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Sphere in Urban Space: The Case of Diyarbakir

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The Case of Diyarbakir

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Abstract

The double aim of this study is to rethink the public sphere as an agonistic space enabling negotiation and collective agency, on the one hand, and to understand the mechanisms through which public spaces hegemonized by the state, the military and the PKK were subsequently recovered by other actors in the particularly hostile environment of South-eastern Turkey, on the other hand. Pending more comprehensive field research, I will explore the relevance of various theoretical alternatives to the Habermasian scheme of a rational-deliberative public sphere when studying the transformations taking place in the city of Diyarbakir, the largest in South-eastern Turkey. Since the beginning of the armed uprising of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) in 1984, the city's population more than tripled with the arrival of mainly forced immigrants from nearby villages. Whole new neighbourhoods sprang up all around the city, while at the same time, the entire urban space was subjected to strict military and state control. Within the past five years, however, armed conflict having ceased, Diyarbakir was astoundingly transformed into a paradise for civil society activism. Insights obtained from the field demonstrate that local public spheres have indeed emerged through conflictual interactions between previously hostile parties.

Keywords

Introduction[1]

Ever since the publication of Jürgen Habermas's *Strukturwandel der Offentlichkeit*[2] in 1962, the expression 'public sphere' has acquired an undeniably respectable position within the conceptual horizon of the social sciences. Despite the distinctive original meaning in Hannah Arendt's thought, the expression has come to connote a rational and deliberative arena standing between state and society. Although feminist as well as poststructuralist and Marxist theories continue to contest the public/private distinction implied in the notion, the Habermasian 'public sphere' is not so much a space than it is a mode of relating. The initial bourgeois public sphere flourished in cafés and reading societies in the late 17th century, but what Habermas emphasizes is not so much the place in which this debate takes as the type of debate involved. Reasoned debate and communicative rationality are the conditions for the formation of a public sphere, anywhere and anytime. This type of communication is a remedy against one-sidedness and bias in society. It serves the double function of warding off the effects of ideology and of ensuring the legitimacy of government policies scrutinized by a critical-rational public.

That the dynamics of power are absent from this perspective has been sufficiently pointed out.[3] Social studies on identity formation, cultural politics and changing patterns of urbanization have also contributed to extending the scope of the concept, blurring the line between private and public and introducing power into what was initially a space for reconciliation and consensus-formation in Habermas's perspective.[4] Poststructuralism has convincingly argued that politics is not essentially about harmony or consensus, but about antagonism. Whether based on a Gramscian perspective whereby consciousness is ideological consciousness formed in a struggle for hegemony, or on a Foucauldian one where subjects are constituted through the dialectics of power and resistance, poststructuralist theories emphasize the formative function of conflict in social and political interaction. They seem to be echoed in the words of a visitor at a photo exhibit in Diyarbakir: 'Men come into existence through their struggles.'[5]

Can conflict and antagonism be inscribed into the conceptual framework of the public sphere then? The first question that comes to mind is the relevance of such an inscription. Why should we continue to employ a notion whose shortcomings have been demonstrated over and over again? What makes such an endeavour necessary and meaningful? A second issue that must also be addressed pertains to the possible consequences of the inscription of conflict into the Habermasian notion of public sphere. Will the latter retain its Enlightenment features or be transformed beyond recognition? If it were to be transformed, what would be the new socio-political and theoretical status of the public sphere?

A preliminary response to the first question may be sketched as such: micro studies of the formation and transformation of modes of identification or affiliation generally assume that struggles over meanings and categories are power struggles but fail to specify how these struggles affect a public that is larger than the groups directly concerned other than by pointing out the process character of the

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2 *Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere. An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, Cambridge, Mass., The MIT Press, 1989.

3 Cf. Michael Kelly (ed.), *Critique and Power: Recasting the Foucault-Habermas Debate*, Cambridge, Mass., The MIT Press, 1994, and Craig Calhoun (ed), *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, Cambridge, Mass., The MIT Press, 1992.

4 Cf. for example on Turkey Yael Navaro-Yashin, *Faces of the State: Secularism and Public Life in Turkey*, Princeton, N.J., Princeton University Press, 2002, and for other contexts, D. Howarth, A. J. Norval and Y. Stravrakakis (eds.), *Discourse Theory and Political Analysis: Identities, Hegemonies and Change*, New York, Manchester University, 2000.

5 Comment inscribed in the visitors' book at the Diyarbakir Art Center exhibit of American photographer Ami Vitale's Kashmir photos: '*Insanlar mucadeleleriyle varolurlar.*'

circulation of new significations. But if power is not only structural but also performative, the formation and subsequent reproduction of hegemony requires a series of micro and macro strategies that include the 'staging' of a form of discursive categorization. The effectiveness of certain discourses in hegemonizing social spaces, on the one hand, and the varying degrees of visibility and invisibility of other discourses, on the other hand, partially depend on the success or failure of this staging. Consider, for a moment, the Iraqi War that broke out in March 2004. Hundreds of thousands of anti-war activists emerged around the world to organize meetings, campaigns, set up web sites and take to the streets throughout the year. This mobilization that united total strangers in the full sense of the word—strangers sharing no other physical space than the globe writ large—was more of an event than a process. The event of the war altered the former processes of mobilization, irreversibly in some places, such that new practices and relations were established in the aftermath. The entire event of war was oriented toward the staging of political positions through the media, primarily, but also through other sites of visibility such as streets, the internet, newspapers and local public spaces. The visibility and effectiveness of a briefing by a high-ranking US statesman redefining 'national security' was countered by the anti-war movement through alternative tactics of visibility. The effectiveness of the anti-war movement actually depended on the creation and maintenance of a counter-hegemonic space that would interrupt the circulation of hegemonic significations—effectiveness denoting the visible imposition of a different form of categorization or relationality into a space that tendentially tries to close itself up to intrusions.

Reconceptualizing the Public Sphere: Conflict, Negotiation and 'Commun-Ity' Formation

With this problem in mind, it is meaningful to re-conceptualize the public sphere as a space of appearances where conflicts, identities, differences, communalities and power structures are compellingly revealed to a heterogeneous multitude. The public sphere is not a deliberative institution but a space, an opening or clearing in Heideggerian parlance. It is in this space that not only intellectual and political issues but also social activities, struggles, relations, identities, feelings of belonging or of exclusion and collective memories are made to appear to people who are not immediately involved or concerned. In this sense the public sphere can be said to transcend localities and particularities, thus becoming 'public.' It is also in this sense that the opening of a space of appearances simultaneously transforms otherwise unconnected people into a 'commun-ity.' This 'stranger-relationality' is at the same time what confers on the public sphere its reflexivity: a public is constituted performatively as the addressee of discourses and practices that brings it into being. This orientation towards strangers also explains its 'risked estrangement':

> In a public, indefinite address and self-organized discourse disclose a lived world whose arbitrary closure both enables that discourse and is contradicted by it. Public discourse, in the nature of its address, abandons the security of its positive, given audience. It promises to address anybody. It commits itself in principle to the possible participation of any stranger. It therefore puts at risk the concrete world that is its given condition of possibility. This is its fruitful perversity.[6]

While this account brilliantly captures the contradictory dynamics of the formation of publics, the mobilization enabled by the Iraqi war is only partially represented by it. The process character of the formation of the public is as if ruptured by the event of the declared intention to go to war. The event was simultaneously constitutive of several publics that positioned themselves with respect to the war. Likewise, the PKK's (Kurdistan Workers' Party) war on the Turkish state initiated a whole series of ruptures and realignments that deeply affected previous social processes of circulation.

From public to public sphere, then, the transition is from circulation to articulation. The public sphere should not be thought of as a mere space of connectedness, although communication or the sharing of information is one of its traits. Neither is it synonymous with culture, political or otherwise.

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6   Michael Warner, 'Publics and Counterpublics', *Public Culture*, 14 (1), 2002, p. 81.

Mere living together in the same urban or geographical space does not constitute a public. Although such figures of the social imaginary as 'nation', 'people' or ''community' usually accompany such living together, the public sphere is not constituted by the reiteration of established discourses, even though reiteration itself can take on a performative character.[7] A space of connectedness between several publics becomes a public sphere if and only if former representations, identities and modes of relating become subject to a dynamics of re-articulation that assumes the character of collective agency. The public sphere, then, is a space of collective re-symbolization and is an incision as much as an opening.

To drive in the point: if publicness is 'simply this space of coming together that discloses itself in interaction',[8] the public sphere is a sphere in which contact between subjectivities prompts action in view of a collective reshaping of existing relations. It is, in this sense, a precondition for the Habermasian public sphere, where intersubjective consensus is reached between competing viewpoints. Without the appearance of conflicts, identities, differences, communalities and power structures to heterogeneous publics, neither the designation of a given problem as a common problem that prompts action, nor proper 'commun-ication' (rendering common) is possible. This 'commun-ication' provides for the possibility of collective action, understood as the collective shaping or restructuring of the social space available to the communicating publics. It is only within this space and through the interactions that bring it about can subjects truly become agents of change.

In this sense, the public sphere opens up a space for the transgression of established forms of behaving and relating as well as for their re-symbolization. Difference, therefore, is a necessary element in public sphere formation. Heterogeneous publics come to terms with each other, negotiate their differences, act and respond in recognition of the other as other, not always in non-antagonistic terms, and become strategic agents of change. In the words of Gole, 'the public sphere provides a stage for performance rather than an abstract frame for textual and discursive practices.'[9] Instead of being a strictly ocular stage, though, the public sphere should be considered within the Arendtian framework as a space of appearances, where visibility connotes much more than mere physical signs and symbols.

The conceptual status of such an understanding of the public sphere will, of course, be much different from the Enlightenment connotations attributed to it by Habermas. The idea of opposition to pedagogical state discourses is retained in this alternative conceptualization, but the Arendtian notion of acting-in-concert is introduced in such a way as to enable a more practice-based and performative account. I am especially thinking of a passage in 'The Gap Between Past and Future' where Arendt looks at the French resistance through the eyes of the poet René Char and depicts the *résistants* as such:

> they had been visited for the first time in their lives by an apparition of freedom, not, to be sure, because they acted against tyranny and things worse than tyranny […] but because they had become 'challengers', had taken the initiative upon themselves and therefore, without knowing or even noticing it, had begun to create that public space between themselves where freedom could appear.[10]

Acting-in-concert procures the power to change the set of circumstances, which is what freedom is all about.[11] Translating Arendt's own peculiar language into the language of sociology, the two distinguishing features of the public sphere would be the struggle against hegemony and the collective institution of a new social imaginary.

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7   Cf. Judith Butler, The *Psychic Life of Power. Theories in Subjection.* Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1997, p. 15.

8   Warner, 'Publics and Counterpublics', p. 88.

9   Nilufer Gole, 'Islam in Public: New Visibilities and New Imaginaries', *Public Culture*, 14 (1), 2002, p. 177.

10 Hannah Arendt, *Between Past and Future. Eight Exercises in Political Thought*, New York, Penguin Books, 1977, p. 4.

11 Interestingly enough, this idea of 'actual freedom' (as opposed to the 'formal' freedom of choice) is also taken up by Žižek: 'freedom is "actual" precisely and only as the capacity to "transcend" the coordinates of a given situation, to "posit the presuppositions" of one's activity […], i.e. to redefine the very situation within which one is active' ('Can Lenin Tell Us About Freedom Today?', *Rethinking Marxism*, 13 (2), 2001). Freedom then comes to connote the 'gesture of initiating a political project'.

Such a framework not only brings power back into the concept of the public sphere, but also serves to fill in a gap in poststructuralist accounts of power and hegemony. The vague concept of 'process' is employed to suggest a sort of domino effect (or invisible hand effect) whereby micro and local practices cumulatively transform macro discourses and practices over time. The process of transformation is devoid of 'actors'; at best, one may speak of diffused 'agents' of social change. But it does not seem possible to make the theoretical or practical move from micro-practices to a more macro level within poststructuralist epistemology. How do different temporalities and meaning structures link up with each other to create national or global effects? What role do collective actions or social movements play in establishing this link? How are collective actions possible in the first place? The question has prompted Negri and Hardt to describe the new characteristics of social struggles as such:

> First, each struggle, though firmly rooted in local conditions, leaps immediately to the global level and attacks the imperial constitution in its generality. Second, all the struggles destroy the traditional distinction between economic, political and cultural struggles. The struggles are at once economic, political, and cultural—and hence they are biopolitical struggles, creating new public spaces and new forms of community.[12]

This, however, is easier said than theoretically explained or actually done. An important contribution that Negri and Hardt make to social analysis lies in the postulate that power is called into being from below, by the actual life practices of the 'multitude': power responds to immigrants' problems, unemployment, gender issues, linguistic and cultural demands. Reversing Foucault, they argue that resistance, not power, is the primary productive force. Power is a response, but in responding, it is obliged to transform itself. Putting it differently, politics consists in a series of events and interventions that continuously produce, reproduce and transform subjectivities in that diffuse zone called 'life'—the zone of corporeal movements and affects. Nevertheless, the question of agency as well as that of articulation seems as absent from this perspective as it is from Foucault's.

The concept of 'communitarian space' elaborated by Laclau and Mouffe is a step forward in that it is constituted by articulatory practices. A hegemonic articulation is only possible when the frontiers separating two antagonistic forces are instable. This could alternatively be read as meaning that the logic of articulation presupposes shared although contested terrains. While a single political space is not the precondition of articulation, successful hegemonic practices are those that '*tendentially* construct the division of a single space in two opposed fields.'[13] In other words, popular struggles and antagonisms construct a single space by articulating various discursive elements together under a logic of equivalence, while at the same time dividing the same space through the exclusion of a series of other elements. On the other hand, not all struggles or resistances take on a 'political' character. 'Political' refers to those forms of resistance that are directed towards putting an end to relations of subordination by constituting them into sites of antagonism. A problem remains, however: within this scheme, only antagonism provides for the possibility of collective action through the dividing of space into two camps. We are at the antipodes of the Habermasian scheme, since only conflict may bring about 'consensus.'

The task is to understand how particular/local points of contact in cultural, social, political and economic life are articulated at a broader level, turn into venues of 'commun-ication' between competing publics and mobilize energies in such a way as to alter hegemonic modes of relationality. In contrast to purely sociological accounts of social change, this perspective looks for the public sphere in relations that enable collective agency. In contrast to purely deliberative accounts of collective agency, it does not invalidate the role of struggle in the constitution of the public sphere. This amounts to saying, first, that struggles are paradoxically among the most effective mechanisms that bring about the consciousness of 'commun-ity'; and second, that the specific ground of 'commun-ity' or the specific issues that the public at large finds itself having to respond to is constituted not only by the privileged discursive strategies of

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12 Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire*, Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press, 2000, p. 56.

13 Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy. Towards a Radical Democratic Politics*, London, Verso, 1985, p. 137.

institutional actors, but also by the demands of the multitude. A public sphere exists where this 'commun-ity' allows for a collective repositioning that changes the given set of coordinates.

A challenging yet extremely difficult case at hand is Turkey's 'Kurdish problem', a complex nexus of antagonisms that encompasses such vital dynamics as ethnicity (Kurds vs. Turks) and state-society relations, but that also points beyond them.[14] Within the tug-of-war between systemic structures and the anti-systemic undercurrents generated by the problem, the dialectics between concrete practices and official discourses functions like the testing ground of the scope and limits of public sphere formation.

The persistence of the Kurdish problem as one of the main axes around which politics revolves is an indication of its irreducibility to any simple solution of a military or discursive kind. But although the previous alignment of forces that reached a peak at the beginning of the 1990s had made it practically impossible to speak from a 'middle ground' without belonging to one of the antagonistic camps, the bold lines of the 'Us' and 'Them' divide seems to be thinning out in the past five years. The major actors of the conflict in its military phase were the army and the PKK, with state officials (the Emergency Rule governor, provincial governors, the gendarmerie and police force, state security court judges and prosecutors, bureaucrats) and various non-official actors (political parties, grassroots organizations, labour unions, human rights associations, lawyers, the press) mostly aligned along the conflict axis.

The war itself, paradoxically, made it impossible for anyone to ignore the Kurdish reality. Despite the 'politics of denial' or of postponement, it was evident even to the mainstream media that the PKK could procure enormous support from among the population in the Kurdish provinces. Its ranks were continually being fed and re-fed by villagers taking to the mountains. For about 10 years and despite the economic backwardness of the region, the PKK could stand out against the Turkish army, strong by 300,000 men, including the village guards.[15] But genuine discussion and debate was completely lacking in the Turkish public sphere. As Hasan Cemal, a prominent Turkish journalist and intellectual, admits:

> In Turkey, neither journalists nor the press fulfilled their duties with respect to the Kurdish or the Southeastern problem. The number of those who did remained low. I admit it. As a graduate of political science, I did not know what the Kurdish problem was. It was only when the PKK entered the political scene that I started to learn […] If, at that time, we could have exposed the Diyarbakir Military Prison as the horrible space in which crimes against humanity were being perpetrated […] maybe certain things could have been different in Turkey.[16]

Three factors were the main triggers of change: the unilateral ceasefire declared by the PKK in 1998, the election of DEHAP to the metropolitan municipality in March 1999, and the December 1999 Helsinki Summit, officially accepting Turkey as a candidate for full European Union membership. These contributed to the feeling that the Kurdish problem could be solved by political means.[17] Now that the strict polarization of the political space is mitigated, one might expect the emergence of new actors, new publics and new fields of action, or at least, the transformation of the formerly existing actors and fields of action. But the question that is of particular interest to the present study is whether this struggle

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14 Cf. for the history of the Kurdish movement, Hamit Bozarslan, 'Kurd Milliyetciligi ve Kurd Hareketi (1898-2000)', in: Bora (ed), *Milliyetcilik*, pp. 841-870; Gulistan Gurbey, 'The Kurdish Nationalist Movement in Turkey Since the 1980s', in: Robert Olson (ed.), *The Kurdish Nationalist Movement in the 1990s. Its Impact on Turkey and the Middle East*, Lexington, Kentucky, Univ. of Kentucky Press, 1996; Amir Hassanpour, 'The Creation of Kurdish Media Culture', in: P.G. Kreyenbroek and C. Allison (eds.), *Kurdish Culture and Identity*, London and New Jersey, Zed Books, 1996, pp. 48-84. On Turkish nationalism as repressive discourse, cf. Baskin Oran, *Ataturk Milliyetciligi: Resmi Ideoloji Disi Bir Inceleme*, Ankara, Bilgi Yayinevi, 1996; Taha Parla, *Turkiye'de Siyasal Kulturun Resmi Kaynaklari Cilt 3: Kemalist Tek-Parti Ideolojisi ve CHP'nin Alti Ok'u*, Istanbul, Iletisim Yayinlari, 1995, and Mesut Yegen, 'Turk Milliyetciligi ve Kurt Sorunu', in: Tanil Bora (ed), *Modern Turkiye'de Siyasi Dusunce IV: Milliyetcilik*, Istanbul, Iletisim Yayinlari, 2002, pp. 880-892.

15 Kemal Kirisci and Gareth M. Winrow, *Kurt Sorunu. Kokeni ve Gelisimi*, Istanbul, Tarih Vakfi Yurt Yayinlari, 1997, p. 134.

16 In an interview with Nese Duzel, 'Basin General Emri Dinlememeli', *Radikal*, 26 May 2003.

17 The capture of PKK leader Abdullah Ocalan in Kenya in February 1999, although not a trigger of change in the direction of a political solution to the Kurdish problem, contributed to the eventual appeasement of the tension generated by the war.

has succeeded in opening up of new spaces that allow for the emergence of a 'commun-ity' of differences in such a way as to change the set of coordinates constituting 'Turkey' or the 'Southeast.'

It is absolutely crucial to emphasize that this paper does not seek to describe the Kurdish movement from within, nor does it disregard the pains and sufferings that the armed conflict has inflicted to millions of people in this geographical space. The only subject position that enables me to speak about the Kurdish problem is one that was called into being by the incision operated by the Kurdish movement into the hegemonic political space of Turkey. It is as a member of the Turkish public space that I speak, but the availability of my own subject position is in itself a sign of the effectiveness of that incision.

This having been recognized, the informal capital of the region, Diyarbakir, seemed a good place to begin to explore the transformation of politics through the depolarization of the public space. Diyarbakir is a micro cosmos that appeared to constitute a preliminary step on the way to analyzing the transformation of regional as well as national dynamics. The focus was be on the public spaces opened up in the city of Diyarbakir by the relaxation of the polarization between the two protagonists of the conflict. It must be noted, however, that Diyarbakir is not representative of the region as a whole. Diyarbakir's dynamics point to transformations that might take place in other south-eastern cities, but as the bustling cultural and political capital of the region, Diyarbakir is bound to remain incomparable.

Diyarbakir: The City Within and the Cities Beyond

Diyarbakir's actual layout reflects its transformation to a significant degree. The historical city is surrounded by impressive walls. These harbour a formerly central quarter, the Surici, divided into four equal slices by two intersecting arteries. The Surici is a virtual enclave and sits atop of cliffs that follow the contours of the Tigris valley below. The historical quarter is presently inhabited by immigrants from villages and towns around Diyarbakir and is one of the poorest quarters of the city. Nevertheless, the Surici also harbours the darkest of elements in Diyarbakir: the army headquarters, the State Security Court and the (in)famous Diyarbakir prison. These are rendered invisible by the Ic Kale, or Inner Fortress, an enclave within Surici itself. The entrance to the zone is barred by military signs and road blocks.

From the 1930s on, Diyarbakir overflowed the enclave into a new quarter sprawling outside the walls and stretching the city westward. With its modern buildings and large roads, the quarter is exactly what its name indicates: Yenisehir, or 'New City.' This is where the civilian authorities and modern business is located. The Metropolitan Municipality, the Governor's Office and a high-brow office zone, ironically called Ofis and harbouring the Diyarbakir branches of political parties such as DEHAP and of several radical unions such as Egitim-Sen and KESK. It is in this zone that the effects of modernization and globalization on Diyarbakir are felt the most. The MMM Migros Hypermarket, the Dedeman Hotel Tower, the Galleria shopping mall with its movie theatres and cultural centre, Diyarbakir's most elegant restaurants and locales (of professional associations such as the Bar Association or the Chamber of Architects and Constructors) are visible at first sight.

Surrounding Yenisehir are districts that were virtually inexistent until the early 1980s. The most striking is Baglar, a huge district of almost 400,000 inhabitants, constructed on former orchards as the name indicates. These outgrowths of the city are sad echoes of the massive migration from outer Diyarbakir districts and villages into the city, for the most part after 1980. Several kilometres away from the city centre, at a good distance from the Yenisehir and the immigrants' quarters, stand artificial *sités*, or residential zones. Some were constructed to house the influx of immigrants; some were and are being constructed for the upper class city dwellers who no longer want to mix with immigrants in the city centre. Complete with green areas and grocery stores, the *sites* stretch Diyarbakir further out into the countryside.

Surici's physical layout does not accommodate parks or squares. In Yenisehir, in contrast, the impressive Governor's Office overlooks a large square with a park in the middle. What is striking is a bright red portal overarching a main road leading into the square and carrying the inscription: '*Ne*

Mutlu Turkum Diyene' ('What a joy it is to say "I am a Turk"'). The inscription, as well as the unconcealed presence of the central state via the governor's office, contributes to making the square an unsuitable place for public events. Instead, rallies and meetings take place outside the municipality, where a large frontal esplanade provides a substitute for a town square. This (dis)placement is ironic, though meaningful: protests in Diyarbakir have almost always targeted the state and its representatives, while the municipality has been considered as being on the side of the people after the 1999 local elections. In addition, the municipality has chosen to organize its open-air concerts, which are also protest activities as shall be explained below, within the city walls.

Public life in Diyarbakir suffered from the curfews and restrictions imposed by Emergency Rule throughout the 1980s and 1990s. During the height of the conflict, it was extremely dangerous to be out in the streets after dark. Even daylight could not provide security, as most of the infamous 'extrajudicial executions' (the identity of the assailants is either unknown or officially unrecognized) took place during the day. These dealt a major blow on public life in the city until around 1997. While in the 1980s, people discussed politics in neighbourhood cafés (which are exclusively for men), their voices were so loud that passers-by on the streets heard. By 1990, these voices had been completely silenced. The private spaces within houses became settings for secret meetings. Publicly, speech was censored and streamlined. Indirect messages spared people from pursuit or harassment.

The ceasing of the armed conflict and the sudden drop in the number of 'extrajudicial executions' finally removed the physical and psychological barrier against street life.[18] Now, however, main streets are full of people on foot or in minibuses, although women are still rare. This hustle and bustle, though, seems to stem from the hardships of making a living in Diyarbakir than from any cultural or social motive. A gigantic problem of unemployment haunts the city, with over 60% estimated to be out of jobs during the winter months (in the summer a large portion of the new settlers move to tourist resorts along the Aegean and Mediterranean coasts or to cotton plantations in the West).[19]

Diyarbakir's population tripled, rising from around 350,000 in 1993 to about a million in 2004. The estimated number of people displaced is anywhere between 2-3 million, with Diyarbakir becoming a stopover for immigrants on the way to larger cities in the West such as Istanbul, Mersin and Adana. Those who settled in Diyarbakir brought the number of housing up from 30,000 to 100,000 units. The migration had an enormous impact on the urban infrastructure, the city's residents and on the migrants themselves.[20] As far as infrastructure is concerned, only 30% of houses and buildings in Diyarbakir could receive water in 1999 and only 30% of the sewerage could be collected. The rest flowed over streets and alleys. Water-related diseases were abundant when DEHAP won the local elections in 1999. The municipality partially resolved the water and sewerage problem, but the remaining infrastructural works are to be undertaken with European Bank of Investment and German funding.[21]

The evacuation of rural areas was experienced as forced modernization by many. The migration, coupled with hundreds of 'extrajudicial executions' within metropolitan Diyarbakir over an extended period of about six years (1991-1997), caused old and new residents to migrate out of the city. This out-migration to western cities in Turkey paradoxically carried the Kurdish problem out of its geographical confines and into new spaces in Turkey and elsewhere (to Western Europe in particular). But its immediate impact was heightened political consciousness in the city itself, which partially explains the overwhelming support given to the municipality.

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18 The Diyarbakir Police Chief Gaffar Okkan, appointed to office in 1997, is said to have drastically reduced the number of ambushes and cross-fires known as extrajudicial executions. As an irony of sort, he became a victim of one in 2001. The Hizballah is said to be behind his assassination.

19 According to the Southeastern Businessmen's Association figures, the annual income in Diyarbakir was around 1,373 USD in 2003.

20 Interview with Bulent Ipek, member of the municipal council and advisor to the Metropolitan Mayor, Diyarbakir, 11 February, 2004.

21 T.C. Diyarbakir Buyuksehir Belediyesi 2002 Yili Calisma ve Tanitim Raporu, pp. 45-46.

The Municipality as Ground-Breaker

The election of HADEP-DEHAP[22] to the metropolitan municipality marked a turning point in the recent history of Diyarbakir. The impact was not straightforwardly political in the narrow sense of the word, but, as I will argue below, mainly cultural and social. The municipality became the engine force that opened new spaces of communication and expression, which not only fostered cultural life, but also allowed for new political publics to emerge—sometimes to the detriment of the Kurdish movement. Without the institutional weight of the municipality as a counter-force against the central state institutions in the city (the governor, the police force, the army and state security courts), the transformation could not have been as impressive. The existence of a DEHAP municipality spatially united—while at the same time ideologically distinguishing—the various social and civic actors already involved in opening up niches for themselves in the polarized public sphere. The municipality metaphorically became the *agora* in which various new and diversified voices could be heard. The materialization of a new discourse, that of the social, cultural and urban needs of the population, became the nodal point marking the dispersion of former antagonisms in favour of a more fluid constellation of forces.

The brief history of the municipality indicates that this transformation was achieved more through conflict and defiance, than through dialogue and reasoned compliance. Culture and the provision of social services, but not overt politics, was the means through which the conflict was carried out. To put it differently, the municipality became the main social agent that did the ground work of shattering the practical and psychological confines imposed by the so-called 'low-intensity war.' Its acts of defiance had a transforming effect on local practices such that practices and activities that were previously banned or unthought-of now had to be accepted (though not totally endorsed) by the representatives of the central state. The split space was thus gradually turned into a community, albeit tense one. A sense of sharing the same public space, literally a sense of 'commun-ity', was formed through the municipality.

A quick look at the unfolding of (literally) ground-breaking events will show how the changes could take hold. The metropolitan mayor, Feridun Celik of DEHAP, was elected with an overwhelming 40.92%. The runner-up was the religious party Fazilet's candidate, who could muster up only 15.69% of the votes. At the onset, however, the municipality was caught up in a dilemma:

> The Kurdish question was not yet resolved, but all of a sudden you find yourself in the local administration. You got there because of the Kurdish problem, because of the OHAL [Emergency Rule], and because of the conflict. In this sense, there were considerable problems and contradictions.[23]

The party that took over the municipality was an 'outsider' who now belonged within the administrative mechanisms of the state. The dilemma expressed by Ipek must have been echoed by the central government, for the state was reluctant to provide funds to a municipality run by the former 'enemy.' For a city in which so many lives had been affected by conflict, migration, oppression, and extraordinary measures, no provisions were made by the central administration to help financially.[24] This reluctance, apart from being a power strategy intending to weaken the grip hold of the municipality on its constituency, signalled another important attitude: the state was refusing to respond to the demands of the people. Securing the loyalty of the people in order to institute a practice of governance that would be both subtle and effective was not (yet) among the strategies available to the central administration with respect to the Kurdish region.

The DEHAP municipality thus became the first governing institution to institute social *dispositifs* or arrangements pertaining to daily practices. On the one hand, it contributed to the (re)constitution of

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22 For practical purposes, I will use the acronym DEHAP from now on.

23 Interview with Ipek.

24 The municipality had to seek funds elsewhere, from European banks or from international or local businessmen and NGOs. How this has affected the relationship of the municipality with DEHAP, with Diyarbakir businessmen and with globalized capital deserves additional research. One imputed outcome of this relationship was the corruption of the mayor. Celik lost DEHAP's support in the March 2004 municipal elections—and subsequently lost his position as mayor to another candidate.

the discourse of social needs; on the other, it dispelled the effects of the strict separation of the public space into the state vs. the people. In other words, the coming of DEHAP was in itself a bridge linking the state administration to the people.

> In the last instance, we are part of the state; we serve the people as part of the state. Although the people do not perceive us as part of the state, we nevertheless are. This situation helped establish "bridges of confidence" between the people and the state.[25]

Although this was undeniably a sign of the relaxation of the tension caused by the state's refusal to recognize Kurdish identity, the shift of tone was apparently welcomed by the municipality. Kurdish identity was to be reinstituted through means other than armed conflict:

> Responsibility calls for establishing a dialogue and strengthening the desire and intent to live together, to become the ground, the facilitator for the democratic solution of the Kurdish problem.[26]

Fostering this desire to live together through cultural activities and festivals, and imposing Kurdish culture and identity onto a formerly oppressive space by shifting the terms of the antagonism seems to be what the municipality aimed to do—and eventually succeeded in achieving.

Public Sphere Formation Through Newroz *Celebrations*

The municipality-sponsored *Newroz* celebrations marked the turning point. Since the 1984 armed uprising of the PKK, *Newroz*[27] or the spring festival celebrating the New Year, took on the character of symbol of Kurdish identity and resistance. Owing particularly to heavy security measures in the south-eastern provinces, March 21 became the theatre of protests, rallies and subversive celebrations. To offset the effects of the counter-hegemonic deployment of *Newroz* by the Kurdish movement, the government declared the Turkified version of the festival, now called *Nevruz*, an official celebration in 1991. But only a handful participated in the official celebrations—the only authorized ones—until the year 2000. Instead, alternative—and unauthorized—celebrations took place every year, causing violent clashes between security forces and Kurdish participants.[28] A wave of arrests usually ensued. In 1999, owing to the extraordinarily heavy security measures in all south-eastern provinces, *Newroz* went uncelebrated. Only a handful of people appeared on the streets that day in Diyarbakir and over 400 were taken under custody for having attempted to light fires. But the first stage of the attempt to include *Newroz* into the hegemonic discourse of the state had produced the paradoxical effect of recognizing it as a legitimate day of celebration. The question of whether *Newroz* celebrations should be allowed was thus transformed: it was now a matter of *who* organized *Newroz*. In 1999, the Diyarbakir governor declared that any group desiring to celebrate *Newroz* could do so, but only after having obtained a formal authorization. So when the newly elected municipality of DEHAP applied the next year to organize *Newroz*, it simply had to be granted the authorization.[29]

It goes without saying that the representatives of the central administration could not passively stand by and watch. They employed various techniques to dispel the passions aroused by the cultural revival in Diyarbakir. *Newroz* celebrations were prohibited within the city walls. A fair site at an 8-kilometer distance from the city centre was designated by the governor for the celebrations. This did not discourage anyone, though: *Newroz* was legitimately celebrated in Diyarbakir on 21 March 2000 in a massive outbreak of emotion that swept the whole city. Over 500,000 city residents participated,

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25 Ibid.

26 Ibid.

27 Although of Zoroastrian tradition, *Newroz* is celebrated widely in Iraq and Iran as well by Kurdish populations.

28 The bloodiest *Newroz* occurred in Sirnak in 1992. The city was the theater of a 38-hour long shoot out, resulting in the death of as many as 52 civilians and a police officer. *Hurriyet*, 21 March 1998.

29 DEHAP was given the permission to organize the festivities in Diyarbakir and in Batman.

but despite such massive participation, only minor incidents were reported. The general secretaries of leftist political parties participated alongside Murat Bozlak, DEHAP's general secretary.

The 2000 *Newroz* celebrations in Diyarbakir marked a turning point in that they pinpointed how poorly the previous attempts to Turkify and de-radicalize *Newroz* by brutally suppressing Kurdish celebrations had fared. In a way, they prompted the central administration to become extraordinarily creative in trying to dearticulate *Newroz* from its Kurdish connotation of resistance. In 2000, President Suleyman Demirel and Prime Minister Bulent Ecevit both made public announcements as to the brotherly significance of the *Newroz* celebrations. The next year, the Minister of Culture and the Minister of Education danced with folklore groups invited from the Turkic Republics in Central Asia to celebrate *Newroz*. In 2002, the Police Department published a *Newroz* booklet to be distributed in schools. *Newroz* was presented as a Central Asian Turkic day of festivities, and even associated with the two main symbols of the ultra-nationalists, the *bozkurt* or grey wolf, and the Turkish founding myth of *Ergenekon*.[30]

Despite these efforts, however, Kurdish *Newroz* attracted the whole nation's attention when the Turkish pop music superstar Sezen Aksu attended the celebrations in Diyarbakir in 2002, summoning hundreds of thousands of spectators. Sezen Aksu, like relatively less known artists and singers before her, was thus signalling that she had embraced the cause of Turkey's Kurds. So much that when Aksu invited the Diyarbakir Children's Chorus over to her grand concert at the Ephesus antique amphitheatre the following year on August 30, a national holiday marking the final victory of Turkish forces led by Mustafa Kemal against the Greeks in the War of Independence, she caused an unprecedented uproar. A high-ranking general publicly criticized its timing. Nationalists insulted Aksu for being a traitor. This prompted a prominent journalist to write that 'the concert she gave at Ephesus has turned into a test of the sincerity of laws promulgated by the Turkish Grand National Assembly.'[31] Although Aksu was criticized by the Left for making money out of a political cause, the effect of the concert (and others she gave afterwards) was to initiate debates on the issue. All sectors of society were attracted into these debates: generals, politicians, lawyers, journalists, nationalists, as well as the general public. Only a superstar of the calibre of Aksu could have had such an impact, since admiration for her cuts across all ethnic, social or political divides in Turkish society.

Without exaggerating the impact of these events, *Newroz* celebrations can be said to have disturbed the chain of significations that split Turkey's symbolic space into two. Instead of functioning as a signifier that constituted and reinforced the mutual exclusivity of the two camps (pro-state and pro-Kurdish), *Newroz* became the ground for a mutual struggle - for recognition on the part of the Kurdish movement and for hegemony on the part of the central state. The struggle around *Newroz* did not remain bound to any locality, but stretched out to include the Turkish public in general. This struggle—and the collective energies it mobilized among Kurds scattered all around Turkey— prompted a shift in the central state's discourses and practices such that the symbolic value of *Newroz* was altered for both Kurds and Turks. Although still a symbol of Kurdish cultural identity for the Kurdish movement, it is no longer a site of violent antagonism, but of proud affirmation. On the part of the Turkish public, on the other hand, *Newroz* no longer retained its threatening connotations, becoming a day of festivities in common with the Kurds—although the two publics continue to celebrate in different physical spaces.

But this was only the beginning of the new tug-of-war between the state and the Kurdish movement. In Diyarbakir, another terrain emerged in the form of a series of cultural festivals initiated by the municipality and attracting the support of various private and public institutions. These festivals and events brought together local actors that were at best indifferent—at worst antagonistic—to each other. Although no attempt at recognition or negotiation was taking place at the level of the central

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30 'Emniyet'ten Nevruz Kitapcigi', *Hurriyet*, 5 March 2002.

31 Ertugrul Ozkok, 'Sezen Aksu'nun Bana Sordugu Soru', *Hurriyet*, 4 Sept. 2002. The laws in question where the lifting of the ban on Kurdish-language broadcasting and education.

state, several state institutions began working together with pro-Kurdish groups at the local level. These eventually prompted the local governor, a representative of the central state, to budge from its previously held position of oppression and denial.

The Politics of Depolarization

The cultural explosion that was initiated by the municipality and the subsequent softening up of such polarized dichotomies as society/state and PKK/Turkish army was accompanied by two developments: the emergence of new actors on the political scene in Diyarbakir and the transformation of the previously agenda-setting actors themselves.

By standing militarily against the central state, the Kurdish movement was in a way reproducing the subjectivity it had set out to destroy. The terms of the antagonism dictated the continued polarization of identities, such that the effect was to reproduce the dichotomies that constituted the problem in the first place. The Turkish Republic's unrelenting stubbornness in categorizing the Kurds as 'others' had created a backlash that reproduced the dichotomy by inverting it. One was either 'for the Kurds' or 'for the Turkish state.' No in-between was tolerated. Both discourses were pedagogical, in the sense attributed to national narratives by Homi Bhabha.[32] The legitimization of the Kurdish movement through the municipal elections and EU politics allowed for the opening up or the conquering of different spaces, which allowed for the performative contestation of pedagogical authority. Kurdishness *per se* continued to operate as a signifier that called for a joining of forces, but the shift toward a depolarized form of politics meant that new nodes of 'commun-ity' could be established. These nodes such as 'culture and arts', 'women's liberation' and 'civic activism' have started bringing previously antagonistic groups in touch with each other. The emergence of these nodes and the possibilities they offer for collective action are indicative of the future transformation of the 'Kurdish problem'.

The loosening of former identity structures has caused some anxiety, however, especially when it comes to 'middle terrains', that is, stances that are neither inside nor outside the Kurdish movement or the central state. This resulted in considerable inertia and intestine conflicts within the new spaces. To illustrate this simultaneous movement towards and away from community formation—and pending additional research—I will make anecdotal references to two spaces in which subjectivities seem to be transforming: gender and civic activism.

The Case of Women

In the Southeast, as in other regions in Turkey, women often suffer beatings, corporal violence, psychological torture, rape and even murder by spouses, relatives or fellow villagers. The so-called 'custom killings' or 'honour killings' whereby young girls and women get killed for having lost their moral integrity or for disobeying male-dominant norms and codes are frequent, but rarely attract the attention of either local institutions or the press and media. Disobedience can often range from adultery to having been raped. A woman who loses her virginity or gets pregnant because of rape is considered to have lost her chances of living a decent life. She is therefore either killed or forced into marriage to an elderly man.

When Nebahat Akkoc, a former elementary school teacher and political activist, decided to found the Women's Centre (KA-MER), an organization to help women suffering from physical abuse, she found herself in an extremely difficult position.[33] The state eyed her suspiciously for having been an activist in the Egitim-Sen union and later on in the Human Rights Association, officially stigmatized as being pro-PKK. The Kurdish movement, on the other hand, criticized her for introducing a division within the

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32 Homi Bhabha, 'DissemiNation: Time, Narrative and the Margins of the Modern Nation', in: H. Bhabha (ed), *Nation and Narration*, London and New York, Routledge, 1990.

33 Interviews with Nebahat Akkoc, Diyarbakir, 9 and 12 Feb. 2004.

movement between men and women. Women's rights came after human rights and the Kurdish movement considered itself as having other priorities. Pressure was exerted on Akkoc for wanting to create an independent women's organization as well as for publicizing the taboo issue of custom killings.

The privatization and even denigration of women's problems by actors militating for rights and justice provoked Akkoc into opting for the cause of women. She was intent on 'being independent' in order to be able to work efficiently. Only a handful of women decided to join her struggle at the beginning. Being independent was not the norm. 'It was as if we crossing the Sirat Bridge[34] […] You have to walk hyper straight. It was so tiring. We thought twice about the meaning of every word we used; we weighed and measured every remark […] It wasn't easy at all.' In such a black and white zone where shades of grey were not allowed by either side of the antagonism, KA-MER first attracted support from the 'outside', that is, from Istanbul-based women's rights groups and from abroad.

When KA-MER was finally founded in 1997, there were only two organizations dealing specifically with women in Diyarbakir: a religious women's solidarity group and the Family Planning Association, which was being accused of wanting to sterilize Kurdish women. After KA-MER had gained some ground, the Bar Association was the first to open its Women's Rights Centre. A number of independent women's groups emerged between 1999 and 2001. The municipality joined in the bandwagon with its own Research and Application Centre for Women's Problems (DIKASUM) in 2001. This was followed in 2002 by the Selis Women's Consultation Centre, purportedly close to DEHAP. Thus, once again, a successful ground-breaker had literally obliged other groups to follow suit.

But although the agenda of the women's groups in Diyarbakir is more or less the same—struggling against the discourses and practices that sanction honour killings, confine women to the house, deprive them of financial or social autonomy, bar their chances of education, deny them a choice in choosing a husband or determining the number of children they will bear—their relations with each other are more marked by difference than by consensus. The spaces that each opens depending on its position from the scale that runs from the state on one extreme end to the DEHAP on the other is different, notwithstanding the overlaps.

DIKASUM, for instance, is working with immigrant women in a miserable zone in Surici called Hasirli. A municipality project, it aims to provide low-income families with free services. A collective laundry and earthen stove centre was opened in 2003 and attracted women from over 350 households.[35] The centre was designed in such a way as to provide a hall for women to sit while waiting for their laundry to be washed. The centre not only satisfied the daily needs of the women, but also created a space for them to communicate with each other, as women are not allowed in coffee houses, a popular public meeting space for men. This is how the DIKASUM staff got to know the women's problems and began to strike up conversations on health, child education and environmental issues. This practice, although slow in producing wide-reaching results, provided an important space of contact with an otherwise excluded group. DIKASUM can thus be said to provide an example of how the municipality responds to the basic needs of the multitude—the women's need for cooking and washing, in this case—while simultaneously articulating them with new needs—the need for regular health check-ups, birth control, alphabetization and even official marriage.[36]

The proliferation of differences concerning the ways to approach and reconstruct women's problems in the Southeast actually does permit of new spaces of encounter, though. The workshop on Women Entrepreneurship, held under the auspices of the GAP-GIDEM in Diyarbakir on Feb. 10, 2004 illustrated how. The GAP is state institution that administers the gigantic South-eastern Anatolia

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34 A hair-thin bridge which one crosses on Judgment Day, according to Muslim belief. If the sins outweigh the virtues, one falls into the river of Hell.

35 Interview with DIKASUM coordinator Handan Coskun, Diyarbakir, 11, 12 Jan. 2004.

36 A large number of families do not register their girls upon birth, thus depriving them of an ID card. When the girls come of age, they are simply married by the local *imam*, owing partially to custom and partially to the lack of official papers. DIKASUM arranged for the marriage of 50 couples in the Hasirli neighbourhood.

Project of irrigation and social reform. Although this was the first appearance of Selis at a state-initiated workshop, its representatives hardly said a word during the whole meeting. Most participants acknowledged that they knew little about the work of others and welcomed the occasion GAP had provided for them to get together. The most significant aspect of the event, however, was that it would not have happened if it were not for the GAP-GIDEM Diyarbakir branch's efforts to arrange for it to take place in the municipality conference hall. This was a first, since both the GAP and the DEHAP municipality formerly took care not to work together. Nurcan Baysal of the Diyarbakir GAP-GIDEM bureau says she does not feel herself as representing the state. She prefers to muster up local support. Organizing the conference at the municipality was significant in that only then would such groups as Selis agree to participate. GAP's Ankara head office acquiesced.

Thus, the potential for a division of labour between the women's groups in Diyarbakir exists, although each tends to safeguard its specificity, thus multiplying the available discourses. Such formations as the Diyarbakir Women's Platform indicate that a community formation is possible, even among groups that position themselves differently. Preliminary observations suggest that the issue of 'custom killings' could become a common concern that joins the various groups. The issue is now attracting considerable attention among groups varying from the pro-PKK women's movements to non-Kurdish women's groups over the country.[37]

Civic Activism

New points of contact among people, and between people and local authorities have been created by the influx of immigrants in Diyarbakir. Infrastructural projects and arrangements in view of the needs of the immigrants, projects to provide for a return to villages, economic and industrial concerns, poverty, illiteracy, women's problems, and health are new problems awaiting solutions.

The municipality and various civic associations were the first to respond to the new demands. Both were affected in such a way as to deemphasize national political concerns in favour of local social ones. Civic associations, unions and rights groups were already being accused of sacrificing their primary vocations (such as representing their members' interests or proposing concrete solutions to specific local problems) to political activism. But during the 1980s and 1990s, associations were actually expected to do just that: choose their camp and act accordingly.[38] Numerous civic associations in Diyarbakir joined forces, formed alliances and created a strategic consensus during the years of conflict. Conflict, in other words, was what created the space between these associations, albeit one which was continually guided by the PKK. The Turkish state also determined the role and status of the associations. A splitting of the political and social space of 'Turkey' into two was what ensued. But as soon as the strict disciplining influence of the war waned, new possibilities and spaces of expression sprang into being in Diyarbakir.

A transformation was evidently taking place:

> Conflict was previously armed conflict. Now the guns are silent, but the sufferings created by the conflict are continuing. The only type of politics that the region can accommodate is politics addressed to these sufferings. If you ignore these demands, if your politics does not aim to solve these problems, whoever you are, you will be doomed to failure.[39]

Most of the previously politicized associations such as the Human Rights Association (IHD), the Chamber of Doctors, the Union of Education Personnel and the Confederation of Civil Servants'

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37 According to an article in a pro-PKK women's monthly, the KONGRA-GEL is to embrace the cause of women's liberation as 'the fundamental characteristics of the new era.' It will fight all types of violence against women, committed as a result of 'backward moral norms.' Zelal Amed, 'Halklarin Yeni Kimligi', *Ozgur Kadinin Sesi*, Jan. 2004, pp. 3, 4.

38 Seyhmus Diken, *Guneydogu'da Sivil Hayat*, Istanbul, Metis Yayinlari, 2001, p. 295.

39 Interview in Diyarbakir (the identity of the interviewee as well as the date have been concealed for security reasons).

Unions admit to having neglected issues concerning their *raison d'être*.[40] 'Now, says the chairman of the Diyarbakir IHD, we can finally deal with all human rights abuses.'[41]

Pending further research, it is possible to say that the actual presence of surprisingly diversified civic associations in and around the city may eventually become obstacles to mustering support for armed struggle. Problems and issues that were previously neglected both by the state and by the unified Kurdish front are now being made visible by the activities of these associations. Among them are environmental issues, archaeological or cultural heritage concerns, poverty reduction, entrepreneurship and consumer protection, in addition to the associations mentioned in this paper that focus on women's issues, youth and culture. These issues provide for spaces of cooperation and contact within the locality but also at a national and international level. What is more, the arrival of big business to Diyarbakir in the form of national companies as well as MNCs signals the slow but sure implantation of the global practices of neoliberalism.

The effect of these developments on social life will inevitably be to multiply local needs. While in the past, demands for the recognition of Kurdish ethnic identity, for regional autonomy and for basic rights and liberties were the axes around which the Kurdish movement organized itself, these discourses now fall short of addressing emergent local issues. This is not to say that they have lost their meaning or importance: they still constitute sites of antagonism in a space that is wider than the locality. In fact, they preserve their productive strength as struggles that stir up the Turkish political space as a whole and create a public sphere of previously unconnected publics. They are the discourses of the Kurdish movement itself. But they are no longer the discourses that satisfactorily constitute a public sphere in Diyarbakir. In the regional capital, sites of antagonism have begun to disperse so that the discourse of identity or autonomy (or even that of constitutional rights) fails to serve as an overarching space for the articulation of all differences. Thus, it seems, the national and local spaces have entered into a phase where their transformation is no longer synchronic. In the local space of Diyarbakir, the presence and activities of the DEHAP municipality as well as of the diverse associations is generating a new set of problems that are more biopolitical than constitutional or political in the narrow sense. Kurdish identity competes with the identity of being a woman, being an artist, an environmentalist or a social worker. The specific problems related to living in a locality seem to gain as much weight as problems related to being a Kurd.

This inevitably put an unfamiliar pressure, both on local forces aligned with the Kurdish movement and on the movement's headquarters. The two-track development of the movement, on a national-international level on the one hand and on the local level on the other, has in fact altered the discourse of its central command. In November 2003, the KONGRA-GEL, the new Conference of the People's Congress of Kurdistan that is supposed to supersede the PKK, announced the beginning of a new era of Kurdish politics and called for dialogue with the Turkish state.[42] The new party line is summarized in the catchphrase 'democratic-ecological.' KONGRA-GEL also announced that the 21st century would be that of women.

DEHAP has also changed, despite the recent row over local elections. It now has to compete with the various civic associations that began positioning themselves differently and entertaining alternative relations with the urban population.

Concluding Remarks

Coming back to the theoretical framework outlined at the beginning of the paper, the case of Diyarbakir in particular, and of the Kurdish conflict in general, demonstrate that antagonism may indeed hinder contact between conflicting parties, but it nevertheless imposes itself as a *common*

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40 Interviews in Diken, ibid..

41 Interview with Selahattin Demirtas in Diyarbakir, 14 Feb., 2004.

42 'Declaration of the Foundation Conference of the People's Congress of Kurdistan', available at: http://www.kurdishinfo.com/

reality to both sides. The reality of conflict simultaneously separates and connects the two parties. This paradox—and only this paradox—explains how antagonism may eventually evolve into a productive agonism without any reasoned debate taking place between the parties. Political and social actors find themselves generating new practices or responding to new demands. Reasoned or otherwise, debate or negotiation then becomes inevitable between formerly antagonistic groups. In fact, neither of the post-war changes narrated in this paper was produced by rational debate. They were the effects of an ongoing depolarization that transformed armed conflict into cultural politics and biopolitics. The new spaces were opened up through conflict and competition, turning the outright antagonism into an agonistic struggle for hegemony. This phenomenon may be considered as the 'conflictual emergence of public spheres', an idea that calls for more theoretical and empirical attention.

The DEHAP municipality played the major role in this transformation. Neither a total 'insider' for being part of the state, nor a total 'outsider', the municipality was in itself a space in-between. The state could not go untouched, since it had now to compete with the municipalities in order not to lose ground to them. It had to respond to demands not of its own making and towards the satisfaction of which its former coping strategies did not suffice. But other former actors also underwent considerable transformation. The outcome of the elections that brought DEHAP to the municipality, in other words, was the event that gave the initial impetus to the formation of a public sphere in Diyarbakir.

The direction that this process of rearticulation will take in the future is as yet indeterminate. Two contradictory possibilities seem to exist. Either the Kurdish movement will lose its cutting edge and be engulfed by biopolitics. This would not only mean that it would fail to constitute a uniting site for collective action but that the era of governmentality in the Foucauldian sense of the word would begin in the Southeast. Instead of violence and intimidation, subjugation would then be brought about through subtle disciplinary practices and through the development of consumption culture. Or the Kurdish movement will readjust itself to become the space in which a new form of 'commun-ity' is formed. This would call for the capacity to articulate the demands and practices of the locality so as to initiate new forms of democratic collective action on a wider level. It would then be able to set the tone of the transformation, instead of merely being subjected to it.

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