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Making transnational publics:

Circuits of censorship and technologies of publicity in Kurdish media circulation

ABSTRACT

Kurdish media producers who interweave social and political agendas with their filmmaking are often marginalized within Turkish media worlds. Impeded by national censorship, these filmmakers move between national and transnational media worlds to advance their cinematic work. Such movement helps them create and maintain transnational publics that reinforce circulation of their media texts. Here I analyze how a documentary film about a seminomadic Kurdish community moves through international screening venues. As it journeys through film festivals in Europe, its director, Kazim Öz, accompanies it and, through deliberate discourse, attempts to increase and accelerate the film's transnational circulation. I explore the ways that Öz discursively globalizes his film, relates it to festival audiences, flags the politics of Kurdish media production, and seeks to construct a European public sensitive to the plight of Turkey's Kurds. [publics, media circulation, transnational, documentary film, censorship, discursive authority, footing]

A few international film festivals animate the national cinema scene in Turkey. One of the more prestigious is the Golden Orange Film Festival in the Mediterranean city of Antalya. Many films compete to be included in this annual festival, which promises national and international publicity for the titles selected and significant networking opportunities for undiscovered, emerging, and celebrated filmmakers and producers. The Antalya festival gets significant coverage in the national media, not only during the six-day fall event itself but also before and after. In the weeks following the festival, the award-winning films, actors, and directors, as well as the associated festivities and parties, occupy the pens of film critics and dominate the columns of popular culture writers.

When, in the late summer of 2009, the Golden Orange selection committee announced the Turkish films to be included in that year's festival, the producers at Mesopotamia Cinema, a Kurdish film collective in Istanbul, were shocked to discover that their latest production, *The Last Season: Shawaks*, was not one of the 25 documentaries to make the cut. Indeed, before the news arrived at the company, director Kazim Öz had seemed very confident that his film would make it into competition, as a documentary if not a feature film. A feature-length documentary, *The Last Season: Shawaks* (2009) revolved around a seminomadic tribal family in eastern Turkey. With dialogue mostly in Kurdish, the film documented the social and cultural make-up of the Shawak community, their day-to-day life, their struggle with harsh natural conditions, and their subsistence methods over the course of four seasons. Sitting athwart the boundary between documentary and fiction film, *The Last Season: Shawaks* had competed in European film festivals and been well received in artistic circles abroad as soon as it was released in 2009.

Disappointment turned into aggravation soon after word of the Golden Orange rebuff reached Mesopotamia Cinema. Furious at the selection committee, Kazim Öz grabbed the phone to complain to the festival director but was unable to reach him. Pacing up and down the hallway, he fumed, "Obviously, this is censorship! We need

to issue a protest remark immediately.” In an hour, a collectively crafted text was ready to be sent to the company’s media contacts. The press release alerted Turkish media about the film’s exclusion and posited a transnational public that appreciated its artistic merits.

The exclusion of *The Last Season: Shawaks*, an internationally appreciated documentary film that was co-produced by the French television channel ARTE and which was the opening film at the Corsica Documentary Film Festival just last week, has been shocking . . . Having premiered in the Swiss Visions du Reel, one of the most prestigious international documentary film festivals, *The Last Season: Shawaks* competed and was acknowledged not only in documentary film festivals but also with fiction films in important European festivals, such as in Mannheim. The film’s increasing international success indicates the political nature of its exclusion from the Golden Orange. As revolutionary and alternative filmmakers, we attract your attention to the political censorship executed by the Golden Orange committee towards Kurdish films that depict realities outside of the official ideology.

By juxtaposing the exclusion of *The Last Season: Shawaks* from the Golden Orange Film Festival with the praise the film received at festivals outside Turkey, Mesopotamia Cinema’s press release underlined transnational circulation as a point of leverage. In doing so, it hailed European publics as having better artistic taste and cinematic vision than Turkish film authorities and sought to reveal the political nature of the film’s exclusion from the Golden Orange festival and reinforce its producers’ stance in protesting the marginalization of their films within the national media culture.

Kurdish media producers, consigned to the fringes of mainstream Turkish cinema culture, move between national and transnational media worlds to advance both their work and their social and political agendas. A significant goal of their activities is to create and maintain transnational publics that reinforce circulation of their media texts. Transnational circulation is significant for politically engaged Kurdish filmmakers for two reasons. First, because of their controversial content, filmmakers’ political reputations, or both, their films do not circulate widely in Turkey; transnational exhibition venues have historically been primary outlets for these films. Second, in Turkish national media circles, the existence of European audiences for Kurdish films and the films’ successful transnational circulation function as leverage against political censorship, exclusion, and marginalization. Mesopotamia Cinema’s press release protesting the Golden Orange selection exemplifies the application of this leverage.

In this article, I identify the historical dynamics of Kurdish film circulation in Turkish media worlds and explore the ways Kurdish filmmakers publicize, globalize, and seek to circulate their films transnationally. Publics come into being in relation to texts and the ways they circulate (Himpele 2008; Lee and LiPuma 2002; Warner 2002:50). How cultural objects such as films are discursively characterized may accelerate, decelerate, or inhibit their mobility through space and time (Urban 2001). As *The Last Season: Shawaks* journeys through film festivals in Europe, its director, Kazim Öz, accompanies it and, through his discourse, attempts to increase and accelerate its transnational circulation. In festival settings, Öz carefully tailors his encounters with international audiences and positions his film and filmmaking within a circumspectly crafted discourse during question and answer sessions that follow the film’s screenings. Through several “technologies of publicity” (Torchin 2006), he erects his discursive authority, relates his film and filmic material to his audiences, mediates his identity politics, and interweaves a political statement with his narrative about the Shawaks and about *The Last Season: Shawaks* and its making. In doing so, Öz seeks to accomplish two intricately related social ends: to advance interest in his filmmaking and to stimulate European attention to Kurds in Turkey, both of which, he anticipates, will accelerate the circulation of his films.

The Last Season: Shawaks: A documentary film set to circulate

The Last Season: Shawaks is a 93-minute-long documentary film with dialogue in Kurdish and Turkish and subtitles in English and French. The film depicts the daily life of the Shawaks over the course of a year. With a population of roughly three thousand five hundred, the Shawaks (also called “Shekaks”) are transhumant herders spread throughout 15 villages in the Dersim area in eastern Turkey (Andrews 1989; Sykes 1908). Punctuated by the transitions between seasons that mark the different phases of transhumance, the film opens in winter with the narration of a folktale about the cycle of life in one of the villages. As spring arrives, snow melts and life reawakens. Shawak families prepare for the journey into the Munzur hills. The camera singles out one extended family as the migration begins with the loading of belongings and livestock onto trucks. Once the family arrives at the highland grazing area, they establish a tent encampment, or *oba*. They resume their daily activities: milking and herding the livestock, trading with nearby merchants, baking bread, and taking care of children. When fall arrives, the family packs up again to begin the migration back to the village. The film ends with folktales narrated by elderly women in the village during the winter nights.

My first encounter with *The Last Season: Shawaks* and Kazim Öz explicates the ways that Kurdish media produced in Turkey are often imagined as predestined to circulate outside that country. In the summer of 2006, I went to Istanbul to conduct pre-dissertation research on Kurdish media and identity politics. From my earlier work, I was well aware of the significance of one particular Kurdish community locale for my research. A shrine of Kurdish cultural production, the Mezopotamya Kültür Merkezi, or Mesopotamia Culture Center (MKM), had attracted numerous Kurdish youths to participate in its artistic and cultural activities since its launch in 1991. The center's most active branch had been its cinema unit, Mesopotamia Cinema Collective. Established in 1995, the collective had produced, distributed, and exhibited films and videos over the subsequent 15 years. Many of these films were funded internationally, and some received acclaim at international film festivals. One of the collective's filmmakers, in particular, had developed a reputation, in Turkish as well as Kurdish and international cinema circles, for his cinematic talent and explicit tendency to cultivate political messages in his films. I had heard upon arrival in Istanbul that Kazim Öz, then at the peak of his career, was preparing to shoot his next film, a documentary about a Kurdish community in eastern Turkey.

Having made an appointment with Öz on the phone, I knocked on the door of the Mesopotamia Cinema Collective's offices one afternoon that summer. After I had waited a short while in the lobby, Öz welcomed me into his study. As I was introducing myself, as a Ph.D. student at a university in the United States with an interest in Kurdish filmmaking, he interrupted me disinterestedly: "You study in America. So you read and write English." He reached into the drawer of his desk and took out a roll of papers. Handing me the papers, he said, "This is the pre-purchasing contract ARTE France sent us for my new documentary. Can you translate this [from English to Turkish] for me?" A bit surprised by Öz's informality, I said, "Sure," and sat down in the next room to translate the text. When I handed Öz the translation an hour later, he showed me the demo of the film that he had sent ARTE. As I watched the two-minute-long, beautifully shot and edited video, he said, confidently and light-spiritedly, "With this film, I am going to need your translation services frequently." Instructive vis-à-vis the mechanisms of participant-observation, this episode also concretized my questions about Kurdish media production in Turkey. How and why would ARTE France, a European television channel, have pre-purchased a documentary by a Kurdish director? How might the involvement of a French partner have affected Öz's perception of the Kurdish community that was the subject of the documentary? What did a documentary on Shawaks reveal about the Kurdish identity movement, with which Öz had been strongly associated? Translating the pre-purchasing contract and, later, many

other documents, as Öz had predicted, I entered into a constellation of ethnographic encounters in which I sought answers to these and other questions in the ensuing years.

In the late spring of 2007, I drove with Öz and his documentary crew, consisting of a production assistant and a sound technician, in a rented car off-road through Dersim. From Istanbul, we headed east on the first of several production trips into the Munzur hills and surrounding villages, where the Shawaks live. The mountain roads slipped under the wheels of the car, and we soon found ourselves leaving the Keban Dam behind and looking toward the beautiful hills ahead. Having lived in the area until he was 17, Öz seemed to know what to expect in the Shawak village and the Munzur highlands. During production preparations in Istanbul, he had repeated that this project was near to his heart; with this film, he was returning to a childhood in which he had naively tended his family's goats in the Munzur hills. In production meetings at the Mesopotamia Cinema offices, Öz had also stated repeatedly that *The Last Season: Shawaks* would reach large audiences in Europe not only because it had been pre-purchased by ARTE TV and funded by a Dutch documentary agency but also because it would achieve universal currency as a work of art. He had correctly anticipated then, even before shooting began, that *The Last Season: Shawaks* would enjoy significant transnational circulation.

Between 2006 and 2011, I followed Mesopotamia Cinema Collective members, especially Öz, the production practices in which they engaged, and the media texts they produced between different localities, including Istanbul, the Dersim highlands, and European film festivals. I translated numerous documents, participated in production meetings, interviewed subjects on the documentary set, and mediated between the director and his international audiences in Europe. In this article, drawing primarily on my research at multiple international film festivals through which *The Last Season: Shawaks* circulated in 2009, I analyze the ways in which a politically oriented Kurdish filmmaker from Turkey relates his film, media practice, and identity politics to European festival audiences. At the festivals, in addition to research activities, I translated for Öz between Turkish and English. As his translator, not only did I act as a mediator between him and his audiences but I also had to assume a particularly active participant role in the festival settings, as I often helped Öz schedule his appointments, attended industry meetings with him, and accompanied him in taking care of the details of the screenings. Introducing me as a member of his production team, Öz often relied on me during screenings and other festival events. The multiple roles of ethnographer, translator, and documentary producer provided me with an especially productive, if difficult, standpoint for participant-observation. Considering European film festivals as the primary, if not the sole, outlets for his products, Öz geared

his conversations with cinema professionals and audiences at festival events toward creating and solidifying a network that, he asserted, would open up new pathways of production and circulation for his films.

Circuits of censorship and international circulation for Kurdish films

For Kurdish filmmakers, the idea of Europe as a primary node in film production and circulation is nothing new. Marginalized within nation-state-bound media worlds, these filmmakers have long operated at the interstices of local, national, and transnational cinema industries (cf. Naficy 2001). As Pierre Bourdieu writes, the conditions of cultural production, which are themselves products of history, generate “individual and collective practices, and hence history, in accordance with the schemes engendered by history” (1977:82). Sociopolitical forces, and their historically dialogical relationships with each other, circumscribe, enable, and complicate not only the practices of Kurdish filmmaking but also how agents characterize films discursively, seek to circulate them, and calibrate links and gaps between texts, practices, and audiences. Two interrelated historical, sociopolitical forces have profoundly demarcated how Kurds have produced and circulated films. Firstly, Kurds lack a nation-state of their own in which the conditioning and regulation of national art and cultural production can occur. In Turkey, the field of Kurdish cultural production has been strictly monitored and censored by the Turkish state. The emergence of Kurdish filmmaking has been contingent on the discursive space reclaimed, since the 1990s, by the three-decade-old armed Kurdish movement, and Kurdish films have gravitated increasingly toward highly contested cultural domains. In that context, Kurdish filmmaking continues to constitute a discursive space in which Kurds may imagine a national existence against a backdrop of the ruptures imposed on such imaginings by Turkish, Iranian, and Iraqi nation-state projects. Because of its nature as a visual medium dependent on circulation, film–video has borne the potential for Kurds to contest the official histories, imposed identities, and hegemonic construction of Kurdishness. This field of cultural production has historically been highly politicized.

Secondly, Kurdish cinema as a discursive space is transnational by nature in the absence of a state to regulate a national cinema. In addition to the Turkish, Iranian, and Iraqi film industries, Kurdish filmmakers have navigated global production and distribution avenues to enable and maintain their media practices. Moreover, in dialogical relationship with the political nature of Kurdish cultural production, transnational circumstances have, in part, generated the conditions for the politicized subscription to a Kurdish identity and the nationalization of Kurdish cul-

ture and language. For instance, films by Yılmaz Güney, the legendary Kurdish director who was exiled to Europe, had widely circulated abroad during the 1980s. Only in France did Güney overtly define and endorse his Kurdish identity as critical to his excommunication from Turkey. While Güney’s films were banned from public showings in Turkey until the late 1990s, his most famous feature, *Yol (The Road)* (1982), received international praise, including the award for best film at the 1982 Cannes Film Festival (Kennedy 2007; Naficy 2001:54).

The filmmaking practice of Bahman Ghobadi, a Kurdish director from Iran, further reveals the transnational nature of Kurdish films as well as the transformative nature of transnational media circulation (cf. Lee and LiPuma 2002). Ghobadi completed his first feature film, *A Time for Drunken Horses (Zamani barayé masti asbha)*, in 2000. The film narrated the tragic story of Kurdish children who struggle to earn a living by smuggling on the war-torn border between Iran and Iraq. In 2000, Ghobadi received the Camera d’Or prize at Cannes, which established his film’s artistic worth and facilitated its appearance at over 40 international festivals in 2000 and 2001. Critics applauded the director for his simple yet powerfully realistic portrayal of “the hardships of a family of Kurdish children living in a remote, mountainous area near the Iran-Iraq border” (McLarney 2004).

In fact, by the 2000s, before *A Time for Drunken Horses* reached European film circles, Kurds had already become a topic of international politics and public curiosity, particularly because of the Iran–Iraq War, the Gulf War, the PKK (Kurdistan Workers Party) resurgence, Turkey’s EU accession bid, and the increasing visibility of Kurdish communities in diaspora. The 2003 U.S. bombing of Iraq and the subsequent emergence of a Kurdish regional government in northern Iraq garnered Kurds additional attention. Such interest established the means for the discursive circulation of films about Kurds and by Kurdish filmmakers. Ghobadi’s film, as one critic noted, successfully supplied “faces to go with news stories about the Kurdish peoples of Iran, Iraq, and Turkey” (Ebert 2000). *A Time for Drunken Horses* functioned as “[a repertoire] of images, narratives, and ethnoscapes to viewers throughout the world, in which the world of commodities and the world of news and politics are profoundly mixed” (Appadurai 1996:35).

Cultural circulation is not “simply a movement of people, commodities, ideas, and images from one place to another” but a process that transcends objects moving through space and time (Goankar and Povinelli 2003:391). In interviews with the international press, Ghobadi frequently highlighted his Kurdish identity, the censorship he faced in Iran, and the existence of Kurds as a disjointed people whose political status has borne tragic stories (Kutchera 2000). Such discourse helped globalize the notion of “Kurdishness” in international cinema circles. The circulation of

Ghobadi's films, as of Güney's, stimulated a transcending cultural process that electrified a cinema culture based on Kurdish identity politics. Kazim Öz's filmmaking has built on the international work of these directors.

During his career, European screens have often been the first outlets for Öz's films, primarily because of political censorship of his work in Turkey. *Ax (The Land)*, his breakthrough short in 1999, is a case in point. *Ax* is about the Turkish military's forced expulsion of Kurds from their villages and revolves around one old man who refuses to leave his otherwise evacuated community. When completed, *Ax* was expurgated and its public screening prohibited by the state because of "its secessionist content." Soon after being banned in Turkey, *Ax* found its way to festivals in Italy, Spain, and Germany. However, getting the 35-millimeter print of the film into Europe was problematic. Mesopotamia Cinema did not have the financial resources to ship it. The filmmakers asked a friend who was traveling to Europe at that time to take the print with her. At the airport, the police arrested the young woman, accused her of being a dispatch courier for the PKK attempting to smuggle "a secessionist film" into Italy, and confiscated the copy. Only after the film finally reached Europe and received awards in film festivals there was the ban on *Ax* lifted in Turkey.

National censorship has inhibited the immediate release of Öz's films since his debut. At the same time, discourse about censorship has, ironically, helped globalize his filmmaking and created pathways for the circulation of his films, especially in Europe but also in Turkey. That *Ax* had been subjected to Turkish state censorship contributed to the film's wide and fast circulation in Europe. When it reached Italy, and later Spain and Germany, it made European headlines, which brought Öz significant publicity as a Kurdish director whose films were strictly censored in Turkey. During the following years, as Marit Kapla, the director of the Göteborg Film Festival, told me in an interview, Öz's reputation as "a young Kurdish director, who gives voice to an oppressed people via his talented filmmaking, has grown in European film circles." Especially within the last few years, his films have received increased attention and a considerable amount of production funding from a number of cinema institutes and granting agencies in Europe.

The Last Season: Shawaks is Öz's fourth feature-length project. During its production, Mesopotamia Cinema filed several applications for funding from national institutions, such as the Turkish Ministry of Culture. Unable to obtain national support, the company financed the documentary through international agencies, a not-unexpected path for Öz's films. ARTE, a transnational TV network, underwrote a significant part of the production budget in exchange for broadcast rights. The network is more than a financial partner, and its endorsement of the project represents a critical node in the documentary's transnational

circulation. First, ARTE is a reputable European artistic and cultural institution that airs high-quality international programming. Based in both Germany and France, it is transnational by its very nature and targets "audiences from different cultural backgrounds, in particular French and German" (www.arte.tv). The channel's sponsorships are highly competitive and, because of its prestigious standing, partnerships with ARTE, by default, publicize the films the network sponsors. ARTE's support characterizes *The Last Season: Shawaks* as a film of cultural and artistic quality and international currency, tailored especially to European audiences.

Second, relationships with ARTE connected Öz and Mesopotamia Cinema with significant artistic networks in Europe, including major international film festivals. These connections often helped boost the film's circulation in Europe. The international premiere of *The Last Season: Shawaks* at the Swiss Visions du Reel Documentary Film Festival in April 2009 is a case in point. To give the film a good head start in its journey along the festival circuit, Luciano Rigolini, commissioning editor at ARTE TV, had advised Öz to premiere it at Visions du Reel, a festival geared especially toward documentary professionals, festival organizers, and commissioning editors (www.visionsdureel.ch). The film's premiere in the competition section of this festival was possible only after the head of the documentary department at ARTE had talked to his friend Jean Perret, the director of Visions du Reel. Perret agreed to watch a DVD of *The Last Season: Shawaks*, mailed from Mesopotamia Cinema to Nyon, Switzerland, weeks after the deadline for festival submissions had passed. Two weeks later, having liked the film, Perret called Mesopotamia Cinema to invite *The Last Season: Shawaks* to premiere in Nyon.

In the spring of 2009, Visions du Reel's guest attendant drove Öz from the Geneva airport south to Nyon. Öz was invited to attend the international premiere of *The Last Season: Shawaks* in the historic Nyon cinema that night. Having arrived in the city a couple of days earlier than Öz, I had learned that the tickets for the films in competition, including his, were sold out. At that night's premiere, before a packed house, Jean Perret introduced *The Last Season: Shawaks* as an experimental documentary film about a Kurdish community in eastern Turkey and "a cosmic ode to a yet unchanged world." In the following few days, the documentary drew a lot of attention from the Swiss press. One journalist for a daily newspaper referred to the film as "a poetic film by a Kurdish political activist."

The prestigious premiere in Nyon clinched "the universal artistic quality" that ARTE's endorsement attributed to the documentary. In the following months, Mesopotamia Cinema received numerous e-mails from festival acquisition agents inviting *The Last Season: Shawaks* to their venues. Seeing such invitations as opportunities for

publicity, Öz traveled to these festivals, some of which were geared exclusively toward the documentary film market. The Corsica Documentary Film Festival, at which *The Last Season: Shawaks* was the opening feature, was one of them. Other festivals held separate competitions for documentary and feature film genres. At the 32nd Paris Cinema Film Festival and at the 58th Mannheim-Heidelberg Film Festival, *The Last Season: Shawaks* was the only documentary film to compete against feature films in international competition. In Mannheim-Heidelberg, the film received the jury award, a significant accomplishment for a documentary, as was acknowledged by the German press.

International film festivals are mediascapes (Appadurai 1996) in which circuits of production, distribution, dissemination, and consumption enable the transnational mobility of images, ideas, and identities. Successful transnational circulation and critical acclaim provide media producers with platforms to establish professional networks and achieve further exposure for their films in international film circuits. More critically for my discussion, such international attention, transnational circulation, and critical acclaim help Kurdish filmmakers expose the political nature of their marginalization and gain leverage in national media circles. As the Golden Orange press release illustrates, Öz juxtaposes the national censorship of his films with the international praise they receive. He highlights the stark contrast between European interest in his films and the persistent neglect and censoring of his work in the national context. International interest, nevertheless, does not just emerge by default because Öz's films endure circulation difficulties in Turkey. As Greg Urban notes, "The interpretation of culture that is intrinsic to metaculture, immaterial as it is, focuses attention on the cultural thing, helps to make it an object of interest, and hence, facilitates its circulation" (2001:4). As a Kurdish filmmaker from Turkey with a decade-long international career and experience at European film festivals, Öz carefully harnesses the pathways of transnational circulation by discursively globalizing *The Last Season: Shawaks*, relating it to festival audiences, and flagging the politics of Kurdish media production.

Festival screenings and the politics of discursive authority

Film festivals are cultural performances (MacAloon 1984) in which more than media texts are put on display; identities, political projects, and media production narratives are also exhibited (Dayan 2000; Iordanova 2008). The ways in which festivals are crafted, presented, and experienced diversify according to participants' agendas and a festival's position in the global film arena. While certain film festivals are geared more toward film production markets, others are cinema events tailored mainly for local audiences.

The festivals in which *The Last Season: Shawaks* circulated during 2009 ranged from long-running, market-oriented, and high-profile festivals, such as Mannheim-Heidelberg, to smaller, low-budget local ones, such as the Corsica festival. A site of multiple discourses and practices, each festival event had a unique character that emerged at the intersections of the agendas of the festival organizers, festival participants, and other audiences at a particular point in time (cf. de Valck and Loist 2009).

Kazim Öz had predetermined ideas about each festival to which he traveled. His ideas were based both on earlier experiences at festivals and preconceptions about the historical relationship between Turkey, Kurds, and Europe as well as a festival's home country more specifically. In German or French festivals, for instance, he expected participants to be familiar with Kurdish identity politics because of those countries' large diaspora communities as well as their involvement in Turkey's EU accession process. On the plane to Ajaccio, Corsica, by contrast, Öz noted that many Corsican people lived on mountains and subsisted by transhumance, so he assumed festival audiences there would be familiar with the Shawak way of life. In *Visions du Reel*, he did not seem taken by surprise when participants were mostly cinema professionals.

At each festival, however, Öz presented himself to festival organizers, fellow filmmakers, and audiences in the same general way and with a determined agenda. Especially while constructing his verbal performance during the question and answer sessions after film screenings, he followed a set routine, sometimes even disregarding the actual sequence and nature of the questions he received. He was frequently already recognized as a Kurdish director from Turkey who engaged in political filmmaking. Before he issued an overt statement about the Kurds in Turkey, however, he carefully mediated his political views and worked to position himself as a bridge between his filmic material and its viewers and his film as a cultural document with artistic value consistent with European standards of filmmaking. The questions from audiences of film professionals, European cinephiles, and, often, Turkish and Kurdish immigrants residing in or around the festival town functioned as a means to present his narrative. He always concluded his performance with a statement about Turkey's Kurdish question and the national media worlds it entailed for politically oriented Kurdish filmmakers like him. He had a set of questions in mind that he expected to be asked. When an audience member asked a question that dramatically diverged from his mental script, he sometimes reacted by questioning my translating services, hinting that I might have misunderstood and unintentionally mistranslated the question. In such instances, I asked the participant about the question and retranslated it. At times, Öz simply decided that the questioner had missed his point. In such instances, Öz often reinterpreted the question, answering it

briefly yet politely, and then resumed his narrative in accordance with his intended performance.

Production and reception of verbal performances at festival settings are “moments in a cycle rather than two poles at the opposite ends” (Barber 1997:358). A verbal performance is “a link in the chain of speech communication, and it cannot be broken off from the preceding links that determine it both from within and from without, giving rise within it to unmediated responsive reactions and dialogic reverberations” (Bakhtin 1986:94–95). Thus, the production of utterances involves considering both the addressees’ immediate responses and the historical, dialogical ramifications of their anticipated responses. The overarching motivation that drove Öz’s performance was to interweave a political statement with the narrative of his filmmaking and to cultivate an audience that was potentially already aware to some degree of the politics of Kurdish identity and that paid attention to the issue through his filmmaking. Through two distinct publicity techniques, Öz first geared his discourse to establish his discursive authority over his filmmaking as a representational practice with aesthetic value, and then he established that his film and filmic material were relevant to European audiences. The first technique was an adept management of a simultaneous distance from and proximity to the filmic material. Öz is a Shawak Kurd himself. Yet he has lived outside the community for most of his life. His dual positioning, both inside and outside the community, helped build his discursive authority. The second technique situated *The Last Season: Shawaks* on the experimental border of the documentary and fiction film genres. In blurring the genre boundaries in his films, Öz demonstrated his mastery of both forms, a capacity that many within European film circles admired. These techniques set the stage for Öz’s use of a third technique for garnering publicity: addressing censorship, and, by virtue of doing so, constructing a European public sensitive to the situation of Kurds of Turkey.

The Last Season: Shawaks: A pendulum between contrasting worlds

At festivals, a moderator generally provided a short introduction to each film. At the Corsica Documentary Film Festival, for instance, festival director Annick Peigne-Guily introduced *The Last Season: Shawaks*, saying, “Tonight’s film by Kazim Öz is one which poetically documents the visceral and panoramic journey of the Shawaks in eastern Turkey.” The question and answer sessions that followed screenings lasted between half an hour and an hour. Questions usually commenced with the moderator’s simple inquiry about the film’s subject matter. Öz started the conversation by giving a synopsis of the film, introducing the Shawak community and highlighting the structural elements of the narrative: “*The Last Season: Shawaks* is a cultural journey; it

is a window to the Shawaks’ way of life. The film narrates the story of the Shawaks, which is a pastoral community in Kurdistan, over the course of four seasons. The film documents the relationship between humans and nature, humans and animals, and the relationships among humans themselves.”

To establish his discursive authority, draw attention to his filmmaking, and address a European public during his verbal performance Öz skillfully deployed the communicative device Erving Goffman (1981:128) calls “footing.” A shift in footing “implies a change in the alignment we take up to ourselves and the others present as expressed in the way we manage the production or reception of an utterance” (Goffman 1981:128). In his statements early in the question and answer sessions, Öz laid the ground for his upcoming changes in footing in two ways. First, he shied away from making any political statements and presented the film simply as a cultural documentary. Second, he maintained a discursive distance between himself and the filmic material.

Such distancing, that is, separation between the self as the performer and the self as the commentator (Goffman 1961), engendered a rather dramatic effect when Öz subsequently shifted his footing, through a remarkable “embedding,” when responding to an inquiry about his relationship with the Shawak community. According to Goffman, an embedding implants “a *figure*—a figure in a statement—that serves as the agent, a protagonist in a *described* scene, a ‘character’ in an anecdote, and someone, after all, who belongs to the world that is spoken about, not the world in which the speaking occurs” (1981:147). In illuminating his relationship with his filmic material, Öz embedded his self within the world of the Shawaks. This highlighted his insider status in the community and rendered him a character in the filmic world: “I am coming from the exact same life that you saw in the film. I spent the first 17 years of my life as a Shawak living within this community. I was a shepherd myself.” Once embedded in the filmic world of the Shawaks as a shepherd, someone from the community, Öz attained “an astonishing flexibility” (Goffman 1981:147) in the production of his utterances. Within the same utterance, for instance, he gradually changed his footing back to the discursive temporality he had held earlier: “At the age of 17, I left my village to attend college in Istanbul. After I met with cinema, I wanted to keep this way of life alive [by way of making this documentary]. This was something I owed to my past, to my memories.” Describing how he moved to Istanbul and came to make *The Last Season: Shawaks*, this utterance repositioned Öz within the urban European audience in the movie theater. Through these shifts in footing, Öz oscillated between the two worlds he occupied simultaneously, the world of the Shawaks, that is, the subject of the speech, and the world of the European film festival, which generated and circumscribed the act of speaking. The act of

filmmaking both enabled and conditioned the swinging of the pendulum between these worlds.

Central to Öz's discursive authority was the contrast in the social worlds between which the pendulum swung. Having simultaneous access to these disparate worlds had required significant effort and ability from Öz in mediating between them. The differences between the Shawaks' living conditions and modern, urban life had already registered with the viewers who had just screened the documentary. Öz highlighted the contrast further: "There is such a gap between the modern life in Istanbul or Europe and the life among the Shawaks. It is such a gap that I could not help but end up in the mountains with my camera."

A trope of romanticism overarched his contrasting construction of the two worlds: "It is both very difficult and wonderful to be a Shawak. For instance, the kids there do not have any toys or any opportunities like the ones here in cities. Yet they have the power of their imagination. They are freer than the modern kids are. I doubt that the kids in the city are better off with no imagination, trapped in apartment buildings."

The starkly contrasting worlds between which Öz shifted his footing gave him discursive authority for two reasons. First, having built and highlighted a gap between the difficult yet romantic and authentic Shawak world and the prosperous yet degenerate and restless European world, Öz highlighted his access to both worlds. Second, in his narrative he portrayed this gap as occluded by his filmmaking, an act that further nuanced the split between the modern and the premodern (Russell 1999:5) and through which he could carry the cultural world of the Shawaks into Europe.

Yet why should Europeans care about having access to the Shawaks' way of life? Öz's narrative offered an answer to this question: The Shawaks, whose culture was about to expire, represented the earliest stages of humanity and civilization. Öz thus located the Shawak community at the very beginning, and European culture at the very end, of the civilizational scale (cf. Fabian 1983). In doing so, Öz identified himself with his European viewers. Bracing his footing in the discursive temporality of the movie theater, Öz shifted his tone from a personal narrative ("I was a shepherd") to a justification for documenting the Shawaks' way of life: "When I look back at the Shawaks life, I can better understand how we got alienated from ourselves, how we got detached from nature, and how the chaos began ... The Shawaks' life is the most primitive and pristine form of humanity ... I wanted to document a vanishing way of life, a life, which is the basis for and the beginning of all humanity." To bridge the gap between the Shawaks and the modern world was not just something Öz owed to his past in the mountains. To salvage a disappearing culture was important to everyone, especially to Europeans, who occupied a position at the recent end of the civilization scale.

In Öz's narrative, the interrelated processes of modernity have had detrimental effects on the Shawaks and led to the expiration of their culture. A major reason for the decay of their culture involved the processes of capitalism, through which the policies of the Turkish nation-state were insinuated into Shawak life:

Although counted in hundreds of thousands a few decades back, today Shawaks are only around a few thousand. The younger generation migrates to the West in increasing numbers because of the Turkish state's policies towards Kurds and the exploitation by the merchants encouraged by the Turkish state. Merchants buy the Shawaks' produce for very low prices and make large profits. We become part of this crime when we buy cheese without asking who was exploited in the process ... Our modern ways of life create the very disruption to the Shawaks' way of life.

What is remarkable in these utterances is the use of the subject pronoun *we*, which indexed a shared stake and a common responsibility for the well-being and the decay of the Shawak culture. It was this sense of collective responsibility that led Öz to construct a text like *The Last Season: Shawaks*, which salvaged the Shawak community, the Kurds, and the cultural traces of primordial humanity, even if only on camera. Not only were the Shawaks the ancestors of all humanity but also the civilized world shared responsibility for their impending extinction and therefore had an obligation to aid in their preservation.

With these utterances, Öz cultivated a specific relationship to the filmic material, managing his simultaneous distance from and proximity to the Shawak community by establishing "metadiscursive links and gaps" (Briggs 1996:448). These links and gaps helped him speak with an accruing authority. As Charles Briggs explains, representing tradition involves creating simultaneous connections and disjunctions between the past and the present. Claims to represent the past entail a construction of the past and of the present as processes that are intricately linked yet incommensurable in their entirety. In such a construction, only the bearers of the relevant tradition can act as the link between the two (Briggs 1996:449). Yet assuming a position too close to the tradition deprives the interlocutor of objective distance, which is required of the agent linking the past to the present. Öz aptly managed his productive proximity to the cultural material in hand through "techniques of shaping the amount of distance" (Briggs 1996:459). As he shifted his alignment with respect to the filmic material, he constructed a coherent narrative by which he related the Shawak community to European audiences. As Benjamin Lee writes, "Narration is constituted by a semiotic reflexivity between the event of narration and the narrated event whose coordination reveals the locus of a new type of subjectivity, that of the narrator" (1997:321). Having mastered

the cultural codes and values of both the Shawak world he narrated and the European world in which the event of narration took place, Öz successfully coordinated his emergent subjectivity and constructed himself as eligible to bridge the gap between the two contrasting cultural worlds through his filmmaking.

A pendulum between documentary and fiction film genres

Film circulation “is a cultural process with its own forms of abstraction, evaluation, and constraint, which are created by the interactions between specific types of circulating forms and the interpretive communities built around them” (Lee and Li Puma 2002:192). The circulation of films in international festivals is contingent on how well they fit within the framework and the conventions of the films consumed favorably by the interpretive communities at those festivals. An emerging trend in the international documentary film marketplace is to cultivate authentic stories through experimentation in form. The documentary genre is now considered to have transcended the generic limits of a learning kit, as the global theatrical marketplace has welcomed artful entertainment and cinematic spectacle in the form of documentary films (Aufderheide 2005).

The praise *The Last Season: Shawaks* received in European film festivals stemmed partly from its experimental nature. Sitting astride the boundary between documentary and feature film genres, *The Last Season: Shawaks* challenges the conventional forms of representation through its narrative structure and aesthetics (cf. Russell 1999:3). For instance, in documenting the daily life of the Shawak community, the film wrenches apart the linear understanding of time and space and constructs a kind of “folkloric time” (Bakhtin 1981). The narrative posits an idyllic chronotope (Bakhtin 1981). That is, it revolves around the cyclical temporality of four seasons, which is central to the Shawaks’ comprehension of life. The film starts in the Shawak village in winter. In spring, the Shawaks move to the highlands. They spend the summer there. In fall, they journey back to the village. The film ends where it began, in the village in winter. In the opening and final scenes, the elder of the village narrates two tales that underwrite the cyclicity of life. The content of these tales framing the cyclical construction of the film’s narrative supplements its structural representation of Shawak cosmology.

A significant aspect of the formal structuring of *The Last Season: Shawaks* is its reflexive mode, which results in the decentering of the stereotypical subject–object relationship of the canonical documentary, contributing to its experimental nature (cf. Nichols 1991; Ruby 2000). Throughout the film, we encounter such reflexive inscriptions on three distinct levels. First, Öz imprints his own filmmak-

ing image, as he frequently and intentionally captures his and his camera’s shadows in the frame. Second, he highlights that he once was (and still is to some degree) an active member of the Shawak community by excerpting his dialogues with local individuals. Third, he registers himself as a displaced individual, longing for his homeland and his past through the elegy-like whistling he performs, and the poetic intertitles that delimit the four seasons represented. The title that carries the narrative cycle back to the winter-time beginning, reads, “The winter, once again . . . The silence of my heart, once again . . . Sweet sleep, once again . . . In my distant country.” These reflexive inscriptions in the documentary were always items of curiosity for and were appreciated by festival audiences. At the Corsica Documentary Film Festival, during the question and answer session, a middle-aged woman who had a hard time believing that Öz himself had performed the whistling in the film stood up among the viewers to applaud his “extraordinary performance.”

The portrayal of animals in *The Last Season: Shawaks*, however, attracted more attention from audiences, industry professionals, and film critics in Europe than any other aesthetic and stylistic characteristic of the film. In September 2009, a French journalist entitled his review of the documentary “An Animal Melodrama” and highlighted how the film narrativized the animals in such a way as to render them almost human. Consistent with the idyllic chronotope that structures human life as symbiotic with nature, the documentary portrays animals as main characters of the film. Central to Shawak life, animals, from mules to sheep to shepherd dogs, occupy a significant narrative space as they are juxtaposed with and aesthetically treated similarly to human characters. One particular sheep functions as the structural glue of the film. The cyclicity of Shawak life revolves around the life cycle of that sheep, born in spring and slaughtered in fall. Footage from its infancy is parallel edited with scenes of Shawak kids playing in the village, and the closeups and point-of-view shots construct the sheep as if it holds human agency. At the end of the fall, as the Shawak family packs to move back to the village, the older son takes some of the herd to a nearby town to sell. The protagonist sheep is among the bunch sold, whose lives end in a slaughterhouse. The scene showing the slaughter of the main sheep along with the others often induced sobs and sighs from festival viewers, justifying the French journalist’s animal-melodrama characterization.

In European film circles, experimentation with form and conventions of different genres is highly respected, according to Luciano Rigolini, the commissioning editor of ARTE France. Several times during our encounters, Rigolini praised Öz’s talent for crosscutting documentary and fiction film by wielding aesthetics from each genre. In festival forums, Öz persistently underlined his use of this technique. During the question and answer session in Visions

du Reel, he said, "I do not separate documentary form from fiction. Documentary is to make fiction out of reality and fiction can be totally based on reality. I experiment with form a lot in my filmmaking. For instance, my latest fiction film *The Storm* feels like a documentary and *The Last Season: Shawaks* is almost like fiction. I use the liberties of each genre in making my films."

Although Öz worked to sustain interest in his experimental style of filmmaking, he nevertheless held his footing in the documentary genre and made sure he remained grounded in the reality he had already constructed through the discourse of preservation. Öz further reinforced this position by referencing his methods of shooting, a significant aspect of which was cultural immersion. In response to the question posed by Vision du Reel's director about his approach to making *The Last Season: Shawaks*, he said, "My aim is always to be immersed within the culture that I document. Only after a filmmaker becomes a part of the reality in focus, he has the right to make a film about it. That is why I did everything to get closer to the reality of the Shawaks."

With this utterance, Öz swung the pendulum toward the side of the documentary genre. He also braced his footing within the discursive space of the movie theater. Having moved to the modern world years before, Öz had to reimmerse himself in the world of the Shawaks. However, the immersion was not an easy process at all:

What we [the crew] had to go through during the shootings can easily be material for another film because the conditions in this geography are extremely harsh. For instance, it was impossible to carry those large electricity generators up to the mountains. Sometimes we just had to quit everything else and help the family out. In that one scene, in which the mules got stuck in snow while passing over a hill, we had to leave everything aside and help them pull the loaded mules out of the snow.

The scene to which he referred documented perhaps the most difficult part of the Shawaks' journey to the highlands. In the middle of the summer, the Shawak family relocated their oba to a higher elevation. The trip to the new settlement location required walking with herds, small children, and loaded mules for a day. The snow-covered mountains made the journey even more difficult because the heavily laden mules often got stuck in the snow. Once, the crew members stopped shooting to help the family free their mules from the snow. At the end of that day, almost all of the crew members fell ill.

The difficulties the documentary crew had to endure during the shootings accentuated the idea of "reality" as a state one could attain only after immense suffering. The idea of reaching "reality" after withstanding hardships helped ally the project of *The Last Season: Shawaks* with "the discourses of sobriety" associated with the documen-

tary genre (Nichols 1991). While, on the one hand, Öz positioned his film within this genre, on the other hand, he highlighted the film's experimental characteristics. He thus drew attention to his mastery of both genres and demonstrated his capacity for playing with aesthetic conventions while simultaneously constructing a coherent narrative. When asked if any preceding or contemporary filmmaker influenced his aesthetic view in filmmaking, Öz reasserted that he had lived in the mountains until he was 17. Thus, he did not know many directors who might have influenced his filmmaking aesthetics when his cinema life began. Given that media had not entered Öz's life until relatively late, his conscious experimentation with form implied a mastery of genre conventions through self-taught creativity and talent. The way in which he framed his talented filmmaking within a narrative of his life story highlighted his aesthetics as a technology of publicity by which he further erected his discursive authority.

Addressing a European public

Only after establishing his status as an interlocutor between the worlds of Turkey, the Shawaks, and the Europe of his audiences as well as between the genres of feature film and documentary, did Öz overtly address the politics of the Kurdish issue in Turkey. The final part of his verbal performance yielded a critical merger between that issue and the politics of his filmmaking. In many forums, one particular scene in the documentary functioned as a vantage point on his subsequent utterances about the Kurdish issue. In that scene, the camera follows the convoy of trucks in which the Shawak family is traveling with their herds to the mountains in the springtime. As the last truck is about to wander out of the frame, a military vehicle passes by and is caught on camera. At the back of the vehicle are Turkish troops with their backs turned to the Shawaks' trucks, indifferent looks on their faces. The brief passing of the vehicle in and out of the frame is shown in slow motion, creating a space for viewers to register the soldiers. The sequence signifies the state's military presence in the region and was chosen by Öz to index the ongoing war in the region and the Kurdish issue. During the question and answer session in Mannheim, he operated this index as follows:

Many of *you* in this room already know about the situation in eastern Turkey. Today there is a Kurdish problem in Turkey. It stems from the state's denial of the Kurds as a distinct nation ... That scene refers to the ongoing war ... This war is because the Kurds are not accepted as a nation ... This might be difficult to imagine for *you* Europeans but Kurds cannot speak their mother tongues freely.

Addressing this utterance to a "you" marked a significant shift in the relationship Öz had established between

himself and the audiences in front of him. Until that point, he had posited the politics of his Kurdish subjectivity only subtly, when, for instance, he gave background information on Kurdish migration to the West. By contrast, in addressing the audiences as “you,” he engendered himself as belonging to a separate “we”: “we the Kurds,” the objects of “already knowing.”

In addition, addressing this utterance to a “you” sought to transform audiences of strangers into a public. Michael Warner (2002:50) writes that a public, which is the social space that circumscribes people who are otherwise strangers, comes into being as an entity only when addressed in relation to circulating texts, objects, and ideas. He explains this process via Louis Althusser’s (1971) notion of “interpellation”: “In the moment of recognizing oneself as the person addressed [by the police], the moment of turning around, one is interpellated as the subject of state discourse. Althusser’s analysis had the virtue of showing the importance of imaginary identification—and locating it ... in the subjective practice of understanding” (Warner 2002:58). The way in which Öz encased his utterance within the pronoun *you* not only interpellated audiences but further created a distinct category for viewers to inhabit, a metadiscursive label that assigned them certain roles and responsibilities, the prerequisite for which was “to already know.”

Marked by the statement “many of you ... *already* know,” Öz’s utterance was predicated on his evaluation of his addressees’ perceptions of that utterance (Bakhtin 1986:95). Öz anticipated a certain degree and a particular form of responsiveness from his audiences. His expectations were shaped mostly by the history between Turkey and Europe in relation to the Kurds of Turkey. The relationships between a speaker and his or her addressees, and the ways in which he or she imagines listeners, are “always embodied in historical processes in the sense that they are played out through time” (Hanks 1996:169). By accentuating the relevance of Turkey’s Kurdish issue in a European context, Öz telescoped historical processes into present utterance and anticipated, accordingly, a certain level of responsiveness from addressees. In doing so, he connoted a reflexive discursive space, by which he assumed his audience in the movie theater to be a public with a degree of historical consciousness of the Kurds in Turkey.

In the act of addressing audiences, performances compose those audiences as particular forms of collectivity and “audiences themselves, by choosing to participate, constitute themselves as members of a collectivity” (Barber 1997:354–355). Perceptive to current developments in Turkey, audience members, especially in places like France and Germany, where Turkey’s Kurdish issue has been a public matter for the last few decades, usually queried Öz about “any changes for good in the Kurdish situation lately.” Öz responded,

Yes, it seems that the state is taking some steps lately ... However, this is not exactly the state’s initiative but of the Kurdish people who insisted on protecting their culture, their language despite all the pressure, torture, and assimilation policies. Can you imagine that you are taken into custody by the police just because you speak Kurdish publicly? This happened in Turkey for many years. But Kurds did not give up. Yes, now the state acknowledges the Kurdish existence but because it had to, not because it wanted to.

Central to this utterance was the assertion that through their own political agency Kurds had forced the Turkish state to make some concessions to them. Soon after making this statement, Öz again embedded his self within the world he described. He was one of those Kurds who “did not give up”: “Although the film is not a political but a cultural one, we cannot ignore the war as an aspect of the Shawaks life. In fact, we were shooting this film in the middle of that war ... The state even took me into court for hanging out in the mountains. They even accused me of being accessory to terrorism.”

The state’s approach to artistic endeavors like shooting a documentary film proved that not much had changed in Turkey when it came to freedom of expression, especially when the filmmaker was overtly associated with the Kurdish political movement and its institutions:

There is now a line between “beyaz Kürtler” (the white Kurds) and “esmer Kürtler” (the dark Kurds). The white Kurds repeat what the state and its official ideologies tell the masses about the Kurds. However, the dark Kurds are alternative, revolutionary, and defiant to the official ideologies in their film production. Whereas in the recent past any Kurds without exception had been excluded from the artistic public sphere, today the dark Kurds are marginalized by the mainstream cinema culture.

According to Öz, national media circles acknowledged and accepted the white Kurds and their films, which, he asserted, were not necessarily artistically better than his films. In conjunction with the current government’s approach to the Kurdish issue, Turkish mediascapes, including the national film festivals, have, in fact, embraced Kurdish-themed content and media produced by Kurds more than in the past. At the 2009 Golden Orange festival, for instance, a few Kurdish films, such as *İki dil bir bavul* (*On the Way to School*; Doğan and Eskiköy 2008), received national publicity. This, according to Öz, was a reflection of the government’s “insincere” approach to Kurds on the national cinema. He underlined this diligently in festival venues:

The state still prevents free artistic expression about and by the [the dark] Kurds ... Although there are no legal limitations, the mainstream Turkish TV stations

never ever air my films, for example. My projects never get funding from the Turkish Ministry of Culture ... The national festivals, moreover, ignore my films; they execute censorship. They disregard my submissions for their events because I do not say what they want to hear.

With his answers to these last questions, Kazim Öz connected the larger picture he drew about the Kurds in Turkey to his cinematic practice and the difficulties he faced within the mainstream Turkish media world. His utterances posited his filmmaking as the embodiment of a vanishing practice, that is, making films about Kurds that are not compliant with the state's ideologies and the government's policies against the backdrop of political pressures, financial difficulties, and censorship.

Conclusion

Cultures of circulation both create and are created by particular opportunities, rules, and constraints. In this article, I have focused on the ways Kurdish media producers, marginalized within Turkish national media worlds, seek to enable transnational pathways of circulation for their media texts. Constitutive of the culture of transnational circulation, national censorship both forces and enables the transnational mobility of Kurdish films. The national and international mobility of Kazim Öz's films has been intricately contingent on the circuits of national censorship that have stymied them in Turkey. Discourse of censorship has created pathways for the circulation of Öz's films, especially in Europe but also in Turkey. Walking the pathways of transnational media circulation, politically engaged Kurdish filmmakers like Öz strategically tailor their encounters with transnational audiences to further the circulation of their media texts. The metanarrative that Öz crafts during discourse with festival audiences about *The Last Season: Shawaks* provides a significant vantage point on the ways he harnesses the pathways of transnational circulation. Here I have explored, in particular, how Öz discursively globalizes his film, relates it to festival audiences, flags the politics of Kurdish media production, and seeks to construct a European public sensitive to Turkey's Kurds. Basic to his utterances, which forecast a favorable response from European listeners, is the persistent assessment of the public, which he simultaneously assumes to exist and means to construct.

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