sociological research to be done in the field. How does the relationship of the colony to the metropole take place, considering the vast majority of the population of Kurds living in the Western metropolises in Turkey? I

believe that the peculiarity of this geography divided into four pieces and haven't achieved a sovereign state status like other colonial context challenges the analytical tools introduced by postcolonial theory. Did the Kurds ever find themselves in a postcolonial condition? Recently, scholars working on Palestine suggested to reuse the perspective of settler colonialism among, arguing that the ongoing struggle over land and for return never become a post-conflict situation (Salamanca, 2012, p. 3). I picked to use the word siege, on the other hand, to underline the fact that occupation is not a single event but constant appreciation of land and labor, the language and cultural heritage. It is a continuous oppression, humiliation and being exposed to different forms and intensities of violence.

From this vantage point, we need to think and discuss more about the neocolonial ways of ruling and of making distinctions between ruler and the ruled. Therefore, how the social policies of the Turkish Republic articulate as well as resolve with specific visions of Ottoman Empire. Colonial occupation imposes its boundaries on space, time and discourses, therefore, the case of Kurdish seasonal workers in the Western cities, politics of resettlement in Turkey, land and resource appropriation in the Kurdish regions such as the hydroelectric dam construction and mining industry as well as the geographical layout of the cities and infrastructure are all some fields which can provide hints about the daily constructions, imaginings and encounters of the occupation by different actors. In short, this thesis is written hoping to expand the conversation on colonialism/neocolonialism within Kurdish studies.

Yet, ethnography many times proves to us that what is at stake simply destruction, death and domination but also reconstruction, insurgency and hope. With this insight, chapter 3 looks at the everyday unmakings and remakings of life, how life gets cut, shattered by violence under constantly changing circumstances. It traces

the intimate and mundane ways of knowing and inhabiting in the world including the newly emerging forms of witnessing, stories and rumors gathered around death and insurgency as new sources of knowledge as well as the feelings of guilt, apprehension and uncertainty marking the present. I wrote that chapter with this sense of reality, aware of the fact that “the danger lies in the making definitions of violence appear too polished and finished- for the reality never will be” (Nordstrom and Robben, 1995, p. 4). In this sense, I hope that it opens a door for affective grid of colonial politics within theory building, accounting for intimate sites of production of not only power but also insurgency, not just death but also survival.

On the other hand, given the situation, we need for a transformative and liberatory research agenda, a project of *researching back* which involves “‘knowingness of the colonizer’ and a recovery of ourselves, an analysis of colonialism, and a struggle for self-determination” (Smith, 1999, p. 7). In the last decade, the Kurdish Movement formulated its politics around mother tongue education. Today, many Kurds believe that as long as the Kurdish language is not recognized and used in education, it wouldn't be possible to stop the threat of language attrition. Therefore, the demand for mother tongue-based education practices and Free Schools are seen as a powerful possibility to fight against language endangerment and the denial of Kurdish identity and culture as well as the indigenous forms of knowing, living and history. Yet, the historical domination and privileges attributed to Turkish sometimes lead to a feeling of urgency and belatedness which can result in attributing political and symbolic missions to the Kurdish language in the becoming a nation process in the same way Turkish has been burdened by. I have mentioned both the dangers of approaching Kurdish as a



“homogenizer” and the decolonizing possibilities of the radical philosophy of Free School can provide Kurdish culture and society with.

I have already stated that the establishment of Free Schools showed up as a strategic political move to de facto force the Turkish State to recognize linguistic human rights of the Kurds. However, considering the scope of Kurdish population estimated as 20 million in Turkey and the future of the children around 700 who are currently receiving in these schools, they cannot remain so. Therefore, there is the need for a more detailed curriculum of the primary level of education, considering the issues of funding and training of the teacher to be prepared. As a part of the decolonizing endeavor, we need to think of alternative models that can be realized and sustained collectively, even if the long-awaited legal status does not arrive. Otherwise, Free School may have to remain as symbolic language schools and, the decolonizing philosophy of education underlying them cannot be realized.

Besides, the tendency to assume that Kurdish children first hear and learn Kurdish in the social life and encounter with Turkish around at the age of 6-7, when they are schooled, is not true for the new generation growing up in the cities and exposed to TV, internet and other means of communication much more than the previous ones. Therefore, education models based on the use of mother tongue in education should count for the linguistic heterogeneity of the children. Linguistic mappings of the children living in the different regions as well as in the Western metropolises are needed. What I observed in the school was that, almost all children already know before they start to school and sometimes better than Kurdish so, they are usually off-balance bilinguals. During my fieldwork, there were times that children had difficulties in adopting social life outside of the school since their siblings and friends likely go to “Turkish schools”, some families speak Turkish at

home and more importantly, Turkish is still dominantly in use in the streets of Diyarbakır. Any suggested educational model and research in the field should account for these broad scale dynamics.

Different bilingual and multilingual models can be offered for different regions and, these models can be revised and replaced over the course of time. For example, the Zaza children coming to Free Schools who speaks Zazaki, Turkish or both had to start take education in Kurmanci dialect of Kurdish because to provide a separate bilingual classroom for them was not possible. In addition to the dynamic and well-designed mother tongue education models, there is also a need for bigger campaigns to be organized in Diyarbakır in order to “bring back the Kurdish language to the streets” (personal communication, 2016). There are very limited opportunities for the students of Free Schools to be bilingual in social life. There are mainly Kurdi-Der and the Diyarbakır Metropolitan Municipality offering bilingual services. There also Egitim-Sen and SES, two unions include mother tongue-based services to their agenda. Yet, when you overhear children playing on the streets, one can easily recognize that it is neither Turkish nor Kurdish indeed. Conversations started in Kurdish may switch to Turkish as the latter is more improved or, people sometimes wait for the other person to take the first step, they speak Kurdish only if you ask in Kurdish. The parents I got in touch with stated that their children help them and their siblings going to “Turkish Schools” improving their Kurdish. They said having one person knowing Kurdish well changed a lot at home.

To give a sense of why I use the term colonial occupation and how it is named, described, imagined and resisted by the people of Diyarbakır, I do mention my field encounters and daily conversations as well as some ethnographic details such as places I have been, some songs and sayings in Kurdish I have heard. I also

introduced the discourse of lack; a very much colonial vocabulary with resonances to “civilizing mission”, emphasizing the backwardness of the region in terms of economics, cultural diversity and its adjustment to modernity. In Turkey, the East has been coded as a geography of poverty, illiteracy, crowded families, making too many babies, a social life organized around the kinship relations rather than “rational individuals” of nuclear families, feudalism and so on.

The second chapter of the thesis explores topics around the argument that Diyarbakir should be seen as a space of colonial occupation. It can be read at one level as a geographical introduction of the occupation also, as the opening chapter as well as the most theoretical one, informing the other chapters. In doing so, I portray the city and the colonial dynamics of the way it has been compartmentalized. I did mention military quarters and life inside the military boardings and how they are built completely separate and disconnected from the rest of the city, the well-protected forbidden areas occupying almost half of the city. Then, I briefly reflected on the colonizer and the colonized in Kurdish context as well. Economic privilege – not as a final end but as remarkable motivation- lies at the heart of reasons coming to the city from the West, including public officials, bureaucrat, army forces and PÖH hired by the government. They constitute a similarity with what Fanon called the governing race, remaining as strangers in the city in two sense. They don’t interact with the local people, have no interest in participating social life indeed, but wait until their compulsory service period gets over. Secondly and more importantly, they are considered as strangers and representatives of the Turkish State, easily identified and marked in the public space.

The third part of the chapter examines the dominant symbols of occupation in social life and the struggle over the organization of space that are developed and

maintained during the period of what I called re-occupation of Diyarbakir. These includes police barricades and stations in every corner, the armored vehicles passing every five minutes, checkpoints, arbitrary police raids to houses, associations, political parties and even the book fair, Turkish flags hold on everywhere, playing of nationalist songs and racist street writings, daily harassment's and insults of the army forces.

Finally, I introduced the terms military zone and death zone in order to understand the workings of necropower in the late-modern modern colonial occupation. Death zone refers to geography of lawlessness where the tortured bodies can be tied to the back of a police car and displayed in public. Besides, it is not only about the rule of violence and lawlessness in display but also, people who perpetuate the violence know that nobody is going to be hold responsible for or punished her extra-legal actions. For example, in this period, security personnel and civil servants involved in “counter-terrorism activities” in the Kurdish regions were granted immunity from prosecution. Moreover, knowing that no one has security of life protected by law/citizenship deeply affects the meaning of life and death and greys the boundary between the two. In this respect, in Kurdish society, being a guerilla, facing the death in the name of life, is considered as the most respected position a human being can achieve.

At this point, Achille Mbembe`s (2003) article *Necropolitics* provided me valuable insights on tracing how and under what conditions the sovereign right to kill has been exercised practically as well as the contemporary forms of subjugation of life to death. My fieldwork came across to a time period that the armed conflict between the Turkish State and PKK moved in the city centers and, the Kurdish movement declared self-governance in several districts in the cities. Governmental

strategy of declaring on and off curfews enabled the Turkish State to cut the outside connection and the access to basic needs such as food, electricity, water etc. of these districts. People who lived there were forced to leave; the ones who refuse to do so were criminalized as terrorists in the eyes of the West and killed. Violence has always been present in the streets of Diyarbakir and in the lives of its inhabitants. In the last period begun with summer 2015, on the other hand, I argue that we witness an *intensification* of this violence in a “war without end” form very much in line with what Mhembe delineates as necropolitics. He argues that in the late-modern colonial occupation, a new modality of killing in which the entire populations are the targets of the sovereign has emerged. It involves the besieged villages and towns that are sealed off and cut off from the world, the militarization of daily life, the absolute freedom given to local military commanders to use their discretion as to when and whom to shoot. Gaza would be the most visible example to grasp how such modality of power works. Therefore, for any further research in the field a comparison would be relevant even essential.

On the other hand, this peculiar terror formation emerging in the late-modern colonial occupation geographies led me to reconsider the notion of violence by looking at the mundane life and the daily experiences of people in order to see how they deal with life under rapidly changing circumstances of excessive violence. The following chapter examines the intimate sites of production of power and insurgency where the categories of life and death are redefined. Herein, I borrowed the term *affective grid of colonial politics* from Ann Stoler (2002) which she introduces to investigate the connections between the broad-scale dynamics of colonialism and the intimate sites of implementation and used term in another direction to trace the ethnographic sensibilities of war, the *intimate sites of production of life*. I looked at

the sentiments dominating the social life, creating certain movings and non-movings and redefining people's attachments to category of life and death.

In the second chapter, I elaborated more on the spatial dynamics and theoretical implications of death zone. In the chapter 3, however, I tried to trace how death, in all possible ways, haunted and hovered the mundane life and cut life short. Witnessing death, hearing the detailed stories of people get killed in different ways, getting exposed to the images of their tortured bodies and becoming a target yourself, knowing that you are killable as much as someone else is, accompanies you in Diyarbakır. In this uncanny space, going out alone and staying out after darkness falls -it was at 5pm in the winter days- were considered as “dangerous”. Moreover, the district of Sur turned into a fabric producing death and distributing it to the rest of the city. So, calculating the safety of a place depended on its distance to Sur, the more it is far away the more you were likely to have some mobility. Meanwhile, “the safest” places became the five shopping centers located in the new city started to build after 2000s. Along with the apprehension of death, voices of war also capture life in Diyarbakır. Fireworks, guns, bombs, artillery shootings, armored vehicles open fire, warplanes get off and land the ground... During my fieldwork I kept wondering how many different voices could there possibly be after all? In accordance with these voices of war, different survival strategies had been developed such as prostrating, not sitting close to the windows, trying to figure out the quietest place in the house to be able to be sleep.

During my fieldwork, I also traced the different ways and sentiments of to bear witness to the war. Many of my informants, in different words, implied that the feeling of guilt and self-blame is inherent to their witnessing. “I sit at home, I feel guilty. I go out, I feel guilty. I go to a movie and feel guilt. I couldn't feel something

else in this period (personal communication 2016)". I encountered different levels of guilt; the first one was more about witnessing to a war against "your values", "your nation" and not being able to do anything/not being as much involved as the ones fighting with their guns. Such level of guilt was more common among the people who support or, have sympathy for the Kurdish Movement. On the other hand, not all my informants precisely linked their testimonies to political motivations. Rather, the second level of guilt feelings were related to everyday unmakings of life firmly captured by the uncertainty and related to the fact that life goes on for the survivors. The third chapter aims to provide ethnography of the experienced and encountered. The ethnographic hints and insights gave birth to it include the intimate reaches of people's lives such as the burden of remembering, storytelling and rumors.

For the critically engaged researchers seeking to work within neocolonial geographies, one important task would be think further on the issues of how to become engaged scholars and to give a space to liberatory agendas in our writings, to mediate not only on power, violence and surveillance but also on recoveries and decolonizing strategies. In writing a thesis that focuses on spatial and intimate dynamics of the neocolonial legacy, I have faced many difficulties. Part of it was about to maintain the security of my informants and myself. Even though I thought that I was aware of the difficulties of working in violent geographies, it turned out to be even greater than I expected. For example, before I went to Diyarbakır, I spent nearly one month in the occupied Palestinian territories to see a zone actually existing on the map and considered as occupied. However, there I underestimated the fact that I travelled with a foreign passport with together with the members of the international community. When I arrived in Diyarbakır, on the other hand, even though I technically held the correct passport, I was not able to conduct the research I

had in my mind when I first arrived to the field because of the intensification of war in the Kurdish regions. I had to make a decision whether I would leave the field. I preferred not to do so and developed a completely different research agenda in a very short time.

In addition to the survivors strategies developed by the inhabitants of the city during the war times that I delineated throughout the thesis, I came up with certain research strategies as well. These included never carrying a camera, voice recorder or anything related to my fieldwork with me as well as writing down and keeping everything online. I also remained silent about my position as researcher, except with my informants. Indeed, this made me feel exhausted most of time, thinking that I won't be able to complete my research. One day, for example, I was at home and complaining about these difficulties. I said "I am not even able to carry a notebook with me. How am I going to do a research?" My flatmate then said, "This is very much about the dynamics of the geography you are working on. Then, you should write about why you cannot carry a notebook with yourself". And I did indeed, I considered my/self also as a resource both while writing down my field notes and writing up my ethnography.

The second difficulty which I also believe that provides a creative ground for research was my position as a researcher in the field. I consider myself neither as "insider" nor "outsider" but remain on the peripheries of binary oppositions. Yet, I was considered as both at the same time. I was at the beginning seen as a "Turk", also stranger, speaking "high Turkish" and coming from outside for research. As I mentioned in the fourth chapter, one of the students identified me as a "Turk" because I was carrying books in Turkish and it made me very uncomfortable. What disturbed me was more about an eight years old child occupying his mind with racial



categories. Later on, his teacher and I explained to him that there are two libraries at the school, these books from the Turkish library but he wasn't convinced. In a similar manner, later on one of the teachers at the school told me that sometimes she "forgets that I am a Turk". I felt uncomfortable one more time as I don't call myself Turk and have never declared my ethnic identity –coming from an ethnically and religiously very mixed family, it is not always so easy to pick one of them. But during my fieldwork, I was always expected to do so, to be bothered with finding a label for myself. On the other hand, when the police yell at me to take my hands out of my pockets in that cold winter, I am not "Turk", no longer identified as such. In these examples, language appears as a key issue, as I have argued as key opening door to the dominant culture and its privileges. On the other hand, the last one is a good evidence for the mutability of these categories like insider and outsider, colonizer and colonized and, their loss of meaning in newly emerging modality of killing in neocolonial geographies where entire populations are the target of the sovereign (Mbembe, 2003).

Fieldwork involving an analysis of colonial occupation as well as a struggle for self-determination could also be seen as a decolonizing practice, providing a critical space for re-evaluating the continuities of colonialism. In the field, I embodied an ambivalent position allowing me to be both "occupier" and "occupied". Being both an insider and outsider at the same time, more importantly, willing to remain so was very difficult. However, my ethnographic self also provided me with a deeply empathetic space, from which to reflect on the lived realities and affective grid of colonial politics. I believe part of the task of decolonizing is to come up with creative responses to play with these categories, to rethink them and to show how mutable and fragile they are.

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