

## The Kurdish political and artistic making by the transborder perception in the interstitial spaces

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### Introduction

This article focuses on the recontextualization of the interstitial space over the last decade in Kurdish space. It will specifically focus on the Middle East territories between Turkey and Syria. The aim of this article is to investigate how the urban interstices have affected the political mobilization of the stateless Kurdish society and state control process in the conflicted public sphere. The previously mentioned interstitial urban space is important for Kurdish mobility. The 'Kurdish space'<sup>1</sup>, first of all, bears a case of intra-state question in the Middle East (Turkey, Iran, Iraq and Syria). The term 'interstitial space or urban interstices' ('openness in the city', Nicolas-Le Strat, 2004) encompasses a multitude of concepts that are multifaceted (from conceptualisation to institutionalizing). The urban interstice in the Kurdish space signifies the invisibility of the minority's space in the becoming and a space, which gives the possibility of also creating Kurdishness in the place of the conflict. As pointed out by Sanò, Storato, and Puppa in their article (2021, p.3): 'The (in)visibility and the emptiness that characterise these interstitial spaces make them a source of autonomy.' At the same time, Kurdish space is positioned in relation to its new subjectivity constituting emancipatory space and decolonial corpus around this stateless society practice by deploying the urban interstitial spaces in big cities like Diyarbakir in Turkey and Qamichli of Rojava in Syria.

Meanwhile, the Syrian conflict after 2010 plays a central role in redefining the interstitial cross-border relationship around the Kurdish context today. This article aims to question the complex reading of 'interstitial practices' in the Kurdish space (especially the Kurdish city of Diyarbakir)<sup>2</sup> and its critical decolonial approaches against the power and the knowledge of authoritarian regimes in Turkey, especially in Syria. It also analyses the rising of emancipation in these in-between empty spaces against the militarist destruction of the war. It is possible today to say that urban interstices has a rhetoric and an attitude that is favourable to the priorities of the Kurdish urban struggle like 'Hewsel Gardens'<sup>3</sup> in Diyarbakir ('Baxçeyên Hewselê' in Kurdish). The Kurdish experience of interstitial space is above all a political questioning of colonial habitat. This is questioning that diffracts according to several political points of view and different levels of reality. We will discuss the expression of interstitial space in the Kurdish space in relation to the urban uprising and Kurdish political cause. The complexity of the Kurdish space engenders a new sociological reading by means of 'counterpower' and countercultural approach (and 'a political economy of space'<sup>4</sup>), which makes itself visible (from invisibility to visibility), transcending any conventional structure on the spatiality of the place in

2 We will give specially the images of the city of Diyarbakir. Because the city of Diyarbakir is an important laboratory in the Kurdish space of resistance and political change of Kurdishness, and thus of the operational intervention of the state.

3 In this article, we want to use the letter 'w' of the Kurdish appeal instead of the letter 'v'.

4 See, version of 'Cobayes Lettrés Editions' in pdf, Henri Lefebvre. 2000b. *Espace et politique : le droit à la ville II*, Paris, Rémi Hess, Editions Anthropos : [https://monoskop.org/images/7/78/LEFEBVRE\\_Henri\\_-\\_Le\\_droit\\_à\\_la\\_ville\\_II\\_Espace\\_et\\_politique.pdf](https://monoskop.org/images/7/78/LEFEBVRE_Henri_-_Le_droit_à_la_ville_II_Espace_et_politique.pdf), pp. 75-87.

1 The concept 'Kurdish space' means the territoriality of the Kurdish population in Turkey, Iran, Iraq, Syria or in western diaspora, etc. See the book for more detailed concept analysis. Hamit Bozarslan. 2013. (interview), pp. 23-32, and Engin Sustam. 2016a. pp. 19-65.

the making. It will be about understanding what these urban or peri-urban interstitial spaces are in the context of the emergence of insurgent subjectivity in Kurdish spaces/ areas. Even if the Kurdish municipality had deployed the spaces of interstice for a new way of living and investing the urban space completely militarized by the war since the 90s in the Kurdish region, the governmental interventions after 2015 restructured the city as a zone of control and a place of surveillance with the policy of 'Kayyum' regime ('trustee' or 'trustee regime')<sup>5</sup>. It is important to recognize that interstitial space in the Kurdish region become one of the control places for the regime of 'biopolitical governmentality'. Through the concept of biopolitics and governmentality, Michel Foucault tells us how life, living things, population, and thus space has become the stakes of new neoliberal strategies (Foucault: 1994, pp. 641-642, 2004a and 2004b).

As Deleuze also shows (1990, pp. 229-249), these spaces may not be the 'lost' urban interstices, but the spaces are replaced by state domination by erasing all traces of the collective memory of the place. With its multi-layered political-cultural background, Kurdish urban spaces are open to different sociological or urban readings. As Nicolas-Le Strat points out, 'we will say that an interstice unfolds at several levels of reality and that each of these levels is determined concerning the others' (Nicolas-Le Strat, 2007, p. 115). The article observes, in addition, the social processes in the spatiality of conflict and resistance and analyses the constituting space that contains the urban memory (see, Harvey, 1997, pp.19-28). In other words, how can the spatiality of the Kurdish areas be both the place of state control and the common spaces of Kurdish urban resistance. For example, the Kurdish national celebration ritual event 'Newroz' in Diyarbakir (the ritual of the Kurdish insurrection and, also the imaginary space of the Kurdish identity, Aydin, 2005; Khalid, 2020), on March 21 of each year, and which expresses the Kurdish national awakening, is a remarkable example. The places where the Newroz celebration in Diyarbakir takes place are temporally defined as urban interstices are in fact the places where the circulation of

daily life is the most intense. The Newroz squares, one of the empty urban spaces, were not formed according to the structures surrounding the city centres but were formed on the outskirts of the city, because the state systems (governor, military, police, places of control, etc.) surrounding the downtown area did not allow.

The article proposes to question the role and place of artistic perceptions in the creation and the use of interstitial space. We observe that contemporary artists invent and critically reconstitute these spaces in their conceptual forms to ironically reclaim militarized space and the locus of state violence. In this sense, this article is interested in the forms of resistance in urban space through the spatiality of 'interstice or in-between' in Kurdish space and is also interested in the heterotopic dimension that can be involved in its temporality and spatiality. Hence, we will first address the memory of the Kurdish space and its resistance in the interstice spaces in the chapters below (1) before dealing with urban interstice (2) in its relation to the Kurdish political question, then analyse them with the works of contemporary art (3).

### **The area of resistance and the context of conflict**

Our purpose deals with the question of in-between spaces. The notion of urban interstices is strongly instrumentalised by the neoliberal sustainable development in a logic of gentrification, via an ecological approach of living together with the will to appropriate in-between places in the city. This approach of social engineering creates the possibility to rehabilitate these interstitial spaces for an urban sprawl. While the concreting culture develops so much in Turkey (Pérouse, 2017; Erdi& Sentürk, 2017), the interstices could constitute spaces to live together, a voice to create a common life. However, when we talk about Kurdish urban spaces (or rural spaces) with different social models, we can not read these areas by ignoring the culture of colonial oppression, conflict and war. For nearly a century, the Kurdish space has been defined by dynamics of violence and conflict (Bozarslan, 2009). On the other hand, the mobilization in the Kurdish space shows that politicization has spread to all the sociological layers of place and spatiality.

<sup>5</sup> See the article, Mahmut Hamsici, 2019; Sultan Tepe, Ayça Alemdaroğlu, 2021, pp. 87-101 and the news, 'Turkey: Crackdown on Kurdish Opposition', URL : <https://www.hrw.org/news/2017/03/20/turkey-crackdown-kurdish-opposition>, and

The interstitial space is physically fragmented by the armed conflict and occupied by the 'subversive actions' of Kurdish emancipation struggle. Hence, interstices are now becoming places of artistic resistance and creative visibility. Indeed, the Sur district (generally Sur district in Diyarbakir, 'Suriçi' located inside the historical fortress of Diyarbakir) was transformed during 'Hendek' resurrection (barricade trenches)<sup>6</sup> in 2015 and 2016 into a battlefield. It is currently being transformed through the urban gentrification projects of TOKI (Mass Housing Administration)<sup>7</sup>. The town centre of Diyarbakir like many others is therefore targeted for demolition<sup>8</sup>. It becomes a controlled space where the daily urban life of the population is controlled by the State.

We could give the example of the resistance of 'Baxçeyên Hewselê' as an emancipatory resistance of the Kurds by using the interstitial space to create an ecological, micropolitical, and creative activism in the Kurdish city of Diyarbakir. Another example of an initiative in civil society is 'Jinwar' ('woman's place' or 'woman's land'), the women's self-managed ecological village in the canton of Cizîrê, near the city of Amûdê in Rojava in Syria (Rosen, 2021).

Qamichli city in Syria (in Djézireh canton of Rojava) is also quite interesting to see for the reconstruction of its multiplicity of space after the conflict, and the use of interstitial space. Some Kurdish urban spaces, after the urban destruction from 2016, occupy an important place. Like the city Diyarbakir which is a very important place for the Kurdish political movement, they represent also the traces of the struggle for emancipation through the socio-political mutation of the public space and the social change of spatiality (Güvenç, 2011, p. 25-40).

6 See for the 'Hendek' resistance and re-occupation of Diyarbakir city by Turkish neo-colonial politics : Leyla Bedirxan. 2017 and Kurdistan TATORT, 2013.

7 See the real estate announcement on the TOKI gentrification town planning project. 'TOKI Diyarbakir Sur Dibi'nde kentsel dönüşüm yapacak.' (TOKI will carry out urban transformation in Diyarbakir Sur Dibi). 2008, January 31. In Emlak Kulisi. URL : <https://emlakkulisi.com/toki-diyarbakir-sur-dibinde-kentsel-donusum-yapacak/2927>

8 See, the master thesis work 'The heritage development process in Diyarbakir' of Mehmet Tayfur. 2018. 'Le processus de patrimonialisation à Diyarbakir : Moments, acteurs, valeurs. Unpublished Master's Thesis. Ecole Nationale Supérieure d'Architecture de Lyon.



Figure 1: Urban gardens between buildings in Diyarbakir, and Hewsel Gardens' Resistance<sup>9</sup>

Some transit areas of the city and the rural place in the outskirts of the city such as Diyarbakir's Seyh Said Square, Sur neighbourhoods, or Hewsel Gardens were chosen as the subject of work by the artists. The 'Baxçeyên Hewselê' (Hewsel Gardens) mobilization deployed a form of ecological squat against TOKI's gentrification project (the mass housing administration in the town city and around the fortress of Diyarbakir), as well as tree chopping and nature destruction in the Kurdish area.

9 The image taken from the Arkitera site, 'the report with the Ecology Association in Diyarbakir' by Ekin Bozkurt URL : <https://www.arkitera.com/soylesi/diyarbakirda-yasam-alanlarini-yeniden-kurmak-uzerine/> , and Hewsel Gardens resistance, The image taken from Bianet, Ercan Jan Aktas, URL : <https://m.bianet.org/biamag/toplum/154165-hevsel-de-neler-oluyor>

The resistance and 'the squatted space' created by Kurdish urban insurgents have attracted the attention of artists and intellectuals to protect this space. Civil, and ecological disobedience and artistic practice in Kurdish space are transformative for a transversal creation of habitat against spaces designed by the state. Indeed, the Kurdish space in Turkey (and in the Middle East) becomes a 'place' of interstice in the face of the nationalist definition of state territoriality. The resistance makes then a micropolitical place constituting the break with the state disciplinary order of the city. The new way of defending the ecological habitat space like the artists' squats, has become a form of civil disobedience in the spatial urban fabric (Subra, 2016).

It is most certainly, the conflictual environment, which creates destructions in the physical form of cities in the Kurdish space, can also allow a city to become an intrusion control mechanism. Social living and urban spaces or spatial patterns require another reading because of war, conflict, and violence. This is also a new micropolitical culture of mobilization through an ecological struggle on the interstitial spaces in the Kurdish region. On the other hand, this form has a certain spatiality in the social, cultural, and political sense in the Kurdish space which mobilizes the emergence of urban uprisings in Diyarbakir since the beginning of the 20th century. Because the city of Diyarbakir carries a central political coding of the Kurdish question (Gambetti, 2005, 32, 43-71; Gambetti and Jongerden, 2015 and Genç, 2014). The city of Diyarbakir is a cultural and political capital of the Kurdish space, and an imaginary capital of historical Kurdistan in its spatiality. Therefore, we chose to analyse the interstitial space in this emblematic spatiality.

These are urban interstices in the Kurdish space which gave an urban micropolitical aspect deployed by the actors of political, cultural, and artistic disobedience vis-à-vis the practice of institutional control of neoliberal governments. In this case, the urban interstices in the Kurdish space can be seen as areas of insurgent and decolonized visibility (like the area of Hewsel gardens). The resistance and 'the squatted space' (Hewsel Gardens) have attracted the attention of artists and intellectuals to defend this space and to reveal how multiple identities of a Mesopotamian heritage can align with the specific goal of preserving an urban intersti-

tial space within a conflictual area and socio-political production of the Kurdish space. The Hewsel Gardens protests garnered transnational support from intellectuals like David Harvey.<sup>10</sup>



Figure 2: Hewsel Gardens and Fortress-Diyarbakir Metropolitan Municipality<sup>11</sup> pro-HDP before Kayyum intervention of AKP government.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>10</sup> See, 'On 'urban riots' with David Harvey' by Beril Eski, BBC in Turkish URL : [https://www.bbc.com/turkce/haberler/2014/04/140409\\_harvey](https://www.bbc.com/turkce/haberler/2014/04/140409_harvey)

<sup>11</sup> The image taken from The Independent newspaper in Turkish, Veysi Polat see URL: <https://www.indyturk.com/node/120051/haber/tarihi-surlar-icin-diyarbakir-gelecek-unesco-ya-çalıştırı-sadece-devleti-değil-stk>

<sup>12</sup> The Image 2 taken from the website of Unesco, URL : [https://whc.unesco.org/uploads/thumbs/site\\_1488\\_0003-360-360-20150610152851.jpg](https://whc.unesco.org/uploads/thumbs/site_1488_0003-360-360-20150610152851.jpg)



*from Hewsel Gardens to the street barricades*

Kurdish uprisings have succeeded in delineating the oppression in the Middle East with the prospect of trans-border mobility. They are creating a new stage in their decolonized cross-border visibility on the Kurdish question. To understand the political character of the Kurdish political movement and his political resistance in interstitial space, it is necessary to concentrate on the Rojava Revolution and the resistance at the barricades ('Hendek') in Kurdish cities between 2015-2017. After which a growth of the population towards the outskirts of the city increases and the rapid construction of buildings in the urban centres by the legal and practical politics of a 'trustee' replacing elected Kurdish mayor is realised (Tayfur, 2018, p.67-86 and Öztürk, 2013). As Tayfur emphasizes on the conflictual situation of Diyarbakir during the resistance of the armed struggle in Kurdish city, the state destroyed much of the ancient town of Sur. *'The conflicts that erupted in the historic town in December 2015 completely changed the situation in the old town of Sur, which led to the destruction of many historic buildings, and some of them were damaged.'* (Tayfur, 2018, p.13) Indeed, after this military intervention, a large part of the city is emptied, and rebuilt according to the state policy of TOKI of the Turkish government (Özyeti, 2016 and Scalbert, 2013). The military attack by the Turkish government between 2015 and 2017 following the resumption of clashes between the Turkish state and the PKK, the Kurdish municipalities of the DBP (HDP) became the target of Erdogan's power (Günes, 2019, p. 41-60). Hundreds of people lost their lives and thousands of people were forced to emigrate, which also led to the destruction of the districts of the sub-prefect of Sur in Diyarbakir (formerly 'Hançepek or Gavur Mahallesi : Giaour Neighborhood' or 'Non-Muslim' quarter according to the local language)<sup>13</sup>, one of the symbols of contemporary Kurdish resistance in the city of Diyarbakir. Indeed, leaving a large interstitial space within the medieval fortresses of Diyarbakir (see Soyukaya, 2015), and the destruction of the sub-prefect Sur neighbourhoods, not only destroyed a collective memory of existence but

<sup>13</sup> These neighbourhoods are the former urban area of the Armenian and Assyrian populations before the Armenian genocide of 2015. See, Ahmet Yikik. 2018. p.453-464, and Francesco Marilungo. 2018. p.144-145.

also a control mechanism was created with these empty spaces created by the state violence Celik, 2010).<sup>14</sup> As the state creates new open or empty spaces in insurgent cities, it has instead placed the memory of the state. In the latter case, all the urban interstitial spaces became the control zone laid out by the state's landscape architects after the demolition.



Figure 3: Satellite image '2015' of Sur before Turkish security forces bombarded the city. Source: Google Earth Pro Satellite. Image '2017' of Sur after demolition by armed bombardment. Source: Google Earth Pro<sup>15</sup>

<sup>14</sup> To see the cartography of the neighbourhood (transformation of district) which became a ghetto after the forced political migration of the 90s.

<sup>15</sup> These images used for analysis on the South Florida

It is rather a question of underlining a difference of approach on ecological transformation and democratic resolution in the Kurdish space with the analyses, the dynamics, and the stakes which lead to the point of the discussion. There are so many different experiences of the Kurdish space, so many dissonant visions of uprising emancipation and urban destruction: How do we include this socio-political complexity in our analyse on interstice urban? With the post-2015 demolitions, the conflict space in the Kurdish zone emptied, on the other hand, all the interstitial zones in Diyarbakir or other Kurdish towns were re-occupied by the military forces of the state. Indeed, returning to the geopolitics of decolonial knowledge whose transformation of the Kurdish space in recent years was marked by Kurdish ecological emancipation and by its decolonial approach (Sustam, 2021d). Therefore, our approach underlines the extent to which this transformation and the instrument and political language at the heart of the Kurdish identity struggle with facing the decolonial practice (Spivak, 1988 and 1999). As a result of the destruction of the spaces of the old city in Diyarbakir and the gentrification, the state not only de-memorizes the old historical spaces but also modifies the texture of the city and the politico-cultural forms (Armenian, Syriac or Kurdish architectural heritage). In recent years, it is possible to observe an artistic visibility of a new generation of artists dealing with the Kurdish space. We propose to study works of artists like Deniz Aktas, Berat Isik, Ahmet Ögüt, Fatos Irwen, Hasan Pehlevan, Hüseyin Aksoy, Sidar Baki, Sener Özmen, Timur Celik, etc.

### Artistic Perceptions on interstitial space

The most destructive aspect of the new type of neoliberal and militarist intervention in the Kurdish space was implemented by the AKP government after 2015 (after the destruction of the old 'Sur' district of Diyarbakir by a military

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University St. Petersburg Campus site by Thomas Smith, 'Political Science Professor Explores 'Urbicide' and Redevelopment of Kurdish Cities in Turkey', See URL : <https://spcampus.usf.edu/home/2020/06/11/political-science-professor-explores-urbicide-and-redevelopment-of-kurdish-cities-in-turkey/>

intervention). This article observes the emergence of the creative meaning of the Kurdish space occupied by state hegemony (interstices urban under the authoritarian control). This space is also the place of artistic work carried out by the study of various artistic perceptions as well as their political urban dimensions. For example, the contemporary artist, Deniz Aktas, associates his work with an 'aesthetic of urban ruin'. In general, his drawings reflect this feeling of being both in and out of the urban space or city ruin, of urban crisis (conflict, ruin, squat, occupied, etc.), which refers to this idea of 'aesthetic of ruin'. The ruins in the Kurdish space due to the war contain the traces of state violence as well as a potential for social transformation (Grierson, ed., 2017). This article will reflect the urban trauma concerning the interstices urban, and the architectural violence by the gentrification state project. The main purpose of this paper is to investigate art interventions in the interstices urban design by Kurdish artist as the concept of trauma, and the memory of struggle. How the Kurdish urban space becomes the decolonial making of Kurdish artists 'in-between' approach? Nevertheless, artistic performers make a positive impression on the future of the Kurdish area with their works. Urban space is becoming popular each day in global contemporary art. Our hypothesis is that the Kurdish artistic intervention should be considered as an artistic form of struggle for the emancipation of Kurdish identity. In fact, it seems that the space is not only 'marked' (Lefebvre, 2000b) by politics, also by emancipating artistic and cultural production. The artistic perception on urban interstices gives a 'policy of singularity' like 'a constituent power' (Nicolas-Le Strat, 2007) on urban planning.

Discussing the decolonial relationship of the urban space and contemporary artworks performed in interstices urban space in Kurdish cities, this article will study the traumatic memory in the visual perception of artists using the public aspect. The question then arises to know to what extent the concepts of artistic creativity interfere in the interstitial space. Because at the end of the 1990s, many interstices urban spaces resumed their place in artistic works such as the work 'Welcome to Diyarbakir' of Sener Özmen. Some artists, some activists take action on the interstitial practice. They settle, with or without rights, on these abandoned places which become a representative political space. In-

deed, the exemplary work 'Welcome to Diyarbakir' takes advantage of the interest of a stigmatized exoticism to thus question the stateless society in an interstitial space. The photographic installation of artist Sener Özmen was present in a former depot of 'Sümerbank' (former national bank of the Turkish state) as part of the 'Force of language 1' exhibition (curator: Ali Akay) in 2003 in Diyarbakir. The work is a photographic installation, that includes different images such as those of a ruined, abandoned, enclosed depot (which has become a place of interstice), and those of Tahitian women dancing and warmly welcoming visitors to this interstitial space. The exhibition takes place in a war zone where the local culture is named by a different social layer, repressed by the colonial spirit. This photo affects the crack that cuts through reality and the cultural tone of the interstitial space in the middle of the ruin with five women dancing and singing 'Welcome to Diyarbakir' like an exotic place, represents in the background a gnawed, ironic space and traumatic.



Figure 4: Image 1: 'Welcome to Diyarbakir' by Sener Özmen, 2003, Former Sümerbank Factory in Diyarbakir. Image 2: 'Adult Games' by Erkan Özgen, 2004, a park among the houses of the city in Derik, Mardin occupied by hooded children.

So, we can look at the works of Deniz Aktas. He works on urban spaces, also on urban interstices spaces by deploying in his works the images of materials in the place of interstice such as abandoned statues, armchairs, tombstones, water wells, military vehicles, car tires, etc. His work deal with the situation between destruction and nature in the interstitial space. In his work, the artist looks at the 'a place without a place', the demolitions, the ruins, the rubble, and what remains of the excavations. We see that the 'a place without a place'<sup>16</sup>, the demolitions, the rubble, the rubbish, the concrete graves, and the rubbish. That could count as excavations do not come from 'natural' ways in the interstitial space, but that the natural becomes 'natural' by constant militarist destruction and reconstruction, just like the unchanging fate of the geography in which it lives and produces. The artistic approach of Kurdish space gives us a decolonial aesthetic through the singular approach of collective memory and makes a lot of use of the interstitial space and the entry position. The urban images of the Kurdish space that the artist has painted look at the buildings of a complex form, dispersed city, the space in-between, the spaces of interstitial space, the traces of urban transformation, the forced evictions by the gentrification project of the inhabitants (their memorial materials). Looking at the destroyed urban area, he also examines the memory formed in the spaces of this interstice urban area (Figure below, taken in Diyarbakir). The artist emphasizes the urban representation of Kurdish space with his compositions in which the artist chooses the 'a place without a place' (the heterotopic space in-between the city and the Mesopotamian steppe) and the traces of the interstitial space to document the ruin and the trauma with the monochrome technique in the abandoned spaces. For Kurdish artists and actors, making works of art or work on the Kurdish space is simply a politi-

16 The Foucauldien concept is 'un lieu sans lieu' in French. See, Michel Foucault. 1994b. 'Des espaces autres' Dits et écrits, Tome IV, Editions Gallimard, p. 756.



cal approach and decolonial perspectives (a rhetoric of micropolitical critique of traumatized memory: Sustam, 2016a and 2016c, p. 45-71).



Figure 5: Photos, Deniz Aktas. The works 'those who change - those who transform'

We can also quote 'Kan Baldan Tatlıdır' (blood is tastier than honey), this collective work by Sener Ozmen and Ahmet Ögüt is part of a larger project 'A Contemporary Art Project', which was presented in an exhibition in Istanbul in 2004. 'Kan Baldan Tatlıdır' is an allegorical black and white

fanzine whose dialogues are adapted in Kurdish, Turkish and English, and which takes place in the streets of Diyarbakir. Their art book creates a postmodern fanzine style that manifests itself in the form of urban 'nomadic' art that takes the spaces of interstice as a frame for the Kurdish war zone in Diyarbakir. Kurdish artists not only do an artistic practice on the Kurdish space and its urban codes, but they also do on the world-ecology, the urbanity of today, the spatiality, the place of demolition, the interstitial margins of the city like the works of Ahmet Ögüt, Fatos Irwen, Sidar Baki. One of the absurd examples of artist Ahmet Ögüt's work is 'Yichang and Pleasure Places of All Kinds' (2014)<sup>17</sup> that humorously conveys urban gentrification in Turkey. Ahmet Ögüt always also deploys the global dimension and a relational aesthetic of urban space in his works. Ögüt, attached to the collective memory of the city, transforms the gaps of urban areas in his work. It is not about showing works of art in the Kurdish space to see how Kurdish artists intervene in the multiple dependencies of the city (urban interstice). The area of conflict (Diyarbakir and the Kurdish region) becomes a interstitial space (like 'body without organ', Deleuze and Guattari: 1980)<sup>18</sup> by the artistic approach with the movements of reterritorialization and deterritorialization. The urban area is the place where interstitial spaces are deterritorialized. It can still be seen in the work 'The Castle of Vooruit'<sup>19</sup> by Ahmet Ögüt (2012). The urban interstice is a spatial projection of artists, a form of resistance, blockage, and thus a force for micropolitical productivity. We find that Kurdish artists deploy the image of interstitial spaces and empty or rural spaces, and the balance of power between periphery, center in their works of art. It would be interesting to relativize and put into perspective the definition of urban interstice for the use of art through sociological study. The video 'Adult Games' of Erkan Özgen is a good example of asserting a point of view of the 'periphery

<sup>17</sup> See, the work 'Pleasure Places of All Kinds', URL : <https://www.artbasel.com/catalog/artwork/68605/Ahmet-Ögüt-Pleasure-Places-of-All-Kinds-Zurich>

<sup>18</sup> The 'Body without Organs' and 'the movements of reterritorialization and deterritorialization' are a concept of Deleuze and Guattari as a concept of a set of practices in its spatiality and temporality that they define. See, G. Deleuze, F. Guattari. 1972. *L'Anti-Œdipe*, Éditions de Minuit, and 1980. *Mille Plateaux*, Éditions de Minuit.

<sup>19</sup> See the work 'Figure : Castle of Vooruit' by Ahmet Ögüt in Ghent, URL : <https://www.e-flux.com/announcements/34180/track/>



as the interstitial place and of exclusion (periphery, suburb, and city in Kurdistan), a decolonized artistic criticism anchored in an interstitial position and in a 'relational aesthetic' (Bourriaud, 2001) in front of the discourse of the 'center'.

It is in this context of interstitial space between resistance and control that the 'in-between' condition emerges, thus offering us a non-institutional approach to various micropolitical and artistic activities. Indeed, we could consult a micropolitics of spatial singularities which constitute these 'in-between' spaces. These two situations (visibility or invisibility or resistance or control) situated 'in-between' the vertical zones and the horizontal zones of the city lead us to another reading on the interstice. The 'in-between' areas are the areas where the city or social struggles take place, as we can see in the example of Diyarbakir. These spaces of interstice also produce an internal and external conflict according to the diverse strategy. Deleuze and Guattari had underlined this 'in-between' encounter with the connection as 'An apparent conflict arises between desiring-machines and the body without organs.' (Deleuze and Guattari :1972, p. 15). We find another approach to the analysis of spatiality that Deleuze and Guattari underlines in 'Thousand Plateaus' the tension between two different zones which interpenetrate (1980, p. 70): 'Nomadic waves or flows of deterritorialization go from the central layer to the periphery, then from the new center to the new periphery, falling back to the old center and launching forth to the new.' This 'in-between' situation in art expresses a perception of spatiality like 'normative space and anti-normative space'. It is a space that can consider as a heterotopic space according to the Foucauldian reading. Foucault would say this 'Of Other Spaces' (Heterotopias : Foucault, 1994b, p.752-763) as 'a place without a place' where space puts in charge different tensions, various issues, forms of opposition without counting the sign of the nation-state. From the interventions of the space of the oppressed, the interstitial space here becomes the actions of a minority counter-power. It is also as a conceptual reference, that Foucault's analyses (as well as his referential concept 'Heterotopias') will allow us to draw up the analysis on the interstitial space. The interstices

space are the spaces of heterotopia that we underline as 'a set of relations' and 'a relation of forces.'

### **A memory of urban space and urban interstices**

Interstitial spaces are also reclaimed by the process of state militarization in Kurdish space in Turkey, especially in Diyarbakir which is emblematically an identity capital of urban insurgency in Kurdish memory. So, it is a question of questioning the two accesses to the term in the Kurdish space: the Kurdish state and subjectivity. The war and destruction that emerged in the urban uprisings of 2015 damaged the urban memory of the Kurds with the target of state violence that shook the geography of Kurdish region. Thus, many struggles aim to protect these interstitial spaces for an account and to reveal the evocative power of these places. Like the resistance from Hewsel Gardens to Diyarbakir, the Kurdish insurgents are expanding the field of resistance to also transform the urban interstices under the control of authoritarian regimes in Turkey and Syria. The interstitial space becomes a form of reappropriation, aesthetic reassessment of Kurdish social, cultural and political resistance in Turkey and also in the Middle East (especially in Kurdish region between Turkey (North Kurdistan-Bakûr) and Syria (Western Kurdistan-Rojava).

In the practice of the Kurdish space, we could consider these spaces of interstice as the space of fashions, uses, urban approaches which requalify the borders of the city, memory in the face of forgetfulness. It is obvious that these districts have three different memories. The first (1) is that there are areas the suffering and trauma of the Armenian genocide (Celik and Dinç, 2015). The second (2) is that these pains or traumas were constantly recalled by the memorial works of the former municipalities of HDP in the interstitial spaces before, the preservation of the buildings, the statutes, the renovation of the chapels, and the rehabilitation of the old names of the streets before the founding of the Turkish republic (1923). That is the reconstitution of

the space to memorize the traces through the signs in Kurdish, Armenian, Arabic, or other languages. As the replacement of the old names of places, towns, and villages (from Arabic to Kurdish or other languages) in North of Syria (in the Kurdish space, the Rojava) after the revolution of 2012, and the declaration of the Autonomous Self-Administration in North and East of Syria. The name change of space (which is the symbols of Kurdishness) is placed in the political and epistemic discourse of Kurdishness according to the political and identity terminology of the Kurdish political movement (Sustam, 2016b). Even if the trustee appointed ('Kayyum') of the Turkish government replaces today the local toponymic panels (city, village and neighbourhood change names for the Turkishness view) in Kurdish by panels in Turkish.<sup>20</sup> The last (3) is the new codes of Kurdish political resistance that were taking hold in the interstitial zones of the city's neighbourhoods, and thus the state control of the interstitial space through militarism and authoritarian police visibility like daily visibility of the police after the revolt of Gezi Park in Taksim Istanbul. The AKP government uses a certain national policy of gentrification in minority areas such as the neighbourhoods of Alevis (especially in Istanbul), Kurds (particularly in Kurdish region), Armenians (particularly in Istanbul), or Greeks (in Aegean and Mediterranean region) and Gypsies (in Sulukule Istanbul : see, Erdi, 2019). We can compare it with the renovation project of the Gypsy district of Sulukule in Istanbul.



Figure 6: the new look of Sheikh Said or Dag Kapi Square, Diyarbakir<sup>21</sup> and its former image in 1970.<sup>22</sup>

While it is disputable whether the state reconstitutes its memory in the spaces of interstice and the place opened by the bias of the visibility of the state or by the means of the construction of the statutes, the architectural landscape installation. Therefore, the new memory of the Kurdish space emerging in these areas may be a new area of struggle to protect the urban interstice that the state is trying to erase and reveal its mnemonic power, just like in the old place Dağkapi (nominated by the HDP municipality as 'Sheikh

20 For the discussion on the Kurdish naming of villages, squares, towns, and panels in the Kurdish space, and thus the change of first names (from Turkish to Kurdish) : Senem Aslan, 'Incoherent State: The Controversy over Kurdish Naming in Turkey', *European Journal of Turkish Studies*, 10 | 2009, URL : <http://journals.openedition.org/ejts/4142>; Joost Jongerden. 2007. *The Settlement Issue in Turkey and the Kurds*. Leiden-Boston, Brill, and 2009, 'Crafting Space, Making People. The Spatial Design of Nation in Modern Turkey', *European Journal of Turkish Studies* 10: 2-22, and 2010, 'Dams and Politics in Turkey. Utilizing Water, Developing Conflict', *Middle East Policy* 17 (1): 137-143.

21 The image taken from the T24 site, 03 December 2015, URL: <https://t24.com.tr/haber/diyarbakir-dagkapi-meydaninda-sokaga-cikma-yasagi.318935>

22 The image taken from 'Eski Türkiye Fotoğrafı Arşivi', URL : <http://www.eskiturkiye.net/3554/diyarbakir-1970>

Said Square' (Gambetti, 2009).<sup>23</sup> However, with the project prepared by the Ministry of Environment and Urbanization of Turkey, it is desired to change the name of Sheikh Said Square (Saadi, 2021, p. 847-861). As the Diyarbakır city space demonstrates, the Kurdish space is not only a scene of conflict, also a political scene of 'productive forces' and 'social production' as Henri Lefebvre underlined in '*La production de l'Espace*' (Lefebvre, 2000a, p. 48, 56, 93, 102 ; 1974, p. 15-32, and 2000b. Ibid.).

## Conclusion

Interstitial spaces are heterotopic and urban living quarters. That is, it invests a space (geographic or regional) in connection with its local environment, its memory, and with the inhabitants. Indeed today, there is more and more talk of local policies on the interstitial space that is occupied by the gentrified project. These are spaces of life, control, violence, and travel that define the veins of the city as underlined Andrea Mubi Brighenti (2016, p. XV, Introduction). The analysis of the Kurdish space in this approach with the analysis of the space of interstices gives us to carefully read the tensions of this minor and invisible space in the field of urban study or urban sociology. The concept of 'interstice' in our analysis is defined as a decolonial heterotopia in artistic and urban political perception. Through our analysis, we tried to question, why and how are these urban interstices formed in the Kurdish space which favors a micro-political practice of habitat and find themselves between borders, control, and resistance. Urban interstices provide an opportunity to rethink differently living together, neighbourhood and meeting in the temporality and spatiality of contemporary cities.

In this context, the significance of interstitial space is a political framework in Kurdish space, and indeed generated by several factors. This is the way to imagine differently

<sup>23</sup> During the time of Co-mayor of the Metropolitan Municipality of Diyarbakır Gültan Kızıoğlu, with the decision of the council of the Metropolitan Municipality of Diyarbakır, the name of Sheikh Said, who was executed in 1925 by the Turkish Independence Court along with 47 of his friends Kurdish insurgents in Dağ Kapı Square, was attributed to the place where he was hanged in 2014. See, the Evrensel newspaper and the DIHA news agency : <https://www.evrensel.net/haber/89855/dagkapi-meydaninin-adi-seyh-said-meydani-oldu>

the places of resistance, of the Kurdish question today. This is the way to perceive the loss of memory of the Kurdish inhabitants considered 'so-called citizens' in Turkey. The Kurds have already suffered this stereotypical language in Turkey 'so-called people', 'so-called society', 'so-called Kurdistan' (or 'so-called language', etc.) as a racial pathology of the dominant space. Like the artistic work of Cengiz Tekin '*Sanatçının Sözde Portresi*' (2003, the Portrait of so-called artist)<sup>24</sup>, the artist criticizes the stereotypes in Turkish popular culture and the taboos towards the Kurds. Artistic movements are certainly emerging in Kurdish space that are struggling to assert themselves, and an intellectual consciousness that is deploying urban space, urban interstice, and city intrusion. In other words, this is about showing different aspects of the same space of artistic creation, resistance, and control: spatiality, reality, experience, urban interstitial.

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<sup>24</sup> See the artist's work, in 'I'm too sad to kill you!'. Proje4L Istanbul Contemporary Art Museum. 2003, in *Salt Arastirma* URL : <https://archives.saltresearch.org/handle/123456789/9606>



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