GIRLS IN THE NATION: GENDERED CHILDHOOD AND LIMINALITY IN THREE KURDISH FILMS

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Abstract

This thesis dwells on the gendered imaginings, positions and the roles assigned to children in the narratives of nations. As argued by feminist critiques of nationalism, children are not always mere victims or the ones in need of protection; they are represented in the category of children and adults-to-be, which render them a significant object of inquiry in the studies of nationalism. More specifically, this thesis reads the category of children through the lenses of gender by emphasizing the different imaginings, positions, roles assigned to the boys and girls. The concept of liminality elucidates their childhood and adulthood positions and shows the ways in which their in-between positions are represented in narratives on Kurdish nation through the analyses of three Kurdish films, *Time for Drunken Horses* (Ghobadi, 2000), Turtles Can Fly (Ghobadi, 2004) and Min Dit: Children of Diyarbakir (Bezar, 2009). Even if liminal states of children are depicted in these films at the level of cinematic representation, the chosen films give us a window through which the representations of Kurdish children as a collective experience of Kurdish population who live social and political conflicts as secondary citizens and experience suffering, death and violence under the rule of Iranian, Iraqi and Turkish nation-states. Three female characters, Agrin, Rojine and Gulistan, are analyzed in the film narratives to show the ways in which their parentlessness and statelessness drive them into the state of liminality. This study aims to contribute the feminist critiques of nationalism by positing a state of liminality in narratives on nation, and reads the narratives of gender through the lenses of liminality. In so doing, this study deploys the concept of liminality to the analysis of gender and nation.

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Introduction

This thesis will scrutinize the representations of Kurdish girls in national aspects of Kurdish-ness by analyzing three Kurdish films and shows the ways in which national underpinnings of gender operate in these films through girl characters. The three films are *A Time for Drunken Horses* (2000) and *Turtles Can Fly* (2004) directed by Bahman Ghobadi and *Min Dit: The Children of Diyarbakir* (2009) directed by Miraz Bezar. For this project, the research question is: In what ways do these three films discursively produce narratives of Kurdish nation and how do cinematic portrayals of Kurdish girls in films depict national aspects of Kurdish-ness in a state of liminality? My tentative answer is that Kurdish girls are portrayed in a liminal position by oscillating between the category of child and adult woman. On the one hand, these films perpetuate the national roles of women assigned to them, pinpointed in feminist critique of nationalism. On the other hand, these films depict girls as stateless, innocent and lost orphans who suffer from the national conflicts in Kurdish region and at the same time the ones who try to survive. Parvulesce states that orphans in war films in the context of post-communist era have symbolic meanings:

> [Orphans] could be seen anywhere, begging, stealing, looking for relatives, dying, Their presence turned into a powerful reminder of the grim deeds the generation of their parents had committed. They became a symbolic figure that gestured at the same time toward traumatic experience of war, the guilt of participating in it, and the hope of rebuilding civilization. (2015, p. 3-4)

Even though Parvulesce focuses on the symbolic figuration of orphans in Eastern European Cinema, his claim on "hope of rebuilding civilization" may be applied to symbolic representation of Kurdish-ness, and Kurdish girls in films may be regarded as not only adult women surrounded by certain roles assigned to them, but also as the symbols of resistance and survival belonging to Kurdish-ness, who will become the future of the Kurdish nation.

In the first chapter, I will present how Kurdish women are discursively produced as fighters both as combatants and survivors. After that, I will introduce the concept of "liminality" (van Gennep, 1960) and the ways in which liminal positions of girls works by means of liminal spaces, that are considered as borderlands in the context of this thesis. That is why, I will dwell on the potential meanings of borderland as liminal spaces and to show how the spatial dimensions of liminality construct liminal positions of girls in films. This spatial analysis will follow the concept of "betwixt and between" coined by Victor Turner (1969) for the potentialities of Kurdish girls' as not-woman-not-girl.

In the second chapter, I will introduce the theme of homelessness of Kurdish nation and the ways in which theme of homelessness in Kurdish Cinema (Arslan, 2009) construct Kurdish children also as parentless and lost. The featuring of children in this way is particularly important to further analyze how film narratives in Kurdish films turn into narratives of Kurdish nation and also how girl characters are discursively produced as the subjects of Kurdish nation through highlighting the death, fear and danger that Kurdish children experience.

In the third chapter, I will use Kuhn's concept of "transitional space" in psychoanalysis, where the thresholds are defined as national borders and conflict zones causing children not to pass beyond these thresholds to become an adult. These analyses are expected to show how psychoanalytical film theory considers passing from childhood to adulthood in films via film space. In this chapter, employing the concept of "transitional space" (Kuhn, 2010) and show how the three Kurdish girls of the films stay in thresholds, and the spatial in-between-ness not allowing them to become adults. After analyzing the liminality of childhood/adulthood in these films, I will analyze how Kurdish girls experience the liminal positions in terms of gender roles where young mothers and protective sisters are dominant tropes. This part will show how Kurdish girls in the context of Kurdish-ness have potential to

question family as "hierarchy within unity" proposed by McClintock (1993) by focusing on brother-sister relationships in these films. Third, it will be analyzed that Kurdish girls also oscillate between compliance and resistance.

Purpose of This Study

Kurdish lands are divided into four regions in Syria, Turkey, Iraq and Iran and these different parts have different cultural, social, linguistic and political backgrounds. Nevertheless, this study first aims to show experiences of Agrin's character in *Turtles Can Fly*, Rojine's character in *Time for Drunken Horses*, Gulistan's character in *Min Dit: Children of Diyarbakir*. Featuring these three female characters aims to show how their experiences form symbolic resemblances on the representations of Kurdish-ness and how the national conflicts play a role to shape their Kurdish-ness. Second, this study aims to indicate how these female characters are produced as subjects of Kurdish-ness by becoming in a liminal position by being constructed as both children and adults-to-be. Following this contribution, these analyses also allow to see how Kurdish girls' sexualities distinguish them from boys and produce different national imaginings.

To be clear, the purpose of this research is not to produce the figure of Kurdish girl as a unified, coherent, authentic form of identity. The girls in these films are in different regions of Kurdistan and they experience the national conflicts in different political, social and cultural circumstances. However, national aspects of Kurdish-ness attempt to produce certain type of images and identities, which are shown in these three films. Therefore, three Kurdish films should be seen as discursive texts for an attempt to "provide set of stories, images, landscapes, scenarios, historical events, national symbols and rituals, which stands for, or represent, the shared experiences, sorrows, and triumphs and disasters which gives meaning to the nation" (Hall, 1992, p. 613).

Plots of the Films

Before moving on to the detailed introduction of characters and films, it is essential to point out the reasons why these films are particularly chosen. First, these three film narratives give us a window into Kurdish narratives of nation in different parts of Kurdistan. Higson states:

> Films will often serve to represent the national to itself, as a nation. Inserted into the general framework of the cinematic experience, such films will construct imaginary bonds which work to hold the people's of a nation together as a community by dramatizing their current fears, anxieties, pleasures and aspirations. (Higson, 1995, p.7)

Higson's explanation of how film narrative produces and circulates the national discourses may be applied to Kurdish films. These three films produce Kurdish children as the children of Kurdish nation who attempt to survive in different national conflicts. Therefore, the first reason why these films are chosen is that the film narratives discursively turn into narratives of Kurdish nation.

Second, in these three films, fictional film spaces turn into spaces of the Kurdish-ness by depicting geographical characteristics and signifying the geographical space by cultural traditions of Kurdish nation. Schlesinger points out the importance of film space by stating that "Consciously or unconsciously, [national cinema] is an expression of the cultural geography of the nation-state in a world of sovereign states" (Schlesinger, 2002, p. 29). In addition to Schlesinger's ideas, I think cultural geography of nation, not in the form of nation-state, may be depicted in films to express the space of nation by signifying national culture as it is seen in Kurdish Cinema. According to Arslan, Kurdish films produce spaces of nation in films by visualizing and fictionalizing the Kurdish oral storytelling tradition called *dengbejs* and the films help to keep memories and history of Kurdish people alive by bringing the *dengbej* tradition to films. The national discourses and imaginings are discursively produced in Kurdish films as a visual mimesis of Kurdish *dengbej* culture and for Arslan, the adaptation

of this cultural tradition into cinematic framework leads to signify the potential spaces of Kurdish national culture (2009, p. 216).

Third, in these films, film characters turn into subjects of Kurdish nation at the level of representation, which have shared experiences around being subjected to violence, pain and death as a result of being Kurdish as well as surviving in the conflict zones as stateless, homeless and parentless. More specifically, these films bring Kurdish girls to the forefront and show them as the representatives of Kurdish nation by constructing and re-cycling these film characters as the imaginings of Kurdish-ness.

Time for Drunken Horses (2000)

Time for Drunken Horses directed by Bahman Ghobadi in 2000 tells the stories of children in Iranian-Iraqi border. The film starts with the Amaneh's voice-over, a small girl in the family, who tells the story of her family members. Amaneh says that their mother is died when she tries to give birth to their last brother. In the village, people make a living by smuggling among national borders, which is surrounded by full of landmines. One day, when the children come back to their village, they learn that their father has died since he stepped on a mine while he works. After than that, children start to live with their uncle and uncle's children. Since their uncle breaks his arm when he works, Ayoub starts smuggling by his uncle's horse (even if people smuggle by mules, name of the film and subtitles articulate them as horses) and tries to collect some money for Madi's medical treatment. Madi is the oldest child in the family, who has a joint disease. Madi's doctor comes to village frequently to give him a painkiller but one day, the doctor tells the Ayoub and Amaneh to bring Madi to hospital for surgery. After doctor's advice, Ayoub starts to work more to pay for surgery but he couldn't. One day, a group of men come to their village to ask for Rojine's hand for one's son and the uncle gives Rojine in marriage, only if she brings to Madi with her and pay for surgery in return for her dowry. Family members of the man accept this offer. Even if Ayoub opposes to Rojine's marriage, the uncle hits him not to disobey to his decision. The uncle and

Ayoub, then, bring Rojine to the other village and deliver her to the broom's family. At the last minute, groom's mother (or co-wife) does not allow Madi to stay with them because she says that she has so many children to look after and she does not want one more. Then, Rojine runs towards her uncle and Ayoub and wants to give up the marriage. The uncle and Ayoub go to broom's mother (or co-wife) to convince her but groom's family makes the uncle convinced when the family decides to give a new mule to them in return for a dowry. Rojine's uncle and Ayoub bring Madi back to home and give Rojine to marry him. Ayoub and Amaneh are still concerned about Madi's health and towards the end of the film; Ayoub decides to bring Madi to the other side of the border for the surgery and brings Madi with himself when he goes for smuggling. Border keepers attack smugglers on the mountain and Ayoub tries to save the mule and Madi from the attack. After they escape from the border keepers, they pass the border together and the films end with the scene of passing the threshold.

Turtles Can Fly (2004)

Turtles Can Fly directed by Bahman Ghobadi in 2004 tells the stories of children at small village at Iraqi-Turkish border. The film starts with an opening scene with Agrin's committing suicide scene, which is actually the end of the film. After the suicide scene, the film actually starts with an establishing shot to the village and starts with the story of Kurdish children at the border. The villagers try to have a television signal to follow the news and attempt to learn when the US will occupy Iraq. Another child character, called Satellite, is almost a thirteen-year-old-boy and the only person who knows how to set up a television transmitter, speak elementary English and organize children for helping them to make some money in the village. Agrin, her disabled brother, Hegrov, and one small baby, Riga, are the main child characters in the village, who try to pass the border and start a new life. In the village, children make a living by collecting mines in the landmines and selling them by bringing them to the village. Agrin is generally silenced and mysterious throughout the film

and the film narrative still does not give any clue what happened to Agrin in the past and the reason why she wants to commit suicide. Agrin again comes to the same cliff, where she tries to jump off. That scene consists of flashbacks, which show us that Agrin is got raped by Iraqi soldiers. Agrin's mystery gets clear because the film tells the Agrin's story that Riga is Agrin's son after Iraqi soldiers raped her. Agrin tries to get rid of Riga and decides to rope Riga from his leg to a tree in a landmine. Agrin kisses him and moves away from there. Other children see that Riga walks in that minefield and tries to save him. Satellite tries to rescue him with entering into the minefield by his bike and the mine is exploded and Satellite loses his leg after he saves Riga. The war starts; US war crafts and soldiers arrive to the village. Meanwhile, Agrin still wants to commit suicide. One day, she gets the baby and ropes him to the rock and throws the baby with the rock into the small lake and she goes to the cliff and commits suicide.

Min Dit: Children of Diyarbakir (2009)

Min Dit: Children of Diyarbakir directed by Miraz Bezar in 2009 takes place in Diyarbakir, which is a metropolitan city at the southeastern part of Turkey and tells the story of Kurdish people in Diyarbakir. In the film, the father works as a journalist on the issue of Kurdish people murdered by unknown assailants and the mother is a housewife. One day, when the family comes back from wedding ceremony in another village by car, three Turkish intelligence officers stop the car and kill the father and the mother. Then, children's life stories start and Gulistan, his eight-year-old-brother Firat and the baby sister start to survive in Diyarbakir. After some time, Gulistan and Firat become out of money and they are not able to look after their baby sister and the baby suddenly dies because of high fever. After that, Gulistan and Firat start to live on the streets and make a living by selling handkerchiefs. Gulistan meets a woman named Dilan, who is in her late twenties and works as a prostitute. Gulistan becomes a friend of her and goes with Dilan when Dilan goes to the place for a sex work because Dilan gives her some money after she leaves the house and Dilan thinks that it

is better to hang out with Gulistan in order not to draw attention as a sex worker in the city. One day, Firat comes across with the guy who kills her parents. The guy named Nuri Kaya works as a Turkish secret agent lives in Diyarbakir with his wife and his son and no one knows his job around him. One day, Dilan meets Nuri Kaya, the intelligence officer, and Nuri Kaya brings Dilan to her home. Gulistan comes to his house with Dilan in order for planning to kill him with his own gun. Finally, She gives up and takes his gun off. For taking revenge, then, Firat and Gulistan put the leaflets on the streets, which inform people in Diyarbakir on this Turkish secret agent. At the end of the film, Gulistan and Firat start to take a journey to Istanbul in order to start a new life.

Methodology

This project started almost one year ago while simultaneously watching several Kurdish films one after the other. The first striking observation was that the majority of Kurdish films tell the story of children, where these children experience rape, death, suffering and armed conflict under the rule of different nation-states. It was the first time I decided to focus on these films more to understand the reason why children are common figures in Kurdish films. Second, children's parentlessness struck me as a way to think through the potential meanings of these films. These initial queries led me to look at other national cinemas to see how children protagonists are represented in different films. After watching several films that featured children protagonists, I realized that children in Kurdish films have symbolic meanings related to their Kurdish-ness and the representations of these children are associated with the political and social conflicts Kurdish people experience in Turkey, Iran, Iraq and Syria. These initial insights led me to watch other Kurdish films to see how children's stories turn into the narratives of Kurdish nation.

One of the challenges and limitations of my study is that the majority of Kurdish films are not in circulation and most of them do not have English or Turkish subtitles. In order to compensate for this limitation, I started to look at film journals and Internet blogs, which give background information about inaccessible Kurdish films. I would say that the majority of Kurdish films are not shown outside of film festivals and people do not have easy access to different Kurdish films. To deal with this inaccessibility issue, one of my friends also contacted the film coordinator of the London Kurdish Film Festival to reach the subtitles for several Kurdish films but he did not send the English subtitles of the films I wanted to get. This problem led me to interrogate why Bahman Ghobadi's films are more popular and accessible than others and why there are so many academic sources on his films. Ghobadi is a

well-known Kurdish director who won the Golden Camera Award in International Cannes Film Festival with his film entitled *A Time for Drunken Horses* (Ghobadi, 2000). This award is seen as a collective achievement of Kurds and as an important step for the recognition of Kurdish Cinema since Kurdish films become more popular and important since his films bring Kurdish people's issues to the international level. Therefore, I have chosen two Kurdish films directed by Ghobadi, which I think particularly important for this study to argue how Kurdish-ness is constructed via films. I added *Min Dit: A Children of Diyarbakir* (Bezar, 2009) to this study in order to show how Young Kurdish Cinema (Arslan, 2009) also employs children to depict Kurdish people's lives in different regions. Bezar's film also helped me to broaden the territories of Kurdish children's depictions in films since the major studies on Kurdish films are only limited to Ghobadi's films which make his films look like the only ones dealing with Kurdish people's issues. Moreover, Ghobadi's films do not provide insights about Kurds in Turkey since they only depict children's experiences in Iran and Iraq.

There are also other significant reasons that I selected these films in this project. First, the films show different children's experiences in different conflict zones and in different time periods. Even if the characters and the narratives of these films have particular differences related to their gender and class identities, the symbolic resemblances around Kurdish-ness produce a particular kind of structure of Kurdish-ness. If we take a step back and look at these symbolic resemblances, Kurdish children are all subjected to danger of death because of situations produced by the predicament of their Kurdish communities and the chosen films signify their problems and experiences associated with their Kurdish-ness. Second, these three films touch upon different problems that Kurdish people face under the rule of different nation-states. This commonality shows that no matter which state rule they live under, they are produced them as othered, excluded and underprivileged, but their discursive production also reflects material realities of Kurdish children. Third, the climaxes

of these films stem from national, political and social conflicts Kurdish people have experiences in their recent history. Therefore, narration of the films is not only fictional but also mirroring the potential stories of Kurdish-ness in the past for keeping the history of Kurdish people alive.

At the beginning of the research, I assumed that these films could be read as the cinematic production of Kurdish nationalism and the characters as national characters. Moreover, my initial hypothesis was that these films contribute to Kurdish nation-building and construct Kurdish national identity. Nevertheless, in the process, I realized that the chosen films are not overtly nationalist in the sense that they advocate a particular collective outcome like political autonomy, independence, or a greater Kurdistan but they depict characters and communities as representatives of a collective experience of suffering and oppression, which is a comment on the injustices of Kurds have had to go through in recent history. More specifically, these films depict the ways in which national conflicts shape Kurdish children's living conditions, make them stuck to the specific thresholds and make them homeless as well as parentless. That is why, the film narratives do not turn into national narratives but become a part of potential narratives of the Kurdish nation and also film characters are the symbolic embodiments of real Kurdish people in Kurdish nation.

Considering the initial journey of discovery in these films, I conducted this research by analyzing film narratives, film characters as well as film spaces and the potential meanings assigned to these three dimensions. I did not conduct a classical film analysis, which deals with camera movements, editing, framing or other technical elements for meaning making production in films. Rather, I consider the film narratives, film characters and film spaces for scrutinizing the potential experiences of Kurdish people lives in different conflict zones. The detailed analyses brought me to the position of researcher instead of a simple viewer and helped me to dig into the discursive meanings of characters, narratives and films spaces in

time. I watched each of the film several times in different time periods in one year to understand how the narratives and the characters gain different meanings for me as a viewer and later as a researcher. At first, these films are only a lament for the victimization of people in conflict zones. However, throughout the process, I started to dig into different symbolic meanings of Kurdish children by also reading about representation of Kurds. The film spaces, loss of parents or the other dimensions changing children's lives allowed me to use the concept of liminality in these films to theorize their in-between positions in terms of their gender, their family and their nation.

I had two concerns while conducting this project: First one was my privileged Turkish and middle class perspective as a viewer. The second one was my limited knowledge of the Kurdish language. For the first issue, I feel that my privileged position does not allow me to scrutinize the life experiences depicted in these different conflict zones. However, as someone who was a child in 90s political context in Turkey, I was exposed to representations of Kurds in the Turkish media. In those times, Kurds were discursively produced as killers by media representation of PKK's actions and Kurds as national enemies became a part of my childhood. I, therefore, grew up absorbing the antagonistic representations of Kurds in Turkish media and I wanted to explore close-up sympathetic depictions of what it was like for them from their own sides.

I used discourse analysis as a method to show how the discursive construction of Kurdish children is related to the construction of Kurdish-ness and what the potential meanings are associated with different aspects of Kurdish-ness in these films. Van Leeuwen and Kress also explain the significance of media texts for the production of discursive meanings:

> Visual structures of representation can either be narrative, presenting unfolding actions and events, processes of change, transitory spatial arrangements, or conceptual, representing participants in terms of their

> more generalized and more or less stable and timeless essence, in terms of class, or structure, or meaning (1996: 79).

Therefore, these films should be considered as visual texts producing and circulating varieties of Kurdish-ness. To be more precise, the representations of Kurdish children in these films may both stabilize and complicate the constructed meanings of Kurdish-ness. More specifically, I focused on Kurdish girl characters in these films and show the ways in which they experience the conflicts and question whether their gender identities led them to engage with life situations different from Kurdish boys.

My second concern is about my limited knowledge of Kurdish language, which may cause a problem to understand specific ways of using Kurdish language or potential meaning-making production through the Kurdish language itself. Therefore, I suppose that analyzing these films with Turkish and English subtitles did not allow me to understand specific cultural, national or social phrases and words related to Kurdish-ness. To deal with this issue, I focused on visual details of the film and analyzed film characters associated with their specific positions and roles, the way they talk to each other.

As far as this study is concerned, in this long journey of discovery, I realized that Kurdish films are not a mere reflection of Kurdish people's experiences but they are discursive texts which, give us a window for this thesis to examine the liminal states of subjects, families and nation in Kurdish contexts.

Chapter 1 - Liminality of Kurdish Girls In Kurdish-ness

This chapter will outline Kurdish women as warriors in the context of Kurdish-ness. Kurdish women are active agents as combatants and as survivors at the level of representation. Their experiences, the spaces they live in and their homelessness in different region complicate their transition from child to adult and put Kurdish women and girls in a liminal position, where they challenge the gendered roles and entitlements assigned to them at the level of representation. Their various representations as warrior girls/women lead us to scrutinize their alternative positions to become a part of Kurdish-ness in the context of military. Women's combat to survive produces them as the active agents of Kurdish-ness in cinematic representations by depicting their lives in borderlands and conflict zones. Arguing that film spaces as borderlands and conflict zones are seen in the majority of Kurdish films, this chapter will argue how Kurdish girls experience liminal positions as a result of spatial dimensions of liminality and Kurdish nation-building as a liminal process. It is my initial hypothesis that these two varieties of liminality are significant for the Kurdish girls' state of liminality between girlhood/womanhood and their states of liminality complicate the narratives of Kurdish-ness in terms of the representation of their gender identities.

1.1 Representation of Kurdish Girls as Survivors

This part will first give an overview of feminist critique of nationalism and the certain roles and positions of women in nationalisms in order to show the ways in which foundational feminist critiques of nationalisms stop short of considering children, particularly girls, as a category of analysis. Nationalisms may construct girls as de-sexualized and innocent subjects. At the same time, girls are depicted as young women expected to participate within national processes in the limits of national roles and expectations assigned to them. Their in-betweenness as de-sexualized children and sexualized women in narratives of nation leads us

to re-visit the feminist critique of nationalism and may give us a window to interrogate whether there are alternative discourses or positions possibly assigned to women in narratives of nations. Here, it is necessary to look at the alternative positions of Kurdish girls/women in military by the analysis of YPJ in the representational level. These analyses first bring us to show how Kurdish women are discursively produced as "freedom fighters" for their own liberation and the ways in which YPJ women may challenge "the hierarchy within unity" (1993, p.64) in military.

YPJ (Women's Defense Units) is the women's branch of YPG (People's Defense Units) in Rojava (Western Kurdistan- in today's Syria). It is an all-women unit from the foot soldiers to the top commanders. Why it is particularly important in Kurdish nationalism is that it is the application of PKK's ideals in practice within an established quasi-state system where military participation is on voluntary basis and open to women. There were multiple reasons for the establishment of separate women armies within PKK. The leader's stance on gender equality, to increase the number of potential fighters in its fight, but more importantly it was because women wanted to separate themselves from men (both physically and symbolically) to fight against patriarchal oppressions within the PKK. Even if YPJ women fighters reflect the position of Kurdish girls/women in the context of military, it could be seen as an instance of active agency of women, where women take a part of consolidating egalitarian relationship in military context. YPJ girls/women's active recruitment in military should be analyzed in the same ground of Kurdish girls' attempt to survive in different conflict zones not by soldiering but by struggling as active agents in chosen films. Moreover, egalitarian relationships are also noticeable between boys and girls in cinematic representation of Kurdish-ness, which will be analyzed in following chapters.

Arguing that "all nationalisms are gendered" (McClintock, 1993, p. 64), McClintock explores the ways in which men and women are differently engaged in their nations and are

endowed with particular gender roles assigned to them to participate in national and ethnic processes. In this different form of being engaged with nationalisms, McClintock explores the impact of the heteronornative, nuclear and reproductive family and the ways in which family produces a certain type of unity in nationalisms (McClintock, 1993, p. 63). She shows that men and women are assigned national duties, and family is the way of operating "hierarchy within unity" to naturalize the subjugation of women and children (1993, p. 64). Nationalist discourses produce a certain type of family for themselves and in turn, national discourses are reproduced within that particular unity. Therefore, family may be metaphorically considered as mini-nations, which have a key role to sustain the subjugation of women in nationalist projects. Yuval-Davis and Anthias (1989, p. 7) attempt to define more specifically discursively produced roles assigned to women in nationalisms as "biological reproducers", "participants in national / ethnic conflicts [in secondary roles]" and "cultural /biological signifiers" in nationalist projects. As far as the discursively produced national roles assigned to women in nationalisms are concerned, Nagel claims that women are typically constructed as the mothers of the nation and the symbol of homeland (1998, p. 255). Additionally, she claims, women are constructed as wives and daughters who should be protected not only for the sake of family but also for the purity and the honor of nation (Nagel, 1998, p. 255). Therefore, with all these roles assigned to women, Nagel points out that nationalisms consider the position of women as "supporting actors" (Nagel, 1998, p. 243), which are expected to be defended by "real actors", men, in order to protect the future and the honor of the family and nation.

Women and children are considered as actual and potential victims and in need of protection in unified form, which leaves unexamined the positioning of children and to analyze how girls and boys are exposed to different processes in national projects which I think is an important analysis to point out girls' active agency and their potential to resist

patriarchal control in the state of liminality. Moreover, feminist critique of nationalism does not dwell on how girls both in category of children and adult women have a key role in nationalist projects. Now, I will take a step back and look at the ways in which Kurdish women and girls are constructed as agents of nation. These analyses will indicate the ways in which there are different ways of experiencing national discourses in Kurdish contexts.

Abdullah Ocalan, the leader of Kurdish national project, sent a message for International Women's Day in 2014 in which he declared:

> Women must take their own decisions. They must have their own free spaces, places you can determine your lives. Make the search for freedom the basis of your work. Don't complain, be creative. When 3 or 4 women come together produce a solution. Trust your femininity… For me, the freedom of women is more important than land and culture. A woman must be a freedom fighter. You must liberate yourselves. (Ocalan, 2014)

In his statement, there are two significant points that can be argued related to feminist critique of nationalism. The first one is that Ocalan does not define the freedom of Kurdistan by emphasizing the labels and the entitlements assigned to women argued in feminist critiques of nationalism. In his statement, women are positioned as agents of Kurdish nation, who are expected to be free to take their own decisions. The second one is that, contrary to what feminist critique of nationalism suggests for the symbolic resemblance between motherhood and nation, Ocalan's statement offers a different vision associated with the symbolic position of Kurdish women. He tries to show the position of women beyond emphasizing prevalent roles assigned to them and depicting them in need of protection unlike what scholars like Nagel (1998) emphasize as a common pattern in nationalism. Therefore, in Ocalan's statement, Kurdish women are not only constructed as mothers, daughters and wives as pointed in feminist critique of nationalism, but rather in the Kurdish national context, they are also considered as "freedom fighters" (Ocalan, 2014) who have to fight for their own freedom.

YPJ (Women Protection Units) can be an instance because of not being solely "to be in a supportive or nurturing relation to men" (Yuval Davis and Anthias, 1989, p. 10) in narratives of Kurdish nation. In order to see the different experiences of Kurdish women in the military, it is essential to point out YPJ fighters' reasons why they participate in the YPJ. In one of the documentaries, titled "YPJ Kurdish Female Fighters: A Day in Syria" (Ahmad, 2014), Janda Captain says: "Our society used to look at women only as "good housewives". Women were just ready for men and locked up at home like a slave. But we now understand our bitter reality" (Ahmad, 2014). In another scene of this documentary, a fighter identified as Desine Combatant also states: "We were slaves in our society because women were seen as slaves without rights. Women were also passive, some still have no clue as to what it means to be a woman. I am now [a] free woman, brave and able to defend myself and my people. I fight for the enslaved women, help their liberation from oppression" (Ahmad, 2014). Both these statements are quite intriguing in the sense that YPJ fighters do not only participate in the space of the military for national liberation but it is seen as a way of liberating themselves as well as the other women in the nation. Another interesting point in this documentary is that there are women in YPJ in different ages even some of them are below eighteen. For instance, in the documentary titled "Her War: Women vs. ISIS" (2015), Amara, a sixteen-year-old girl fighting against ISIS with the YPJ, says: "When I said I wanted to join the self-defense units, my mother said that it's the path of our honor and no one can say no" (Documentary, 2015). Another Kurdish girl in the same documentary is Chichek, a sixteen-year-old girl. She says, "When I was still at school, my mother wanted to marry me off. I refused. I did not want to become a slave or live in that house" (2015). Then, as far as these two Kurdish girls are concerned, they consider YPJ as a site of resistance not only for nation but also for enjoying their own rights. Moreover, in Chichek's case, even though her family expects her to become a part of the Kurdish nation by following the roles assigned to her, particularly as a mother or a

wife, she comes to the YPJ, in her claim, for her own liberation and not to become a slave. Therefore, even if YPJ is a women protection unit and fights against ISIS in Syria, the representation of YPJ shows the multiplicities of ideologies and imaginations of Kurdish-ness in different contexts. Even if Kurdish girls in films do not fight as soldiers and combatants, Kurdish girls in films struggle against the patriarchal rules and hierarchical relationships among them and their brothers. If we look at different Kurdish films, their agency is signified by their attempts to survive. The majority of the films depict female characters as representatives of the death, pain and suffering of Kurdish women just because of their Kurdish-ness but they are also depicted as resilient survivors.

Not to cause a misunderstanding, my purpose here is not to depict YPJ women or Kurdish girls in films as the sole representatives of all Kurdish women in nationalism. When scrutinizing the discourses on the roles of women in Kurdish nationalism, one can claim that the five points raised by Yuval-Davis and Anthias (1989) are majorly contested and that nationalist discourses might vary contextually in their perception of women's roles in the nation. Besides, even within the same nation, there might be multiple roles that nationalist discourse assigns to women. This, though, does not intend to break down the whole discourse but rather to show that there are liminal spaces that Kurdish women construct by trying to keep themselves distant from the prevalent roles and positions assigned to them in their nation. In that sense, YPJ does not challenge the whole national discourse and roles assigned to Kurdish women but YPJ is a particular instance to show resistance and survival of Kurdish women and girls, where women and girls experience liminality to produce new positions and possibilities of difference for the future of Kurdish nation.

From this point of view, the cinematic representations of Kurdish girls also give several insights on the liminal positions of girls in Kurdish nationalism. Even though they are represented as being subjected to death, pain and violence just because they belong to the

Kurdish population in their regions, Kurdish girls are produced as in-between compliance and resistance, not at the same way with YPJ fighters, but by holding on to the life in the regions they live in, which discursively produce them as "fighters" of life against death. Not only the documentaries showing YPJ women's experiences around fighting, but also fictional girl characters in Kurdish films narrate the potential real situations of Kurdish girls around survival and resistance in Kurdish nation. "Fighting" in different ways, then, may be considered as collective experience of Kurdish women and girls which highlights the agency of Kurdish women and girls by the representations around their surviving. Is it possible to consider the Kurdish nation as liminal, on the way to achieving nation-state status, where subjects or collectives try to challenges the old gender regimes in the state of liminality? And can we consider girl characters in films as the reflections of Kurdish national discourses demanded for Kurdish girl/women to leave them in an unambiguous position? Here, it is essential to take a step back and to show what the concept of liminality is and how spatial dimensions play a role of producing liminality as a collective experience.

1.2 Approaches to the Concept of "Liminality"

In this part, liminality as a concept will be introduced and argued in different theoretical frameworks. Even though this part will first give an overview of anthropological approaches to liminality, as coined by Gennep (1909), the concept will be considered as the experience of individuals or collectives in liminal positions rather than solely as rite of passage. This part leads to argue later how liminality is embodied in nation-building process and how Kurdish nation-building processes produce the liminal position of girlhood /womanhood in cinematic representations.

Liminality was coined by Arnold van Gennep in 1909 in his study *Rites of Passage* in order to define the complexity of transition from childhood to adulthood and the ways in which this transition happens in three levels: preliminal rites, liminal rites and postliminal

rites (Gennep, 1960). The preliminal rites period is the first stage defined as the metaphorical "death" of a child. The second level defined as "liminal rites" explains that a child is an ambiguous state by the "removal of taken-for-granted forms and limits" (Szakolczai, 2015, p. 18) and opens a space for the subject to experience an in-between position. However, in Gennep's framework, the subject is endowed with the authorities of the rites and the in-between position does not allow someone to play with social and cultural constraints. The third stage of postliminal rites is the stage of becoming a new person or in other words, turning into an adult at the latest stage of transition. Szakolczai (2015, p. 17) points out the importance of experience in rites of passages and the ways in which a rite of passage is a subjective experience. Szakolczai's aim is to challenge structural form of rites of passages, to highlight the agency of individuals and to consider the possibility of change in liminal states. That is why he claims that experience is a rite of passage itself (Szakolczai, 2015, p. 17), where people experience new becomings and different reactions while passing through liminal states.

Thomassen (2015, p.40) also scrutinizes liminality by highlighting the importance of experience but he argues the possibilities of liminality both in an individual and collective level in terms of spatial and temporal dimensions. Liminality, for Thomassen, means, "how human beings, in their various social and cultural contexts, deal with change" (2015, p.40), where the change produces new positions and possibilities of difference in different spatial and temporal frameworks. He illustrates that falling in love at a personal level or a natural disaster on a social level are instances of breaking the routines and repetitions of everyday life (Thomassen, 2015, p. 40). These kinds of personal feelings and social (even natural) changes produce the in-between positions and liminal stages in personal lives or in communities. Therefore, Thomassen's analysis of liminality is associated with both individual and

collective experience and the ways in which experience may produce new becomings by change both in individual and collective level.

As far as the broader context of liminality is concerned, I would like to ask: "Can the nation-building process be considered a liminal state?" It is my hypothesis that nation-building processes are liminal, where nations consolidate and produce their national identities, cultures, borders and imaginings. In that process, none of the national discourses have firm and fixed positions. This process also occurs on two levels, both individual and collective. Liminality as a collective experience of nations is sustained by conflicts and wars for their autonomy and independence to resist ruling by others, where collectives in nations question the old regimes and structures in the existing system. Malksoo would also consider wars as liminal experiences:

> All wars are essentially liminal experiences, moments of radical contingency and uncertainty accompanying the birth and demise of eras. Recognizing war as a liminal experience sheds light on war's constitutive function for politics and societies, that is, its profoundly productive power over the structure and the substance the international system and discontents" (2015, p. 235-236).

Therefore, wars produce discontent and collapse, where the discontent opens up future possibilities for different becomings of nations and challenge the old power dynamics. In addition to liminal experiences of war, the liminality does not work in the same way for men and women, which implies that liminal experiences also produces in-between-ness of the subjects in terms of their gender identities. Turpin argues how women experience wars and how their positions change in the wars when she states:

> Women and girls stationed in camps and refugee settlements, as well as in new societies of residence, frequently suffer sexual abuse, abduction, and forced prostitution. History has demonstrated the link between war and control of women's sexuality and reproduction through rape, sexual harassment, and militarized prostitution (Turpin, 1998, p. 4-5).

As far as Turpin's arguments on potential experiences of girls and women are concerned, wars give birth to collective experiences of women, which bring them to the liminal states in a different way from men because of their sexualities. Therefore, the majority of collective liminal experiences have gendered aspects since men and women are exposed to different treatments. In the process of wars, nations do not gain any firm or fixed positions but re-build themselves by exploring different positions. It follows that liminality is a collective experience, where individuals are a part of it in the context of nation building, in which there are spatial and temporal dimensions that produce all nations differently.

1.3 Borderlands: Liminal Spaces of Kurdish-ness

Thomassen analyzes the significance of spatial and temporal dimensions to broaden the territories of the concept to approach its methodological and interdisciplinary aspects and availability to apply to social theories (Thomassen, 2014, p. 89). For him, liminal states, whether individual or collective, do not always produce difference after they are over. Rather, liminality is the process itself, where difference happens. Therefore, for him, instead of looking at the stages following after liminality, it is essential to focus on the liminal state itself in specific subjects, time periods and spaces. These are shown as the components of liminality in his analyses: subjecthood, temporality and spatiality (Thomassen, 2014, p. 89). He states:

> Single moments, longer periods, or even whole epochs can be considered liminal. Liminality can also be applied to both single individuals and to larger groups (cohorts or villages), or whole societies, and arguably even entire civilizations… the temporal dimension of liminality can be related to moments (sudden events), periods (weeks, months, years) and epochs (decades, generations, arguably even centuries) (Thomassen, 2014, p. 89).

Thomassen's analyses related to dimensions of liminality are particularly important because he does not specifically define clear-cut rites of passage through which individuals and collectives should experience change. Rather, when and where these rites of passages

happen and who performs them are essential to show the ways in which liminal states are shown. Moreover, when he emphasizes rites of passage, he does not use the concept in Gennep's context, but rather he tries to consider rites of passage which breaks down the routines and repetitions. Even if he defines borderlands as the spaces of liminality, he does not argue the liminal experience for nations and national subjects. He only touches upon the importance of borderlands in the spatial dimensions of liminality:

> Spatial dimensions of liminality can be related to: specific places, thresholds (a doorway in a house); areas, zones, and 'closed institutions' (border areas between nations, prisons, airports); countries or larger regions, continents (meso-potamia, medi-terranean). (Thomassen, 2014, p. 91)

My purpose here is to apply borderlands as a space of liminality for Kurdish nation, where they experience in-betweenness of Kurdish-ness and the identity assigned to them in the nation states they live in. Considering that liminal spaces are the spaces to play with identities, positions and possibilities, Kurdish people are in the process of destructing and rebuilding their identities in these liminal spaces. Malksoo states that "[l]iminality points to in-between situations and conditions where established structures are dislocated, hierarchies reversed, and traditional settings of authority possibly endangered" (Malksoo, 2015, p. 226). Not to cause a misunderstanding, my aim is not to show Kurdish people and their experiences as homogeneous. Rather, Kurds in borderlands experience liminality via space and time by fighting against established structures of other nation-states. That is why in cinematic representations of Kurdish people, long experiences of conflict with nation-states in these spaces become a part of the Kurdish-ness. Yildirim also states the importance of borderlands when he writes that: "Kurdish identity is constructed through the borders reflecting the difficulties and oppression Kurds go through" (Yildirim, 2015, p. 143).

To be more precise, it is essential to go back to Kurdish films' depictions of Kurdish people in conflict zones and borderlands to understand how much borderlands and conflict

zones are significant in Kurdish Cinema. *A Time for Drunken Horses* (2000) is set in Iranian Kurdistan in a village very close to the Iraqi border. *Marooned in Iraq* (2002) another film directed by Bahman Ghobadi, takes place along the border of Iraq and Iran and show the Kurdish people's experiences in that region. *Turtles Can Fly* (2004), again by the same director, is set in a village close this time to the Turkish border. In Bahman Ghobadi's other film, *Half Moon* (2006) he tells the story of a Kurdish musician who faces difficulties while also crossing national borders. *Kilometre Zero* (2005) directed by Hiner Salaam tells the story of Ako, a young Kurdish man sent to the frontline at the Iran-Iraq border to join the army during the Iran-Iraq war. *Exorcism* (1993) directed by Rawe Jinoke tells the stories of Kurdish people sufferings and deaths on the Iraqi borders after Saddam Husein's chemical attack in 1991. *Requiem of Snow* (2005) directed by Jamil Rostami similarly takes place in a village at the Iraq-Iran border.

Even if these films are shot in different times and different borderlands, it is essential to highlight that borderlands is of utmost importance for the cinematic representations of Kurdish people, in which Kurds are subjected to death, violence and suffering in different regions. Therefore, borderlands as liminal spaces are depicted in cinematic representation of Kurds and discursively produces Kurdish-ness via space. As Yildirim stated before, cinematic production of Kurdish-ness is commonly articulated with their engagement with the borderlands of Syria, Iran, Iraq and Turkey. All these films depict Kurdish characters experiencing the liminality and exploring their Kurdish-ness by fighting against pre-established settings of authorities and structures under the rule of other nation-states. Arslan states:

> Borders, smugglers, forcefully emptied villages, people who die or lose their parts of the bodies in mine explosions, refugee camps, orphans, widows and massacres... all these themes are social realities in Bahman Ghobadi's (and also other directors') films (2009, p. 19).

As far as Arslan's ideas are concerned, national borders discursively produce the themes of national cinema and the ways in which Kurdish people experience all these national conflicts. Therefore, it may be claimed that borderlands in films draw cinematic portrayals of Kurdish-ness in films and these borders turn into a liminal space, where Kurdish people experience liminality in a collective sense. Thomassen particularly emphasizes the impact of borderlands as thresholds to produce liminality as:

> Referring the spatial co-ordinates, the axial 'leaps' all happened in in-between areas between larger civilizations, in liminal spaces: *not* at the centres, *nor* beyond reach of the main civilizational centres, but exactly at the thresholds. (Thomassen, 2014, p. 92)

As it is stated before, even if liminality is experienced both individually and collectively, it is not possible to claim that liminality turns into the same experience for everyone. Even if Thomassen scrutinizes liminal spaces for large groups in large-scale settings, he does not analyze the ways in which liminalities of borderlands may be experienced for men and women in different ways. Hence, in the context of this study, it is vital to ask how borderlands as liminal spaces construct cinematic representation of Kurdish-ness in a different way for Kurdish men and women. More importantly, within the context of this thesis, Kurdish children in different borderlands engage with the spaces they live in and these spaces in Kurdish films produce boys and girls in different ways. Considering Thomassen's lack of gender analyses in liminality as collective experience, I will argue in the next part how this liminal space produces Kurdish women in an in-between position from girlhood and womanhood.

1.4 "Betwixt and Between" in Representation of Kurdish Girls

Turner states: "Liminal entities are neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention and ceremonial"

(Turner, 1969, p. 60-61). As far as Turner's statement is concerned, there are three levels. The first is that the Kurdish nation is betwixt and between since it is not a nation-state but an imagined political community without a state of its own as in Benedict Anderson's (1983) terms. The second one is that borderlands are liminal spaces discursively producing Kurdish women as fighting against the oppression and difficulties they experience not only under the other nation-states but also under patriarchal rules about the authority and sexuality. Third level is that the liminality of the nation-building process and the liminality of spaces also produce liminality for Kurdish girls who are both represented as children and adults.

Cinematic representations of Kurdish girls lead to scrutinize narratives of children by employing gender as a category of analysis because they are depicted both as adult women and innocent orphan girls in these films. However, the representations of these girls do not completely depict them as victims, who only suffer from death, violence and fear in that region. On the contrary, Arslan argues of Kurdish characters in films that "Kurdish people are depicted as oppressed but still people who do not lose a joy of living" (2009, p. 19). As far as Arslan's analyses of Kurdish characters are concerned, Kurdish girls also attempt to resist the geographical circumstances and national conflicts they experience and they survive in these films. Therefore, in Kurdish national narratives, cinematic portrayals of Kurdish girls produces a "betwixt and between" situation by producing them as neither-girl-nor-woman. Lury also emphasizes the ambiguous position of women and girls in Kurdish films:

> [In Kurdish films,] It is predominantly girls who demonstrate the real terror of an open, vulnerable position. There is a grim inevitability to this and it signals the close alliance of the woman and the child in terms of their uncertain categorization as proper subjects and their continuing repression and containment by power relations dominated by patriarchy" (Lury, 2010, p. 290)

Not-Girl-Not-Woman for the liminal position of girls is not an attempt to find a third possibility beyond girlhood or womanhood. As Lury (2010) mentions in relation to the

uncertain categorization of women and children in films, Turner's concept of "betwixt and between" leads to show the uncertain categorization of girls being represented both as children and adults-to-be. The chosen films particularly reveal the injustice of Kurdish girls having to take adult responsibilities before their time. This is the reason why Kurdish girls should be considered as adults-to-be instead of adults and that is why my aim is not to depict Kurdish girlhood as a clear-cut category of identity. Rather, girls are depicted in in-between girlhood/womanhood or neither-girl-nor-women by the roles assigned to them. "Betwixt and Between" plays a role to show the representation of Kurdish girls, not as mere children but also represented as the performers of the discursive roles assigned to them. Contrary to Lury's analysis on the position of Kurdish children merely ruled by power relations and patriarchy, it is essential to analyze later that this liminal experience of girlhood/womanhood does not only represent girls as in a state of compliance but also there are several moments that Kurdish girls try to oppose to the patriarchy in subtle ways.

In the next section, representations of Kurdish children as orphans and the potential references of orphanhood will be analyzed. As far as importance of the families as "a certain type of unity" (McClintock, 1993, p.63) is concerned in the context of nationalisms, it is essential to show the possible meanings of orphans in chosen films and their possible meanings in the narratives of Kurdish nation.

Chapter 2 - Construction of Kurdish-ness via Kurdish Films

In this part, I will analyze the discursive production of Kurdish-ness on different levels. First, this part will analyze how Kurdish children gain potential meanings associated with statelessness of Kurdish nation. Second, this part will analyze how film space turns into the spaces of Kurdish-ness by depicting on the one hand, Kurdish rituals and ceremonies and on the other hand, by showing geographical circumstances as a part of Kurdish-ness. The third section will argue how Kurdish film narratives become a narrative of Kurdish-ness via film styles and via producing the turning points of films via Kurdish people's historical and social experiences. The last section will point out the significance of political and social situations Kurdish people experience as part of what makes these films as narratives of Kurdish-ness. Considering all these sections, I will show the ways in which Kurdish-ness is produced in films along social, political and cultural dimensions.

2.1 Homeless Nation and Homeless Children

This section deals with the representations of orphans in Kurdish Cinema and the ways in which parentless children in Kurdish films become the symbols of a stateless nation. Before the detailed analysis of this argument, it is vital to turn back to the discussion of the close connection between family and nation in order to argue the position of children in narratives of nationalism and the ways in which cinematic representation of parentless children lead to represent Kurdish national identity as stateless, in other words, homeless.

Home is a remarkable metaphor used for defining the territories of the nation and as Nagel points out, women are considered as the mothers of nation, which discursively produce them as the symbols of homeland (1998, p.255). As I argued above, nation is often imagined through the trope of the family by assigning the roles of motherhood to woman, which also

works in the same way for national narratives by showing women as caregivers and nurturers of the nation (McClintock, 1993). These arguments are also seen in Yuval-Davis' and Anthias' five major points identified as common roles assigned to women in nationalisms (1989). Therefore, feminist critiques of nationalism point out that mothers, wives and daughters are always constructed as in the position of being protected since the honor of the nation is discursively produced by women's purity, too. Home is considered as a national metaphor of where nation exist, which glorifies the national territories and home as a national discourse also produces a sense of collectivity and connectivity by implying the significance of nation as a big family.

Considering these arguments, I would suggest that Kurdish Cinema employs orphanhood as a national metaphor to indicate suffering, death and violence experienced by children as a way to depict Kurdish nation's homelessness or, in other words, statelessness and lack of self-determination under the regimes of other nation-states. Motherless and fatherless children, who do not belong to any nation discursively produce the Kurdish people as lost in the land, which is not home for them, where they are under the risk of death and violence. Kurdish orphans try to survive without their caregivers and nurturers. Lury explains the reason why orphans are employed in Kurdish films:

> For several critics, the recurring employment of children and other non-professional actors confirms the relationship of New Iranian cinema [she particularly refers to Kurdish films here] to the form and politics of neo-liberalism and its well-known use of the child. The children are understood as the symbols of the nation, representing the changes and (literally) embodying the uneven and troubled development of their homelands." (Lury, 2010, p. 286)

Lury's explanation on children in New Iranian Cinema is quite significant, allowing us to see that the orphans complicate the mainstream approaches to feminist critique of nationalism since the representation of orphans may imply the lack of familial unity for a nation. Therefore, when Lury argues the cinematic representations of orphans in films as a

metaphor to "troubled development of their homelands" (Lury, 2010, s.286), she points out Kurdish children's sufferings, physical and psychological disabilities depicted in films and emphasize the ways in which the imaginings of Kurdish children in these regions show their despair in their homelands. However, Lury does not dig into how representations of orphans as boys and as girls gain different meanings within this troubled development. Therefore, Kurdish films necessitate the analysis of gender in order to see how Kurdish boys and girls work in a different way to shed light on the gendered imaginings of nation.

A Time for Drunken Horses and *Turtles Can Fly* both feature physically disabled boy characters. Madi in *A Time for Drunken Horses* has a bone disease and needs an urgent medical operation to live even a few months more. Even if he is fifteen years old, his disease makes him look like a small child who is not able to move. Hegrov, Agrin's brother, in *Turtles Can Fly* also does not have arms. These two male film characters show Kurdish boys who are injured physically and not able to achieve their manhood to protect their families, which is considered as a national duty on them for the future of the nation.

On the other hand, in these two films, the female characters do not have physical disabilities but are depicted as bodily and psychologically injured by sexual violence as in Agrin's situation and by early marriage in Rojine's situation. Therefore, even if Kurdish orphans are depicted as the symbols of the Kurdish nation for showing, in Lury's terms, "the troubled development of their homelands" (Lury, 2010, p.286), the representation of injury works differently for boys and girls. In *Min Dit: Children of Diyarbakir*, Gulistan and Firat do not have any physical disabilities but they are both damaged after loss of their parents, which leads them to have to survive in the streets of Diyarbakir. Therefore, *Min Dit: Children of Diyarbakir* is different from the characters of Ghobadi's films. The troubled developments of Kurdistan are not only depicted by physical but also psychological injuries of the characters since the traumatic death of their parents changes their lives. The reason why Bezar' film is

different from Bahman Ghobadi's films may be explained by the time difference between films. Bezar's film is considered as a part of young Kurdish Cinema (Arslan, 2009), which pays attention to show children as the victims of national conflicts instead of as victims of physical or psychological disabilities. Considering orphans' representations in Kurdish films, several film scholars have criticized the theme of orphanhood in Ghobadi's cinema and its connotations since they think that the representation of children as victims in Kurdish films lead to exoticization of the Kurdish people and their experiences. For these scholars, the cinematic representations of victimized orphans may be regarded as a tactical move to draw the attention of Western audiences:

> The child actors [and actresses] are non-professional, indigenous to the world represented in the films. This blurring of the actual with the fictional is key: the facts seemingly evidenced by the children's bodies – their skin tone, beauty, disabilities, their littleness, their gestures, gait and accents – are emphasized by the directors and received (by Western audiences at least) as a guarantee of these films' authenticity." (Lury, 2010, p. 285)

Bahman Ghobadi, who is a very well-known Kurdish film director and is generally accepted as the founder of Kurdish Cinema, explains in one of the interviews why he employs children in his films:

> I use current events to structure the story, but that is by no means the center of it. It is the human relations, the people involved, the situations that the children are thrust into that are at the film's heart. Everybody can relate to a child who is uncared for, an orphan who is left on his own in the midst of war and destruction (Hamid, 2005, p. 45).

Ghobadi's mission with the theme of orphanhood is political. As far as his statement is concerned, orphans In Kurdish Cinema play an important role for the audience to identify themselves with the children who face violence and suffering in the region. His attempt is to employ children as a way of raising awareness on the issues Kurdish people face in different regions. Therefore, the theme of orphans is used in his films for building up an emotional attachment and identification of international audience with Kurdish people's issues in these

regions. Therefore, even if the representations of orphans in Ghobadi's films discursively produce depiction of Kurdish-ness as without its own territory and show the physical and emotional traumas of children as an inadvertent result of statelessness, Bezar's film does not choose to display children with any disability but uses the theme of orphanhood to show the inadvertent result of national conflict in Turkey between Kurds and Turks. Therefore, even if the theme of orphanhood is a common ground for these films, there are different concerns and ways of depiction of Kurdish-ness as without its own territory.

2.2 Film Space as a Space of Kurdish-ness

This part will deal with the film spaces in Kurdish films and the ways in which film scenes are signified by highlighting Kurdish cultural elements in a space where Kurdish people live. Mujgan Arslan draws attention to the importance of representations of Kurdish people in their own cinema since these films are considered as a mode of self-expression of Kurdish people's lives (Arslan, 2009, p. 269). According to her, the existence of these films was a first step in filling the gaps related to Kurdish people's experiences and shows that Kurdish language is speakable. Until the end of 1990s, even Kurdish directors did not shoot their films in the Kurdish language (Arslan, 2009, p. 269). From then, however, the existence of Kurdish language and the characters talking about Kurdish issues started to be used in Kurdish films. Therefore, until the 2000s, Kurdish characters were silenced, which is a common representation of Kurdish people living in different nation-states (Arslan, 2009, p. 269). Therefore, Kurdish people did not make their Kurdish-ness visible in films until the end of 1990s. Even if Kurdish films in that period produce them as Kurdish characters who are not allowed to express their Kurdish-ness.

As far as Arslan's arguments are concerned, Kurdish language and film characters in the 2000s are manifestations of Kurdish-ness. Therefore, after 2000s, film spaces in different

films signify these neutral geographical spaces as symbolic spaces of Kurdish-ness, where Kurdish cultural rituals and ceremonies are represented and at the same time, where Kurdish people experience political and national conflicts in these regions based on their Kurdish-ness.

Therefore, film space as a space of Kurdish-ness was first discursively produced through the use of Kurdish language in Kurdish films after 2000. Second, film space is the space where Kurdish people have been able to perform their own traditions and rituals, even if they live under the rule of four different nation-states. In this part, I will analyze particular scenes from the films that show the cultural rituals and ceremonies of Kurdish people and signify these spaces as a space of Kurdish-ness. Arslan also states: "Ghobadi's films represent Kurdish people's lives from all perspectives. In his films, there are so many things related to Kurdish-ness. First, there is a tough and cold climate and mountainous geography Kurdish people face, Kurdish people's traditional costumes, their behaviors and attitudes to each other, Kurdish weddings and funerals…" (Arslan, 2009, p. 139-140). The representations of customs and ceremonies in films are important to keep Kurdish people's cultural history alive. Additionally, depictions of Kurdish customs and ceremonies serve to mark people and contexts as Kurdish. These films also show Kurdish people's daily life experiences in a ritualized form, which are not culturally defined as customs but may be regarded as daily life routines.

In *A Time For Drunken Horses*, Rojine's wedding scene, where her older brother Ayoub and her uncle bring her to the groom's village on a decorated horse and the way how Ayoub and his uncle give her to her husband's family may be considered as a typical practice of giving a girl in a Kurdish wedding ceremony. In that scene, after her new husband's family takes her, they start to walk with her to the village by dancing, applauding and singing a Kurdish song. Moreover, in this film, smuggling is depicted as the common way of making a

living in borderlands. All men at the border bring various types of goods from the Iranian side to the Iraqi side of the border. In *Turtles Can Fly*, besides their clothing and the language they speak, there is not any representation of specific cultural rituals or ceremonies that can be shown. However, again, collecting mines in landmines is depicted as a daily life routine of Kurdish people in borders to make some money. Children in the films collect the mines on the Iraqi-Turkish border and bring them to the central village to sell. In *Min Dit: Children of Diyarbakir*, at the beginning of the film, Gulistan's mother buys a traditional costume for the wedding ceremony they will go and in the wedding scene, people dance the Kurdish *halay*, a traditional Kurdish folk dance, and celebrate the wedding. These scenes are both presented as Kurdish traditional rituals or as ritualized forms of Kurdish people's daily life experiences and show the ways in which Kurdish people engage with the spaces they live particularly marked as Kurdish.

In addition to the cultural representations, these three films pay attention to show the geographical settings in these regions. In Bahman Ghobadi's films, mountainous spaces depict the difficult life circumstances and Kurdish people's challenges to cope with the geographical difficulties (Arslan, 2009). In Bezar's film, there are so many long shots to the streets of Diyarbakir and historical places. Even though these spaces are the spaces of other nation-states, the film narratives show how Kurdish people engage with these spaces by manifesting their Kurdish-ness with their languages, rituals and daily life performances. In order to analyze how cultural and geo-political space produce the Kurdish-ness, Higson states:

> National identity is about the experience of belonging to such a community, being steeped in its traditions, its rituals and its characteristic modes of discourse. This sense of national identity is not of course dependent on actually living within the geo-political space of the nation. Thus, some diasporic communities, uprooted from the specific geopolitical space of the nation or the homeland, still share a common sense of belonging, despite their transnational dispersal. (Higson, 2002, p. 64)

Based on Higson's statement, it is essential to claim that living in the same place does not automatically produce a sense of belonging among Kurdish people live in those regions. The sense of belonging is also established by people who are away from these regions but define them as Kurdish. Therefore, geopolitical spaces and cultural rituals represented in Kurdish films produce a space belongs to Kurdish-ness, where Kurdistan is not so much a homeland for Kurdish people but a space where they share a common sense of belonging.

2.3 Kurdish Films: From film narratives to narratives of nation

This section will analyze the potential of three chosen films as narratives of Kurdish nationhood. Here, I do not use the concept of "national narrative" intentionally since these films do not produce a sense of nation building of Kurdistan, but instead show how Kurdish people experience violence, death and fear as a consequence of being subjected to Kurdish. Even if these films do not reveal the ways in which the Kurdish nation is constructed, they produce a sense of belonging around children's sufferings, problems and show the ways in which children play metaphorical roles in relation to the nation.

In the three films, Kurdish nationalisms are understated because there is not any direct quotation and any primary signifier related to Kurdish nationhood. To illustrate this argument, there is not any flag, not any anthem and not any Kurdish institution is emphasized or depicted. More generally, these films do not show any prevalent signifiers of nationhood or do not make claims for the independence of the Kurdish nation. On the other hand, various representations of Kurdish-ness and the performances of characters associated with their Kurdish-ness are represented in terms of the problems they face in their daily lives. In other words, daily lives and the problems they face in their daily lives are directly related to the collective social and cultural position of the Kurds in each of the territories they live in, where

their Kurdish-ness is in a state of oppression and they have secondary citizenship in the four nation-states they live in.

For the discursive production of film narratives as narratives of nation, the film styles are particularly important. Arslan explains that:

> Ghobadi mixes neorealist and documentarist film traditions in his films. His shooting techniques, shoulder move shooting style, using natural voices in his films, shooting at outdoor spaces and casting with amateur actors / actresses are worth mentioning (2009, p. 139).

It is also worth to mention that his style constructs Kurdish people's experiences via giving historical references what Kurdish people experience. Arslan also states: "the chosen issues by Ghobadi are based on reality and beyond that, reality is not the reality that happened in the past, but rather it is current where millions of people are still exposed to it" (2009, p.139). This style may be also seen in Bezar's film, which consists of both documentarist and neo-realist film elements to show Kurdish people's embattled positions in Turkey and the characters who face problems because of being othered. Therefore, the film styles in these three films may be considered as fictions but at the same time, a merging of fiction and reality by means of specific film styles. Besides the style of these films, there are common representations of Kurdish-ness which turns the film narratives into narratives of nation.

Now, it is essential to turn back to the films and try to show how smuggling is discursively produced as a social reality for Kurds in *A Time for Drunken Horses*, how collecting mines also become a part of Kurdish people's lives in *Turtles Can Fly* and smuggling again is depicted as a part of Kurdish people's lives in *Min Dit: Children of Diyarbakir*. These references show the Kurdish children's despair in different regions and show the ways in which their modes of survival discursively produce them as "illegal" subjects who deal with "illegal" jobs under the rule of other nation-states. Moreover, smuggling also produces a gendered division of labor among Kurdish boys and girls since in *A*

Time for Drunken Horses, men are represented as smugglers and breadwinners and women are housewifes and caregivers. Kirim's explanation of the importance of horses for populations living in such mountanious border regimes is telling:

> In these areas, there still exist a very important relationship between a man and his horse, the traditional mode of transport for smuggled goods. Hence, horses are valuable possessions for families living at the borders (Kirim, 2015).

A gendered division of labor is thus based strictly on the social and geographical circumstances Kurds live in. As far as the representations of boys and girls are concerned in *A Time for Drunken Horses,* Ayoub is able to move between borders for his work but on the other hand, Rojine always stays at home and depicted as homemaker and caregiver. Following these depictions, it is also possible to see that the film signifies the public/private distinction by representing girls at home more than boys. That is why the film does not only show smuggling as a mode of survival for Kurdish people but also depicts how smuggling shape their daily lives in terms of their division of labor.

Surviving by illegal activities is also depicted in *Min Dit: Children of Diyarbakir*. After Gulistan's and Firat's parents are killed, they start to live in the streets and Firat starts to sell stolen and smuggled goods in Diyarbakir. Moreover, the film starts with an establishing shot of an old man, who is selling smuggled cigarettes from a makeshift table on the street. The first close-up is particularly important to introduce the daily life of plenty of Kurdish people in Diyarbakir and that shows the ways in which, in discursive level, lower class Kurdish people are exposed to make a living by smuggling or selling smuggled goods in these regions. Nevertheless, in this film, border smuggling is not at the very center of film narrative and does not produce a clear gendered division of labor in the same direction with *A Time for Drunken Horses*. As far as Gulistan's and Firat's modes of survival are concerned, Firat's depiction is more focused an illegality of thievery with the scene at the bank machine. On the other hand, Gulistan sells tissues as a part of illegal selling of goods. Children's openness to be

made use of illegal activities is also depicted at the end of the film when the kids are being driven to Istanbul in the end. Gulistan's and Firat's produce a gendered division of labor in a different way in this film since thievery is marked as a male activity. On the other hand, sex work becomes the form of illegality and survival for girls. In *Turtles Can Fly*, smugglers are also male children, who go to central village and sell the collected mines. Throughout the film, Agrin does not participate in collecting mines and only stays behind the landmines. Therefore, smuggling is discursively produced as an othered, excluded Kurdish men's job for surviving. Arslan explains the "Kurdish smugglers" and depict the ways in which smuggling has a key role for narratives of Kurdish nation as:

> Smuggling is fate assigned to Kurdish people, but the irony and the tragedy in the film (A Time for Drunken Horses) is that Kurds are exposed to and forced to become smugglers in their own lands. There is no another chance for the Kurds besides "smuggling" to pass "illegally" one side of their homeland to the other. By setting his film on both sides of the border, and using Kurdish smugglers as major figures, Ghobadi is trying to draw our attention to the disunity of the Kurdish homeland. (2009, p. 158).

Even if smuggling is not at the very center of *Turtles Can Fly* and *Min Dit: Children of Diyarbakir*, smuggling or selling the smuggled goods is still the survival strategy for Kurdish children in these films. Boys are the only smugglers and the ones who make their siblings survive by earning money. Smuggling is a dangerous way of earning money since "they are often ambushed, fired upon or blackmailed by border guards, and are extorted daily by corrupt Kurdish officials" (Kirim, 2015). Therefore, Kurdish people are shown experiencing the danger and violence by the other nation-states' officials, which bring the social issue into a national level. The next part will analyze how film characters turn into the subjects of Kurdish nation in these three film narratives.

2.4 Kurdish People: From film characters to subjects of nation

This section will analyze how Kurdish children in films are constructed as the subjects of the Kurdish nation. As it is argued before, the film narratives of the chosen films do not reveal many national signifiers related to the national construction of Kurdistan. These films do not manifest them as the representatives of Kurdish national identities but discursively produce different aspects of Kurdish-ness based on their secondary status within other nation states. Even if they have different experiences in different regions and experience exclusion and otherness in different ways, all the child characters from the films I analyze are discursively produced as "refugees in their own home lands" (Arslan, 2009, p. 149). The reason why they are constructed in this way is that there is a deliberate and direct positioning of the Kurds as unliberated secondary citizens within the nation-state they are assigned to. Even if their secondary citizenships under the rule of different nation states led to their silencing until the late 1990s, they started to articulate themselves after 2000s. That is why; Kurdish Cinema, says Arslan, is quite important since: "Oppressed nations seek for themselves in cinema and re-build them with it. Cinema is a self-expression and self-embodiment for self-enclosed Kurdish people" (Arslan, 2009, p. xii).

Even if there are cultural, political, linguistic differences in different regions of Kurdistan, secondary positions under the rule of other nation states produce common bonds around Kurdish-ness and their experiences related to Kurdish-ness works in a different way for boys and girls. In this section, it is essential to give the background of how Kurdish people experience smuggling between different borderlands to analyze *A Time for Drunken Horses*. Second, it is vital to scrutinize *Turtles Can Fly* to see how Kurdish people experienced US – Iraq War and the ways in which Kurdish issues gain a different background before and after this. Third, *Min Dit: Children of Diyarbakir* will give an insight to understand how the

political conflict between Turkish and Kurdish people is depicted in terms of unidentified murders in 1990s, which were part of a state campaign to crush political opposition.

The significance of smuggling is analyzed in detail in previous section to understand how smuggling as a metaphor for the plight of Kurdish people shows Kurdish people's despair and the only way of earning money in different films. These three films depict Kurdish people as smugglers or the ones who sell the smuggled goods in different Kurdish regions. However, it is a central theme of *A Time for Drunken Horses* and the turning points of the film narrative stems from the death of the children's father during a smuggling run since the roles and positions of children alter after their father dies. Specifically, this turning point also leads to change in Ayoub's social roles change in the film since he starts to work as a smuggler between national borders to earn money to support his siblings. Aram Kirim, a photographer, who was born in the borderland between Iraq and Iran, created a photo stories entitled "Kurdish smugglers" for the documentation of Kurdish people's lives. He explains the smuggling situation in the borders:

> Poverty and lack of alternative opportunities has pushed many people living on the borders of Iraq, Syria and Iran (Kurdistan) to smuggle goods, despite the grave risks associated with doing so… The smugglers make around three journeys per day across treacherous mountain passes and hazardous minefields, following in the footsteps of many before them. (Kirim, 2015).

Smuggling in the film thus reflects a social reality for Kurdish people, who live close to such borders, as many of them do. Even if the film was shot at the beginning of the 2000s, the Roboski Massacre in Turkish territories shows how Kurdish people still face problems of journeying in different regions and living close to death in their regions. The Roboski Massacre took place on December 28, 2011 between the Iraqi and Turkish borders. Turkish aircrafts bombed a group of Kurdish people who were bringing smuggled cigarettes and oil from Iraq to Turkey since the soldiers assumed them to be the members of PKK. In this

bombing, thirty-four Kurdish people were killed and the Kurdish smugglers drew attention in Turkish press (Geerdink, 2015). Therefore, smuggling become an iconic image of Kurdish daily life recognizable by local audiences.

Turtles Can Fly tells the story of Kurdish people who wait for US occupation at a refugee camp. The film starts with scenes of villages trying to find a television signal for watching the news about the expected coming war. It is worth analyzing how Kurds in Iraq are influenced by the war and how the US-Iraqi war, in their expectation, becomes a part of their liberation. Before the war, in Saddam Hussein's era, there is a huge state oppression on Kurds. Especially in 1990s, there were so many massacres of Kurdish people for the aim of "Arabization" of the Kurdish people. Therefore, US-Iraqi war opened a space for Iraqi Kurdish people to express themselves at a chance for political autonomy and claim their Kurdish-ness in the Iraqi state. Indeed, the Kurdish Regional Government is established at the end of 2007.

In Ghobadi's *Turtles Can Fly*, children are excited about the war at the beginning of the film. Satellite, a boy of about fourteen, sometimes throws in a few English phrases to impress them and when the children see US aircrafts come towards the end of the film, they get excited. The conversation between Satellite and Shirkooh and the excitement of Shirkooh, a small Kurdish child around ten years old, is significant to mention here. Shirkooh says: "The Americans [soldiers] said not to collect mines anymore. Not anymore. They told us to collect these [Saddam Hussein's monuments]. They will pay dollars. Dollars!" (Turtles Can Fly, Ghobadi, 2004). The US occupation is depicted as a hope or a future for Kurds, who will save them from Saddam Hussein's regime.

In addition to the other children's depiction, Agrin's story is also a political representation of Kurds in Iraq. Since Agrin was raped by Iraqi soldiers, film narrative shows how the Kurdish female body is used to humiliate the Kurdish nation. *Turtles Can Fly*

discursively produces Iraqi Kurds' political situation in Iraq and show the ways in which they expect to be a part of Iraq after the invasion. Therefore, the political analyses on Iraqi-US war before are the same line with the film characters' hope and excitement for the future. On the other hand, the final message in the film is that their lives actually won't change so much that they have already lost so much.

Min Dit: Children of Diyarbakir draws attention to Kurds position in Turkey as secondary citizens. More specifically, the film shows how Kurdish people in the Southeastern part of Turkey were subjected to attempted assimilation by JITEM, "Gendermarie Intelligence and Counter-Terrorism", especially in the 1990s. JITEM may be considered as a secret state institution in Turkey, which undertakes the role of illegal activities of the Turkish state and which played role in the Turkish-Kurdish conflict in 1990s. The turning point of the film derives from this specific political situation in Turkey, where Kurdish people are suffering from systematic death and violence at the hands of Turkish state. The scene where the Kurdish family comes back from a wedding ceremony, the car is stopped by three men randomly, and they suddenly kill the Kurdish mother and father is particularly significant since film's turning point is based on the political oppression of Kurdish people in Turkey. That is why the film narrative and characters gain more substantial ground for considering them as the subjects of nation, who suffer as becoming internal other in Turkish territories. Therefore, the turning point of the film discursively produces these characters as a portrayal of Kurdish people in Turkey who are subjected to death, violence and suffering by state apparatuses. As it is stated at the beginning of this section, all these analyses show that Kurdish people do not turn into national subjects of Kurdish nation but somehow they experience the violence and death because of their Kurdish-ness. Moreover, directors signify the turning points of these films by depicting different political struggles that Kurdish people experience under other nation-states (as in *Min Dit: Children of Diyarbakir*), by depicting their despair due to their economic

circumstances (as in *A Time for Drunken Horses*) and by depicting sexual violence Kurdish women might face under the rule of other nation state (as in *Turtles Can Fly*). These turning points of the films turn the Kurdish people's political issues they face into the issues of Kurdish nation.

Turning points in the films are thresholds for Kurdish children, which bring them into the liminal states. Considering that film narratives produce a state of liminality by depicting real social, national and political conflicts that Kurds experience, the points for these films are to show how real situations put real people in the state of liminality. That is why the film characters resonate with the real life situations that Kurdish children experience. Regarding to these, liminality is a productive tool in understanding the potential narratives of Kurdish nation instead of their depictions only in films. Thus, liminality is not only a particular experience of film characters but also a collective experience of other Kurdish children who experience these real situations. This is the reason why this chapter has argued how film narratives turn into narratives of Kurdish nation and how film characters turn into the subjects of nation. In the next chapter, It is essential to read the narratives of gender in films through the lenses of liminality to see how Kurdish girls stay in-between girlhood/womanhood.

Chapter 3 - Liminality of Kurdish Children In Films

The three films chosen for this project discursively produce liminal states of Kurdish children. In the first part, I will analyze how parentlessness and homelessness are primary signifiers to produce liminality for Kurdish children in these films. After that, I will argue how conflict zones in these films produce liminal position of Kurdish girls via spatial dimensions of liminality. Third, I will show how Kurdish girls are depicted both as sisters and mothers in films as a result of the liminal experiences they face in films. In the last part, I will point out Kurdish girls' positions not as mere compliance but as a site of resistance, where they resist different figures of patriarchy.

3.1 Approaches to Liminality for Kurdish Children

First, it is essential to indicate how Kurdish children experience the state of liminality in these films. In *A Time for Drunken Horses*, the children's father dies by stepping on a mine while smuggling and the children start to live with their uncle. This sudden death changes the children's certain positions as children in film and they are left homeless and parentless, which lead to the children into the liminal state (Thomassen, 2015, p. 40). In *Turtles Can Fly*, at the beginning of the film, where Agrin, Hegrov and Riga arrive in the refugee camp, displaced by the conflict in their town Halabja, the film reveals their homelessness and parentlessness. Thus, from the beginning of the film, they are discursively produced as in a liminal state since the conflict between Iraqis and Kurds forces them to move, changes their lives, and brings them to the refugee camp. If I go back to the discussion in the first chapter about how war produces liminal states (Malksoo, 2015), the children's experience of national conflict discursively produce them in a liminal state in the film. In *Min Dit: Children of Diyarbakir*, children also experience the liminality with the death of their parents, which turn them into homeless and parentless subjects, forcing them to "deal with change" (Thomassen, 2015, p.40). Even if these changes and the liminal states of children differ in these films,

leaving their villages or losing their parents are drastic changes in their lives to bring them into the liminal state. Hence, Kurdish children in films start to experience liminality by becoming homeless and parentless.

The most important common ground is that their homelessness and parentlessness is associated with their Kurdish-ness. In other words, the changes they experience are not natural changes, but rather the national conflicts between Kurds and other nation-states produce their in-between positions. Considering that these films point out the real situations put real people into the state of liminality, I will analyze how Kurdish boys and girls experience the liminality in a different way. By primarily focusing on the position of Kurdish girls in these films, I will analyze how girl characters are discursively produced as in-between girlhood and womanhood.

It is my hypothesis that even though these films construct Kurdish girls in-between womanhood and girlhood, these Kurdish female characters complicate the narrative of passive and victimized Kurdish girls because they are depicted as "fighters" as it is argued in the first chapter, turning this liminal position into a point of resilience and survival.

3.2 Kurdish Girls in Liminal Spaces

In these three films, the spaces Kurdish children live is discursively produced as a "closed world" (Lury, Cinematic Experience, Film Space, and the Child's World, 2010) where children could not go beyond the spaces they live in and girls cannot pass from one space to another (Kuhn, 2010). To be more precise, national borders are closed worlds and girls could not go beyond the national territories they live in. Therefore, I will examine the ways in which Agrin, Rojine and Gulistan engage with the space of Kurdish-ness, which can be considered Kurdish people's land but not a home.

Annette Kuhn (2010) argues for the concept of transitional space and the ways in which film space is divided into two parts as "inside" and "outside" in films. She claims that

in films, children may be shown at home or behind the window, which could be considered as "inside". She particularly defines "inside" as home (Kuhn, 2010, p. 85), from which children later leave to experience separation and individuation. According to her, home means security and home also refers to mother. Therefore, inside is always a secure place where the child can grow up. In the films under analysis, a child's experience of passing the threshold (this could be a door or other threshold where child could pass) is interpreted as the child's first experience of separation and individuation. To illustrate this argument, a child may be always depicted in the house, which is "inside" and the threshold can be a door of the house. When a child passes beyond the door of the house first time, the child pass to the outside, which is meant to be the first step of separation and individuation of the child. Kuhn claims that this process occurs gradually, since a child experiences leaving from "inside" at the beginning by turning back to mother and home since the home is the way of "rejoining the security" (Kuhn, 2010, p. 90). If we go back to the same example, passing the threshold is not an absolute freedom or a mere seperation and individuation for the child. Even if a child passes the door of the house, he/she turns back to home several times. Therefore, Kuhn's arguments on "home" means where children start from, but also the place where they can return to until the latest stage of separation and individuation (Kuhn, 2010, p. 86).

In Kuhn's discussion, the metaphor, "home", can be applied to nation since in the context of nationalism, national space is defined as homeland, which is meant to allow a sense of belonging and security. However, as it is discussed in the previous section on homelessness and nation, Kurdish children are depicted as orphans who do not belong to the nation states they live in. Therefore, if the threshold is discursively produced as the national borders of other nation states in the chosen films, Kurdish children are discursively produced as "inside", where the inside is not home for them. Therefore, the homelessness of Kurdish children may be discursively produced in films, where Kurdish girls are not allowed to pass the national

borders as thresholds. In other words, even if girls are able to pass, they can turn back "inside", which is not home for them.

Moreover, Kuhn illustrates the borderline between "inside" and "outside" as a door or a window (Kuhn, 2010, p. 86), where the cinematic experience produces the image of child and adult-to-be in terms of coming back and forth in these divided spaces. This back and forth movement causes the liminal space or in-between-ness in a child's world since child experiences adulthood by oscillating between "inside" and "outside" (Kuhn, 2010, p. 87). Contrary to Khun's divided spaces as "inside" and "outside", Lury considers film space as an open world without any insides and outsides and she regards children's moves as "journeyings" (Lury, Cinematic Experience, Film Space, and the Child's World, 2010) beyond territories, where children explores their childhood by endless comings and goings. On the contrary, Lury considers Kurdish children's "journeyings" (Lury, Cinematic Experience, Film Space, and the Child's World, 2010) in films as "repetitive, boring and dangerous" (Lury, 2010, p. 289). Moreover, Lury scrutinizes this "open world" as a deliberate irony in Kurdish films since the children do not go anywhere even though they are in an endless comings and goings in the region (Lury, 2010, p. 289). For her, Kurdish children in Ghobadi's films fail to become adults since they are exposed to living in a closed world. As far as Kuhn's "transitional space" (Kuhn, 2010) and Lury's "open world" (Lury, Cinematic Experience, Film Space, and the Child's World, 2010) are concerned, Agrin and Rojine are stuck inside since they are not able to move between national borders. Therefore, the film space becomes a space of Kurds, in which film characters experience suffering as well as violence. Conflict zones, then, produce the failure of transition for Kurdish girls and lead them to experience liminality of gender as both-girl-and-woman.

All children in the film are stuck "inside" (Kuhn, 2010) in *Turtles Can Fly* since the Iraqi-Turkish border is impassable for all of them. However, the Kurdish boys and Agrin do

not experience "inside" in the same way. Agrin's traumatic experience is based on the rape she experiences by Iraqi soldiers in her village because of her Kurdish-ness, which discursively produces her as different from Kurdish boys. Moreover, even if no child can cross the border in the film, Kurdish boys are allowed to go to the central village and sell the mines to collect money, which means that they are free to move "inside". However, Agrin always stays in the village and is not allowed to go beyond the village throughout the film. Therefore, even if the threshold is the Iraqi-Turkish national border and no child can pass the national border throughout the film, journeys of Kurdish boys to the village implies that Agrin, as a girl, does not have equal access to move from the refugee camp. Moreover, what she experiences "inside", which is the Iraqi side of the Kurdish region, is marked by her traumatic sexual experience.

Rojine in *A Time for Drunken Horses* also experiences her girlhood on the Iranian side of the Kurdish region, which is depicted as "inside." Before marriage, she usually stays at home and looks after her siblings and her uncle's children. She does not leave the village until she is forced to marry a man who lives in another village. It is very ironic that Rojine is capable of moving beyond the village only when she gets married to a man. As it is previously argued, smuggling is discursively produced as a survival strategy for Kurds in these regions. Smuggling in the film discursively produces a gendered division of labor between breadwinner boys and caregiver girls, which is depicted in *A Time for Drunken Horses*. Hence, if "inside" in the film is considered as Iranian side of Kurdish region (because inside is where a child start from) and "outside" is seen as Iraqi side of Kurdish region (because outside is where to go), smuggler Kurdish boys are allowed to experience the separation and individuation through their journeys between inside and outside. Besides Kurdish boys, Kurdish girls in the film are not allowed to go beyond the borders, unless they marry someone as in Rojine's situation.

Unlike Agrin and Rojin, Gulistan in *Min Dit: Children of Diyarbakir* lives in Diyarbakir, the southeastern city in Turkey, and tries to survive with her brother and her small sister after her parents are killed by Turkish officials when they come back from a Kurdish wedding ceremony. *Min Dit: Children of Diyarbakir* is divided into two parts in a different way from what happens in Ghobadi's films. Before Firat's and Gulistan's parents are killed, the children live in an apartment with their parents. However, after they are killed, the children are forced to leave their house when they can no longer pay the rent. In contrast to the other two films, here "inside" is not a metaphorical space but a material home, where Gulistan and Firat are forced by the Turkish landlord to leave the house when their parents are killed and they are not able to pay the rent. Therefore, Gulistan's experience is different from Agrin and Rojine since she does not experience her childhood in the minefields or in a small village, but the Turkish landlord has also a symbolic meaning because of discursively producing the children as "homeless". Even if these films depict different insides and outsides in film spaces and their meanings are different from each other, there are symbolic resemblances of the Kurdish girls' experiences, which are worth to mention.

First, in Ghobadi's films, national borders between other nation-states are thresholds between insides and outsides. In addition to this, Kurdish boys and girls do not have the same privilege to travel within the regions. Even if Bezar's film depict "inside" and "outside" in a different way, all these three female characters experience their childhood associated with death, violence and fear because state powers define Kurds as others. Second, even if in Kuhn's theory, "inside" is discursively produced as home, the figure of mother and the space of security, Kurdish girls do not experience insides in these films with these metaphors. Insides are not a space of security for them but a space for being subjected to death and violence. As far as these three main female characters are concerned, Kurdish girls' experiences in films complicate the concept of transition from childhood to adulthood because

they do not experience the transition gradually as Khun theorizes. They are always forced to live inside or to go outside by force and the transition from childhood to adulthood is not a clear-cut process in these films. Moreover, the transitions do not work in the same way for Kurdish girls and boys because even if all children face the problems in the films, Kurdish boys are depicted as more mobile than Kurdish girls. Therefore, it is essential to ask some questions here: If the film characters show the failure of transitional space from childhood to adulthood, how could it be applied to liminal states of Kurdish girls in terms of their gender? In what ways are Kurdish girls produced in in-between-ness of girlhood/womanhood in these chosen films? To answer these questions, in the next part, I will focus on their depictions of Kurdish girls in-between-ness of protective sisters and young mothers.

3.3 "Young mothers" and "Protective Sisters"

Nagel analyzes the potential symbolic meanings of women in nationalisms by familial terms. In her argument, women are the mothers of the nation and the symbol of homeland. Besides, she claims, women are also constructed as wives and daughters for the honor of the nation (Nagel, 1998, p. 255). Nagel's study is particularly important as she articulates the women's position in nationalisms in different familial terms. However, it is not quite clear in Nagel's study whether mothers, daughters or wives have different national meanings and imaginings. Moreover, Nagel does not dig into whether sisterhood is a part of nationalist projects and whether sisters are shown as significant figures for the honor and the future of the nation. Since girls are projected as both young mothers and protective sisters in the chosen Kurdish films, these three female characters are quite significant for re-visiting the symbolic meanings of family in nationalisms and to see how sisters play a role both in family and in nation. On the other hand, Massad (1995) claims that sisters are considered a part of nation in the Palestinian nationalist project. Massad analyzes the Palestinian Declaration of Independence (1995, p. 74): "Communique no. 5 describes Palestinian mothers, sisters as

'manabit' or the soil in which 'manhood, respect, dignity' grow. Women are referred to here biologically- and socially-relational terms to men… Mothers, sisters and daughters are described as the soil producing manhood, respect and dignity". In the Palestinian Declaration of Independence, women are considered as national beings, Massad says, and men are "makers of glory, respect and dignity" (1995, p.74). In this part, I will analyze how sisters in these Kurdish films engage with their brothers to show potentials that sisters and brothers may stay in family in a non-hierarchical way.

Agrin, Rojine and Gulistan in the films are in in-between positions of young mothers and protective sisters. In this part, their in-between positions are not analyzed as national roles of Kurdish girls and women, but on the other hand, their in-between-ness gives several ideas associated with Kurdish-ness and the ways Kurdish characters engage with the nation-states they are assigned to. As it is discussed in previous chapters, these female characters are not national characters but rather, discursively produced subjects of the Kurdish nation through films. Therefore, their liminal roles are not directly related to a depiction of Kurdish nationalism but rather, related to their Kurdish-ness, which is discursively produced by national conflicts they experience under the rule of other nation-states. It is my hypothesis that their parentlessness and homelessness are primary reasons why Kurdish girls experience the liminal states. When Kurdish girls experience the conflicts and their parents are killed, they try to survive as orphans in conflict zones. Therefore, the change occurs because of the situation in which their Kurdish community finds itself and this change in their lives brings these Kurdish girls into performing sisterhood and motherhood in these films.

In *Turtles Can Fly*, Agrin experiences rape by Iraqi soldiers and has a baby son. The film starts with a precise close-up of her face, which implies that Agrin's mysterious story is the story of the film. It is mysterious since at the beginning, the film does not allow viewers to understand that the baby is Agrin's baby and the result of being raped. However, towards the

end of the film, Agrin's so-called baby brother turns out to be her son and her silence in the film gains meaning. Agrin is depicted as a mother who is traumatized by rape in conflict zone but at the same time, she is the sister of Hengov, Agrin's older brother, where Hengov does not perform his brotherhood as someone with an authority over Agrin. In the narrative of the film, they are depicted as siblings who try to survive together. Agrin as a sister and Hegrov as a brother are related to one another in a non-hierarchical way, which has the potential to show that the national conflicts produce Kurdish children, at first, as the agents trying to survive together. However, in the film, is it possible to analyze Agrin's suicide as a defeat? I will answer this question in the next section, but it is better here to give several instances related to the relationship between Agrin and Hegrov to see how they become related to each other in a non-hierarchical way. First, these two characters are depicted as both injured in a different way. Hegrov becomes permanently disabled because of stepping on a mine, when they live in Halabja before coming to the refugee camp. Agrin is psychologically injured because of the rape experience. These different depictions of injury refer to their sufferings in the region because of their Kurdish-ness. Moreover, even if Hengov knows that Riga is Agrin's child after Iraqi soldier raped her and that she wants to get rid of Riga, Hengov strongly opposes this. Hengov's attitude here is particularly important since Agrin is not become a symbol of purity for Hengov and he does not interrogate himself about why he could not save Agrin from Iraqi soldiers. Hengov insists on looking after Riga, which implies that Hengov still considers Riga as their small brother or the one who shares the same destiny with them. On the other hand, Agrin does not become womanized in the eyes of Hegrov, even if Riga calls Agrin as mommy in the film. Even if Agrin experiences rape, Agrin is still a de-sexualized girl in the eyes of Hengov, where Hengov does not assert his power as a male by relating to Agrin as a raped woman. Therefore, in *Turtles Can Fly*, even if their relationship before

coming to the refugee camp is not known, their relationship in the film is not discursively produced in a hierarchical way.

A Time for Drunken Horses starts with Amaneh's voice-over, a small girl child character, who tells the story of her family and introduces her sister Rojine by saying "[My mother] died when she was having a baby sister. Rojine is our mother now… She is at home, looking after my little sister" (Ghobadi, A Time for Drunken Horses, 2000). This opening scene is particularly important since Amaneh's voice-over introduces the family and reveals the ways in which Rojine becomes their mother in the family. Therefore, the film situates us to follow Rojine's mothered position. Kurdish children in the film reveal how girls and boys do not have the same privileges. Ayoub, the older brother, tries to assert his power as a male in the family, when his father passes away. Amaneh's voice-over says: "My uncle said: 'Ayoub will be our new father.'" (Ghobadi, A Time for Drunken Horses, 2000). Therefore, in *A Time for Drunken Horses*, Ayoub tries to become a family man and head of her family. There are several scenes in which Ayoub tries to establish an authority over Rojine but the uncle states: "I am the head of the family, you have no word to say" (Ghobadi, A Time for Drunken Horses, 2000). Therefore, Rojine's narrative has patriarchal aspects since the uncle asserts himself as a head of the family instead of Ayoub. My claim is that even if the other siblings' views produce Rojine as a mother, her position is a caregiver of the family as the oldest healthy child in the family. In the film, even if boys and girls have different roles and positions according to their ages and their sex, their aim is to collect money for their brother Madi's treatment. Therefore, besides the roles assigned to them, their goal is to care for Madi, which produces a sense of collectivity and connectivity among them. This togetherness among siblings complicates the position of Ayoub and Rojine as children and adults but discursively produce them as the ones who try to go a long way for Madi's treatment. In Rojine's narrative, she stays in-between mother and sister, which lead her to experience

Turner's "betwixt and between" (1969, p. 60-61) situation as both-sister-and-mother in the film. Turner states: "Liminal entities are neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention and ceremonial" (Turner, 1969, p. 60-61). Considering Turner's concept, I reveal Rojine's position as the oldest sibling in this family who tries to do her part to make Madi live. This view is also the explanation of why Rojine gets married to a man from another village in the same region of Iran. In the film narrative, her new husband's family are supposed to pay for the retreatment in return for a dowry and Rojine sacrifices herself for Madi in exchange for funding Madi's threatment. Therefore, Rojine's story becomes different from Agrin's story since Rojine gives her sexuality and reproductive capacity to her husband to protect his brother. However, as a common ground of these two characters, they are depicted as both girls and women in different ways.

In *Min Dit: Children of Diyarbaki*r unlike Rojine and Agrin, Gulistan experiences the in-between-ness of a sister and a mother after her parents are killed by agents of the Turkish Gendarmerie Intelligence and Anti-Intelligence Units (JITEM). After the scene in which her parents are killed, Gulistan carries her baby sister to the closest neighbor woman and asks for help to feed the baby with a bottle, which means that she directly undertakes the roles of her mother to protect her baby sister. The absence of her mother leads her to become a mother of her baby sister, where she also stays as a sister for her other brother. After her baby sister dies because they do not have enough money for this medical treatment, Gulistan and Firat try to survive in Diyarbakir by selling tissues in the streets and Firat starts to sell smuggled goods in the streets. In the film, Gulistan and Firat meet new children after their parents die and there is not any relationship established in a hierarchical way.

As far as three films are concerned, none of the child calls the other one by using the terms brother and sister to refer to each other. They all call each other with their own names.

This is particularly important to mention since calling each other with their names implies that they try to build upon egalitarian relationships with each other around the sense of togetherness and collectivity to survive. As it is stated before, the representations of these girls do not produce them as national subjects. But rather, their experiences produced by the political and national conflicts produce their Kurdish-ness, which also makes them the subjects of Kurdish-ness. Therefore, even though feminist critiques of nationalism argue that men are the ones who assert their power as males (Nagel, 1998), boys and girls in films do not have clear-cut power dynamics in terms of their gender differences. Their togetherness derives from their sense of collectivity for protecting to each other. Therefore, Kurdish girl characters in films complicate the firm positions for men and women pointed in feminist critiques of nationalism by performing sisterhood and motherhood in these films.

3.4 "Compliance" and "Resistance"

In *Turtles Can Fly*, sexual violence destroys Agrin's childhood. Throughout the film, Agrin's attempts at suicide fail twice when she decides to survive instead of giving up. Moreover, in these suicide attempt scenes, before Agrin walks toward the cliff edge, she stops and looks behind for a while in order to decide whether she wants to leave this world or not. Her suicide at the end of the film does not make her completely distraught and hopeless because Agrin's dilemma about whether to commit suicide or move on may be considered as her resistance to what she experiences in the region. Lury considers children as the agents of resilience and states: "Yet the ways in which the children live reveals their resilience, their persistence and their hope. They express fleetingly, yet tangibly, other ways of becoming and being in the world" (2010, p. 292). Then, going back to the story of Agrin, it could be suggested that Agrin's suicide is a protest where she refuses other ways of becoming in this world because the world she lives in is closed and bounded within national territories, where this region is impassable for her.

In *A Time for Drunken Horses,* Rojine's story also is not merely considered as a compliance of any Kurdish girl, who perpetuates the roles of women dominated by patriarchy by accepting early marriage, by being a mother to younger siblings and by doing housework at home. There are several scenes in which she resists her uncle, who is depicted in the film as the head of the household after the children's father has died. In the wedding scene, when Rojine's uncle and older brother bring Rojine to the other village to her new husband's family, she steps back and runs to her uncle and Ayoub with her disabled small brother, and says: "I don't want to marry him" because her husband's family does not accept her small brother, Madi, to stay with her. Even if her uncle tries to convince her new husband's family to accept her with her disabled brother, they refuse the offer and propose to give a horse to them in as a dowry instead of having to care for Madi. Then, Rojine's uncle accepts this offer since he wants to smuggle at the border and horses are the only way of bringing the smuggled good to the other side of border. Even if Rojine's resistance to marriage seems subtle, she expresses her ideas and feelings at that moment, which gain importance for the depiction of Rojine.

In *Min Dit: Children of Diyarbakir*, Gulistan also try to resist the gender roles assigned to her. In Gulistan's story, JITEM officials murder her parents in the car, on their way back from a wedding ceremony. Firat and Gulistan see the Turkish official's face from the backseat of the car. Then, one day, Gulistan meets one woman in Diyarbakir who works as a sex worker in Diyarbakir and they become friends. The Turkish JITEM official wants to bring the sex worker to his house and Gulistan also goes to his house with her friend. Gulistan decides to kill him in his house at one point before deciding not to do. At the end of the story, Gulistan turns into a revenger when Firat and she put the leaflets on streets, which inform people on the Turkish official's secret in Diyarbakir. Then, the film ends with Gulistan's ability to challenge the authority of Turkish state, which makes her a strong female character.

In this part, analyses of female characters allow to scrutinize the particular moments when they try to resist brothers, uncles and even officials. That is why there are several moments in which they express themselves and oppose to those exerting their authority over them. These moments highlights the agency of these girls in these narratives, which make them resisting subjects against patriarchal control.

Conclusion

This thesis contributes to studies of nationalism by emphasizing the ambiguous position of children in representations of ethno-national identity. Moreover, this study sheds light on the gendered imaginings of boys and girls and argues that boys and girls in narratives of nations should be examined through a gendered lens. In this study, liminality as an analytical concept leads to re-visit narratives by considering them from the perspective of gendered childhood by highlighting the cinematic imaginations of Kurdish girls and boys in three Kurdish films.

This thesis analyzes Kurdish children's liminal positions in three films, *A Time for Drunken Horses* (Ghobadi, 2000), *Turtles Can Fly* (Ghobadi, 2004), *Min Dit: A Children of Diyarbakir* (Bezar, 2009), where girl characters are constructed both as children and adults-to-be at the same time. Their homelessness and parentlessness are the main causes of liminality in these films. Even if the liminalities are depicted at the representational level, their depictions give us a window through which to the representations of Kurdish children as a collective experience of Kurdish population who experience suffering, death and violence under the rule of other nation-states. Therefore, the chosen film narratives are considered as potential narratives of Kurdish people since these films have the historical references to what Kurdish people have faced in history. Additionally, the film characters resonate strongly with real life situations of real Kurdish children and Kurds as a whole.

The chosen films show the characters' experiences in different conflict zones. It is essential to re-emphasize the importance of spaces in films since this study considers conflict zones as spaces of liminality and posits a state of liminality in national narratives, and read the narratives of gender through the lenses of liminality. In other words, this study connects gender and nation by employing the concept of liminality to analyze gender. Even if I argue the spatial dimensions of liminality and their inadvertent results to produce the liminal

positions, liminality is not just produced by the means in which things are depicted. The point for these films is to show how real situations put real people into the state of liminality where they suffer. As far as the representations of girls in films are concerned, Kurdish girls do not become passive victims and are not always in need of protection but they turn into active agents the moments when they resist patriarchal control and when they try to build an egalitarian relationship with Kurdish boys. More specifically, Kurdish girls do not always reproduce the gendered roles assigned to them. Rather, there are several scenes that the girls struggle with the patriarchal relationships in subtle ways.

It is essential to state that the gendered discourses assigned to women pointed in feminist critique of nationalism may vary contextually in different contexts. This thesis shows particular instances in which Kurdish women/girls try to change their positions and differentiate themselves from the passive roles assigned to them. My claim in this thesis is that liminality produces ambiguous category between girlhood/womanhood, which may produce new becomings for the future of Kurdish girls/women and these films are the reflection of how Kurdish girls/women try to survive in these regions and at the same time, question their positions in their families.

Nationalist discourses produce certain type of family for itself, which is heteronormative, nuclear and reproductive, and in turn, nationalist discourses are reproduced within that particular unity (McClintock, 1993). This implies that family has a key role in nationalisms to sustain the gendered narratives of nations by perpetuating social hierarchies in narratives of nation. This thesis examines the lack of certain type of families in chosen films and its connotations for Kurdish nation by asking how the positions of children have changed, if their parents do not exist. As an answer to this, Kurdish children's orphanhood in films put them in liminal states in their families and in the nation and paves the way for re-visiting their shifting positions in both family and nation, and allow to re-read the relationships between

sisters and brothers in the context of family, and also, between girls and boys in the context of nation. More specifically, this thesis dwells on the shifting positions of Kurdish girls in films and suggests that Kurdish girls as orphans experience the liminal state of girlhood/womanhood both in family and in nation by undertaking the social roles assigned to them and by interrogating the patriarchal rules in subtle ways. The possible answers are taken from the depictions of Rojine in *A Time for Drunken Horses* (2000), Agrin in *Turtles Can Fly* (2004) and Gulistan in *Min Dit: Children of Diyarbakir* (2009). These characters show that they are in "betwixt and between" (Turner, 1969) situation as becoming not-girl-not-woman exactly and staying in in-between protective sisters vs. young mothers and compliance vs. resistance.

This thesis argues that girls may have potentials for stabilizing/destabilizing the narratives of nation. Beyond a mere representation of women and children as a category of victimhood or in a category of being protected, representations of Kurdish girls give us a window to consider their potential positions between girlhood/womanhood, which provide feminist critiques of nationalism to explore the alternative ways of experiencing national discourses produced on women and girls.

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