

The Making of Cultural Field in Turkey and Syria in the 2010s

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Declaration of Originality

The intellectual content of this thesis, which has been written by me and for which I take full responsibility, is my own, original work, and it has not been previously or concurrently submitted elsewhere for any other examination or degree of higher education. The sources of all paraphrased and quoted materials, concepts, and ideas are fully cited, and the admissible contributions and assistance of others with respect to the conception of the work as well as to linguistic expression are explicitly acknowledged herein.

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Abstract

The Making of Cultural Field in Turkey and Syria in the 2010s

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Assistant Professor Seda Altuğ, Thesis Advisor

This thesis examines the field of cultural production in Turkey and Syria in the 2010s. Employing Pierre Bourdieu's theory of the field of cultural production, this research delves into the primary actors, institutions, and factors that influence cultural production in Turkey and Syria, as well as the challenges and transformations faced by the field. Analyzing how social crises influence the emergence and autonomy of the cultural production field in politically unstable settings, this study aims to consider how the field theory can be adapted and contextualized to address the region's distinctive features and challenges adequately. This study also seeks to comprehend the interplay between the cultural production field and the field of power by scrutinizing actors' habitus, along with their respective positions, roles, and strategies. Lastly, this thesis considers how the notion that the cultural production field inherently evolves towards autonomy might be affected by specific social and cultural conditions. This thesis is based on semi-structured interviews conducted with actors engaged in cultural production field.

50.000 words

Özet

2010'lu Yıllarda Türkiye ve Suriye'de Kültürel Alanın Oluşumu

Ersin Zengin, Yüksek Lisans Adayı, 2023

Boğaziçi Üniversitesi Atatürk İlkeleri ve İnkılap Tarihi Enstitüsü

Doktor Öğretim Üyesi Seda Altuğ, Tez Danışmanı

Bu tez, 2011 yılı sonrasında Türkiye ve Suriye'deki kültürel üretim alanını incelemektedir. Pierre Bourdieu'nun kültürel üretim alanı teorisini kullanarak, bu araştırma, bölgedeki kültürel üretimi etkileyen temel aktörleri, kurumları ve faktörlerin yanı sıra alanın karşılaştığı zorlukları ve dönüşümleri ele almaktadır. Toplumsal krizlerin istikrarsız ortamlardaki kültürel üretim alanının ortaya çıkışını ve özerkliğini nasıl etkilediğini analiz eden bu çalışma, alan teorisinin bölgenin ayırt edici özelliklerini ve zorluklarını yeterince ele almak için nasıl uyarlanabileceğini ve bağlamsallaştırılabileceğini incelemeyi amaçlamaktadır. Bu çalışma aynı zamanda aktörlerin habitusunu, konumlarını, rollerini ve stratejilerini irdeleyerek kültürel üretim alanı ile iktidar alanı arasındaki etkileşimi kavramayı amaçlamaktadır. Son olarak, bu tez, kültürel üretim alanının doğası gereği özerkliğe doğru evrildiği fikrinin belirli sosyal ve kültürel koşullardan nasıl etkilenebileceğini ele almaktadır. Bu tez bölgenin kültürel üretim alanında faaliyet gösteren aktörlerle yapılan yarı yapılandırılmış görüşmelere dayanmaktadır.

50.000 kelime

to my mother Qaro and my father Celal

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Introduction

The wave of anti-government demonstrations that began in Tunisia in December 2010 swiftly spread across the Arab world, encompassing Syria, and leading to significant revolutions in Egypt, Tunisia, Yemen, and Libya. These events prompted governmental, constitutional, and radical socio-political transformations throughout the region. In Syria, the Arab Spring initiated a series of protests in March 2011, which subsequently escalated into a full-blown civil war. In 2012, following the withdrawal of Syrian regime forces, the Kurdish forces in the country's northeastern region seized power and established an autonomous administration. This development thrust the Syrian Kurds, who had previously received limited attention in historical and political literature, into the spotlight. Consequently, scholars from diverse disciplines, including politics, military studies, administrative, and international relations, have been drawn to investigate this newfound autonomy. Despite the surge of research, the cultural field and its implications have remained largely underexplored in these academic endeavors.

The study seeks to examine the landscape of cultural production in the northeastern region of Syria, specifically in the aftermath of the events of 2011. It aims to provide a comprehensive examination of the key actors and institutions operating within the cultural production field,

as well as an analysis of the factors that shape their habitus and capital. Through an in-depth examination of the cultural production in the region, this thesis aims to shed light on the ways in which the cultural production field has evolved and the challenges that it currently faces. Additionally, the study will explore the ways in which the cultural field has been shaped by historical and political events and how it reflects the social and political realities of the region. Despite the substantial transformations that have transpired in the region's cultural, artistic, and media landscapes since the establishment of the autonomous administration, there has been a dearth of comprehensive research on the developments in the field of cultural production in northeast Syria.¹ This study aspires to bridge that gap by offering a nuanced examination of the activities in the publishing field and the role various institutions have played in the advancement of cultural production in the region.

When we examine the evolution of the cultural production field in northeast Syria over the past decade, we can see the presence of a dynamically emerging cultural production field under construction. This field has developed within the unique and specific conditions of northeast Syria, striving to establish its own norms, values, and institutions. Emerging literary and cultural production fields, such as the one in northeast Syria, exhibit certain differences compared to established literary and cultural production fields that are more stable and predominantly within the boundaries of nation-states. When analyzing the emerging cultural production field in northeast Syria, it is essential to take these differences into account. A cultural field under construction refers to a newly emerging social space or domain where the norms, rules, and power relations are not yet firmly established. Unlike established fields,

¹ The 2011 uprisings in Syria led to a shift in the administration of northern and eastern regions, with Kurdish forces assuming control. However, as events in the region continued to unfold, the official name and function of the governing body underwent changes, ultimately leading to the adoption of the name "Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria" (AANES) in 2018. Throughout this thesis, I will predominantly refer to a geographical region encompassing the northeastern part of Syria using the acronym AANES.

a field under construction tends to have a more fluid and less rigid structure, with less clear-cut hierarchies and categories. Power relations in a field under construction are often in flux, with different actors vying for positions of dominance or influence. The norms and rules that govern the field might not be clearly defined yet, and there can be more room for innovation, disruption, and contestation. The forms of capital (economic, social, cultural, symbolic) that are most valued within the field might still be emerging and might not yet be fully recognized or legitimized. There might be ongoing disputes about the boundaries of the field, including who can participate in the field and what practices or discourses are considered relevant or legitimate within it.

It is worth noting that all the conditions mentioned above are applicable to the cultural production field in northeast Syria, and it is precisely due to these characteristics that the cultural production field in northeast Syria is an emerging and under-construction field.

According to Johnson, Bourdieu's theory of the field of cultural production and his extremely demanding analytical method encompass the set of social conditions of the production, circulation and consumption of symbolic goods.² Employing Bourdieu's field theory, this thesis investigates the field of cultural production in northeast, focusing on the diverse social agents and practices that contribute to the creation, distribution, and consumption of cultural works and activities within the region. The analysis will delve into the manner in which cultural production is imbued with socio-political significance and serves as a vehicle for the formation and reinforcement of collective identities. It is crucial to recognize that the field of cultural production not only plays an essential role in generating cultural products and endeavors but also significantly impacts the construction of identity and collective consciousness.

Bourdieu's theory of the field of cultural production is a versatile and powerful framework that can be used to analyze a wide range of social

² Randal Johnson, Introduction to *The Field of Cultural Production*, by Pierre Bourdieu (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 9.

contexts, including cultural production in unstable environments. However, its suitability also depends on how it is applied and adapted to these specific conditions. Firstly, the concept of the 'field' is flexible and can be adapted to different contexts. In unstable environments, this framework can help us understand how cultural producers navigate uncertainty, negotiate power relations, and adapt their strategies to changing conditions. Secondly, Bourdieu's theory emphasizes power dynamics, which are often intensified in unstable environments. This allows for a nuanced analysis of the struggles and strategies of different actors. Bourdieu's focus on struggle and power relations within the field of cultural production could be highly relevant in the context of the AANES, where cultural production is influenced by political conflict, resistance against oppression, political divisions, and attempts to construct a new society. Thirdly, Bourdieu's theory acknowledges that fields are influenced by broader social, political, and economic contexts. This is particularly relevant in the AANES, where external factors such as regional politics, international alliances, and war have a profound impact on cultural production. Lastly, the theory's focus on different types of capital (economic, cultural, social, and symbolic) can illuminate how resources are mobilized, valued, and contested in contexts of instability. Bourdieu's concept of the 'habitus' allows for an understanding of how socialized norms and practices might shift in response to changing conditions. The new societal norms being built in the AANES and how they impact cultural production could be explored through Bourdieu's concepts of cultural capital and habitus. However, Bourdieu's theory might not fully capture some specific aspects of cultural production in the AANES. In rapidly changing environments, the structures and dynamics of the field might be more volatile than Bourdieu's theory typically assumes. The scale and speed of social change in the AANES might challenge some of Bourdieu's assumptions about the relative stability of fields and the durability of the habitus. Bourdieu's theory often assumes relatively clear boundaries for fields, which might be difficult to discern in unstable environments. Thus, it is important to acknowledge some potential challenges and limitations of field theory.

Political crises can have a significant impact on cultural production, influencing the themes, content, and form of artistic or cultural works, as well as the way in which they are received. Crises can also shape the historical narratives and traditions of specific art forms within a local or regional context. Cultural production can become a site of contention in conflicts, particularly those with an ethnic or national dimension, as it allows for the promotion and contestation of symbols, images, identities, and justifications. Socio-political events such as wars, revolutions, and popular uprisings, can have a significant impact on the field of cultural production. These events can alter the conditions under which cultural production takes place, leading to changes in the types of cultural products that are produced, how they are produced, and who produces them. During times of war or political turmoil, for example, the focus of cultural production may shift away from artistic or aesthetic concerns and towards themes that reflect the realities of the conflict, such as propaganda or resistance art. Censorship and control over the circulation of cultural production can also increase, leading to a suppression of certain ideas, beliefs, or representations that the governing authority deems harmful or inappropriate. Political events can have both a direct and indirect impact on cultural production, shaping the themes, forms, and distribution of cultural products, and influencing the artistic freedom, opportunities, and representation of cultural producers.

Cultural production in northeast Syria before 2011 was either banned or heavily regulated by the Baath regime; however, since the uprising, there has been a notable expansion of cultural production, making it a fascinating area for study. The examination of cultural production in the AANES provides insight into the cultural dimensions of the self-governance project and sheds light on broader political and social developments within the region.

One of the key strengths of Bourdieu's approach to cultural production lies in its ability to strike a balance between highlighting the pursuit of autonomy within the realm of cultural production, which has been

a prevalent trend since the 1800s, and emphasizing the interconnectedness of this field with other spheres such as the economic and political fields, which comprise the field of power. Additionally, Bourdieu's perspective also takes into account the educational and intellectual fields. This approach to understanding the intersections of various fields, particularly the focus on power dynamics, sets Bourdieu's sociology of cultural production apart from other sociological perspectives on culture.³

Bourdieu's field theory posits that culture is not simply a reflection of society, but rather an integral part of the social structure. The concept of a field focuses on identifying social spaces that are relatively autonomous and centered around a specific activity. These spaces have been built over time through conflicts and power interactions, and they have developed their own rules, evaluation principles, institutions, the mechanisms of recognition and legitimation, classification systems, and unique structures of relative positions. According to Bourdieu, the cultural field is a site of struggle where individuals and groups compete for cultural capital and symbolic power. Cultural production, in this sense, is not just the creation of art or media, but also the production of knowledge, values, and norms that shape society. Bourdieu argues that the field of cultural production is composed of some types of capital. One of these is economic capital, which is the financial resources used to produce and disseminate cultural goods and services, and the other is cultural capital, which refers to the knowledge, skills, and education that give individuals access to and status within the field.⁴

According to Bourdieu's perspective, the field of cultural production serves as an analytical framework for examining the social implications of the creation, distribution, and reception of cultural and literary works. The theory also delves into the symbolic significance of these products within society, and the manner in which they perpetuate existing social structures through reception. In essence, the field of cultural

³ Richard Peterson and N. Anand, "The Production of Culture Perspective," *Annual Review of Sociology* 30 (2004): 311-334.

⁴ Pierre Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production*, trans. Randal Johnson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993).

production allows for an exploration of how cultural artifacts are produced, disseminated, consumed, and their relationship with the field of power. In this thesis, I employ Pierre Bourdieu's concept of the field to examine how the field of cultural production in northeast Syria has evolved in conjunction with the broader transformations in the political field. Through a rigorous application of field theory, I aim to provide a nuanced understanding of the dynamics shaping cultural production in the context of this unique and rapidly changing region.

To comprehensively grasp the dynamics of cultural production in northeast Syria, it is essential to consider factors such as the historical suppression of Kurdish identity, culture, and language under the Baath regime, as well as the region's ongoing conflict. Moreover, the distinctive autonomous governance structure in northeast Syria, along with the influence of the Kurdish political movement in shaping cultural production, require thorough investigation. Furthermore, to understand the dynamics of cultural production in northeast Syria, it would be necessary to adapt Bourdieu's theory to take into account the unique political and economic context of the region and the specific ways in which cultural capital and power are distributed among the various agents involved in cultural production. This could involve a close examination of the role of the states such as Syria, Turkey, and non-state armed actors, as well as the influence of transnational actors in shaping the field of cultural production in northeast Syria.

In my thesis, as mentioned above, I argue that Bourdieu's theory of the field of cultural production can be applied to the autonomous experience in northeast Syria. I suggest that while there may be challenges in applying the theory in this context, such as a lack of historical and statistical data, a more nuanced approach that takes into account the unique contexts and cultures of the region can still provide valuable insights. I suggest that the theory of the field of cultural production can be used to understand the dynamics of power and capital in the field of cultural production in northeast Syria, as well as the ways in which cultural goods and symbols are produced, disseminated, and consumed. The study also

mentions that the theory can be useful in understanding the challenges faced by cultural actors in the Middle East, such as political instability, civil wars.

1.1 Methodology

This study's qualitative approach centers around the use of in-depth interviews, conducted in accordance with established protocols for this method.⁵ A total of twenty-three individuals were interviewed for the purpose of this research.

Throughout the research process, a variety of ethical considerations arose, particularly in relation to the sensitive nature of the topic being studied. Maintaining confidentiality was a significant challenge, not only due to the inherent power dynamics present in qualitative research, but also because of the political undertones of the subject matter and the identities of the participants. Additionally, the relationship between the researcher and participants was further complicated by the politicized nature of the topic. To safeguard the confidentiality of my interview participants, I have chosen to withhold their identifying information throughout this thesis. Although I stated to all my interviewees that I would keep their names at the beginning of the interview, whether in writing or verbally, some interviewees accepted this, while others stated that it was not very important. Nonetheless, I have consistently maintained anonymity for all participants throughout the course of this study.

The undertaking of a thesis on the cultural production process in northeast Syria presented a number of methodological challenges. It is important to acknowledge that conducting online interviews throughout the research presents some challenges. One of them is related to lack of contextual understanding. Although the region is an ongoing conflict zone, I believe that not being physically present there limited my ability

⁵ Herbert J. Rubin and Irene S. Rubin, *Qualitative Interviewing: The Art of Hearing Data* (Thousand Oaks, CA; London, UK: Sage Publications, 2005), 30.

to comprehensively understand the local social, cultural, and political dynamics necessary for accurate analysis throughout my research. I would like to express that being away from the research field has always created a sense of doing things incompletely for me. Not being on the field can limit the researcher's immersion in the local context, which is often critical for developing a nuanced understanding of the complexities and subtleties of dynamics of the cultural production field. Conducting remote research can result in missed opportunities to connect with other local stakeholders outside of the available networking connections. One of the challenges of not being in the research field is that I couldn't follow events related to cultural production, such as seminars, festivals, workshops, book promotion days, and theater festivals there. I must mention that there are no audio or visual recordings of such events, or they don't find enough space on social media.

Between 2019 and 2022, I conducted a total of twenty-three structured or semi-structured interviews, primarily with individuals residing in the AANES. These interviews were primarily conducted via WhatsApp and other messaging platforms, either through video, audio, or text. In these interactions, I introduced myself firstly, conveyed the purpose and subject of my thesis, and posed the questions I intended to ask. Some interviewees requested additional time to provide thoughtful responses, while others referred me to other potential interviewees. All these interviews were conducted in Kurdish. For me, conducting remote research often makes it difficult to establish rapport and trust with research participants that is necessary for collecting reliable and accurate data. This seemed like a challenging issue to overcome, especially in the initial stages of interviews with some participants. Additionally, some interviewees were reticent to provide detailed responses, citing political distance from current autonomous administration or a lack of trust in the interviewer. Furthermore, some interviewees were unable to provide sufficient time for the interview due to their busy schedules.

Conducting remote research limits access to primary data sources such as direct observation, face-to-face interviews or focus groups. In

some cases, one of the challenges of this research is that participants give almost completely opposite answers to the same question, and I don't have the opportunity to directly observe which one is closer to the truth. Another one of the significant limitations of this thesis is the language barrier that arises from the bilingualism of the writers in the region, rendering me unable to fully engage with the works of Kurdish writers written in Arabic, as well as the fact that a substantial portion of the publishing and cultural production activities in the region are conducted in Arabic.

On the other hand, there are some advantages to conducting online interviews, especially with those in conflict zones. Al-thalathini et al. point out that having the interview conducted online, allowed the participants to maintain their privacy and security, increased their trust in the researcher, and eliminated the risks and fears associated with inviting a stranger into their premises. From the researcher perspective, given the risks and vulnerabilities involved in conducting research in conflict zones, it is unethical to risk the researcher's safety and wellbeing for face-to-face data collection in conflict zones.⁶

Another advantage is that the lack of time constraints allows both the researcher and the respondent to thoroughly contemplate their inquiries and responses, potentially engaging in the reevaluation, and refinement of their replies to questions. Interviewees can answer the interview questions entirely at their own convenience. James shows how this can enable the research process to become more reflexive, allowing both researcher and participant to reflect on the interview data and experience⁷.

⁶ Doaa Al-thalathini, Haya Al-Dajani, and Nikolaos Apostolopoulos, "The Impact of Islamic Feminism in Empowering Women's Entrepreneurship in Conflict Zones: Evidence from Afghanistan, Iraq and Palestine," *Journal of Business Ethics* 178 (2022): doi: 10.1007/s10551-021-04818-z.

⁷ Nalita James, "The Use of Email Interviewing as a Qualitative Method of Inquiry in Educational Research," *British Educational Research Journal* 33, no. 6 (2007): 963-76, doi: 10.1080/01411920701657074.

Furthermore, the gender distribution of interviewees was imbalanced, with only four out of twenty-three interviewees being women. This disparity may have been due to a reluctance on the part of female interviewees to engage with a male interviewer. Additionally, some interviewees expressed discomfort with certain questions, particularly those pertaining to personal information.

It was difficult to access cultural artifacts and activities produced in the region. Direct access to published materials within the sphere of Kurdish publishing in Syria remained unattainable, and online availability was similarly restricted. Most of the accessible periodicals were supplied by respondents in the form of PDFs. In addition, while certain magazines and literary associations engaged in cultural production maintained dedicated websites, numerous sites appeared either outdated or lacked professional presentation. Moreover, the predominant reliance on Facebook for disseminating information about cultural events and publications was noted.

Lastly, it is important to clarify that this thesis predominantly concentrates on the Kurdish cultural production field centered in Qamishli, with the particularity that conducting an academic study from a distance without being in the field led me to focus on the cultural production domain in a Qamishli-centric manner. The connections and relationships between the cultural production field in northeast Syria and the rest of Syria, as well as its relationships with Syrian Kurdish circles abroad—particularly in Germany—are not addressed in this thesis. Furthermore, the influence of the Syrian regime on the Kurdish cultural production field, as well as the Arabic and Syriac cultural production studies in northeast Syria are not encompassed within the scope of this research. While the study attempts to provide a comparative analysis of the cultural production field in neighboring countries, specifically the Iraqi Kurdistan Regional Administration (KRG), a comprehensive examination of these interactions and relations is not conducted. Further research is necessary to explore the gender dimension of cultural production in

northeast Syria and to analyze the content, themes, writing styles, and issues of the works produced. As a result, this thesis does not possess any knowledge or insights pertaining to these matters. Undoubtedly, these aspects will be the focus of future research endeavors. These additional investigations will contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the region's cultural landscape and its underlying dynamics.

I hope this thesis will enhance our academic comprehension of the cultural production process in northeast Syria. By employing Bourdieu's field theory and extending its theoretical framework, I hope this study offers valuable insights into the relationship between a political identity movement and the field of cultural production.

1.2 Summary of Chapters

In the second chapter of this thesis, I will examine the historical context and power dynamics within which Kurdish cultural production has emerged in both Syria and Turkey. Specifically, I will delve into the political, economic, and social developments that have shaped the experiences of Kurds in Syria, highlighting key events and figures that have played a significant role in the history of the Syrian Kurds. I will examine the endeavors and pursuits within the sphere of cultural production by Syrian Kurds before 2011, and subsequently delve into the emergence of autonomy experienced by Syrian Kurds in the post-2011 period. Concurrently, I will conduct a comparative analysis of the circumstances surrounding Kurds' cultural production in Turkey, taking into account the historical context of political, economic, and social developments that have shaped Kurdish experiences in this country. Ultimately, my analysis will focus on comprehending the activities and efforts of Kurds within the sphere of cultural production across the Syrian-Turkish border.

In the third chapter of this study, I will engage in a critical examination of Pierre Bourdieu's theory of the field of cultural production, specifically focusing on key concepts such as field, capital, and habitus, as a means of providing an analytical framework for this thesis. Through this examination, I will assess the suitability of this theory as a conceptual

framework for non-European regions, particularly the Middle East. Furthermore, I will explore potential adaptations to the theory that may be necessary to effectively analyze the cultural production landscape in this region. Subsequently, I will delve into an examination of the impact of social crises on the field of cultural production in the context of the Middle East, focusing on the Syria case. In the final part of this chapter, an attempt will be made to comparatively analyze the similarities and dissimilarities of the cultural production and publishing fields by juxtaposing the experiences of self-governance in northeast Syria with those of the Palestinian National Authority and post-apartheid South Africa.

In the fourth chapter of this thesis, a comprehensive analysis of the political economy of the field of cultural production within the context of northeast Syria will be undertaken. The main emphasis of this chapter will be to scrutinize the interconnections between politics and the field of cultural production. In this chapter, the main agents, institutions, and their respective positions within the field of cultural production in northeast Syria will be explored, along with the interplay between this field and both the economic field and the field of power. This analysis will provide insights into the dynamics and relationships among these fields, as well as the impact of the political forces on the cultural production landscape in the region. Lastly, in this chapter, following an analysis of the unfolding cultural practices and developments in northeast Syria since the post-2011 period, a concise comparative analysis will be conducted between the cultural production field in northeast Syria and its counterpart in the neighboring Iraqi Kurdistan Regional Administration, in order to illuminate the distinctive characteristics of each context.

The fifth chapter offers a comprehensive analysis of northeast Syria's cultural production field, focusing on actors' habitus, roles, positions, and strategies. The chapter investigates various aspects, including field-specific challenges, actors' positioning in relation to political context, relationships and interactions within the field, and the influence of Arabic on cultural production. Furthermore, it explores the interplay be-

tween actors and the autonomous administration through specific mechanisms like censorship and consecration. By examining these elements, the chapter aims to provide a nuanced understanding of the complex dynamics shaping the cultural production field in northeast Syria

2

The History of Culture and Politics in Turkey and Syria

In this chapter, I attempt to present a history of the political and cultural history of Kurds in Turkey and Syria. I will briefly explore the evolution of the cultural field before 2011. Next, I will compare the stance of Kurdish agents in relation to the Syrian state's policies on Kurdish identity, language, and culture to the corresponding circumstances in Turkey, primarily focusing on the Republican era. To facilitate this comparison, I will concisely explore the foundational motivations of cultural policies enacted in tandem with the establishment of the Republic of Turkey, and the relationship between the emergence of the cultural production field and the nascent nation-state. The historical analysis presented here aims not to provide a comprehensive and detailed examination of the cultural production field or the constructive role of political history, but rather to understand the general traces that this political, historical, and cultural background has carried to the present day.

2.1 Historical and Political Background

The Kurds in the Middle East is the largest minority population. Kurdistan as a geographical entity is divided between the states of Iran, Iraq, Turkey and Syria. The population of the Syrian Kurds is estimated to be nearly between 2 and 2.5 million (1.9 million citizens, 350,000 foreigners and 250,000 unregistered-without ID) which equals to 11–12% of the 22-million Syrian population in total.¹ These numbers demonstrate that the Kurds are the biggest non-Arab minority in Syria, and as a high number of Kurds are deprived of basic rights and of the Syrian citizenship until, it is more difficult to estimate the actual number.² However, this situation changed after the 2011 Syrian uprising. The Syrian regime granted citizenship to the Kurds to reduce the protest movements in the Kurdish regions. According to Schmidinger, At the beginning of April, President Assad proclaimed that the stateless Kurds would get their Syrian citizenship back. Decree No. 49 of 7 April 2011 gave all *ajānīb*, that is, all those who were regarded as foreigners, but not the non-registered *maktūmīn*, the right to citizenship.³

Allsopp notes that the Kurdish areas of Syria are located in the north of the country, along the borders with Turkey and the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. The three main Kurdish regions in Syria are the Kurd Dagħ (Kurdish mountains) in the northwest; Kobanî, to the east of the Kurd Dagħ; and the Jazira, which roughly corresponds to Hasaka province, in the northeast of Syria. In these regions Kurds grow up with the Kurmanji dialect of Kurdish as their first language and do not start learning Arabic until they begin school, at about six years of age. Kurdish community in

¹ Bekir Halhallı, "Kurdish Political Parties in Syria: Past Struggles and Future Expectations," in *Comparative Kurdish Politics in the Middle East: Actors, Ideas, and Interests*, eds. Emel Elif Tugdar and Serhun Al (Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 29.

² *Ibid*, 29.

³ Thomas Schmidinger, *Rojava Revolution, War, and the Future of Syria's Kurds*, trans. Michael Schiffmann (London: Pluto Press, 2018), 86.

Damascus is more integrated into Arab society and will often use Arabic as their first language. Large numbers of Kurds also live in other cities and regions such as Raqqa, Dayr al-Zor, Aleppo, Homs and Latakia.⁴

Modern Syria like modern Turkey is borne out of the post-World War I agreements. Nevertheless, the Sykes-Picot agreement signed secretly between Great Britain and France (1916) roughly defined its borders. The San Remo Conference following WWI designated Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, Palestine and Iraq under the mandatory rule of France and Britain. The League of Nations granted France the mandate to rule Syria and Lebanon. During the mandate period (1921- 1946) France worked to establish a new political and administrative structure in Syria, while also pursuing its own economic and strategic interests. The mandate period in Syria was marked by political instability, economic difficulties, and opposition to French rule, which ultimately led to an anti-colonial Arab nationalist movement that sought independence from France. In 1946, Syria became an independent republic, marking the end of the mandate period.

Following the uprising led by Sheikh Said (1925) in Turkey, a significant number of Kurdish individuals opposed to the newly established regime in Turkey relocated to Syria.⁵ According to Allsopp, Syria was the recipient of many members of Turkey's Kurdish nationalist and traditional leadership. This included Kurds such as Emin Ali Bedirxan, his sons Celadet Ali (1893- 1951), Kamuran (1895-1978) and Sureya Bedirxan (1883-1938), who had been involved in Kurdish cultural and political activities under the Ottoman Empire, Ihsan Nouri Pasha (1893- 1976) who was to lead the Ararat Revolt, and both Ekrem Cemil Pasha (1891-1974) and Kadri Cemil Pasha (1892-1973), as well as Kurdish intellectuals such as Osman Sabri (1905- 1993). While in Syria, these Kurdish exiles continued efforts to promote Kurdish culture and organize the Kurds against the Turkish government. The Bedirxan brothers renewed their struggle

⁴ Harriet Allsopp, "The Kurds of Syria: Political Parties and Identity in the Middle East" (I.B. Tauris, 2014), 29.

⁵ Ibid, 58.

for Kurdish independence and unity and Celadet Bedirxan was one of the founding members of the Xoybûn League, the first Kurdish political organization seeking independence for Kurdistan and bringing together Kurdish leaders from all areas of Kurdistan.⁶ Xoybûn was created in 1927 through the efforts of Kurdish exiles.⁷ The organization was established in Lebanon and comprised Kurdish intellectuals, leaders of tribes, sheikhs, and rebel fighters from Turkey, Iraq, and Syria. The primary goal of the league was to unite the Kurdish movement and focus their efforts on Turkey, with the aim of freeing Kurds from Turkish domination. In Syria, The French mandate authorities, while not obstructing Kurdish cultural expression, were reluctant to grant specific cultural or political rights to the Kurds and utilized the Kurdish issue for their own benefit. The French mandate administration implemented a kind of policy of balance between the different populations under its rule. According to Altuğ, anxious of the economic, social and political costs of settling the refugee populations in inner Syria or the frontier zone, the French authorities attempted to make a rational balance between the colonial interests, the interests of the refugees, the Syrian Arab nationalists and the political claims of the Turkish state.⁸ With the exception of some limited protests in 1937, the Kurdish region of Syria did not experience significant political unrest or violent conflict during the period of French mandatory.⁹ In the 1930s, a Kurdish linguistic and cultural revival was facilitated with the aid of the French authorities in Syria, where Kurdish intellectuals such as Celadet Ali and Kamuran Bedirxan established several journals. One of the first was "Hawar" (The Calling), which was published between 1932 and 1935, and then again between 1941 and

⁶ Ibid, 57.

⁷ Ibid, 57-58.

⁸ Seda Altuğ, "Sectarianism in the Syrian Jazira: Community, Land and Violence in the Memories of World War I and the French Mandate (1915–1939)," PhD Dissertation, University of Utrecht, 2011, 76.

⁹ Wadie Jwaideh, "The Kurdish National Movement: Its Origins and Development." Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 2006, 143.

1943.¹⁰ The focus of the publication was to promote the Kurdish alphabet and to further the study of Kurdish grammar. It also featured works of Kurdish classics, folklore, as well as historical and ethnographic studies. The first twenty-three issues of *Hawar* were published in both Latin and Arabic script. Then with the twenty-fourth issue, it started to be published only in Latin script.¹¹ The journal *Ronahî* came out in April 1, 1942, as a supplement of *Hawar* and ended in March 1945 leaving twenty-eight issues behind. The journal came out monthly with a few exceptions. The word 'Ronahî' means 'light' or 'illumination'.¹² These journals were distributed in Syria and smuggled into Turkey, where they helped to spread the use of the Kurdish alphabet and became a foundation for the development of Kurdish national identity. Today, these journals and their founders are still held in high esteem and are considered central to Kurdish cultural heritage.¹³

The Kurdish political movement could not bring various political groups together after the disintegration of *Xoybûn* movement, in the end of 1940s, some of prominent Kurdish individuals such as Cegerxwin, Qedri Can, Osman Sabri, Resid Hamo and Muhammed Ali Hoca turned towards the Syrian Communist Party.¹⁴

Between 1946 and 1957, the Syrian Kurds, who predominantly experienced marginalization, did not possess a political party explicitly advocating for Kurdish rights. This absence can be attributed to the suppression of their social, cultural, and political rights. It was in the latter half of the 1950s that a discernible policy of discrimination against the

¹⁰ Harriet Allsopp, "The Kurds of Syria: Political Parties and Identity in the Middle East" (I.B. Tauris, 2014), 61.

¹¹ Ronayî Önen, "The Role of Language in the Discursive Construction of the Kurdish Nation: A Case Study on the Kurdish Periodical *Hawar* (1932-1943)" (master's thesis, Istanbul Bilgi University, Institute of Social Sciences, 2012), 3.

¹² *Ibid.*, 4.

¹³ Harriet Allsopp, "The Kurds of Syria: Political Parties and Identity in the Middle East" (I.B. Tauris, 2014), 29.; Jordi Tejel, *Syria's Kurds: History, Politics and Society* (New York: Routledge, 2009), 22-23.

¹⁴ Halhalli, "Kurdish Political Parties in Syria: Past Struggles and Future Expectations," 31.

Kurds in Syria emerged, as pan-Arabism started to gain momentum. Prior to the establishment of the United Arab Republic, a unification of Syria and Egypt, the Kurdistan Democratic Party in Syria was founded in 1957. Its agenda encompassed the principal demands for cultural rights recognition, such as education in the mother tongue, and inclusion of Kurds in military and security positions, as well as public service roles.

Since Syria's independence, the governments in Damascus have predominantly viewed the presence of Kurds within their borders as a security concern.¹⁵ With the rise to power of the Baath party in the 1963, a program of Arabization was implemented, which entailed the prohibition of Kurdish publications, alteration of Kurdish place names, and the ceasing of registration for children with Kurdish names. While pursuing the objective of assimilating the rest of the Syrian population through the promotion of the Arabic language in accordance with Baath ideology, discriminatory measures were taken against the Kurds.¹⁶ In 1962, a census was conducted in the Hasaka province, resulting in the revocation of Syrian citizenship for approximately 120,000 to 150,000 Kurds, who were deemed as refugees from Turkey or Iraq.¹⁷ This segregation led to the emergence of two groups: the *ajanib*, (foreigners) who were recorded as stateless individuals, and the unregistered *maqtumiin* ("hidden"). Without a Syrian ID, the affected Kurds were unable to move freely, have, legal marriage, land ownership, voting, government aid, or public office. As a result of their descendants not receiving citizenship, the proportion of stateless Kurds grew over time, constituting approximately 500,000.¹⁸ After an unofficial journey, the government started to undertake a policy of Arabization along the eastern stretch of the Turkish-Syrian frontier.¹⁹

¹⁵ Harriet Allsopp, "The Kurds of Syria: Political Parties and Identity in the Middle East" (I.B. Tauris, 2014).; Harriet Allsopp and Wladimir van Wilgenburg, *The Kurds of Northern Syria: Governance, Diversity and Conflicts* (United Kingdom: Bloomsbury Publishing PLC, 2019).; Jordi Tejel, *Syria's Kurds: History, Politics and Society* (New York: Routledge, 2009).

¹⁶ David McDowall, *A Modern History of Kurds*, 4th ed. (London: I.B. Tauris, 2020), 680-685.

¹⁷ Harriet Allsopp, "The Kurds of Syria: Political Parties and Identity in the Middle East", 139.

¹⁸ *Ibid*, 143.

¹⁹ David McDowall, *A Modern History of Kurds*, 682.

As part of its Arabization policy (the formation of a so-called “Arab Belt”), the Syrian government has been relocating Arabs from the Euphrates Valley to many towns along the Turkish border since the 1970s. Additionally, the Syrian regime banned the usage of the Kurdish language, observance of Kurdish festivals, and the formation of Kurdish parties. In the process of Arabizing the Kurdish regions, numerous villages underwent name changes, with the ban on singing Kurdish songs at weddings and giving Kurdish names to newborns. The Kurds in Syria have been subjected to a range of discriminatory practices, including economic disadvantage, such as the lack of subsidization for Kurdish farmers in north-west Syria, as well as Arabization, harassment, and denial of citizenship rights. Kurdish was never recognized as an official language, with the Kurds prohibited from running their own schools and the printing of Kurdish books being prohibited.²⁰

The emergence of a new factor in the Kurdish question in Syria during the early 1980s can be attributed to the relocation of the PKK leadership to Syria following the 1980 military coup in Turkey. This development allowed the PKK to establish training camps in the Beqa Valley in Lebanon and offices in Syria, which served as both a logistical and deployment base and a starting point for military actions. Initially, the PKK's presence was met with sympathy among the Kurdish population, leading to a significant number of young Kurds joining the organization as fighters.²¹ As a result, the PKK was allowed to recruit Kurds of Syrian origin to fight in Turkey, leading to an estimated 7,000 to 10,000 Syrian Kurds losing their lives in the conflict.²² Syrian state support for the PKK persisted until the late 1990s, at which point Turkey was able to increase

²⁰ Harriet Allsopp, “The Kurds of Syria: Political Parties and Identity in the Middle East” (I.B. Tauris, 2014).; Harriet Allsopp and Wladimir van Wilgenburg, *The Kurds of Northern Syria: Governance, Diversity and Conflicts* (United Kingdom: Bloomsbury Publishing PLC, 2019).; Jordi Tejel, *Syria's Kurds: History, Politics and Society* (New York: Routledge, 2009).

²¹ David McDowall, *A Modern History of Kurds*, 686.

²² Jordi Tejel, *Syria's Kurds: History, Politics and Society*, 76.

pressure on Syria through cutting the water from the Euphrates River, forcing the Syrian government to expel Abdullah Öcalan, the leader of the PKK and take action against the PKK in 1998.²³ In order to evade subsequent repression in Syria, the PKK ceased its political activities and the PYD was founded as a new party in 2003 to continue to bind Syrian supporters and PKK members to the party.²⁴

During the first decade of the 2000s, developments in Iraq, particularly the negotiations on the new constitution in 2004/05 and the election of Talabani as president in 2005, encouraged younger generations of Syrian Kurds to engage in more daring forms of protest. This resulted in the discovery of the street as a forum for protest actions, as exemplified by the riots in Qamishli on March 12, 2004. These riots, which began as a clash between Kurdish and Arab football fans and turned into aggressive Kurdish demonstrations, were not instigated by any political parties but were supported by the PYD and the Yekîtî. In 2005, the murder of Kurdish liberal Sheikh Muhammad Mashuq al-Xaznawi led to violent clashes between the Syrian security forces and Kurds.²⁵

The escalation of acts of violence against the Kurds in Syria, such as the violent interruption of a peaceful Newroz celebration in Aleppo in 2007, highlights the capacity for resistance among the Syrian Kurds. These events are significant in that they demonstrate the importance of these protests for the Kurdish nationalist movement in Syria and serve as a collective memory, often referred to as "Serhildan" or "rebellion."²⁶

²³ Harriet Montgomery, *Suriye Kürtleri: İnkâr Edilen Halk*, 186.

²⁴ Jordi Tejel, "History of Syrian Kurds and Their Political Parties," in *The Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria: Between A Rock and A Hard Place*, ed. Thomas Schmidinger (London: Transnational Press, 2020), 34.

²⁵ Jordi Tejel, *Syria's Kurds: History, Politics and Society* (New York: Routledge, 2009), 111-114.

²⁶ Harriet Montgomery, *Suriye Kürtleri: İnkâr Edilen Halk* (İstanbul: Avesta, 2007), 33.

2.2 A Brief Overview of Political Developments in Syria After 2011

In the previous section, I tried to briefly summarize the historical developments in Syria up to 2011. In this part, the aim is to provide a concise overview of the main developments in the Kurdish regions of Syria during the post-2011 period. Given the extensive body of literature available on different aspects of this subject,²⁷ my focus will be on presenting the key points in an explanatory manner, rather than reiterating well-documented aspects.

The post-2011 process in Syria was marked by a series of significant events, largely influenced by the outbreak of the Syrian uprising in 2011.

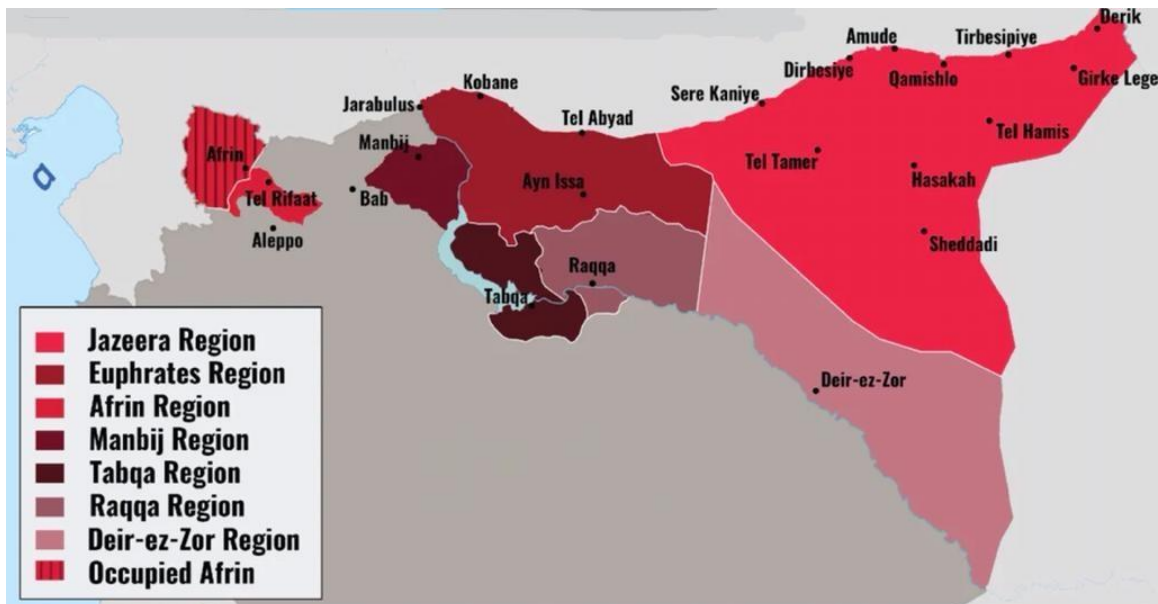
Following the Arab Spring, the uprising against the regime of President Bashar al-Assad began as peaceful protests, which later escalated into a full-fledged armed conflict.

²⁷ Here I will only list some articles written on different aspects of this topic: Can Cemgil and Clemens Hoffmann, "The 'Rojava Revolution' in Syrian Kurdistan: A Model of Development for the Middle East?" *IDS Bulletin* 47, no. 3 (2016): 53-76, doi: 10.19088/1968-2016.144.; Vittoria Federici, "The Rise of Rojava: Kurdish Autonomy in the Syrian Conflict," *The SAIS Review of International Affairs* 35, no. 2 (2015): 81-90, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/27000999>.; Michiel Leezenberg, "The ambiguities of democratic autonomy: the Kurdish movement in Turkey and Rojava," *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies* 16, no. 4 (2016): 671-690, doi: 10.1080/14683857.2016.1246529.; Martin Knapp and Joost Jongerden, "Communal Democracy: The Social Contract and Confederalism in Rojava," *Comparative Islamic Studies* 10, no. 1 (2016): 87-109.; Rana Khalaf, *Governing Rojava: Layers of Legitimacy in Syria* (United Kingdom), accessed April 20, 2023, <https://policycommons.net/artifacts/613664/governing-rojava/1593710/>. CID: 20.500.12592/70tjqj.; Bülent Küçük and Ceren Özselçuk, "The Rojava Experience: Possibilities and Challenges of Building a Democratic Life," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 115, no. 1 (2016): 184-196, doi:10.1215/00382876-3425013.; Bahar Şimşek & Joost Jongerden, "Gender Revolution in Rojava: The Voices beyond Tabloid Geopolitics," *Geopolitics* 26, no. 4 (2018): 1023-1045, doi: 10.1080/14650045.2018.1531283.; Nazan Üstündağ, "Self-Defense as a Revolutionary Practice in Rojava, or How to Unmake the State," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 115, no. 1 (2016): 197-210, doi:10.1215/00382876-3425024. Pinar Tank, "Kurdish Women in Rojava: From Resistance to Reconstruction," *Die Welt des Islams* 57, 3-4 (2017): 404-428, doi: <https://doi.org/10.1163/15700607-05734p07>.

During the early stages of the Syrian civil war in 2012, the Assad regime strategically withdrew its forces from the predominantly Kurdish regions in northern Syria. Facing multiple fronts and resource constraints, the regime decided to focus on combating opposition forces in other parts of the country, leaving a power vacuum in Kurdish areas. This withdrawal allowed the Kurds to establish their own administration and self-governance structures, ultimately leading to the formation of the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria.

On 16 September 2014, ISIS (Islamic state) started a further major offensive against Kobanî during which it succeeded in capturing all villages of the canton and a large part of the city of Kobanî itself.²⁸

The AANES Administrative Regions Map



Source: Rojava Information Center (October 17, 2022).

Kurdish forces, consisting of YPG/YPJ, later with the participation of some peshmerga forces from Iraqi Kurdistan, and some Free Syrian Army factions, mounted a fierce resistance against the brutal assault. With the support of the U.S.-led international coalition's air campaign,

²⁸ Thomas Schmidinger, *Rojava Revolution, War, and the Future of Syria's Kurds*, trans. Michael Schiffmann (London: Pluto Press, 2018), 105.

the Kurdish forces successfully pushed ISIS out of Kobanî by January 2015, marking a major defeat for the extremist group and a turning point in the fight against ISIS in Syria.²⁹

Turkey has launched multiple military operations into Syria since 2016, primarily aimed at preventing the territorial expansion of Kurdish forces along its southern border. The first operation, "Euphrates Shield," began in August 2016 and targeted both ISIS and the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), led predominantly by the Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG). In January 2018, Turkey initiated "Operation Olive Branch" to capture the Afrin region from the YPG. The most recent incursion, "Operation Peace Spring," commenced in October 2019, following the withdrawal of US forces from the area. This operation aimed to establish a "safe zone" along the Turkish-Syrian border and led to the displacement of thousands of Kurdish civilians. These military interventions have sparked international concern over the humanitarian consequences and the potential destabilization of the region.

On January 21, 2014, the "Democratic Autonomous Administration" was formally declared with three autonomous cantons in Afrin, Kobanî, and Jazeera.³⁰ This development was made possible through the collaboration of various political parties represented in the three regions, who negotiated the establishment of an interim government in December 2013. While the administration of the cantons involves representation from Kurdish, Arab, Armenian and Assyrian Christian political entities, the PYD holds a prominent position as it not only provides the majority of the military force but also significantly influences the political landscape. The PYD itself was the initial driving force in Syria behind the expansion of control over Kurdish areas, the formation of the YPG/J and other security forces, as well as the formation and positioning of TEV-

²⁹ David McDowall, *A Modern History of Kurds*, 734-737.

³⁰ Wladimir van Wilgenburg, "Evolution of Kurdish-Led Administrations in Northern Syria," in *The Kurds in the Middle East: Enduring Problems and New Dynamics*, ed. Mehmet Gurses, David Romano, and Michael M. Gunter (Lexington Books, 2020), 152.

DEM³¹ as the driving force of the ‘social revolution’ and its administration.³²

In March 2016, the three Kurdish-controlled regions agreed at a conference in Rumeilan in northeast Syria to establish the self-administered “federal democratic system of Rojava—Northern Syria.”³³ In December 2016, they agreed on a new draft constitution and dropped the word “Rojava” from the newly proposed system of federal government, since the plan was to potentially include Raqqa and Deir Ezzor also into the Democratic Federation of Northern Syria (DFNS).³⁴ This new administration was not just planned as a Kurdish entity only but as a multiethnic region. In July 2017, the decision was made for elections to take place to determine the leadership of the new system of government in SDF-controlled areas.³⁵

Since 6 September 2018, the Syrian Democratic Council has adopted a new name for the region, naming it the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria (AANES). The new administration includes the Interior Body, Education Body, Local Administration Body, Economy and Agriculture Body, Finance Body, the Culture and Art Body, Health and Environment Body, Social Affairs and Labor Body, and the Women’s Body.³⁶ Within AANES, the evolution and adaptation of political and administrative regulations persistently transpire, contingent upon prevailing circumstances and exigencies.

³¹ TEV-DEM, which originated in 2011 and stands for “The Movement for a Democratic Society,” functions as an umbrella body for civil society organizations. The PYD is also a part of this umbrella organization.

³² Wladimir van Wilgenburg, “Evolution of Kurdish-Led Administrations in Northern Syria,” 152.

³³ Ibid, 152.

³⁴ Ibid, 152.

³⁵ Ibid, 152.

³⁶ Ibid, 154.

2.3 Publishing Field in Syria in the Pre-2011 Period

In this part, I will first briefly discuss the cultural policies of the Ba'ath regime in Syria since its rise to power, and then focus on the publishing and cultural activities carried out by Kurds in response to these policies in the pre-2011 period of the Syrian state.

According to Weiss, Syrian writers and intellectuals had begun to band together into associations as early as the 1950s. The Syrian Writers' Collective was founded in 1951 and was then transformed into the Arab Writers' Union in 1954. Formally incorporated only in 1969, it was meant to function as an independent body but over time became bound to the ideological strictures and political influence of the state.³⁷ Upon coming to power in 1963, the Ba'ath regime in Syria initiated a series of cultural policies that sought to centralize control over cultural institutions and promote Arab nationalist ideals. The regime aimed to establish a single, state-sanctioned cultural narrative that emphasized Arab identity, unity, and loyalty to the ruling party. Cultural institutions, such as theaters, publishing houses, and cultural centers, were subjected to state control and often became tools for disseminating Baathist ideology. The regime also imposed censorship measures, restricting artistic and intellectual freedom to maintain its grip on power and suppress dissenting voices. According to Dubois, who stated that the Baathist regime in Syria produced rigid forms of artistic creation in the service of the state's official nationalist and pan-Arab ideology, when the Baath Party took power in 1963, it declared the state of emergency, leading to system-wide controls being put in place over cultural production. This system was reinforced in 1970 with the coup d'état of Hafez al-Assad that purged the country's bureaucracy in order to re-establish control over the cultural institutions. The artistic field then saw various changes. First, there was the opening up to the private sector that took place in the 1990s and saw the arrival of the

³⁷ Max Weiss, *Revolutions Aesthetic: A Cultural History of Ba'athist Syria* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2022), 63.

television series industry.³⁸ The coming to power of Bashar al-Assad created an expectation in cultural circles in the 2000s about the softening of the regime, but the policies implemented under his rule destroyed these hopes. On the other hand, Alexa Firat argues that during the 1960s, Syrian writers, readers, and intellectuals constructed an autonomous field within which literature, film, and other forms of cultural production could gain symbolic and institutional power, with specialized journals, venues for discussion and debate, and modes of marking distinction.³⁹ She noted that dissent against authoritarian practices has been one of the key properties of cultural capital in Syria since at least the 1980s. Fluid in practice, we may look to the publication of *Cultural Battles* (*Ma'āraka thaqāfiyya* 1977), a collection of articles and essays as a way into reading the debates circulating in the field of culture after the consolidation of power by Hafez al-Assad in 1970. These essays foreshadow the cultural environment artists would negotiate for the next thirty-plus years, not only debating the artist's role in society, but also the dynamic of ruling institutions in their lives. Likewise, the emergence of the genre of 'prison literature' in the 1980s provide a framework for reading creative dissent.⁴⁰ In shortly, the Ba'ath regime sought to cultivate a cult of personality around the ruling party and its leaders, particularly Hafez al-Assad, who came to power in 1970. The regime used art, literature, and media to glorify the ruling elite and propagate their vision of the nation. Cultural production was expected to align with the regime's values, emphasizing themes of loyalty, patriotism, and submission to authority. Artists, writers, and intellectuals were encouraged to produce works that celebrated

³⁸ Simon Dubois, "A Field in Exile: The Syrian Theatre Scene in Movement," in *Culture and Crisis in the Arab World: Art, Practice and Production in Spaces of Conflict*, ed. Richard Jacquemond and Felix Lang (London: I.B. Tauris, 2019), 169.

³⁹ Max Weiss, *Revolutions Aesthetic: A Cultural History of Ba'thist Syria*, 63.

⁴⁰ Alexa Firat, "The Symbolic Power of Syrian Collective Memory since 2011," in *Culture and Crisis in the Arab World: Art, Practice and Production in Spaces of Conflict*, ed. Richard Jacquemond and Felix Lang (London: I.B. Tauris, 2019), 54-55.

the regime's achievements and promoted its political agenda, while dissenting voices or works that challenged the regime's narrative faced censorship, prison, repression, or exile.

Prior to 2011 in Syria, the publishing field was predominantly under state control, leading to substantial limitations on press freedom. The situation was exacerbated by the state's official Arab identity and constraints imposed on Kurdish representation, which had considerable repercussions on the Kurdish population. The policies of the Ba'ath party played a significant role in suppressing Kurdish representation within the country. In response, Kurdish political parties and publications resorted to printing their materials in Lebanon and smuggling them into Syria for distribution.

Prior to 2011, there is a notable dearth of research on cultural production in Syria, with the exception of M. Malmîsanij's study.⁴¹ Examining the pre-2011 period in Syria, it is evident that under the Ba'ath regime, Kurdish book publishing and distribution were almost non-existent from 1960 to 1990. The generation born in the 1950s and 1960s, influenced by the national struggles of Kurds in other parts, the collapse of the USSR, and the advancements in communication and technology in the 1990s, attempted to engage in clandestine Kurdish literary and cultural activities within Syria's Kurdish regions. For instance, while only 3 books were published in the 1970s and 20 in the 1980s, the number rose to 111 books in the 1990s. Additionally, previously unpublished genres, such as memoirs and biographies, emerged during the 1990s.⁴²

According to Malmîsanij, The Kurdistan Democratic Party, which was founded illegally in Syria in 1957, clandestinely published a Kurdish newspaper titled *Dengê Kurd*, using Latin script. Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, there were very few books published in Kurdish within Syria.⁴³

⁴¹ M. Malmîsanij, *Türkiye ve Suriye'de Kürtçe Kitap Yayıncılığının Dünü ve Bugünü* (İstanbul: Vate Yayınevi, 2016).

⁴² *Ibid*, 126.

⁴³ *Ibid*, 107.

2000 was the year when Bashar al-Assad inherited the power from his father, Hafez al-Assad. His rule initially raised expectations for change and flexibility in the publishing sector among Kurdish literary circles. However, the newly enacted printing and publishing law, coupled with the Qamishli uprising (2003), significantly hindered the printing of Kurdish books in Syria, even through illegal means.

Between 1990s and 2000s, Syrian-Kurdish writers did not have their own organizations but could be members of the Kurdish PEN, which had its headquarter in Germany. Secretly organized poetry reading events, known as Kurdish Poetry Festivals, have taken place in Syria since 1993. These festivals are held in clandestine locations, sometimes in a basement, other times outdoors in pre-selected rural areas. Poetry awards are presented at these festivals, which have been organized consistently since their inception. Additionally, several Syrian Kurdish writers, such as Konê Reş, Seydayê Tirêj, and Dilawerê Zengî, have received literary and cultural awards in KRG during the 1990s and 2000s.⁴⁴ Kurdish intellectuals managed to publish some journals, such as *Gurzek Gul* (1989–92), *Zanîn* (1991–97), *Aso* (1992), *Pirs* (1993), *Hêvî* (1993), *Delav* (1995), and *Xwendevan* (1995). In addition, since 1980, political parties launched various newspapers: *Stêr* (1983–95), *Xunav* (1986–95), *Roj* (1991), *Deng* (1995), and *Newroz* (1995). Finally, Kurdish students were very active in sponsoring clandestine literacy courses, particularly at the University of Aleppo.⁴⁵ According to Tejel, though all the cultural journals have been declared independent, their economic fragility and their problems with distribution have created conditions favorable to dependency on political parties. Thus, for example, the review *Pirs* is printed by the *Yekîtî* (Demokrat) party, while *Gelawêj* is traditionally tied to the KDPS (el Partî) and *Hevind* to *Yekîtî* (Kurd). The political organizations assure the distribution of cultural reviews and, in certain cases, decide even the

⁴⁴ Ibid, 115.

⁴⁵ Jordi Tejel, *Syria's Kurds: History, Politics and Society* (New York: Routledge, 2009), 105.

linguistic criteria and style.⁴⁶ The fragmented nature of the Kurdish political landscape is paralleled by a fragmented cultural sphere characterized by numerous endeavors led by a limited group of intellectuals.

In his book on the historical development of Kurdish book publishing in Syria, Malmîsanij gives some statistics about Kurdish writers and books in Syria. According to him, among the authors whose Kurdish books were published in Syria and Lebanon between 1925 and 2006, there were a total of 123 authors, with 95 from Syria and 28 from non-Syrian Kurds. The number of Kurdish books identified as published in Syria up until 2006 totals 220. Books by local Kurdish authors in Syria began to be published for the first time in the 1980s. Of the 220 works published in Syria between 1925 and 2006, 112 are poetry books, 20 are short stories, 14 are folklore books, 12 are children's books, 11 are alphabet books, and the remainder consists of various other genres.⁴⁷ As evident, more than half of the published books are poetry collections. The dominance of poetry among Syrian-Kurdish writers, both pre- and post-2011, stems from the assumption that prose writing necessitates a more advanced level of linguistic proficiency, encompassing grammar rules and language nuances that many writers lack. Consequently, there is an overabundance of poetry books, leading to a limited number of exceptional works and diminishing the overall literary field's quality. Before 2011 in Syria, Kurdish writers frequently endeavored to gain proficiency in the Kurdish language, which was often prohibited and suppressed, through personal efforts and restricted access to printed resources, in a clandestine and informal manner. Their main motivation was to "defend Kurdish" and "safeguard their own language from extinction." As conveyed by a Kurdish writer living in Qamishli, the act of writing in Kurdish as a form of resistance and manifestation of national consciousness was often deemed more significant than creating high-quality works. This perspective persists in the post-2011 period.

⁴⁶ Ibid, 105.

⁴⁷ Ibid, 131-133.

According to Malmîsanij, among the writers before 2011, only eight are women, yet despite the significant population disparity, the number of female Kurdish writers from Syria surpasses that of their counterparts from Turkey. Over one-third of Syrian-Kurdish writers hail from Qamishli, while others originate from various cities, particularly Afrin and Heseke.⁴⁸ The use of pseudonyms is common among Kurdish writers, with a higher prevalence among those from Rojava. Some authors employ multiple pen names, likely due to the potential risk of state pressure.

In 2001, the Syrian government replaced the General Law No. 1949 on printed materials with Decree No. 50, which imposed even greater state control over publishers, printers, journalists, writers, editors, distributors, and bookstore owners through over fifty articles. Pursuant to Article 16 of Decree No. 50, only Syrian Arabs were granted the right to own a publishing house or printing press, effectively excluding Syrian Kurds from these industries and high-level positions.⁴⁹ The law does not specify the use of languages other than Arabic, so it is unclear whether broadcasting in Kurdish is allowed. Before the implementation of Decree No. 50, a limited number of Kurdish novels were able to receive approval from relevant ministries for publication, although this process could take up to 18 months.⁵⁰ These works generally did not address the political matters and instead, they focused on Kurdish culture and history.⁵¹

Amidst the tense atmosphere following the Qamishli uprising in March 12, 2004, only four authors managed to publish their books in Kurdish in that year.⁵² The aforementioned decree requires the owner and manager of a printing house to maintain specific records, notifica-

⁴⁸ Ibid, 110.

⁴⁹ Harriet Montgomery, "Suriye Kürtleri: İnkâr Edilen Halk", 143

⁵⁰ Ibid, 146.

⁵¹ Ibid, 147.

⁵² M. Malmîsanij, *Türkiye ve Suriye'de Kürtçe Kitap Yayıncılığının Dünü ve Bugünü*, 109.

tions, and to obtain press and distribution permissions for books. Printing houses that publish books without permission face penalties. According to Malmîsanij, for instance, a well-known printing house was shut down for printing a Kurdish dictionary without obtaining the required permission from the ministry.⁵³ Numerous bookstores selling unauthorized books were also sealed. Consequently, some printing houses that previously printed books in Kurdish no longer dare to do so.⁵⁴

Before 2011, a notable lack of scholarly inquiry exists concerning the readership and reading practices connected to Kurdish literature produced in Syria. Taking into account that Syria's official script is the Arabic alphabet and education at all levels utilizes Arabic, a limited number of Kurds possess proficiency in Latin script. Consequently, Kurdish publishing often adopts unauthorized approaches, facing difficulties in addressing concerns related to printing, distribution, and marketing.

As a result, the publication of Kurdish literature and cultural works has faced numerous challenges, primarily due to the prohibition by official Syrian authorities. Between 1925 and 2006, a total of 220 works were published in Kurdish, with poetry being the dominant genre. The most prolific decade for Kurdish cultural production was the 1990s, influenced by various factors, including political activities, improved transportation and communication, the emergence of Kurdish television channels, and the expanding use of Kurdish in Iraq and Europe.

The Kurdish population in Syria has faced restrictions on publishing, with some authors resorting to pseudonyms and illegal methods for printing and distribution. Despite these obstacles, a new generation of authors emerged in the 1990s, and events such as the clandestine Kurdish Poetry Festival, the Newroz festival have continued to support and celebrate Kurdish literature and culture.

Due to the dominance of the Arabic alphabet and language in the Syrian education system, the number of Kurds who can read and write in Latin letters is limited. This factor, combined with the prohibition on

⁵³ Ibid, 129.

⁵⁴ Ibid, 129.

Kurdish cultural production, has led to difficulties in printing, distribution, and marketing, and little research exists on the readership and reading habits associated with Kurdish books published in northeast Syria.

2.4 The Cultural Politics in Turkey and the Kurds

In this part, I will try to delve deeper into the power dynamics that have affected Kurdish cultural production in Turkey. To this end, the analysis will focus on the Kemalist paradigm of nation-building, which sought to engender a homogenized society and culture, and the forms and dynamics of struggle in the cultural field of the Kurdish political movements and actors that have contested this paradigm. An examination of the cultural production process in Turkey must necessarily include an investigation into the ways in which power relations have been intricately intertwined with this process throughout the country's history.

Scalbert discusses the impact of state policies and minority politics on the development of Kurdish literature, particularly in the Kurmanji dialect, in Turkey. The national context is characterized by the non-recognition of the Kurdish population, the deprecation of Kurdish culture, identity, and language, and the ban on the Kurdish language since 1923. However, there have been periods of lighter constraints, and since the 1990s, the use of Kurdish has been gradually liberalized.⁵⁵

The emergence of the Republic as a nation-state with a new identity and the task of modernizing the society led to radical new steps in the field of culture. Zürcher delves into the ideology of the CHP, which became the state ideology, and highlights the connection between the

⁵⁵ Clémence Scalbert-Yücel, "The PKK, the Kurdish Movement, and the Emergence of Kurdish Cultural Policies in Turkey," in Gareth Stansfield, Mohammed Shareef, *The Kurdish Question Revisited* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017); Clémence Scalbert-Yücel, "Languages and the Definition of Literature: The Blurred Borders of Kurdish Literature in Contemporary Turkey," *Middle Eastern Literatures* 14, no. 2 (2011): 171-184, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1475262X.2011.583467>.

ideas of the Young Turks and the policies of the new state.⁵⁶ It becomes clear that the views held by Ottoman intellectuals in the preceding period had a significant impact on the policies of the new state.

The foundation of Kemalism during the early years of the Republic can be viewed as an extension of Turkey's modernization efforts, however, it also implemented a strong emphasis on radical secularism, ethnic nationalism, and centralized authoritarianism. This approach can be understood in the context of the various competing ideologies present during the Ottoman period, such as Turkism, Ottomanism, Islamicism, and Westernism, according to Yeğen.⁵⁷ The leaders of the newly established Republic sought to modernize society in accordance with their Westernization agenda, regardless of the values and beliefs of the population. This approach, characterized by a disregard for public opinion, persisted for a long time under the Kemalist regime, which ironically referred to itself with the phrase "for the people despite the people".⁵⁸

The main idea behind the modernization efforts of the Kemalist government was the belief that culture should reflect the ideologies and values of the state, rather than those of the society. This approach was reflected in the slogans and policies of the government, which aimed to shape society in accordance with the principles of Kemalism. In his article examining the cultural policies of the period between the 1920s and the 1970s, Koçak notes that the cultural policies followed between 1923-38 and 1938-50 are both a founding structural element and a spiritual image of the system, which is briefly referred to as "Kemalism". In other words, it is both a complementary relationship and a representation between the Kemalist political system and these cultural policies. The political system cannot be reduced to these cultural policies wholly—or even a large part—there are other elements that exceed and contradict

⁵⁶ Erik J. Zürcher, "Kemalist Düşüncenin Osmanlı Kaynakları," in *Modern Türkiye'de Siyasi Düşünce: Kemalizm* (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2002), 44-55.

⁵⁷ Mesut Yeğen, "Kemalizm ve Hegemonya?" in *Modern Türkiye'de Siyasi Düşünce: Kemalizm* (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2002), 56-74.

⁵⁸ *Ibid*, 60.

them, but these policies have determined the way the system thinks, feels and presents itself. We can also say that Kemalism gave two images, two faces. Thus, we can also say that the two cultural periods (1923-38 and 1938-50) we have differentiated here represent the two images or faces of Kemalism.⁵⁹ As Koçak states in his article, the Kemalist regime, rather than affording culture an autonomous sphere, has instead monopolized and instrumentalized it. This prevented the formation of an autonomous cultural space, albeit relatively, at least until the 1950s.

It is possible to see that the cultural policies implemented during the early years of the Kemalist regime were driven by two key principles. One of these principles is the idea that culture should be modernized alongside other modernization efforts in various areas. This perspective is based on the assumption that traditional cultural practices and customs from before this period were outdated and inadequate, similar to the viewpoint held for other reforms. At this point, the main emphasis is on “reaching the level of contemporary civilizations”. Given that culture is inextricably linked to societal development, it follows that the cultural and artistic endeavors undertaken within Turkey should align with those of other contemporary nations.

The other main strategy implemented by the Kemalist regime, as pointed out above, was the use of culture as a means to promote and disseminate their ideology. To this end, various forms of art were utilized as tools for propaganda, such as theater, cinema, exhibitions, and music. This approach marked a significant departure from the cultural practices of the Ottoman Empire and was part of the broader goal of Westernization and modernization. As a result, the cultural landscape of Turkey was drastically transformed, with a new context and framework established for the production and consumption of art and culture.

With the foundation of the Republic of Turkey, the mindset of the new state was constructed in a way that symbolized a decisive break from

⁵⁹ Orhan Koçak, “1920’lerden 1970’lere Kültür Politikaları” in *Modern Türkiye’de Siyasi Düşünce: Kemalizm* (Istanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2002), 370-371.

the past, including its institutions and structures. Another point of consideration is the assimilation of all other identities within Turkish identity, and the elevation of Turkishness in all cultural spheres. The Kemalist regime aimed to reshape society through a cultural lens that prioritized those who accepted their ideology and ostracized those who did not. This led to the perception that one's level of civilization was tied to their acceptance of the state's proposed cultural transformation. According to Ünlü, to put it concretely, the state accepts only one culture and language as legitimate, while declaring the others illegitimate, worthless and primitive. The person who stays or chooses to stay in these other cultures and languages thus comes to be seen as illegitimate, worthless, and primitive. Although the use value of his culture and language partially persists in his social environment, its market value is almost zero; because it is neither possible to get an education nor to find a job with that language. In other words, the illegitimate person of the illegitimate culture is also excluded from the labor market as he is excluded from the legitimate culture and language market and cultural capital can only be accumulated in the legitimate culture. Knowing only your own language entails a psychological punishment; because that language has been identified with primitiveness, lack of culture, and historylessness. Legitimate culture and language mean civilization; illegitimate culture and language is barbaric.⁶⁰

Implemented on November 1, 1928, this policy aimed to restrict the use of previous letters and to promote education in line with official state beliefs, which had a significant effect on cultural production in Turkey. The field of education naturally emerged as the most effective arena for implementing policies aimed at Turkifying the minds of individuals. In general, the centralization and monopolization of cultural production, specifically in the realm of education, began with the 3rd of March 1924 Law of Unification of Education (Tevhid-i Tedrisat Kanunu) which aimed to achieve unity in terms of feelings and thoughts of the nation.⁶¹

⁶⁰Barış Ünlü. *Türklük Sözleşmesi: Oluşumu, İşleyişi ve Krizi*. Dipnot Yayınları, 2018, 196.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 190.

To bring Turkey's cultural standing in line with that of the West, the Kemalist regime sought to exert control over cultural and artistic production. This was achieved through a combination of state support and legal restrictions, aimed at ensuring that cultural output aligned with the principles of the Kemalist regime. CHP's 1927 program made clear that adherence to Turkish culture was considered a fundamental aspect of being a party member.

The Kemalist rule aimed to shape cultural production during the single-party era by exerting control over it through various means, including state support or censorship of cultural works and actors based on specific guidelines. This control was carried out through the establishment of official institutions and organizations responsible for producing and promoting culture and art. These groups centralized cultural production under their control and aimed to spread the Kemalist ideology throughout society.

The shift to a multiparty system had a significant impact on cultural production, with a reduction in the state's total control. This change allowed for the field of cultural production to have a separate and independent existence within society, built upon the foundation laid during the single-party era. However, further examination of post-1960 coup developments shows that politics still plays a major role in the field, yet now in the form of external interference as the field establishes its own stability. In this new political environment, marked by multiple perspectives, governments are observed to implement diverse cultural policies. In the period between 1960s and 1980s, right-wing parties attempted to implement alternative policies, but failed in their attempts to influence the cultural sphere.

The limited freedoms allowed by the democratic regime instituted with the 1960 constitution made room for oppressed voices to be heard and political opposition to harness its struggle. Kurds were able to express some of their demands and concerns. Consequently, the 1960s wit-

nessed the proliferation of Kurdish cultural activities leading to an increasing discussion of the Kurdish question.⁶² The 1960s also witnessed a significant increase in Kurdish cultural activities, primarily the publication of cultural magazines and their dissemination to a wider public. Mehmet Emin Bozarslan published the first Kurdish alphabet in Latin script in Turkey and transliterated the Kurdish romance *Mem û Zîn* (Mem and Zîn) into Kurdish-Latin script alongside its Turkish translation in 1968.⁶³ Numerous magazines were published; including *İleri Yurt* (1959), *Dicle Fırat* (1962), *Deng*, *Rêya Rast*, *Roja Newe* (1963) and *Yeni Akis* (1966).⁶⁴ Unavoidably, these endeavors revitalized the Kurdish cultural landscape and engendered an environment conducive to the deliberation of Kurdish rights.

The 1970s marked a significant period in Turkey's political history, characterized by the growth of socialist youth movement, trade unions, and class consciousness among the working class. This era also saw the emergence of an independent Kurdish political movements, which fostered a cultural resurgence, including the flourishing of Kurdish language, culture, literature, and art. PKK was founded in the same years. The 1980 coup aimed to suppress the rising Kurdish consciousness and assimilate Kurds into Turkish identity, which had been the goal of the Republic since its inception.⁶⁵

The 1990s brought about changes, as discussions around social and political reforms in addressing the Kurdish issue gained momentum. There was a growing consensus on lifting the ban on the Kurdish language, which led to its increased visibility in the public sphere, Kurdish

⁶² Cengiz Gunes and Welat Zeydanlıoğlu, eds., "The Kurdish Question in Turkey: New perspectives on violence, representation, and reconciliation" (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2014),2.

⁶³ Metin Yüksel, "A 'Revolutionary' Kurdish Mullah from Turkey: Mehmed Emin Bozarslan and His Intellectual Evolution 1," *The Muslim World* 99, no. 2 (2009): 360, doi:10.1111/J.1478-1913.2009.01273. X.

⁶⁴ *Ibid*, 3.

⁶⁵ Ronayi Önen Baykuşak, "Türkiye'de Hâkim ve Muhalefet Politikasının Gerilim Alanlarından Biri Olarak Kürtçe Dil Meselesi" (PhD diss., Mimar Sinan Güzel Sanatlar Üniversitesi, 2020), 75-79.

literacy, and the expansion of Kurdish publishing, literature, music, and art. Language activism, focused on the development and dissemination of the Kurdish language, also emerged during this period. In Turkey, the initial cultural institution that emerged was the Mesopotamia Cultural Center (Navenda Çanda Mezopotamya, NÇM, in Kurdish; Mezopotamya Kültür Merkezi, MKM, in Turkish), which was inaugurated in Istanbul in 1991. According to Sustam, it had the objective of promoting Kurdish culture and arts and became an important centre of Kurdish cultural development. It organized music, theatre, cinema, and folk dancing classes, as well as many cultural events and performances.⁶⁶ NÇM also published a literary journal (Rewşen, later Jiyana Rewşen) which played a key role in the emergence of Kurdish writing in Turkey. Another organization, the Kurdish Institute of Istanbul, was soon opened in 1992 in order to conduct

scholarly research. Three sections were formed, dealing with language, history, and literature.⁶⁷ In 1992, Nûbihar Publishing House and Nûbihar journal, and in 1996, Avesta Publishing House were established. Both publishing houses have played significant roles in the development of Kurdish publishing.

Reforms in the 2000s further eased restrictions on languages other than Turkish, influenced by Turkey's bid for European Union membership and the Kurdish opposition's push for addressing the language issue. While Turkish remains the official language, publications in other languages have been allowed, and it has become possible to teach, defend in courts, and even provide education in these languages in private

⁶⁶ Engin Sustam, "Kurdish Art and Cultural Production: Rhetoric of the New Kurdish Subject," in *The Cambridge History of the Kurds*, edited by Hamit Bozarslan, Cengiz Gunes, and Veli Yadirgi (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 780.

⁶⁷ Clémence Scalbert-Yücel, "The PKK, the Kurdish Movement, and the Emergence of Kurdish Cultural Policies in Turkey," in *The Kurdish Question Revisited*, ed. Gareth Stansfield and Mohammed Shareef (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 263.

schools. These reforms partially normalized the Kurdish language, making it more visible in the media, politics, law, and education.⁶⁸ After the pro-Kurdish political party, HADEP, won the municipalities in Turkey's southeast and east in 1999, the conditions for the revitalization of Kurdish culture were bolstered. Sustam noted that while the Kurdish space witnessed a cultural and social revolution since the beginning of the 2000s, some cities in Turkey including Diyarbakir, Mardin, Batman, Van and Dersim became a collective space of cultural expressions, despite all state pressure and obstructions. We can then say that in these years, Kurdish music, linguistic studies, literature, cinema, contemporary arts, theatre, popular culture, and gastronomy has managed to produce cultural and symbolic capital.⁶⁹ According to Scalbert, the widening of the conditions of possibility was also due to the progressive softening of the legislation in Turkey in the 1990s, but more radically in the 2000s under the AKP government. The inscription of public actors in the sphere of Kurdish culture under AKP rule does not lead to the end of state pressures on the cultural sphere. On the contrary, it makes culture and cultural policies a site of struggle between two different political blocs.⁷⁰

Overall, Turkey's transformation in its Kurdish policy can be attributed to various motivations and has led to a partial recognition and visibility of the Kurdish language in public spaces. Turkey has made some progress in easing its repressive Kurdish policy in response to the requirements for EU membership, which started with the harmonization laws in 2001. Under the AKP, reforms have been implemented, although not systematically, and the Kurdish population's fundamental linguistic rights have not been fully granted.

⁶⁸ Ronayi Önen Baykuşak, "Türkiye'de Hâkim ve Muhalefet Politikasının Gerilim Alanlarından Biri Olarak Kürtçe Dil Meselesi" 87-94.

⁶⁹ Engin Sustam, "Kurdish Art and Cultural Production: Rhetoric of the New Kurdish Subject," 781.

⁷⁰ Clémence Scalbert-Yücel, "The PKK, the Kurdish Movement, and the Emergence of Kurdish Cultural Policies in Turkey," 261.

The establishment of TRT6 in 2009, Turkey's first state-run 24-hour Kurdish TV channel, was a significant step. However, it has been criticized for its depoliticization of Kurds and its avoidance of political issues concerning the Kurdish population. Despite these efforts, the government has faced criticism for its contradictory and problematic approach to the Kurdish question. Also, starting from the late 2000s, various institutions in the eastern and southeastern cities of the country have established departments of Kurdish language and literature at the undergraduate, graduate, and doctoral levels. Turkey's reforms have been presented as radical changes but have often fallen short of Kurdish expectations.

Scalbert asserts the following regarding the impact of the state's Kurdish policy on the literary and cultural field that the state policies have four main consequences on the Kurdish literary field: absence of writing in Kurdish and lack of a written standard form, diversity in the Kurmanci dialect, diglossia and language conflict at the societal level, and the ex-territorialization of literary activities. The first generation of Kurdish writers faced several challenges in using the Kurmanci language, which was not a given but a conscious choice. Especially, religious sphere has consistently used Kurmanci, contributing to the growth of Kurdish literacy and the evolution of the Kurdish literary tradition.⁷¹

As a result, in analyzing the power dynamics influencing Kurdish identity and cultural production in Turkey, it is crucial to consider the Kemalist nation-building paradigm, which sought to create a homogenized society and culture, and the opposition of Kurdish political movements and actors. The Republic of Turkey's national context, characterized by 'non-recognition of Kurdish identity, deprecation of Kurdish culture, and the ban on the Kurdish language', highlights the complex power relations intertwined with cultural production processes in the country. The Kemalist paradigm sought to create a homogenized society, characterized by a centralized, authoritarian state that promoted radical

⁷¹Scalbert-Yücel, Clémence. "Emergence and equivocal autonomization of a Kurdish literary field in Turkey.", 359-360.

secularism and ethnic nationalism. This project was underpinned by two main principles: modernizing culture alongside other modernization efforts and using culture as a means to disseminate the Kemalist ideology. Despite severe restrictions on the Kurdish language, culture and identity, the Kurdish opposition has grown since the 1960s, culminating in the rise of the Kurdish political movement. Although official policies of denying the existence of Kurds have eased to some extent since the early 1990s, fundamental identity, linguistic, cultural rights remain ungranted, leading to a problematic and contradictory relationship between Turkey and the Kurds.

In the last part, I would like to briefly compare the cultural production field in both Turkey and Syria and discuss the suppression of Kurdish identity and cultural production in the context of nation-building projects. In both cases, the respective governments (Kemalist Turkey and Ba'athist Syria) aimed to create homogenized societies characterized by centralized power structures, and in doing so, they marginalized and suppressed the Kurdish population, their languages, and cultural production and expressions. Hassanpour asserts that Turkey, since the 1920s, and Syria, since the 1960s, have implemented "linguicide" measures aimed at complete or partial eradication of Kurdish or impeding its natural development.⁷² Amir Hassanpour uses the concept of linguicide to describe the deliberate policies and practices aimed at eradicating or suppressing a language and its associated culture. Linguicide refers to the systematic destruction, marginalization, or forced assimilation of a language by dominant political or social forces.

Cultural production in Turkey was deeply influenced by the Kemalist nation-building project. The government's efforts to modernize culture and use it as a means to disseminate Kemalist ideology led to a transformation in Turkey's cultural landscape. Institutions and frameworks for cultural production were established, and policies like the Law

⁷² Amir Hassanpour, "The Politics of A-Political Linguistic: Linguists and Linguicide," in Robert Phillipson, ed., *Rights to Language: Equity, Power, and Education* (Mahwah, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2000), 33-39.

of Unification of Education were implemented to centralize and monopolize cultural production in the realm of education. These measures suppressed the Kurdish language and identity, leading to tensions and conflicts between the Kurdish population and the Turkish state.

On the other hand, it is evident that the Kurdish population in Syria experiences marginalization. The Ba'ath regime, viewing the Kurds as a security threat, implemented Arabization policies to suppress Kurdish culture, language, and political expression. This has led to economic disadvantage, harassment, and exclusion from political and social life for the Kurds in Syria. In response, the Kurds in Syria has resorted to various forms of protest and resistance, especially after 2000s.

In both cases, the respective nation-states' efforts to homogenize their societies have resulted in the suppression of Kurdish cultural production. However, the consequences of these actions have led to ongoing tensions, conflicts, and resistance from the Kurdish populations in both Turkey and Syria. In Turkey, the Kurdish opposition has grown and led to the rise of a Kurdish political movement, while in Syria, protests and resistance have become significant markers in the collective memory of the Kurdish people.

3

Syrian Uprising and The Field of Cultural Production

The primary objective of this chapter is to examine the field of cultural production, with particular emphasis on the publishing field, in the context of the autonomous experience within the AANES. The aim is to assess the accomplishments and limitations within the cultural production sphere in the AANES during the past decade, and to provide a comprehensive historical and academic documentation of these findings.

In the first part of this chapter, Bourdieu's field theory and its primary concepts will be concisely explored as a conceptual framework for this research. The study seeks to assess the appropriateness and adaptability of field theory for comprehending cultural production in the Middle East, specifically concentrating on Syria. Consequently, I will try to analyze the ramifications of particular notions and occurrences concerning the application of field theory within this context and compare the autonomous administration's experiences in the cultural field to international instances from diverse perspectives. In the second part, I shall endeavor to examine the significance of socio-political crises in the genesis and autonomy of social fields, subsequently examining the constraints and insights offered by field theory in relation to unstable social contexts and the potential perspectives it may unveil.

It is crucial to underscore the following caveat prior to delving into subsequent sections of the thesis: the relatively brief duration of

Kurdish self-governance, extending just over a decade, affords a limited temporal scope for drawing substantial and profound conclusions regarding the emergence and development of the field of cultural production. This circumstance must not be disregarded. All assessments articulated in this thesis have been formulated with this specific context in mind.

Prior to delving into subsequent sections of this chapter, I would like to briefly state what I mean by cultural production. The concept of cultural production refers to specific forms such as literature, art, music, film, and media, as well as the institutions, actors, and practices involved in their creation and dissemination. Also, cultural production refers to the creation, dissemination, and consumption of cultural artifacts, expressions, and practices within a society. It encompasses a wide range of creative activities, such as literature, music, film, theater, visual arts, and other forms of artistic expression. Cultural production is significant as it reflects the values, beliefs, and history of a society while also shaping and influencing its identity and development. The process of cultural production involves artists, cultural institutions, media, and audiences, all of whom play a role in shaping the cultural landscape.

The Syrian crisis, emerging from the Arab Spring, has engendered considerable political and social turbulence. Concurrently, it has furnished the Kurdish minority in Syria with the opportunity to advocate for self-governance. As mentioned previously Prior to 2011, Kurdish cultural production in Syria was either categorically prohibited or strictly regulated and supervised by the Ba'ath regime. Nevertheless, since the insurrection against the Ba'ath regime, cultural production in the AANES has experienced considerable expansion, rendering it an intriguing subject for scholarly inquiry.

This chapter delves into the interconnection between culture and politics within the AANES. I contend that the endeavor to forge a new cultural production in the AANES through the autonomy experience may be perceived as a manifestation of political resistance. A thorough examination of Kurdish cultural production in this context should consequently

account for the overarching political milieu in which it transpires. By constructing a new cultural production in the AANES, the Kurds can assert their cultural autonomy and counter efforts by the Baath regime or other external forces to suppress or efface their cultural identity. Moreover, the building of a new cultural field in the AANES can be construed as a means for the Kurds to articulate their political, cultural, and social struggles and resistances via cultural channels, such as through literature and art that address themes of social utopia, resistance, warfare, women's liberation, and political identity. My research aspires to explore the ways in which culture and politics intersect and reciprocally influence one another in the AANES and to enhance our comprehension of the complexities and nuances of the Kurdish experience in this region.

Identity movements engage in a symbolic competition, aiming to endorse “as legitimate the principles of construction of social reality” that most effectively promote their own social presence.¹ The impact of identity movements on the social fields is significantly contingent upon their capacity to alter individuals' perceptions and valuations through the generation of alternative viewpoints and the construction of new meanings. One of the principal accomplishments of the Kurdish political movement lies in its capability to engender new conceptual categories and frameworks that shape both individual and collective mentalities via the autonomy experience in the AANES. These conceptual categories and modes of thought have long been extant in the Kurdish struggle within Turkey; however, the self-governance experience in the AANES has facilitated a more profound and comprehensive exploration of these ideas and perspectives. Consequently, the Kurdish political movement has been able to utilize the autonomy experience in the AANES to further elaborate and refine its ideological underpinnings. Within the AANES, the field of cultural production has emerged as a domain wherein cultural traditions, values, and identities are expressed, enacted, and generated through a variety of cultural forms and themes. It also constitutes a site

¹ Pierre Bourdieu, *Pascalian Meditations*, trans. Richard Nice (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000), 187.

where new conceptual categories and worldviews are assessed, deliberated, and negotiated. The printed cultural texts produced by authors and intellectual collectives influenced by the autonomous experience frequently exhibit the impact of concepts such as democratic confederalism, social ecology, communal economy, popular assemblies, women's liberation, the role of the intellectual and the idea of self-governance. Consequently, identity movements can be conceptualized as generators of cultural meaning, formulating values and alternative perspectives that challenge prevailing paradigms that tend to marginalize and undervalue specific individuals and communities. In this thesis, employing Bourdieu's field theory, I will examine how the autonomous experience of the Kurdish political movement has played a constructive role and had an impact on the field of cultural production.

3.1 The Theory of Field of Cultural Production

In this part, a concise examination of Bourdieu's theory of the field of cultural production will be presented, functioning as the theoretical foundation for this study. The critical concepts of field, capital, and habitus, which underpin the theory, will also be explored.

Prior to addressing Bourdieu's concepts of field, capital, and habitus, it is necessary to examine briefly how Bourdieu interprets the concept of culture. According to Swartz, Bourdieu sees culture as a distinct form of power that functions like capital, but with its own specific laws of exercise. Yet, its autonomy is relative, since it is often exchanged for economic capital or positional power in organizations. Historically, Bourdieu sees cultural fields progressively developing and gaining autonomy from the political and economic fields.² Considering the concept of field, we can say that Pierre Bourdieu's sociological view is that the social

² David Swartz, *Culture and Power: The Sociology of Pierre Bourdieu* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 127

world is composed of various fields. He sees the social world as the product and the stake of cognitive and political symbolic struggles over knowledge and recognition.³

Culture is not an immutable concept that disregards the aspect of power; on the contrary, it is intrinsically political in nature. Serving as both a power resource and a locus for power dynamics, culture encompasses an arena of disputes over symbols and meanings.

Johnson notes that agents do not act in a vacuum, but rather in concrete social situations governed by a set of objective social relations. To account for these situations or contexts, without, again, falling into the determinism of objectivist analysis, Bourdieu developed the concept of field (*champ*). According to Bourdieu's theoretical model, any social formation is structured by way of a hierarchically organized series of fields (the economic field, the educational field, the political field, the cultural field, etc.), each defined as a structured space with its own laws of functioning and its own relations of force independent of those of politics and the economy, except, obviously, in the cases of the economic and political fields.⁴ Fields are sites for the production, distribution, and appropriation of products, services, knowledge, or prestige, as well as the competitive positions held by agents in their attempt to accumulate and dominate these various types of capital. Fields can be perceived as structured spaces arranged around certain forms of capital. According to Swartz, field analysis calls attention to the social conditions of struggle that shape cultural production.⁵ The concept of a field focuses on identifying social spaces that are relatively autonomous and centered around a specific activity. These spaces have been built over time through conflicts and power interactions, and they have developed their own rules, evaluation principles, institutions, the mechanisms of recognition and legitimation, classification systems, and unique structures of relative positions. Field provides a theoretical and methodological framework, along with its sta-

³ Bourdieu, *Pascalian Meditations*, 187.

⁴ Randal Johnson, introduction to *The Field of Cultural Production*, by Pierre Bourdieu, 6.

⁵ Swartz, *Culture and Power*, 119.

ble companions, habitus, and capital, for analyzing social action in its specific historical context. Nonetheless, we must also keep in mind that fields are relational while using field theory. Every field is constructed around particular standards, rules, reasons, and values, and based on a particular understanding of autonomy that renders it irreducible to other relational fields.

In Bourdieu's field theory, autonomy and heteronomy are two crucial concepts that help to explain the dynamics within a given field. Autonomy refers to the degree to which a field operates independently from external influences, particularly from the fields of power and economics. In the context of cultural production, an autonomous field is one where cultural, artistic, and intellectual practices are primarily driven by their own internal logic and criteria, such as aesthetic or cultural standards, and artistic and cultural values. In an autonomous cultural field, the cultural and intellectual works are judged and valued based on their intrinsic qualities and contributions to the field, rather than external factors such as market demand or political considerations. Heteronomy, on the other hand, refers to the degree to which a field is subject to influences from external forces or fields, such as politics, economics, or social pressures. In the context of cultural production, a heteronomous field is one where cultural, artistic, and intellectual practices are heavily influenced by external factors, such as the demands of the market, political ideologies, or the interests of dominant social groups. In a heteronomous cultural field, the production, circulation, and reception of cultural, artistic, and intellectual works are often determined by these external factors, rather than by the internal logic and criteria of the field itself.⁶

In Bourdieu's theory, as a result, the fields of cultural production can exist along a continuum between autonomy and heteronomy, with varying degrees of independence or subjection to external influences. The degree of autonomy or heteronomy of a cultural field can change

⁶ Pierre Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production*, trans. Randal Johnson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993).; Pierre Bourdieu, *The Rules of Art: Genesis and Structure of the Literary Field* (Cambridge: Polity; Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1996).

over time and can be influenced by factors such as historical events, political regimes, and social transformations.

When we consider the concept of capital, a fundamental element in Bourdieu's theory, we see that the concept of capital is a term he uses to describe various types of assets that confer social power. These assets can be material (e.g., money, land, or objects of value) or immaterial (e.g., education, social connections, or cultural knowledge). In short, capital refers to the resources that a group has at its disposal, which can be used to maintain or improve its position. Schwartz notes that Bourdieu generally speaks of four generic types of capital: economic capital (money and property), cultural capital (cultural goods and services including educational credentials), social capital (acquaintances and networks), and symbolic capital (legitimation). His concept of cultural capital covers a wide variety of resources including such things as verbal facility, general cultural awareness, aesthetic preferences, information about the school system, and educational credentials. His point is to suggest that culture (in the broadest sense of the term) can become a power resource.⁷

The last concept that I will briefly summarize here is habitus. The most frequently cited conceptualization of habitus can be found in Bourdieu's seminal work, 'The Logic of Practice'. He notes that a system of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles which generate and organize practices and representations that can be objectively adapted to their outcomes without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary in order to attain them.⁸ To put it another way, and in a nutshell, Bourdieu contends that every single individual is entangled in a network of social relations, which ultimately shapes their habitus. This concept of habitus is Bourdieu's attempt to resolve the problem of how social agents, who are products of their social setting, can nevertheless act in ways that are not completely determined by that setting. The answer, Bourdieu argues, lies in

⁷ Swartz, *Culture and Power*, 74-75.

⁸ Pierre Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1992), 53.

the fact that agents internalize the structuring principles of their social setting and incorporate them into their dispositions.

After briefly discussing these three fundamental pillars, I will now attempt to provide a concise explanation of what Bourdieu means by the theory of the field of cultural production.

This theory proposes that the cultural field is a social space where cultural producers, such as artists, publishers, intellectuals, and institutions, compete and cooperate in the production, distribution, and consumption of cultural goods and symbols. According to Bourdieu, the cultural field is characterized by a specific structure, with different positions and roles occupied by different actors, and by specific rules and principles that govern the behavior and interactions of these actors.

Bourdieu's field, as we mentioned above, is a relational social space, constituted by the relations between actors, their positions and position-takings; in a more general way we could say that the field of cultural production can be understood as a network of relations between actors, symbols and artefacts.⁹ Bourdieu explores, through the concept of the field of cultural production, the social impacts of the production process of cultural and literature products, as well as the symbolic value of these products in the social space, and the reproduction of social structure through their consumption. In short, the field of cultural production offers a way to study how cultural products are produced, how they are circulated and used, and how they relate to the social structure.

For Bourdieu, 'the principal obstacle to a rigorous science of the production of the value of cultural goods' is the 'charismatic ideology of "creation"' to be found in studies of art, literature and other cultural fields. This charismatic ideology, in his view, 'directs the gaze towards the apparent producer – painter, composer, writer – and prevents us from

⁹ Ludger Pries and Martin Seeliger, "Transnational Social Spaces: Between Methodological Nationalism and Cosmo-Globalism," in *Beyond Methodological Nationalism: Research Methodologies for Cross-Border Studies*, ed. Anna Amelina, Devrimsel D. D. Nergiz, Thomas Faist, and Nina G. Glick Schiller (Hoboken: Taylor and Francis, 2012), 219-238.

asking who has created this “creator” and the magic power of transubstantiation with which the “creator” is endowed’.¹⁰ Bourdieu's theoretical framework for cultural production, rooted in the concepts of habitus, capital, and field, offers a nuanced perspective that diverges from traditional approaches in the sociology of art and culture. Rather than solely emphasizing the individual creator or reducing the artwork to a reflection of its social context, Bourdieu's framework encompasses the intricate interplay of agency and structure in the production and reception of cultural artifacts.

Bourdieu proposes three steps for analyzing a specific field. He notes that first, one must analyze the position of the field vis-à-vis the field of power. Second, one must map out the objective structure of the relations between positions occupied by the agents or institutions who compete for the legitimate form of specific authority of which the field is the site. And third, one must analyze the habitus of the agents, the different systems of dispositions they have acquired by internalizing a determinate type of social and economic conditions, and which find in a definite trajectory within the field under consideration a more or less favourable opportunity to become actualized.¹¹ In other words, the field theory aims to locate the field of cultural production within the field of power, to analyze the field's internal structure, and to understand the habitus of the field's actors.

According to Sapiro, when delving into the field of cultural production, one should consider examining the following types of phenomena. She notes that the autonomy of cultural fields is only relative since heteronomous forces are involved in the process of cultural production. At the methodological level, this implies that a real study of cultural production requires a cross-disciplinary approach combining both external

¹⁰ David Hesmondhalgh, "Bourdieu, the media and cultural production," *Media, Culture & Society* 28, no. 2 (2006): 212, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0163443706061682>.

¹¹ Pierre Bourdieu and Loïc Wacquant, *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology*, trans. Loïc Wacquant (Cambridge: Polity, 1992), 104-105.

analysis and internal reading, while taking into account the mediations between these two orders of phenomena. The educational system, the definition of the social role of the producer, professional ideology, the structure of the field, the space of possibilities and the reception process are all major mediations, without this list being exhaustive.¹² This means that the autonomy of the field of cultural production is only relative due to the presence of external factors such as the state, the market or other different factors. It is important to consider both the external influences on cultural production as well as the internal dynamics and perspectives within the field itself. As Thomson points out, Bourdieu suggests a mutual process of influence and ongoing co-construction: what happens in the field of power shapes what can happen in a social field, at the same time as what happens in a social field shapes the field of power and also may influence other social fields.¹³ In other words, according to Bourdieu's framework, the field of power plays a role in regulating what takes place in other social fields, which is an important aspect that should not be overlooked. This means that the field of cultural production is not completely autonomous, but rather is shaped by power dynamics and external influences.

According to Johnson, Bourdieu's model necessarily involves different levels of analysis which account for different aspects of cultural practice, ranging from the relationship between the cultural field and the broader field of power to the strategies, trajectories and works of individual agents. All levels of analysis, each composed of multiple components, must be taken into consideration to gain a full understanding of cultural works.¹⁴ A Bourdieuan perspective emphasizes the importance of analyzing the processes of production and dissemination, the mechanisms of power, and the distribution of resources for cultural production in a specific region to gain a comprehensive understanding of cultural

¹² Gisèle Sapiro, "Autonomy Revisited: The Question of Mediations and Its Methodological Implications." Paragraph 35, no. 1 (2012): 30–48. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43263820>.

¹³ Patricia Thomson, "Field," in Pierre Bourdieu: Key Concepts, ed. Michael Grenfell (Stocksfield: Acumen Publishing Limited, 2008), 71.

¹⁴ Randal Johnson, Introduction to The Field of Cultural Production, by Pierre Bourdieu, 18.

production. These factors play a role in shaping the field of cultural production and understanding their influence is crucial for a complete analysis. The theory proposes that the field of cultural production is structured by a number of social, economic, and cultural factors that shape the relationships between different agents within the field, such as publishers, writers, artists, critics, audiences, and institutions. These factors can include issues like the distribution of economic, cultural, linguistic capital, the power dynamics between different agents, and the dominant aesthetic and ideological norms within the field.

It is also necessary to mention another significant point that deserves consideration in the study. The field of cultural production functions not only as one of the main fields for the production of cultural works and activities, but also as one of the main fields for the construction of identity and collective consciousness. Cultural production is a primary site to produce symbolic goods and texts, which can include a wide range of cultural artifacts such as literature, art, music, film, and media. These symbolic commodities and texts frequently bear meaning and importance, potentially exerting considerable impact on identity, social norms, values, and beliefs.

Cultural production serves as a significant domain for the construction of identity. As Anderson mentioned the importance of the novel in the emergence of national identities as “imagined community”¹⁵, the process of identity construction in the field of cultural production can manifest in several ways. For instance, social agents may identify with specific cultural traditions, styles, or practices, which can reinforce or shape their sense of self. Conversely, they may create new identities by appropriating and recontextualizing existing cultural elements, generating novel interpretations or expressions of cultural content. The field of cultural production also serves as a platform for negotiation and construction of identity and collective consciousness. As individuals and groups interact with cultural artifacts, they may engage in dialogues or

¹⁵ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, revised edition (London: Verso, 2006), 24-45.

debates about the meaning, significance, and implications of these artifacts within their social context. Through this engagement, various perspectives and interpretations emerge, contributing to the formation of a shared understanding of culture and identity.

Furthermore, the field of cultural production can act as a site for the contestation of power relations and the challenging of dominant cultural norms. Minority or marginalized groups may use cultural production as a means to assert their presence, resist hegemonic narratives, and advocate for recognition and representation within the larger societal context.¹⁶

In summary, the field of cultural production plays a critical role in the construction of identity and collective consciousness, serving as a space for individual expression, group affiliation, and the negotiation of meaning and power dynamics within society. In this thesis, I will examine the cultural production field within the AANES, considering this perspective and elucidating its implications for identity construction and societal dynamics.

3.2 Cultural Production in the Middle East: A Field Theory Approach

Having presented a concise introduction to Bourdieu's theory of the field of cultural production and its connection to identity formation, I will examine that how this theory is relevant to the autonomous experience in the AANES, demonstrate its potential applications, and explain how it provides valuable sociological insights into the social and cultural dimensions of the autonomous experience in the AANES.

As Bourdieu's comprehensive analysis of the French cultural field and the positioning of writing within it is predicated on specific institutional frameworks and access to symbolic, cultural, and economic capital, it is pertinent to inquire how such an analytical framework can be extended to different contexts like the AANES, which are characteristically

¹⁶ Stuart Hall and Paul du Gay, eds., *Questions of Cultural Identity* (London: Sage, 1996).

configured differently with respect to these factors. Nevertheless, prior to assessing the potential adaptability of this theory to the AANES context, or its feasibility for adaptation, it is crucial to concisely discuss the critiques associated with the implementation of Bourdieu's field theory in different contexts.

In his book, "Bourdieu and Postcolonial Theory", R. Dalleo challenges Sapiro's use of the prominence of the political in post-colonial literature, where the request for literary autonomy has not yet been fulfilled, as evidence of the underdevelopment of the field. He claims that this reading relies on the idea of unilinear development, that every field develops like France's and is at some stage on the journey to full autonomy.¹⁷ It may be contended that applying Bourdieu's theory outside of Europe, particularly to regions such as the Middle East, presents certain challenges. For example, when examining the fields of art or cultural production in the West, one encounters a wealth of resources, including exhibitions, catalogs, art journals, and critical reviews, that are easily accessible. Bourdieu's theories are built upon historical, political, and sociological case studies, which rely on comprehensive knowledge and documentation. However, obtaining such an extensive factual basis and statistical data in Syria, or many other parts of the Middle East, is considerably more difficult. It must be acknowledged that the field of Kurdish cultural production in Syria faces considerably greater challenges in this regard. Consequently, when examining the field of cultural production, it is imperative to employ a more sophisticated method that acknowledges the distinct histories, cultural backgrounds, and contexts of various regions, rather than unquestioningly implementing Bourdieu's field theory.

In her book "The World Republic of Letters", Pascale Casanova has leveled several criticisms against Bourdieu's theory of the field of cultural

¹⁷ Raphael Dalleo, *Bourdieu and Postcolonial Studies* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2016), 10.

production. Firstly, Casanova argues that Bourdieu's theory is too focused on the cultural production of France and Western Europe, and therefore neglects the dynamics of cultural production in other parts of the world. She argues that Bourdieu's theory fails to account for the fact that cultural production is a global phenomenon, with multiple centers and peripheries. Secondly, Casanova critiques Bourdieu's notion of cultural capital, arguing that it does not adequately explain the dynamics of cultural production in the world of letters. She argues that cultural capital is only one factor among many that determines success in the world of letters, and that other factors such as language, ethnicity, and geography also play a significant role.¹⁸

Davis points out in her article that Michael Burawoy and Karl von Holt in *Conversations with Bourdieu* also identify problems in applying Bourdieu's theories to South Africa, in particular, his avoidance of 'the concept of race' and his emphasis on 'symbolic violence' at the exclusion of 'structural and physical violence'.¹⁹

Considering that the AANES possesses a comparatively recent self-governance experience and confronts numerous obstacles in forming its own institutions across various facets of social life, one might legitimately question the feasibility of asserting an autonomous configuration of a field or even the existence of a Bourdieuan field of cultural production within the AANES. However, despite these challenges, it is still possible to apply Bourdieu's theory of the field of cultural production to the autonomous experience in the AANES to gain a deeper understanding of the cultural dynamics at play in this region.

As Hilgers and Mangez argue, the ambiguity surrounding the field's definition in non-Western societies should not preclude the application of Bourdieu's theory in such contexts. They argue that sometimes it refers to social space, where there is a structure of relational positions,

¹⁸ Pascale Casanova, *The World Republic of Letters*, trans. M. B. DeBevoise (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004).

¹⁹ Caroline Davis. "Playing the Game? The Publication of Oswald Mtshali." In *Bourdieu and Postcolonial Studies*, edited by Raphael Dalleo, 138. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2016.

while at others it refers only to an autonomous domain of activity. "Traditional" societies might be said to lack fields in terms of autonomous domains of activity defined in terms of Western forms of social organization. But it must also be asked, "do non-differentiated societies exist? What would such societies look like?".²⁰ The authors argue that it is problematic to categorize certain societies as "non-differentiated" based on the assumption that they lack distinct institutions of power and clearly defined domains of practice. This approach, they suggest, reflects an ideological bias that privileges Western societies as "modern" and non-Western societies as "traditional," and fails to recognize the complex and differentiated social structures that exist within non-Western societies. According to Hilgers and Magnez, pre-colonial African societies, for example, have their own systems of knowledge transmission, specific forms of capital, and structures of relational positions that involve power dynamics and differences. These structures may be overlooked if the analysis relies solely on Western models of differentiation.²¹ Therefore, the idea that fields should be studied within the context of each country's own social and historical changes has been taken into consideration throughout the thesis. As long as the concept of the cultural field is not applied mechanically, Bourdieu's theoretical model, in which society is composed of various social fields that influence one another and are structurally interrelated, can be applied to the autonomous experience in the AANES. For instance, Bourdieu's concept of the "habitus" can be used to understand how cultural production in the AANES is shaped by the social and historical context, which includes the cultural traditions and practices of the Kurds, as well as their experiences of oppression and resistance. Furthermore, Bourdieu's theory can be used to analyze the power dynamics that exist within the cultural field in the AANES. Another example is that Bourdieu's concept of "cultural capital" can be used to understand how power relations within the cultural field in the AANES

²⁰ Michael Hilgers and Eric Mangez, *Bourdieu's Theory of Social Fields: Concepts and Applications* (Abingdon, Oxon; New York: Routledge, 2015), 258-263.

²¹ *Ibid*, 261.

shape which cultural expressions are valued and recognized as legitimate, while excluding others.

As a result, Bourdieu's theory of the field of cultural production can be used to analyze fields of cultural production outside Europe and to understand the dynamics at play within these particular fields. It can be used to examine issues such as how a particular field exerts or resists power; how capital, resources, social networks, and habitus come into play; how localized knowledge is valued or devalued, and what motivations drive actors in the field. Such an analysis can help to provide a deeper understanding of the various dynamics at play within a particular non-European field of cultural production. This theory can also be used to explore the specific challenges and opportunities faced by cultural actors in the Middle East, such as the impact of political instability, economic inequality, social upheavals, and social fragmentation on the cultural field, and to identify potential strategies for supporting and promoting the cultural practices and goods. Applying the theory of the field of cultural production to the Middle East would involve examining the structure and dynamics of the cultural field in the region, taking into account the unique historical, social, and political factors that shape it. For instance, the role of religion, the influence of traditional and modern cultural practices, the impact of colonialism and imperialism, and the effects of ongoing political conflicts and civil wars would all be important considerations. In such contexts, the cultural field might be influenced by state control, censorship, and political agendas, as well as by grassroots movements, activism, and resistance. These factors can affect the production, distribution, and reception of cultural goods, as well as the forms of capital (economic, cultural, and symbolic) that are valued and contested within the field.

Although there have been several recent studies employing Bourdieu's field theory in the context of the MENA region, the majority of these studies have focused on social spaces where the existence of a formal state recognized in the international arena, as a part of the field of power at the national or regional level, is somehow involved in the field of cultural production (Mehrez 2008; Jacquemond, 2008; Sabry, 2012;

Lang, 2016; Lang and Jacquemond, 2019).²² What sets this thesis apart from the aforementioned studies is its endeavor to examine a cultural production field under construction within a territory dominated by a newly emergent non-state armed actor.²³ The primary objective here is to ascertain whether field theory can serve as a valuable framework for analyzing cultural production within such an unstable environment.²⁴

²² Richard Jacquemond, *Conscience of the Nation: Writers, State and Society in Modern Egypt*, trans. David Tresilian (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 2008).; Richard Jacquemond and Felix Lang (eds.), *Culture and Crisis in the Arab World: Art, Practice and Production in Spaces of Conflict* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2019).; Samia Mehrez, *Egypt's Culture Wars: Politics and Practice* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2008).; Felix Lang, *The Lebanese Post-Civil War Novel: Memory, Trauma, and Capital* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016).; Tarik Sabry (Editor), *Arab Cultural Studies: Mapping the Field* (I.B. Tauris, 2012).

²³ According to Yeşiltaş and Kardaş, non-state armed actors' (NSAA) common features would include the following: being organized and operating outside state control; use of violence to achieve political and military objectives; and the irregularity of military actions and semi-state structure to operationalize objective (Yeşiltaş and Kardaş 2018, p.7). While the administration in Rojava exercises a level of self-governance and controls significant territory, it is not recognized as a sovereign state by the international community. The region operates within the framework of a de facto autonomous administration and does not possess the attributes typically associated with a fully recognized state, such as international recognition, diplomatic relations, and membership in international organizations like the United Nations. As a non-state actor, the administration in Rojava has its own political, social, and economic agendas. It has established its own institutions, implemented policies, and engaged in governance and administration within its territory. PYD and its armed wing YPG/J is actively involved in a state-building process by establishing parallel administrations in the controlled territory and/or employing military means during armed struggles against Syria and Turkey. However, it is important to note that the relationship between non-state armed actors (NSAAs) and states is not always characterized by opposition, but rather exists on a continuum.

²⁴ While the existing literature encompasses several inquiries into non-state actors, non-state armed actors, rebel governance, and violent non-state actors, there remains a paucity of research investigating the relationships between these actors and the cultural sphere. Ana Arjona, Nelson Kasfir, and Zachariah Mampilly. *Rebel Governance in Civil War*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015).; Erica Chenoweth and Adria Lawrence, eds., *Rethinking Violence: States and Non-State Actors in Conflict*, Belfer Center Studies in International Security (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2010).; Natalie Ezrow, *Global*

According to Dryaz, non-state actors have effective control over a territory, engage in the state-building process, and establish a governance structure. Currently, Kurdish organizations in Syria, with the PYD at the forefront, are some of the most organized non-state actors on the Syrian political scene.²⁵ The administration in the AANES is involved in a diverse range of governance endeavors encompassing security, education, health, justice, public service, and diplomacy within regions where the presence and legitimacy of Syria state have been weakened. Namely, we can define the administration in the AANES as a *de facto* state-like political entity.

The emergence of non-state armed actors in unstable environments presents unique challenges and opportunities for cultural production. These actors often operate in contexts marked by political turbulence, shifting power dynamics, and fluid social structures. Consequently, it is essential to determine whether Bourdieu's field theory can serve as an effective analytical tool in such environments, where the traditional assumptions about the role of state apparatus may not hold.

Expanding the application of Bourdieu's field theory in this manner entails a thorough investigation of the dynamics of cultural production in territories under the influence of the autonomous administration. This includes exploring the ways in which these actors shape and are shaped by the cultural field, the role of power relations within this field, the autonomy of the field and the strategies employed by cultural producers to navigate the uncertainties and constraints of an unstable environment. By broadening the scope of Bourdieu's field theory to encompass the realities of unstable environments, we can gain a more nuanced

Politics and Violent Non-State Actors (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE, 2017).; Reyko Huang, *The Wartime Origins of Democratization: Civil War, Rebel Governance, and Political Regimes* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016).; Kujtim Mulaj, *Violent Non-State Actors in World Politics* (London: Hurst & Company, 2014).; Keith Krause and Jennifer Milliken. "Introduction: The challenge of non-state armed groups." *Contemporary Security Policy* 30, no. 2 (2009): 202-220. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13523260903077296>.

²⁵ Massoud Sharifi Dryaz, "Non-State Actors and Governance: Kurdish Autonomy in Syria," in *The Kurds in the Middle East: Enduring Problems and New Dynamics*, ed. Mehmet Gurses, David Romano, and Michael M. Gunter (Lexington Books, 2020), 99.

understanding of the complexities of cultural production in such contexts. This could ultimately contribute to the development of more effective and context-sensitive approaches to supporting cultural production in territories characterized by instability.

In this thesis, the objective is not to rigidly adhere to a purely Bourdieuan approach, but rather to adapt the theoretical framework to suit the specific context under investigation. It is posited that the analytical framework proposed by R. Jacquemond and F. Lang for examining the Arab cultural field may prove beneficial in the study of the cultural production field within the AANES. However, it is crucial to adapt this framework to account for the unique context of the AANES. Jacquemond and Lang note that as a starting point it will help to distinguish seven types of actors and institutions whose relations with the cultural producers, such as novelists, filmmakers and musicians, form the network of the field of cultural production. These are (1) institutions in charge of the publication or display of the cultural product: publishers, galleries, concert venues, cinemas; (2) criticism: newspapers, magazines, websites; (3) prizes and awards; (4) funding bodies; (5) schools and universities as institutions of formation and consecration; (6) censorship; (7) the audience. The relations or ties between these actors serve the circulation of, and access to material and immaterial resources. Such resources would include different kinds of capital, information, labor and facilities needed for cultural production.²⁶

This thesis will also investigate the AANES-specific relationship networks, complexities, and institutions, while examining the impact of institutions of publication, dissemination, and consecration, or their absence, on cultural production. Utilizing the analytical framework proposed by Jacquemond and Lang enables a comprehensive examination of the cultural production field, supplementing and expanding upon a traditional Bourdieuan approach.

²⁶ Richard Jacquemond and Felix Lang, eds., *Culture and Crisis in the Arab World: Art, Practice and Production in Spaces of Conflict* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2019), 12.

Nevertheless, it is vital to acknowledge that the Arab cultural production field and the emerging cultural production field in the AANES are distinct fields with differences in cultural production size, types of sovereignty, diversity of relationships between actors and institutions, levels of institutionalization, and the evolution of the field over time. These elements collectively shape the unique nature of each cultural production field, and their consideration is imperative in developing a well-rounded analysis.

It is important to recognize that many Arab states offer substantial institutional economic support for their own cultural production, and the Arab cultural production field maintains more robust institutional connections with the international arena. Additionally, the presence of consecration institutions and the regional dominance of the Arabic language have further facilitated the growth of the Arab cultural production field. In contrast, the Kurdish cultural production field has yet to experience the emergence of the aforementioned factors.

Nonetheless, the framework provided by Jacquemond and Lang serves as a valuable contribution to the field, functioning as a toolkit, as it underscores the essential aspects to be considered when exploring the unique processes of cultural production within these two contexts. Despite the existing differences, I propose that Jacquemond and Lang's analytical approach remains useful for examining the field of cultural production in the AANES, as it delineates the relationships, institutions, networks, and agents that warrant consideration in the analysis.

Before applying the analytical framework proposed by Jacquemond and Lang to the case of the AANES, it is necessary to examine case studies from other regions that share similar characteristics with the autonomous experience in the AANES in terms of cultural, linguistic, political, and administrative processes. This will provide a basis for comparison and help to contextualize the distinct features of the cultural production field in the AANES.

3.3 The Challenges in Cultural Production in Northeast Syria and Global Case Studies

In this part, I will concisely investigate the relationship between a field of power and the field of cultural production within the AANES. Initially, I will outline the challenges faced by the autonomous administration in the field of cultural production. Subsequently, I will conduct a brief comparison between the AANES and other entities with analogous experiences of autonomous administration in this field.

The AANES often faces several difficulties in the field of cultural production, due to the violent and unstable environments in which it operates and the challenges it faces in accessing resources and support.

The scarcity of resources and support presents a significant challenge for the autonomous administration in producing and disseminating cultural works. Various factors contribute to this situation, including the region's isolation, insufficient funding and infrastructure, and the complications of operating within a conflict zone. Additionally, the fluctuating and uncertain political and security landscape hinders the autonomous administration's ability to devise and execute cultural projects and initiatives. This instability stems from the ongoing conflict, competition among different actors, and the inherent difficulties of functioning in such an unpredictable environment. The lack of recognition and legitimacy in the international arena, which can make it difficult for the autonomous administration to gain acceptance and support from external actors in building the institutional support and infrastructure in the field of cultural production. Additionally, during its early years, the field of cultural production within the AANES was hindered by some obstacles such as institutional limitations, including a lack of infrastructure, funding, and resources for equipment and performance spaces, as well as a deficiency in specialization and the dominance of amateurism. Although some obstacles have been surmounted, others persist. Furthermore, enduring political divisions within the cultural field contribute to these

challenges. This situation adversely affects the positions and roles of various writers' organizations, constituting a significant impediment in the social and cultural domain.

Having provided a brief overview of the challenges faced by the existing administration in the field of cultural production, which will be explored in greater detail in the subsequent chapter, I would like to draw comparisons with two other experiences: the Palestinian National Authority and post-apartheid South Africa under the African National Congress (ANC) leadership. In this section, I will outline a concise framework that highlights both the similarities and differences between these experiences and that of the AANES.

The first case I will examine is post-apartheid South Africa. Bourdieu's theory of the field of cultural production can be useful in understanding the dynamics of cultural production in the context of postcoloniality, as it provides a framework for analyzing the relationships between cultural producers, institutions, and audiences, and the ways in which these relationships are shaped by the legacy of colonialism and the ongoing struggles for decolonization.

The post-apartheid decolonization process in South Africa also presents unique challenges and opportunities in terms of cultural production. After decades of oppression and segregation under the apartheid regime, there has been a concerted effort to promote and support the cultural production of previously marginalized communities, including Black and Indigenous South Africans. This has involved initiatives such as the establishment of cultural centers, the promotion of multilingualism, and the inclusion of traditional knowledge in education and other cultural practices.

During the process of decolonization, particularly, the language and publishing policies in post-apartheid South Africa will be examined in more detail regarding their similarity to those in the AANES. Upon examination of the field of cultural production in South Africa, particularly within the field of publishing, we see a divided field in terms of race and language even in the post-apartheid period. According to Botsis, the field primarily caters to a white, middle-class market, primarily in English and

Afrikaans, and has not adequately represented the diversity of the country's population.²⁷

The evolution of South Africa's publishing field can be traced through the influence of external forces such as colonial governance, the implementation of apartheid under nationalist rule, and the efforts at transformation following the end of apartheid. These factors demonstrate the recurring attempts by the governing authorities to exert control and regulation over the publishing field.

According to Le Roux, in South Africa, a publishing history provides a reminder that the literary field is not autonomous, as Pierre Bourdieu would say, but is rather enmeshed in a larger social, political, economic, and material context. When we look at the relationship between the publishing field and the field of power, the publishing field in South Africa experienced significant changes in the 1990s with the end of state censorship and the cultural boycott, leading to increased competition and consolidation in the field. However, hopes for improved relationships with the new ANC-led government were not realized, and the field has remained largely white-controlled, with English and Afrikaans being the dominant languages in which books are published.²⁸

Perhaps the most significant disappointment for those in the publishing field was the failure of the political transition to bring about desired changes. Those who had opposed apartheid had hoped for a transformed field and improved relationships with the newly elected African National Congress (ANC) government. However, these hopes were ultimately unfulfilled as the new government maintained relationships with the same established publishers which existed in apartheid era and multinational corporations.²⁹

²⁷ Hannah Botsis, *Subjectivity, Language and the Postcolonial: Beyond Bourdieu in South Africa* (Abingdon, Oxon; New York: Routledge, 2018), 44.

²⁸ Elizabeth le Roux, "Publishing in South Africa," *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Literature*, February 25, 2019, accessed December 5, 2022, <https://oxfordre.com/literature/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780190201098.001.0001/acrefore-9780190201098-e-275>.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

In South Africa, akin to the AANES, the most prevalent materials published in the post-apartheid publishing landscape were school textbooks. With the changing curriculum, the state, under the ANC administration, emerged as the largest purchaser in this field. However, unlike the AANES, which will be further discussed in subsequent pages, it was large international publishing houses, rather than government-controlled publishers, that were responsible for producing these school textbooks.

According to Le Roux, the publishing field is a relatively understudied area in South Africa, with a reputation for non-scholarly work by practitioners rather than academics. There is a dearth of comprehensive research on the publishing field as a whole, with only a limited number of historical overviews and studies of specific publishing houses. This lack of research also extends to the AANES and Palestinian publishing fields, which will be examined in the following pages. Literary and cultural studies in South Africa have largely focused on textual analysis and authorship, rather than publication, production, or readership.³⁰

Upon examination of the field of publishing and cultural production in South Africa, even in the post-apartheid period, we see that despite changing government policies and constitutional amendments, a very small number of books have been published in the officially recognized eleven local languages. The racial hierarchy determined what languages were valued and used in particular contexts, with Afrikaans and English existing at the top of the hierarchy and African languages relegated to the bottom rungs.³¹ According to Le Roux, English and Afrikaans are still privileged, and more than 95 percent of books are published in those languages. It was reported that, although English is the fourth most-spoken home language, it is the preferred language of learning in South Africa. About 64% of the 11.5 million pupils in public schools in

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Alexander Neville, "The Politics of Language Planning in Post-apartheid South Africa." *Language Problems & Language Planning* 28, no. 2 (2004): 113-30.

2010 chose to be taught in English.³² In South Africa, many parents have demanded that their children are educated in English rather than their mother-tongue, because of concerns about the quality of mother-tongue education and future education and work prospects.³³ This has led to what Heller describes as 'a multilingual population' exhibiting 'monolingualizing tendencies'.³⁴ The process of transition within the AANES diverges from that of South Africa. Notwithstanding the enduring dominance of Arabic, considerable advancements have been achieved in the adoption of Kurdish as a language in both educational and publishing contexts.

The process in the AANES can be viewed from two angles. On one hand, political parties, intellectuals, and writers from all over the cultural and political spectrum acknowledge that the inclusion of Kurdish, along with Arabic and Syriac, as official languages of education is one of the greatest achievements of the autonomous administration, despite certain reservations³⁵ about the education curriculum. However, the position of indigenous languages in education in post-apartheid South Africa remains quite weak, whilst English continues to gain dominance. On the other hand, it has also been noted that some families have sent their children to schools implementing the Syrian regime's education curriculum

³² Hannah Botsis "Subjectivity, Language and the Postcolonial: Beyond Bourdieu in South Africa", 85.

³³ Felix Banda, "The Dilemma of the Mother-Tongue: Prospects for Bilingual Education in South Africa." *Language, Culture and Curriculum* 13, no. 1 (2000): 51-66.

³⁴ Monica Heller, "Language choice, social institutions, and symbolic domination," *Language in Society* 24, no. 3 (1995): 374.

³⁵ Some opposition groups or individuals who are distant from the current autonomous administration have claimed that the education curriculum in Rojava is based on an ideological doctrine derived from the teachings of Öcalan and the PKK. See: Ofra Bengio, "Reclaiming National Identity in Kurdish School Textbooks," *The Middle East Journal* 74, no. 3 (2020)359-378.; Elise Boyle Espinosa and Adam Ronan, "Rojava's 'war of education': the role of education in building a revolutionary political community in North and East Syria." *Third World Quarterly*, 2022.; Josh Platzky Miller, "Radical Democracy and Educational Experiments: Lessons for South Africa from Brazil and Rojava," *South African Review of Sociology* 52, no. 2 (2022): 131-151.

due to concerns like those of families in South Africa and the issue of educational accreditation in the AANES.³⁶

Ultimately, when examining the cultural production and particularly the publishing field in South Africa during the postcolonial period, we can observe that certain publishing practices and uses of language, despite discursive constructions and constitutional amendments promoting multiculturalism and preserving indigenous languages, have been carried over into the post-apartheid era.

Secondly, I will compare the experiences of the Palestinian National Authority with those of the AANES in Syria.

It is worth noting that there is currently a lack of comprehensive scholarship on Palestinian cultural studies, and there are no academic journals or programs specifically dedicated to this subject. According to Helga Tawil-Souri, Palestinian cultural studies do not formally exist as an accepted field study. She notes that there is no scholarship that addresses the idea comprehensively. There are neither journals devoted to the subject matter nor such an academic 'major'. There has of course been a substantial amount of scholarship on Palestine, on the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, and issues relating to them; but a focus on culture has largely been secondary.³⁷ There appears to be a tendency in academic scholarship on the AANES to either neglect or relegate discussions of culture and cultural production to the periphery, with a disproportionate emphasis on political considerations. Similarly, research on Palestine has often had

³⁶ Elise Boyle Espinosa and Adam Ronan, "Rojava's 'war of education': the role of education in building a revolutionary political community in North and East Syria." *Third World Quarterly*, 2022. DOI: 10.1080/01436597.2022.2115884.

³⁷ Helga Tawil-Souri, "Where is the political in cultural studies? In Palestine," *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 14, no. 5 (2011): 467–482, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1367877911408656>, 468.

a limited focus on cultural issues, potentially due to the prioritization of political concerns and the ongoing challenges faced by Palestinians in their efforts to secure nation-statehood and basic rights. The various challenges and constraints of exile, refugee camps, and occupation make it difficult to prioritize cultural production and research in the academic world.

In the field of culture, like the experiences of the autonomous administration in northeast Syria, there are many challenges and inadequacies faced by the Palestinian Authority (PA), which is the administrative organization that exercises limited self-governance in certain parts of the West Bank as a result of the Oslo Accords in 1994. Some of these challenges are related to the broader political and economic situation in the Palestinian territories, including the ongoing Israeli occupation, restrictions on movement and access, and limited access to resources.

Here are a few fundamental factors that influence cultural production. The ongoing occupation of the Palestinian territories by Israel, as well as internal conflicts within Palestinian society, have had a negative impact on the field of cultural production in Palestine. Political instability can make it difficult for cultural workers to travel, access funding, and organize events and exhibitions in the occupied territories. It can also create an atmosphere of fear and insecurity that can inhibit artistic expression and creativity. Another point is that the field of cultural production in Palestine is underfunded and lacks the resources necessary to fully support the cultural works. This makes it difficult for those who work in the cultural field to pursue their work and limits the ability of cultural institutions to host exhibitions, events, and other programming. One final point to mention is that the occupation of the Palestinian territories has also had an impact on the availability of resources and infrastructure for the cultural field. For example, the movement of people and goods between different parts of the occupied territories is often restricted, which can make it difficult for those who work in the cultural

field to access the materials and equipment they need to create and showcase their work.³⁸

As a result, both the autonomous administration in the AANES and the Palestinian Authority have encountered similar challenges in the field of cultural production, including political instability and conflict, lack of funding, and limited access to resources and infrastructure.

I contend that these three different cases can be understood as different practices of decolonization developed in resistance to a colonial power field, and that the significance of decolonization practices in the cultural field is extremely important in understanding all three oppressed communities because decolonization is a contemporary form of resistance that seeks the humanization of the other. Ultimately, the decolonization of cultural practices and production is an essential tool in recognizing and reclaiming what has been lost and in affirming the validity of, and caring for, diverse ways of seeing, knowing, and being.

One similarity among these three forms of administration is that they all seek to promote and support the cultural production of their respective communities. This may include supporting publishers, artists, promoting authentic cultural practices, and providing funding or resources for cultural initiatives.

Overall, while there are certainly similarities in the roles of these three forms of administration in the field of cultural production, there are also important differences that are shaped by the specific political and social contexts in which they operate. There are important differences in the ways in which these three forms of administration approach cultural production. For example, the self-rule experience in the AANES is based

³⁸ Adila Laïdi-Hanieh, "Arts, Identity, and Survival: Building Cultural Practices in Palestine," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 35, no. 4 (2006): 70-85.; Tarik Sabry (Editor), *Arab Cultural Studies: Mapping the Field* (I.B. Tauris, 2012).; Kirsten Scheid, "Chapter 8 Palestinian Art Talk: A Local Lexicon for Global Art Production," in *The Global Politics of Artistic Engagement*, (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2022), doi: https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004518452_010.; Hanan Toukan, *The Politics of Art: Dissent and Cultural Diplomacy in Lebanon, Palestine, and Jordan* (Redwood City: Stanford University Press, 2021), <https://doi.org/10.1515/9781503627765>.

on a decentralized, participatory model of governance, which may allow for more local control and decision-making in the cultural field. The Palestinian authority, on the other hand, operates within a more centralized political system and may have more control over cultural production within its territory.

During the transitional period in South Africa, the ANC administration and subsequent governments attempted to influence cultural production, primarily by collaborating with large international publishing houses in the publishing field. In contrast, the AANES lacks the capacity and extensive cultural production market seen in South Africa. Instead, cultural production in the AANES is predominantly maintained through the support of the autonomous governance structure.

A crucial distinction between the decolonization process in South Africa and the self-governance experience in the AANES lies in the degree of international recognition and support each has garnered. While the post-apartheid transition in South Africa received substantial international backing, the autonomous structure in the AANES has encountered considerable resistance and suppression from the Ba'ath regime and neighboring countries. Additionally, the international community has frequently withheld political and legal recognition and support for the autonomous structure in the AANES.

After comparing the experiences of the autonomous administration with above mentioned international cases in the field of cultural production, the subsequent section will explore the ramifications of socio-political events, particularly the Arab Spring and the enduring civil war, on the applicability of field theory to the examination of cultural production in the Middle East.

3.4 The Syrian Uprising, the Kurds, and the Field of Cultural Production

How do the crisis, including civil wars, revolutions, popular uprisings, regime changes, foreign interventions, and successions, as well as the subsequent alterations in social and political configurations, influence the field of cultural production? How does the crisis affect the autonomy of

the field? As we explore the consequences of political and social crises on the field of cultural production, it can be posited that occurrences such as wars, revolutions, and popular uprisings may modify the political, economic, and social contexts in which cultural production takes place, resulting in changes in cultural products, the processes of their creation, and the agents involved in their production.

Political crises can have a significant impact on cultural production, influencing the themes, content, and form of artistic or cultural works, as well as the way in which they are received. Crises can also shape the historical narratives and traditions of specific art forms within a local or regional context. Cultural production can become a site of contention in conflicts, particularly those with an ethnic or national dimension, as it allows for the promotion and contestation of symbols, images, identities, and justifications.

In her article examining the impact of the war on the French literary field, Sapiro states that the crisis brought about by the war and the German occupation disrupted the autonomy of the cultural field. She notes that one of the characteristics of this crisis was not only the synchronization of all fields—economic, legal, medical, university, journalistic, literary, and so forth—but also their subordination to the political field. Synchronization always involves, to varying degrees, a loss of autonomy in fields.³⁹ According to Sapiro, war and occupation often disrupt the publishing field, leading to paper shortages, the closure of some publishing houses, and the emergence of new ones, often with political agendas. This can affect the autonomy of the literary field by influencing which works get published and promoted. Writers and other literary actors may be forced to choose between collaboration with the occupying authorities or joining the resistance. This can result in divisions within the literary field and a realignment of power relations.⁴⁰

³⁹ Gisèle Sapiro, "Structural History and Crisis Analysis: The Literary Field in France during the Second World War." In *Bourdieu and Historical Analysis*, edited by Philip S. Gorski, 266-285. Durham: Duke University Press, 2013, 267.

⁴⁰ *Ibid*, 266-285.

C. Raymond posits that research institutions and scholars engaged in the scientific field during the Lebanese civil war were subjected to similar destabilizing influences, as identified by Sapiro, regarding the impact of war and occupation on the autonomy of the literary field. In her article examining the relationship between research institutions, practices, and politics during the Lebanese Civil War, she analyzes how the war affected the autonomy of research institutions and the politicization of research practices.⁴¹

During times of civil war or political turmoil, for example, the focus of cultural production may shift away from artistic or aesthetic concerns and towards themes that reflect the realities of the conflict, such as propaganda or resistance art. The censorship and control over the circulation of cultural production also increased, leading to a suppression of certain ideas, beliefs, or representation that the governing authority deem it as harmful or inappropriate. Political crises can have both a direct and indirect impact on cultural production, shaping the themes, forms, and distribution of cultural products, and influencing the artistic freedom, opportunities, and representation of cultural producers. As we saw in the context of the Syrian uprising, especially in the first years of the civil war in regions outside of the autonomous experience, the field of cultural production was disrupted in several ways. For instance, physical destruction of cultural infrastructure, such as publishing houses, cinemas, museums, galleries, and theatres, hindered the ability of artists and cultural workers to produce and disseminate their work. Additionally, as seen in the example of many Syrian artists having to leave the country, the displacement of artists and cultural workers due to conflict or persecution disrupted cultural production and its autonomy.

In the aftermath of such events, the social and political formations that emerge can also have a significant impact on the field of cultural production. For instance, a new political formation may promote certain

⁴¹ Candice Raymond, "Committed Knowledge: Autonomy and Politicization of Research Institutions and Practices in Wartime Lebanon (1975–90)," in *Culture and Crisis in the Arab World: Art, Practice and Production in Spaces of Conflict*, ed. Richard Jacquemond and Felix Lang (London: I.B. Tauris, 2019), 73-102.

forms of cultural production and expression while suppressing others, depending on its ideology and goals. Alternatively, a political or social formation may support the development of a vibrant field of cultural production as a means of rebuilding and promoting national, political, or social unity. Conversely, a political or social formation may view cultural production and expression as a threat and seek to suppress it, either out of fear of dissent or as a means of exerting control over the population.

Pertaining to crisis situations, such as the civil war in Syria, Lang and Jacquemond assert that in such contexts, social sectors (Bourdieu would say 'fields') that are normally relatively partitioned and autonomous tend to reduce their autonomy, to meet with each other and to mobilize together. The context of crisis re-legitimized politically committed art and the figure of the politically committed artist, after they had lost their legitimacy at the autonomous pole of the field as they were instrumentalized by the field of power. The paradox lies in the fact that these moments of crisis are also times where the field of power loosens its control over the cultural field, resulting in a greater autonomy of the latter.⁴² In other words, in situations of crisis, social fields that usually maintain a certain level of autonomy and separation tend to experience a decrease in their autonomy, as they come together and unite for a common cause. Crises can serve to reestablish the legitimacy of politically engaged art and politically committed artists, who may have previously lost their standing within the autonomous cultural field due to their perceived manipulation by those in power. As they said above, the paradoxical aspect of this dynamic is that during these moments of crisis, the control that the field of power typically exercises over the cultural field appears to weaken, which in turn allows for increased autonomy within the cultural field. This phenomenon may occur because the field of power's focus shifts towards addressing the immediate challenges presented by the crisis, leaving the cultural field with a temporary reprieve from stringent

⁴² Richard Jacquemond and Felix Lang, eds. *Culture and Crisis in the Arab World: Art, Practice and Production in Spaces of Conflict*. London: I.B. Tauris, 2019, 5.

regulation. This increased autonomy can give rise to new artistic expressions and the resurgence of politically driven art.

Although, as observed in the Syria case, addressing other urgent concerns within the field of power during crisis situations may create opportunities for the development of autonomy in the field of cultural production, the increased politicization of actors within this field and their involvement in the political domain can potentially make the autonomy of the cultural field vulnerable to external influences.

As seen in the cases above, civil wars generally diminish the autonomy of social fields and these fields become increasingly vulnerable to external factors, which in turn challenge the domain's ability to sustain its distinct existence as a separate sphere of activity. However, a distinct situation emerges within the AANES context. The Syrian civil war, utilizing Bourdieuan terminology, not only led to a comprehensive restructuring of the field of power, but also facilitated the development of new fields of power and social fields across various regions of the country.

In any analysis of Syria's history, particularly from the emergence of the Ba'ath regime until the outbreak of the civil war in 2011, discerning the presence of a distinct Kurdish cultural production field proves difficult. While the Syrian Kurdish parties were allowed to conduct limited cultural activities and certain Kurdish writers succeeded in printing their books abroad for covert distribution within Syria up until the 2010s, the repressive approach of the Ba'ath regime toward the Kurdish language and culture, combined with its marginalizing policies, make it unlikely to claim the existence of a pre-war Kurdish cultural production, publishing, or literary field. However, the civil war in Syria also brought along new questions. Keeping Bourdieu's ideas on the autonomy of fields in mind, can we claim that an autonomous cultural production field has evolved in the AANES during the last ten years? Is the concept of autonomy considered a distinctive attribute limited to France or Europe, or does it embody an inherent trajectory universally applicable to diverse fields across different historical periods? Is it a universal tendency for social fields to

gravitate towards autonomy over time? In the ensuing sections, an attempt will be made to address these inquiries within the specific context of the AANES.

One of my main arguments in this thesis is that the belief that the field of cultural production should fundamentally move towards autonomy might itself be shaped by particular social and cultural situations. In other words, the trajectory of the cultural production field toward either autonomy or heteronomy is contingent upon the socio-political contexts in which the field is situated, as well as its temporal and spatial dimensions, and its interconnectedness with the field of power and other social fields. I contend that the political field, often regarded as an important external influence that contributes to the heteronomous orientation of a field, ought to be understood as an enabling factor for the advancement of the cultural production field within the AANES in specific aspects. In field theory, discussions of autonomy are central when examining “minority” or “small” literatures⁴³, such as Kurdish literature, which can be extended to other fields of cultural production. Autonomy in minority literature is generally analyzed concerning two factors. The first is the relationship between minority literature and dominant literature, with the domination relationship leading minority literature towards heteronomy. The second factor is the relationship between minority literature and other fields within the minority community, with the political field being of utmost importance. In the AANES case, the relationships between Kurdish literature and Arabic literature, or Kurdish and Arabic languages, negatively impacts the autonomy of the Kurdish cultural field or literary field due to the inherent inequality of the domination relation-

⁴³ B. Lahire, "Specificity and Independence of the Literary Game," *Nationalities Papers* 40, no. 3 (2012): 411-429, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00905992.2012.674017>.; Clémence Scalbert-Yücel, "Languages, politics and field theory – the question of the autonomy of small literatures," *Nationalities Papers: The Journal of Nationalism and Ethnicity* 40, no. 3 (2012): 315-320, DOI: 10.1080/00905992.2012.675150.

ship. On the other hand, as seen in the AANES example, constructing autonomy in the cultural production or literary field, and accumulating sufficient cultural capital is entirely dependent on the political field. This dependency does not indicate a heteronomy relationship but rather acknowledges that literary and cultural production fields emerge as a result of national or identity movements. Though it may seem paradoxical, the attainment of autonomy for literary or cultural production fields can require a certain level of dependency on the political field for a specific period.

The second argument posits that, although crisis situations like the Syrian civil war often diminish the autonomy of social fields, the AANES example, which emerged in the wake of the civil war, enabled the emergence and expansion of new social fields such as cultural production, potentially leading to greater autonomy. However, it is important to bear in mind that other factors also impact this outcome. A related argument, as previously noted by Lang and Jacquemond, is that the power field's concentration on more urgent matters, or the absence of prioritization concerning control over the cultural production field, seemingly affords a certain level of autonomy to agents active within the cultural production field in the AANES.

The autonomization of fields plays a significant role in Bourdieu's theoretical framework; it is suggested as an implicit understanding among agents involved in the cultural production field. Nonetheless, this assumed direction should not be perceived as a universal standard; rather, it is a temporary and localized manifestation of the field, influenced by diverse socio-cultural factors specific to different geography. Contrary to critiquing Bourdieu's theoretical framework as inherently ethnocentric or Eurocentric, my objective is to employ Bourdieu's model and theoretical insights to effectively depict the AANES case as a "special case of what is possible".⁴⁴

⁴⁴ Pierre Bourdieu, *Practical Reason: On the Theory of Action* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), 2.

I contend that the focus on autonomy, which is evident in the evolution of the French cultural production field, does not carry the same significance in the context of Kurdish cultural production field in the AANES. Autonomy is not a component of ‘the structure in each variable observed’, rather should be regarded as a mutable attribute of a field.⁴⁵

It is important to note that the emergence and expansion of the field of cultural production in the AANES is not only a result of the civil war or external factors, but also a product of the specific historical and social context of the region, including the emergence of the autonomous administration and the cultural policies it has implemented. According to Hilgers and Magnez, the study of the genesis of fields provides an articulated set of theoretical propositions that make it possible to identify the features marking the emergence of a new domain of activity, notably, the appearance of a specialized elite, the rationalization and constitution of specific knowledge (a specific language), the creation of authorities providing recognition and consecration, the setting of a tariff for entry into the field, transformation of the schemes of perception, growing refraction.⁴⁶ To put it in other different words, examining the genesis of a field offers a comprehensive framework of theoretical ideas that enable the recognition of characteristics indicative of a new sphere of action. These features include the emergence of a dedicated elite, the development and establishment of a distinct language specific to field, the formation of authoritative entities and institutions that bestow acknowledgment and consecration, the establishment of criteria for field entry, and increasing differentiation. In the subsequent sections, I will elaborate further on how some of these characteristics were developed within the cultural production field in conjunction with the establishment of autonomous administration in the AANES.

With the establishment of autonomous administration in the AANES, it is evident that there has been a significant expansion in the

⁴⁵ Ibid, 2.

⁴⁶ Michael Hilgers and Eric Mangez, “Bourdieu’s Theory of Social Fields: Concepts and Applications”, 5.

field of cultural production when compared to the pre-war period, despite some structural challenges. Factors such as the establishment of new publishing houses and printing facilities, the appearance of new cultural agents, the emergence of numerous magazines, the formation of new institutions and writers' associations, the regular organization of festivals that serve as consecration functions specific to the field, a continuous increase in the number of magazines and books, and the emergence of new forms of capital within the field, all serve as some indicators that illustrate the extent of growth in the cultural production field in the AANES. However, the mere emergence and growth of a cultural production field may not sufficiently elucidate the degree of autonomy within that field.

In situations of social crisis and the resulting political formations, the autonomy of the cultural production field can be affected in various ways, leading to either an increase or decrease in autonomy, depending on the specific context and the interplay between various factors.

In some cases, social crises and the associated political formations may lead to a decrease in the autonomy of the cultural production field. This can happen when the field of power becomes more interventionist, using its influence to control or manipulate cultural production to advance its political interests or maintain social stability. Censorship and surveillance increase as the field of power seeks to suppress dissent or alternative viewpoints. Economic constraints during a crisis can limit the resources available to cultural producers, making them more dependent on external support (e.g., from the state or private sponsors), potentially compromising their autonomy.

In other situations, social crises and the resulting political formations may lead to an increase in the autonomy of the cultural production field. This can occur when the field of power is weakened or preoccupied with addressing different conflicts, creating a space for cultural producers to operate with more independence. Cultural producers and intermediaries mobilize in response to the crisis, forming networks or organizations to support each other and preserve the autonomy of their field. The crisis sparks a surge in creativity and innovation, as cultural

producers engage with the challenges and complexities of the situation, often pushing the boundaries of conventional artistic and intellectual expression.

In summary, social crises and the associated political formations can have different impacts and outcomes on the autonomy of the cultural production field. The specific dynamics and outcomes will depend on the context and the interactions between the various actors and forces involved in the fields of power and cultural production.

When we examine the autonomous experience in the light of the conditions of possibilities mentioned above, the establishment of an autonomous administration in the northeast Syria has led to a unique political and social context that prioritizes principles such as direct democracy, gender equality, and ecological sustainability. This new political framework may have created more space for diverse cultural expressions and fostered a sense of collective identity among the various communities in the region, potentially increasing the autonomy of the cultural production field. The AANES have supported cultural production that reflects its political vision and social aspirations, thus encouraging the development of the autonomous pole of the cultural field. For instance, the autonomous administration might prioritize cultural production that promotes its political values and goals, such as fostering social cohesion, celebrating diversity, and empowering marginalized groups. This could lead to the emergence of new forms of cultural capital and symbolic capital that are valued within the field, as well as new roles for cultural intermediaries, such as festival organizers, magazine editors, and publishers.

As we will see in more detail in the following pages, the ongoing conflict and political instability in the region have led to a surge in creativity and innovation among cultural producers, who often engage with the challenges and complexities of the situation, pushing the boundaries of conventional cultural, artistic and intellectual expression. For example, it is worth noting the significance of the Rojava Film Commune and Hunergeha Welat within this context. On the other hand, upon a broader

examination, it is feasible to briefly discuss an array of factors that potentially diminish the autonomy of the field. The ongoing conflict and political instability in the region might also have significant implications for cultural production in northeast Syria. For example, cultural producers face challenges related to limited resources, insecurity, and displacement and making them more dependent on external support (e.g., from the administration, NGOs, fund organizations, or regional and international actors), which could influence their autonomy. In some cases, the field of power uses its influence to shape the cultural production field according to its interests, which could lead to the co-optation and instrumentalization of cultural production. This might result in cultural, artistic, and intellectual expressions becoming subservient to political agendas, potentially undermining their autonomy.

The relationship between social crises, political formations, and the autonomy of the cultural production field is often complex and multifaceted, with diverse outcomes depending on the specific context. Factors such as the nature of the crisis, the political landscape, the cultural history of the society, and the resilience of cultural producers and intermediaries can all shape the dynamics between the fields of power and cultural production.

As a result, in this chapter, I tried to examine the applicability of Bourdieu's field theory to the context of cultural production in the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria (AANES), a region characterized by a recently established self-governance system. By adapting Bourdieu's framework to suit the unique dynamics of the AANES context, the study aims to investigate the power relations, distribution of capital, and the role of various institutions and actors within the emerging cultural production field. The thesis acknowledges the challenges of applying Bourdieu's theory to non-European contexts and argues that it can still provide valuable insights into the AANES cultural field if employed flexibly and in conjunction with the analytical framework proposed by Jacquemond and Lang. This approach ultimately seeks to contribute to a more nuanced understanding of cultural production in unstable environments.

In examining the impact of political and social crises on the field of cultural production, this chapter argues that the trajectory towards autonomy or heteronomy is contingent upon the socio-political context and interconnectedness with the field of power and other social fields. The AANES case, emerging from the Syrian civil war, presents a unique situation where the cultural production field expanded despite the crisis, potentially leading to greater autonomy. However, this autonomy is not universally applicable and should be considered a mutable attribute of a field, influenced by diverse socio-cultural factors specific to different geographies. By using Bourdieu's theoretical framework, this study aims to depict the AANES as a 'special case of what is possible,' recognizing that the focus on autonomy in the French cultural production field does not carry the same significance in the AANES context. The expansion of the cultural production field is a result of both external factors such as civil wars, and the region's specific historical and social context, including the emergence of the autonomous administration and its cultural policies. The study of the genesis of fields in this context provides insights into the characteristics indicative of the development of the AANES cultural production field, allowing for a nuanced understanding of its autonomy.

4

The Political Economy of Cultural Production in Northeast Syria

In the next two chapters, the following primary questions will be addressed to guide the development of the thesis: (1) How does politics intersect with the field of cultural production, and how have institutional frameworks and self-governance practices impacted the cultural landscape in the post-2011 period? (2) What are the primary institutions and actors that have operated within the field of cultural production in northeast since the establishment of autonomous administration and what forms of capital do writers and cultural actors from the AANES possess? (3) What structural conditions have shaped the habitus of actors in northeast Syria and what are the key themes and stylistic characteristics in the field of cultural and literary production in the post-2011 period (4) What are the challenges and opportunities facing the field of cultural production in this context?

In his article examining the role of various forms of capital, including economic, social, and cultural capital, in shaping power dynamics and influencing the trajectories of civil wars, Baczko and Dorronsoro implies the discipline of sociology has yet to provide a comprehensive and satisfactory explanation concerning the emergence of new institutions under conditions of uncertainty, as the current understanding remains in

a work in progress.¹ In the context of the autonomous administration in northeast Syria, this implication highlights the necessity for further exploration and analysis of the unique dynamics and interplay between various social, political, and cultural factors that have contributed to the establishment and functioning of this self-governing region amidst a volatile environment.

How can a social field be studied? What aspects should be considered during the analysis? Schwartz notes that we do not actually observe fields directly; we construct them from the relevant empirical realities that operate interrelationally. A field perspective, therefore, includes not just one type of social unit, say, churches in the field of religion, but all types of units that are implicated in any significant way in religious activity, such as seminaries, schools of religion, publications, publishing houses, tv and radio broadcasting, music and mass media, and so forth.² In other words, the underlying idea is that fields are complex and multifaceted, consisting of a variety of interconnected actors and institutions. By adopting a field perspective, a researcher can gain a more comprehensive understanding of the dynamics and relationships within a particular area of interest. This approach allows for a better analysis of the power dynamics, exchanges, and negotiations among the diverse units involved. For instance, examining the field of cultural production with this perspective would involve exploring the relationships between various cultural institutions, actors' discourses, their influence on one another, and the role of external factors, such as politics, in shaping cultural practices and beliefs. This method helps to uncover the complex and often implicit interactions and power relations within a field, which may not be evident

¹ A. Baczko and G. Dorronsoro, "Thinking about Civil Wars with and beyond Bourdieu: State, Capital and Habitus in Critical Contexts," *Journal of Classical Sociology* 22, no. 2 (2022): 16.

² David L. Swartz, "Metaprinciples for Sociological Research in a Bourdieusian Perspective," in *Bourdieu and Historical Analysis*, ed. Philip S. Gorski (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013), 27.

when focusing solely on one type of social unit. Drawing upon these insights, I endeavor to scrutinize the various cultural institutions and social entities within the field of cultural production in northeast Syria.

According to Magnez and Lienard, the process that gives rise to the emergence and development of fields is a process of functional differentiation which progressively distinguishes different spheres of activity. By functional differentiation, we do not mean to suggest that this process corresponds to a functionalist dynamic or some 'natural' evolution of societies, but simply to indicate that this process differentiates and constructs distinct functions (health, art, education, etc.). As has been indicated, the specific fields arise from struggles for the recognition of new forms of specific cultural capital: they do not respond to an historical necessity but are constituted through power relations.³ The establishment of the autonomous administration was accompanied by significant transformations in the region's cultural, artistic, and media landscapes, including the proliferation of newspapers, periodicals, books, radio and television stations, as well as new printing and publishing houses, cultural centres, and writers' associations. These developments reflect the process of functional differentiation, which differentiates and constructs distinct spheres of activity.

4.1 The Main Actors and Institutions in the Field

In this part, the primary actors, institutions, and their respective positions within the field of cultural production in the AANES will be discussed, as well as the intersection of this field with both the economic field and the field of power.

³ Eric Mangez and Georges Liénard, "The field of power and the relative autonomy of social fields: the case of Belgium," in Michael Hilgers and Eric Mangez, *Bourdieu's Theory of Social Fields: Concepts and Applications* (Abingdon, Oxon; New York: Routledge, 2015), 186.

Mehrez posits that for Bourdieu, literary, cultural and artistic production in general is inherently related to a complex network of institutions (inside and outside the cultural field) that enable or impede, empower or delegitimize it and its actors.⁴ In the AANES's cultural production field, the autonomous administration holds a central position as both an organizer and financial supporter through its institutions. The key actors and institutions within this field include the Culture Commission (Desteya Çandê), regional culture and arts committees, the Literary Council (Dîwana Wêjeyê), the Kurdish Language Institution (Sazîya Zimanê Kurdî), and writers' and intellectuals' associations, particularly within the publishing sector.

I will now proceed to briefly discuss these actors, their positions, and their roles within the cultural production field. Following the declaration of autonomous administration in the AANES in 2014, the Culture Commission, or Desteya Çandê, was established to serve as the central governing body for cultural production in the region. Co-chaired by a male and female representative, the commission works in tandem with regional culture and arts committees to oversee the cultural landscape and manage a broad array of cultural activities. These activities encompass the organization of book, theatre, and poetry festivals, as well as the preservation of archaeological sites and the revitalization of touristic areas.

Additionally, the Culture Commission and regional committees play a pivotal role in organizing panel discussions, symposia, and other cultural events, while also securing the necessary economic resources. Within the AANES's most basic political units, the communes, committees were formed to address various fields such as culture, education, health, and economy. In each region, an arts and culture committee were

⁴ Samia Mehrez, *Egypt's Culture Wars: Politics and Practice* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2008), 9.

established to assume responsibility for the planning and execution of all artistic and cultural events within the communes.

The Literary Council (Dîwana Wêjeyê) serves as one of main actors in the field of cultural production within the AANES, entrusted with the responsibility of deciding which content merits publication. Although financially supported by the autonomous administration, the council, which changed its name from the Literary Committee to the Literary Council in 2016, retains autonomy in its decision-making processes. It is crucial to note that the Literary Council operates independently from the Cultural Commission of the autonomous administration, functioning as a separate, autonomous entity.

The Kurdish Language Institution (Sazîya Zimanê Kurdî, or SZK) was initially founded clandestinely in 2007, with the objective of providing Kurdish language instruction and training for both teachers and students. Starting from 2011, the SZK emphasized teacher training and conferred diplomas upon those who successfully completed its various course levels. In 2019, the SZK established a research institute in Qamishli, shifting its focus towards the exploration of language, lexicon, linguistics, dictionaries, and folklore. Alongside its research endeavors, the SZK fosters collaboration among intellectuals, authors, and translators in Rojava by organizing lectures, seminars, and workshops on cultural topics.

In addition to the semi-official Kurdish Language Institution, there are a number of intellectual and literary organizations operating within the cultural field that are affiliated with various political parties. These include the Writers Union of Syrian Kurds (Yekîtiya Nivîskarên Kurd li Sûriya), the Writers Union of Syrian Kurdistan (Yekîtiya Nivîskarên Kurdistanê li Sûriya), the Union of Intellectuals of the Cizîrê Region (Yekîtiya Rewşenbîrên Herêma Cizîrê), the West Kurdistan Intellectuals Union (Hewgirtina Rewşenbîrên Rojavayê Kurdistanê-HRRK), and the Syrian Union of Writers and Journalists (Yekîtiya Giştî yê Rojnamevan û Nivîskarên Sûriya). While some of these writer and intellectual associations maintain close relationships and cooperate with the autonomous administration, others refrain from involvement for political reasons.

The existence of numerous writers' unions can be attributed more to political divisions rather than cultural or literary differences within the field. In the AANES, alongside writers' unions aligned with the current administration such as HRRK, the Union of Intellectuals of the Cizîrê Region, and the Writers Union of Syrian Kurds, there are also writer associations that maintain distance the administration or align with opposition parties, such as the Writers Union of Syrian Kurdistan and the Syrian Union of Writers and Journalists. In addition to these writer associations, institutions such as the Culture Commission and the Literary Council share the fundamental objectives of promoting the Kurdish language, enhancing Kurdish literacy, ensuring the publication of high-quality Kurdish books, training capable Kurdish language teachers, and organizing Kurdish language seminars, events, and panels. The primary aim of all these institutions and associations is to establish a "Kurdish" cultural production field independent of political divisions. While the culture commission, the literary council, and writer unions aligned with the administration discuss the significance of the AANES and the opportunities provided by the current administration, writer associations that maintain distance to the administration primarily focus on the cultural sphere, striving to avoid involvement in political matters. Although their public and cultural events are quite similar and sometimes even jointly organized, the existence of five different writer unions solely stems from political differences and divisions. Writer unions aligned with the administration, along with the culture commission, organize cultural activities with the necessary financial support provided by the autonomous administration. On the other hand, other writer unions fund their activities through their own resources, support from politically affiliated parties, or assistance from Europe and Iraq. Additionally, the expenses related to rent, logistics, and similar costs of writer unions aligned with the administration are covered by the current administration. Lastly, in unstable environments, cultural production is often used as a tool for political mobilization and social change. This can lead to a more politicized field of cultural production, as artists and writers use their work to address the

social and political issues that are affecting their communities. The utilization of cultural production as a means of social change and political mobilization is more prominently observed in the cultural activities of writer unions aligned with the administration, the content of their published magazines, and the discourses of writers and intellectuals close to the administration.

The aforementioned institutions have played a significant role in promoting the development of culture, education, art, and intellectual pursuits in the AANES, particularly in recent years. However, it is important to note that there remains considerable room for growth. According to various individuals I have interviewed, these institutions have not yet achieved the desired societal impact, especially in the context of writer's unions. For instance, an interviewee working in a media organization that is not affiliated with any political party mentioned that, although these various writers' and intellectuals' unions exist in theory, their activity in the literary and cultural field is limited. Likewise, the leader of a writers' union affiliated with the autonomous administration indicated that the unions face challenges in unifying, which hinders the growth of the cultural field. According to him, this inability to unite, stemming from the political field's influence on the cultural field, creates a negative perception among the public. This perspective appears to be shared by numerous individuals within the field of cultural production. Another respondent residing abroad, who has also individually contributed to the cultural field, stated that despite the existence of numerous institutions and writer's unions in the AANES the desired level of development has not yet been reached in the cultural field, resulting in a lack of mature and high-quality works. A translator who is a member of a political party opposed to the administration praises the work done in the field of education⁵ by the autonomous administration but claims that an institution to

⁵ According to an article written by Konê Reş in Şermola magazine, who is a well-known writer in Rojava, "the number of students studying under the Autonomous Administration (Cizîrê, Kobanî, Girê Spî, Reqe, and Şehba, where the people of Afrin are) is 898,000. The

standardize the language field has not yet been developed and, as a result, most Kurdish writers use Kurdish grammar rules according to their own interpretation, which is damaging to Kurdish.

According to Magnez, one of the main challenges in implementing the field approach has to concentrate on objectifying the structures of relative positions. Who are the main (individual or collective) actors engaged in the work of production, distribution and consumption? What is the organizing principle of the structure of positions that links, opposes, distinguishes and hierarchizes them?⁶ This situation is easier to objectify when it comes to the field of cultural production in northeast Syria, since it is still a fairly new field. Examining the relatively recent emergence and evolution of the Kurdish cultural production field in the AANES, applying the field approach should not pose significant challenges. In summary, the AANES exhibits a distinctive system of cultural production, with various institutions and organizations significantly contributing to the development of culture, education, art, and intellectual fields within the region. Prominent examples of these institutions include the Culture Commission (Desteya Çandê), the Literary Council (Dîwana Wêjeyê), and the Kurdish Language Institution (Sazîya Zimanê Kurdî). It is important to acknowledge that some of these organizations, such as the Literary Council, maintain independence from the autonomous administration, thus enabling autonomous decision-making processes. Furthermore, the region also hosts numerous intellectual and literary unions, which are often affiliated with political parties, although the extent of their cooperation with the autonomous administration remains ambiguous. Collectively, these institutions have indeed made strides in shaping the

number of students in Cizîrê is 230,000, and there are 20,000 teachers in the Cizîrê region. The number of schools in Cizîrê is 3,229. Today, throughout the Kurdish regions, the Kurdish language is taught in all schools. The number of Kurdish language teachers is estimated to be 1,325 in Cizîrê, 930 in Afrin, and 400 in Kobanî. See: Konê Reş, "Di Sedsala Dawî de, Rewşa Ziman û Rewşenbîriya Kurdî li Rojava," Şermola, no. 16 (autumn 2022): 25-42, Dêrik.

⁶ Michael Hilgers and Eric Mangez, "Bourdieu's Theory of Social Fields: Concepts and Applications", 21.

AANES's cultural landscape; however, some interviewees have articulated that these entities have not yet achieved the desired societal impact.

4.2 Post-2011 Cultural Landscape in Northeast Syria

Since 2014, a variety of cultural activities have been organized in northeast Syria, including the Herekol Book Fair, the Rojava Art and Culture Festival, the Rojava International Film Festival, the Osman Sabri Literature Festival, the Leylun Festival, the Women's Culture and Arts Festival, the Kobanî Theatre Festival, the Children's Festival, the Rojava Children's Orchestra, reading gardens and cafes, and poetry evenings. These events have been coordinated by the Culture Commission and writer and literary unions.

As seen above, a considerable number of cultural and artistic events in the AANES are organized in the form of festivals. For instance, a theater production might be presented as part of a theater festival. While some cultural and artistic activities designated as festivals occur annually, others are one-time events. In Turkey, the organization of cultural events as festivals is reminiscent of the Kurdish political movement's endeavors to shape the cultural sphere at the local level through the municipalities it gained in Turkey in the late 1990s. With the electoral success of parties representing the Kurdish movement in local municipalities at the end of the 1990s, festival activities have significantly increased, leading to the evolution of more sophisticated artistic expressions. Local authorities support specialized festivals dedicated to theater, music, film, literature, and the Newroz celebration. Other municipalities in the region have adopted similar events based on a model developed in Diyarbakır. These festivals are viewed as effective means of promoting Kurdish identity, democratization, cultural diversity, and multiculturalism in the region.

Similarly, the festivals in the AANES can be perceived as efforts to construct a new culture in the post-2011 era. The proliferation of festivals in the AANES should be understood as a revival of Kurdish culture

and language following an extended period of suppression and denial, as well as an embodiment of the new language of political struggle and resistance that has manifested within the cultural field.

Prior to delving into a comprehensive analysis of the publishing field, I would like to provide a brief overview of the developments that have occurred in various fields of cultural production and the cultural institutions that have emerged in the AANES since 2011.

Since 2011, former Syrian state buildings have been repurposed as culture and art centers. Within the Culture Commission, committees focused on cinema, archaeology, theater, and literature were established. Furthermore, a variety of art and culture associations, groups, movements, and communes emerged, including Hunergeha Welat, Pargîn, Kevana Zerrîn, the Rojava Cinema Commune, and the Sarya Baran Theatre. These institutions endeavor to foster and advance cultural production in their respective fields.

In this section, I will explore the various art and culture institutions dedicated to preserving and revitalizing Kurdish culture in the region. Within these collectives, cultural actors aim to forge a new culture and rekindle the connection between art and society through their works, while also pursuing innovation in the realms of culture, film, theater, and music. These institutions emphasize self-sufficiency, allowing them to execute their projects on budgets that are comparatively low by contemporary art market standards and challenging the established norms of modern art. Through their endeavors, these institutions play a vital role in shaping the cultural landscape in northeast Syria.

Established in Dirbesiyê in 2015, the Rojava Film Commune is committed to creating an alternative cinema and culture in the region, with the objective of producing films for the people. The commune has generated numerous documentaries and short films, as well as feature films such as 'Bajarên Wêranbûyi', 'Ji Bo Azadi', and 'Kobanî'. Additionally, there are affiliated communes in Shehba, Kobanî, and the Cizîre Region that are connected to the Rojava Film Commune.

There is a noticeable lack of academic articles addressing the cinema or cinema history in the region. The only existing written work on

the subject is an article⁷ by documentary filmmaker Zanyar Omrani, who resides in France. Omrani's article is based on interviews with elderly individuals in the Kurdish-Syrian regions. The author himself acknowledges the challenges he faced in conducting research on this topic, which proved to be more difficult than anticipated.

According to Omrani, the history of cinema in Rojava, cannot be examined in isolation from the general Syrian cinema. If one accepts the notion of a distinct "Kurdish Cinema," it should be acknowledged that the Kurds have had the smallest contribution to the development of this concept.

Omrani notes that the tragic death of 283 children in a cinema fire in Amude in 1960 led Kurds to avoid attending movie theaters, and subsequent rumors further fueled their apprehension about cinema. For instance, he mentions that in 1993, a rumor circulated stating that "on a certain day, the Ba'ath regime wanted to set the city's cinema on fire, so that, this time the Kurdish youth be burned." Omrani points out that in recent years, young filmmakers such as Şero Hindê, Mano Xelîl, Akram Heidu, and Teimur Abdi have produced short films, clips, and documentaries about Kurdistan in Kurdish. Common themes in Kurdish cinema in Rojava encompass "war," "homelessness and nomadism," "genocide memories," "resistance," and "forced migration." According to Omrani, a critical question to consider is whether the establishment of autonomy in the AANES has generated the necessary conditions for the expansion and development of cinema within the region.

Kevana Zêrîn, a cultural institute for women which translates to "Golden Crescent," has initiated various projects, formed committees, organized conferences, and established centers throughout Rojava. At these centers, women are provided with cultural and aesthetic education, as

⁷ The Kurdish Project, "Introduction to the Rojava Revolution's Cinema," accessed October 17, 2022, <https://thekurdishproject.org/introduction-cinema-rojava/>.

well as support for the advancement of the Kurdish language and literature. Kevana Zêrîn organises trainings and activities such as cultural associations, art exhibitions, bands, dance and theatre groups with the aim of rendering 'women's colours' more visible in the process of anti-patriarchal social transformation.⁸ According to Shahvisi, women-only spaces may be seen as a natural extension of the decentralising of governance within Rojava in accordance with democratic confederalism.⁹

Hunergeha Welat, or "The Art Atelier of the Country," is a Kurdish music academy founded in 2019 and based in Qamishli. It is a music community in the region that engages in artistic and cultural activities. Music videos, short films, and documentaries produced by renowned directors and filmmakers such as Şero Hindê and Mehmûd Berazî have generated significant attention and served as a valuable source of inspiration for young directors and artists in region. According to Dirik, newly formed centres in the fields of theatre, cinema, music, dance, and fine arts, many of which are organized under the revolutionary culture and art association of Hunergeha Welat, recruit from and perform for local communities, displaced people and refugees and revive their traditional folkloric dances, artisanship, songs, and specific forms of musical expression such as dengbêjî. These efforts are amplified in the media outlets built often with the help of the local self-administrations.¹⁰ The autonomous administration has implemented various initiatives in the cultural domain to emphasize Kurdish identity and increase its visibility. These efforts include promoting and preserving Kurdish languages, art, and cultural traditions as a means of counteracting the denial practices imposed by the

⁸ Dilar Dirik, "Stateless Citizenship: 'Radical Democracy as Consciousness-Raising' in the Rojava Revolution." *Identities* 29, no. 1 (2022): 27-44. DOI: 10.1080/1070289X.2021.1970978, 39.

⁹ Arianne Shahvisi, "Beyond Orientalism: Exploring the Distinctive Feminism of Democratic Confederalism in Rojava." *Geopolitics* 26, no. 4 (2021): 998-1022. doi: 10.1080/14650045.2018.1554564, 8.

¹⁰ Dilar Dirik, "Stateless Citizenship: 'Radical Democracy as Consciousness-Raising' in the Rojava Revolution.", 40.

Ba'ath regime over the years, such as the suppression of the Kurdish language and the forced assimilation of Kurds into Arab culture. Furthermore, the autonomous administration has often endeavored to reclaim and reinterpret Kurdish cultural heritage while integrating elements of traditional Kurdish culture into contemporary art and literature. One of examples is "Nazê Nêrgisa Hewşê," a music video produced by Huner-geha Welat and directed by Mehmûd Berazî, which has garnered 20 million views on YouTube.¹¹ Although these viewership rates seem low, they are very promising for a developing cultural production field. Despite being filmed in Qamishli with limited resources, the most notable aspect of this professionally-shot, modern music video is its experimental contribution to the Kurdish music scene from the region, as it does not use any musical instruments. By transcending traditional music forms, this video is among the most innovative works in recent years, incorporating Kurdish songs, folklore, and traditional Kurdish clothing into modern artistic expressions.

In the AANES, numerous theatre groups have been established, both with the support of the autonomous administration and independently. The first theatre festival took place in 2015, featuring nine participating groups, four of which were independent. Presently, only one of these independent theatre organizations remains active. Since 2015, a variety of theatre productions of different lengths, some with abridged or incomplete scripts, have been performed in various regions of the AANES. The Culture Commission assists with the financial costs of theatre groups, while independent groups are responsible for their own funding. One respondent who directs and performs in theatre plays in the AANES notes that musical plays may not always involve compositions by musicians, texts developed by dramaturgs, or stage decorations, costumes, lighting, and other stage design elements. The theatre field in the AANES may require more time and experience to fully develop and mature. Despite various challenges, Teatra Sarya Baran, the first women's theatre group founded within Kevana Zêrin, continues to stage successful

¹¹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ytsUbEqIPJo> accessed January 6, 2022.

plays. Established by four women in Qamishli in 2018, the Teatra Sarya Baran group has performed Dario Fo's "Jina Bi Tenê," "Diqîrim," "Aşti Baskê Çûkê De Ye," as well as the children's play "Diziya Baxce."

A significant challenge confronting the theatre field in the AANES, as with numerous other fields, is the limited interaction with the outside world. According to theatre director in reside in Qamishli, theatre performers and plays from the AANES region neither travel abroad nor to other Kurdish regions in neighboring countries, and similarly, actors, actresses, or plays from other regions do not visit. This restricted exchange hinders opportunities for learning, growth, and development within the theatre community in the AANES.

Pargîn, a cultural institute established in the AANES in 2021, aims to safeguard Kurdish cultural heritage. The village of Deşta Sûsê in Dêrik serves as the centre of the institution, which was founded within the Culture Commission. The term "Pargîn" refers to the act of digging around tents to protect the inside from rain. The institution was named after this traditional practice in order to preserve cultural traditions. In 2020, a small group of predominantly Kurdish Koçers began the work of establishing Pargîn. Pargîn's research has focused on documenting the traditional way of life of Kurdish nomads known as "Koçers."

The Hinar Cultural Project, active in the AANES between 2016 and 2018, was the first initiative of its kind to be published entirely in the Kurdish language. Its objective was to preserve the Kurdish language and cultural heritage, which included collecting and documenting oral traditions in the region. Throughout its duration, the project published approximately thirteen original works spanning various genres such as stories, novels, thought pieces, music, poetry, and children's literature. Additionally, it translated eight books from Arabic and French into Kurdish. The project also produced a book on the renowned singer Mihemed Şexo. Regrettably, the Hinar Cultural Project could not continue due to insufficient financial support.

4.3 The Formation and Evolution of the Publishing Field in Northeast Syria

In this section, I will briefly assess the advancements in the publishing field in the AANES since 2011, including the works published and the cultural projects initiated. Following the attainment of autonomy, the AANES experienced a substantial surge in cultural, media, and artistic endeavors. Although these efforts initially stemmed from a combination of amateurism and social solidarity, given the limited economic resources, considerable progress has been made in most of these fields within a relatively short span of ten years.

It has been noted that the region's economy, due to the ongoing military and political conflict in the region, has a significant focus on military expenditures and salaries¹², which leaves insufficient funding for cultural, artistic, educational, and healthcare initiatives. Additionally, there have been criticisms that the autonomous administration's theoretical commitment to cooperative agricultural and industrial enterprises as the foundation of its alternative social economy model is not effectively implemented in practice.¹³

There is no publicly available information on the specific budget allocated to the culture commission by the autonomous administration

¹² "The number of its employees ranges between 200,000 and 230,000, 100,000 of whom are armed men in the security forces (Asayish) or the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF). The average salary of civil servants is SYP 65,000 a month (\$100) and it can reach as high as SYP 100,000 (\$150) for military personnel" (Hatahet, 2019, 8)

¹³ Sinan Hatahet, "The Political Economy of the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria," (Florence: European University Institute, Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies, 2019), accessed December 10, 2022, https://cadmus.eui.eu/bitstream/handle/1814/65364/MED_WPCS_2019_16.pdf ; Sary Ghadi, "Kurdish Self-Governance in Syria: Survival and Ambition," Research Paper (Chatham House for the Royal Institute of International Affairs, 2016), accessed December 10, 2022, <https://www.chatham-house.org/sites/default/files/publications/research/2016-09-15-kurdish-self-governance-syria-sary-embargoed.pdf>.

in the AANES.¹⁴ The official webpage¹⁵ of the autonomous administration does not provide a general budget or budget for the culture commission. However, the Rojava Information Center (RIC) has listed some cultural and tourism activities that the autonomous administration carried out in 2019, such as maintaining and documenting archaeological sites, organizing book fairs and theatre festivals featuring women's plays, producing short films, and hosting drawing events for approximately 200,000 children.¹⁶ It is unclear how much funding was allocated for these activities and other cultural initiatives not mentioned by RIC. According to Hatahet, there is no or little available data on the budget revenue of the AANES, and it is particularly difficult to trace how it is collected and spent, partly because of the lack of transparency on this issue and partly because of the quasi-non-existent banking sector in the region.¹⁷

As a result, it is also not known how much of the budget is set aside for the publishing and cultural fields. However, some of my interviewees mentioned that the autonomous administration does provide a budget for the publishing sector.

After briefly discussing the general economic situation of the AANES based on the available information, we will now attempt to examine the regulations related to the field of publishing and cultural production. In the AANES, while a media law (2021) exists, there are no specific

¹⁴ "Accordingly, while the total revenue of the autonomous administration in 2019 was \$115,394,089, its total expenses were \$112,245,820. While \$72,570,763 of the total revenue comes from oil and diesel, \$42,143,917 comes from other revenues of the autonomous administration. Of the total expenses, \$45,495,870 went to regional salaries and budgets, while \$66,749,950 went to other expenses, whose detailed information is not available."

" <https://rojavainformationcenter.com/2020/07/annual-report-of-the-autonomous-administration-of-north-and-east-syria/> accessed January 6, 2022.

¹⁵ <http://smne-syria.com> accessed January 6, 2022.

¹⁶ <https://rojavainformationcenter.com/2020/07/annual-report-of-the-autonomous-administration-of-north-and-east-syria/> accessed March 12, 2022.

¹⁷ Hatahet, "The Political Economy of the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria," 12.

laws or regulations addressing printing, copyright, or publishing. A concise document pertaining to printing and broadcasting was drafted as a law in 2015, but it has yet to be enacted. The intention is to prepare a comprehensive draft law in 2023. In the absence of a publishing law, the literary council is responsible for determining which books will be published. The council primarily evaluates the quality of works and does not approve those deemed to be of inadequate quality, rather than acting as a censorship mechanism.

There are several provisions related to this subject in the context of human rights in the social contracts declared in 2014 and 2016. Article 35 of The Social Contract for Rojava: Charter of the Autonomous Regions of Afrin, Jazeera, and Kobane, announced in 2014, states: “Everyone has the right to freely experience and contribute to academic, scientific, artistic, and cultural expressions and creations, through individual or joint practice, to have access to and enjoy, and to disseminate their expressions and creations.” Article 37 of the same contract states: “Freedom of media, press, and publishing shall be guaranteed.”

The Social Contract for the Democratic Federation of Northern Syria, announced in 2016, also includes references to laws and institutions related to publishing, but as previously noted, there is currently no law or institution in this field.¹⁸

¹⁸ Article 63 of the fifth chapter of the contract on media, publishing, and information institution media consists of a few paragraphs. The first three paragraphs are as follows: “Media, publishing, and information institution shall organize itself independently according to the principle of free and democratic publishing and media. It shall help develop and support media and publishing institutions and ensure free media activities within legal frameworks. It shall not allow monopoly in the field of media and publishing; it shall monitor and supervise the realization of freedom of media in accordance with the freedom of society to receive news and necessary information. It shall also be assigned to ensure fair and equal financial support for all media and publishing systems according to legal frameworks. (1), The institution consists of a sufficient number of members, half of them is elected by the conference or cantons’ councils and they include representatives of components and social segments; and the other half are elected by national media institutions. (2), It conducts activities according to the principles of media and publishing law. It organizes itself according to fields of work and it forms committees and conduct activities according to the principles of its rules of procedure (3)”.

While the autonomous administration has maintained cultural units responsible for the cultural field at both cantonal and administrative levels for nearly a decade, a comprehensive and planned cultural policy is yet to be established. This shortcoming may be justifiable for a fragile and constantly threatened political structure, and it could be argued that the decade-long period has been relatively brief to develop a cultural policy. However, considering the autonomous administration's capacity and agility in institutionalizing other spheres of social and political life, it can be contended that progress in the cultural sphere has been somewhat delayed.

Having briefly examined some economic and legal factors in the AANES pertaining to the publishing field, I will now explore the conditions of production and distribution within this field.

In 2017, the autonomous administration's culture commission decided to support and promote local authors by printing and distributing books and magazines within the AANES. To facilitate this, the autonomous administration funded the construction of two new printing houses, Simav and Martyr Herekol. There are also privately-owned printing houses that are supported by individual entrepreneurs. Since the establishment of the autonomous administration in the AANES, there have been four main ways in which books and magazines have been printed. Firstly, materials are printed according to the decision of the autonomous administration's cultural commission or academic unit. Secondly, several publishing houses, such as Şiler and Neqs were established in 2017 and are responsible for publishing a range of periodicals and books. Although these publishing houses receive financial support from the autonomous administration, they maintain autonomy in their editorial decision-making process, including the selection of books to be published. Thirdly, books and magazines are printed by various authors' associations. According to a respondent who serves as the head of a union of dissenting writers residing in Qamishli and opposed to autonomous administration, it has become increasingly difficult to publish and distribute books for dissenting writers in the AANES due to economic reasons. Furthermore,

the same respondent states that the proposal to print books by the autonomous administration has been rejected due to political concerns. However, another dissident writer has a different viewpoint on this issue. The dissident writer who previously held a leadership position within a writers' union, asserts that the works of independent authors are not published in the AANES and that those who wish to print their works must do so at their own expense and distribute them by hand. He claims that it is extremely difficult to work as an independent writer in the AANES, and that those who express a different perspective are met with hostility from all sides.

Finally, private publishing houses like Ava and Dar publish books and magazines that are funded by the publisher or the author. Moreover, some private publishing houses experienced brief periods of operation and closure during this time, and some were recently established for a short duration. One interviewee explained that, given the political and economic instability in Rojava, individuals in the private sector tend to be hesitant in making substantial investments in publishing. Additionally, there is the Mesopotamia Publishing House, which obtains permission for printing from the Syrian regime. While this publishing house primarily publishes Arabic books, it also produces some Kurdish books related to folklore and culture.

An interviewee residing in Northern Europe suggests that while these publishing houses possess the autonomy to decide which books to print, they frequently exhibit a strong inclination to publish works by prominent Kurdish authors—driven by either economic considerations or the pursuit of recognition—without giving substantial weight to the content. For instance, publishing the works of Jan Dost or Helim Yusiv frequently yields financial profit and prestige for these publishing houses within the cultural production field. According to Bourdieu, the publisher's function is not simply limited to reproducing texts mechanically, but rather involves the production of literary prestige. He stated that the symbolic production of the work, i.e., the production of the value of the work or, which amounts to the same thing, of belief in the value of the

work.¹⁹ He posits that the 'prominent' publisher, acting as a 'discoverer' of the author, significantly contributes to the process of 'symbolic production.' However, there is a reverse process at play in northeast Syria. Contrary to Bourdieu's assumptions, these newly established publishing houses in northeast Syria endeavor to publish the works of renowned authors with the intention of providing literary prestige and recognition for themselves, rather than for the authors. Moreover, I suggest that a pervasive sense of disappointment exists among numerous individuals engaged in cultural production, as they perceive that the symbolic value of published works is not adequately generated due to various challenges faced in the field, the most prominent of which is the limited reader base. While having their book published by a publishing house holds significant importance for authors, the name or logo of that publishing house may not yet possess the desired symbolic value or literary prestige. In the AANES, it is the renowned writers, rather than the publishing houses, who can create symbolic prestige within the cultural production field. Publishers in the AANES, with merely six or seven years of history, are frequently willing to publish the works of well-known writers.

According to data collected from 2012 to June 2022, a total of 763 books were published in the AANES, with 432 (57%) of these being published in Kurdish and 331 (43%) in Arabic. The author with the most published works during this period was Salihe Heydo, who produced 39 books primarily focused on Kurdish folklore, compilations, and traditional clothing.

Poetry books constituted the largest genre, comprising 212 titles or 27% of the total, followed by research books with 167 volumes (22%), and novels with 105 books (14%). Short story books were the least frequently published genre, comprising only 86 titles or 11% of the total. Until recently, cultural production in the AANES was predominantly financed by writers or writers' associations. However, in recent years, the autonomous administration has taken on a more significant role in

¹⁹ Bourdieu, "The Field of Cultural Production", 37.

providing support for this field. It is crucial to acknowledge that the economic conditions in the AANES are influenced by ongoing conflict, which inevitably diverts significant resources away from areas such as cultural production, education, publishing, and the arts. As a result, it is expected that the number of books published in the AANES in the last decade would be relatively low. However, this fact should not overshadow the importance of the vibrant cultural and intellectual endeavors in north-east Syria, which, despite facing numerous obstacles, merit in-depth analysis and appreciation in their own right.

Publishers	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	Total
Şiler Publishing House	-	-	-	-	-	69	40	39	27	71	13	259
Cizîrê Culture Commission	-	-	-	6	1	2	5	7	3	4	3	31
AANES culture commission	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	16	-	16
Dar Publishing House	-	-	-	-	2	10	-	-	-	-	-	12
HINAR Project	-	-	-	-	3	8	2	-	-	-	-	13
Mesopotamia Publishing House	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	7	7
Şopdarên Rojê (Children of the Sun) culture center	-	-	-	-	-	-	7	2	8	2	-	19
Neqş Publishing House	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	6	16	1	24
Mesopotamia Translation	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	1	3	5
Ava publishing house	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	10	22	22	5	59
The Studies of Euphrates	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	1	1	-	3
The Union of Intellectuals of the Cizîrê Region	-	-	-	-	2	1	10	1	2	3	-	19
The West Kurdistan Intellectuals Union -HRRK	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	4	1	4	-	10
The Writers Union of Syrian Kurds	-	-	-	1	2	6	2	12	3	20	-	46
The Writers Union of Syrian Kurdistan	-	-	-	1	-	8	22	6	3	1	1	42
Academy unit of AANES	-	-	-	-	-	2	-	-	2	-	-	4
Private publishing houses	5	3	10	17	14	22	4	7	13	22	7	124
Number of Books Published Outside of AANES but in Syria	3	-	1	-	-	5	5	4	1	3	2	24
Number of Books Published Outside of Syria	5	6	6	3	3	2	2	8	4	4	3	46
Total	13	9	17	28	27	135	100	102	97	190	45	763

Annual Publication Statistics in the AANES Source: Dilshad Murad, the editor of Şermola Magazine

Previously, authors who aimed to publish books or magazines were required to gather the necessary funds either individually or collectively before proceeding with the printing process at one of the autonomous administration's printing houses or a select few private publishing houses. For instance, in 2019, the cost for printing approximately 1,500 magazine copies were around 100,000 Syrian liras (app 150 USD). By 2022, a publishing house affiliated with the autonomous administration might print 500-1,000 copies of a book, providing the author with around 100 copies and distributing the remainder to various regions. The autonomous administration's distribution unit disperses a significant portion of the printed materials to bookstores throughout different cities in the region, while some works are also sold at book exhibitions and fairs. In recent years, a dwindling number of authors have financed their own works to be printed in private publishing houses. Apart from the region, books and magazines are also printed in Iraqi Kurdistan, Iran, Damascus, and Lebanon.

The process of printing a book or magazine in the AANES is contingent upon the relationship between the author and the autonomous administration. Typically, the administration prints the works of authors' unions that support the administration and possess a work permit, while authors' unions opposed to the administration or lacking a work permit usually have their works printed in private printing houses that share their views or outside Rojava. In recent years, the autonomous administration has demonstrated a degree of flexibility in this policy, offering to publish works of authors' unions that do not support the administration or lack a work permit. However, these unions have refused such offers for political reasons. This situation indicates that the position-takings within the field is to some extent related to the political field. The costs for works produced by opposition authors' unions are often financed by affiliated political parties, and these works are frequently distributed to the public free of charge. Authors' unions possessing a work permit are recognized as non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and receive monthly funding from the autonomous administration, which is

utilized to cover logistical, rental, organizational expenses, and other costs associated with organizing cultural events and activities.

Since 2016, several periodicals focusing on literature, history, and culture have been established in the AANES, including Şermola, Rojava, Sîwan, Rê, Sormey, Al-Hiwar, Welat, Penûsa Azad, Şar, and Dastar. Between 2011 and 2016, no print magazines were published due to challenges in the printing process. Presently, only a handful of these magazines continue to release new issues on a quarterly basis. Often published in both Kurdish and Arabic, these magazines receive financial support from the autonomous administration or political parties and structures within AANES. The bilingual publication of these magazines aims to reach a wider audience at both local and regional levels. Furthermore, several periodicals have been produced by writer associations or via collaborative endeavors among individual authors; however, numerous such publications have grappled with financial constraints and struggled to maintain consistent distribution. Several have ceased physical printing and transitioned to digital formats, while others have relied on financial assistance from international sources. Moreover, during this period, several other publications, including Penûsa Nû, Dîwar, Nîviskar, and Deşt, were also produced. However, copies of these magazines are no longer available, either online or in print. Despite their ephemeral existence, it is important to acknowledge that these magazines were indeed published and had a presence at the time.

Other notable publications include Ronahi²⁰, a newspaper with a circulation of around 10,000 to 15,000 that is closely affiliated with the

²⁰ There is a television channel with the same name, which is close to the autonomous administration. It also broadcasts on Zagros TV, which is ideologically close to KDP in Iraq. In addition, radio channels such as Arta fm, Welat and news agencies such as Ara News, which are not close to any political structure in northeast Syria, are supported by international funds.

autonomous administration, and *Bûyer*²¹, a newspaper supported by an international fund. Both publications regularly feature culture and art pages with columns on current cultural developments in the AANES.

According to Amir Hassanpour, the characteristic features of Kurdish media in the early 1990s were low circulation, poor printing facilities, poor distribution facilities, shortage of newsprint, and limited professionalization and specialization, which he indicates is a common feature of the press in developing countries.²² Hassanpour's analysis of Kurdish media in the 1990s bears a striking resemblance to the early conditions surrounding the establishment of autonomous administration in northeast Syria after 2011. Nonetheless, as resources have been directed towards the media sector, a noticeable enhancement in the progress of both print and digital media outlets in the AANES has emerged.

In their article on the media field in the AANES post-2011, Badran and Angelis note that the professional identity of independent media in the AANES is based on three main elements: the decision to distinguish themselves in opposition to party media, the use of multiple languages instead of privileging the Kurdish language and the promotion of a multi-sectarian view of society.²³ It is important to highlight that, despite the limited emphasis in the work of Angelis and Badran, the perceived independence of these media organizations from political parties might be attributed to their ongoing financial support from foreign organizations. Another contributing factor could be that the Kurdish language audience has not yet grown to a level that generates adequate economic returns.

²¹ Organizations in the field of media rather than publishing field receive financial assistance from international institutions and funds. Many TV, radio, online magazines and websites such as Arta fm and Shar magazine operating in the field of media receive assistance from international organizations, NGOs and funds.

²² Amir Hassanpour, *Nationalism and Language in Kurdistan* (San Francisco: Mellon Press, 1992), 276.

²³ Yazan Badran and Enrico De Angelis, "'Independent' Kurdish Media in Syria: Conflicting Identities in the Transition." *Middle East Journal of Culture and Communication*, vol. 9, no. 3, 2016, pp. 334–351, doi: 10.1163/18739865-00903001. Available at SSRN: <https://ssrn.com/abstract=2871562>. 336

When examining the media field in the AANES, it becomes evident that regardless of alignment with opposition or administration-affiliated political structures or claims of independence, the media sector is relatively more developed and able to secure financial support from international sources such as funds and NGOs in terms of resource acquisition, when compared to other cultural fields such as publishing, theatre, and cinema.

It is evident that the reliance on funding from foreign organizations has led some media outlets and magazines in the AANES to restrict their coverage mainly to cultural topics, avoiding delving into political issues.²⁴ This can be observed in the content of some magazines, which may not feature coverage of political matters pertaining to the AANES region. This phenomenon is commonly seen when funding is directed towards radios, magazines, or news agencies operating in fields such as culture, literature, or journalism, which avoid engaging with political controversies.

One example of the ongoing cultural and intellectual efforts in the AANES is the online *Şar* magazine, which is funded by a foreign organization. This magazine features numerous articles written by young and mid-career writers who engage in critical discourse on various issues related to the autonomous administration while also expressing sympathy towards it. However, in this magazine, we find very few articles on political issues or the relationship between politics and culture. In this regard, a poet-writer living in Qamishli, who writes articles for many of these magazines, points out that their concern is only to claim their own culture and language, and they only want to stay in the cultural field and

²⁴ According to Badran and Angelis, since 2011 several media institutions have begun to emerge: radio stations such as Arta fm and Welat; newspapers such as Buyer, Welat and Shar; and news agencies such as Ara News. As with the majority of the other Syrian media which emerged in the same period, these outlets are supported by international organizations and governments, or they rely on investments by local businessmen and communities. Ara News, for example, is supported by Free Press Unlimited and Sida. Arta is supported by Creative, a private American association funded by the us Congress. Welat is supported by several organizations including Basma, Adopt a Revolution, and MICT. Shar is supported by us government funding through Chemonics (2016:338).

avoid the conflicting arena of politics. This situation may stem from a sense of fatigue or indifference caused by political issues being sufficiently addressed in other environments, coupled with a drive to concentrate exclusively on cultural topics.

According to Dirik, the issue of funding is shaped on the basis of hostility towards the Kurdish movement. She stated that many reporters and outlets outside of the movement's political circles present themselves as 'independent' but are often funded by European or regional NGOs or affiliated with other Kurdish political parties.²⁵ It can also be seen in the example of Palestine that funders have different agendas. In an article examining the political and social roles of theatres in the West Bank, Varghese states that the issue of funding often aims to direct those being funded towards focusing on specific issues rather than institutions within the national movement. He notes that on the other hand, the funders to whom practitioners must turn have very different agendas. Funders' concerns are not to do with Palestinian liberation but, rather, 'issues' framed as 'projects': women's rights, drugs awareness, sexual health, children's empowerment, coexistence with Israel, non-violence, and so forth. Whereas many of these issues matter to Palestinians, problems arise when funders approach them as singular projects without much attention to the wider political contexts from which they emerge. Of course, theater-makers of the 1970s and 1980s were discussing social and cultural problems within Palestinian society; this, however, was always in the context of the national movement.²⁶

In other words, funding often directs organizations towards specific issues rather than supporting the broader national movement, and funders often have their own agendas related to individual issues such as women's rights or non-violence, rather than supporting any liberation or

²⁵ Dilar Dirik, *The Kurdish Women's Movement: History, Theory, Practice* (London: Pluto Press, 2022), 218.

²⁶ Gabriel Varghese, *Palestinian Theatre in the West Bank: Our Human Faces* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), 31.

political movement. This can cause problems when these issues are approached as isolated projects without considering the wider political context.

4.4 A Concise Comparison of Northeast Syria and Its Neighboring Regions

In addition to challenges related to securing funds and resources, actors operating in the publishing and other cultural fields encounter a variety of other problems. In her article regarding the development of Kurdish literature and its process of autonomy in Turkey, Scalbert elucidates the challenges that persisted in the literature field during the 2000s. She notes that until recently there were few tools or resources, a lack of publishing opportunities, scarce literary production on which to build, and the absence of a standard language as a tool for literary creation. The first generation of writers had to acquire their tools on their own: learning individually from textbooks and from the few literary publications, or directly from their peers and elders.²⁷ In examining the potentialities and limitations within the cultural production field of the AANES, one can discern that the challenges confronted by Kurdish literature in Turkey, as well as the strategies and positions embraced by Kurdish authors in response to these obstacles, bear resemblance to the experiences of writers in the AANES endeavoring to generate cultural artifacts amid the constraints imposed by warfare. Like the situation in Turkey, the publishing field in the AANES struggles with financial limitations and inadequate resources. However, the difficulties encountered in the AANES are a result of the ongoing war and the uncertain political situation. Although the analysis of Turkey's publishing field spans approximately three decades, dating back to the 1990s, the time-frame under consideration for the AANES is comparatively shorter, encompassing merely the past decade and predominantly focusing on the most recent

²⁷ Clemence Scalbert-Yücel "Emergence and equivocal autonomization of a Kurdish literary field in Turkey." *Nationalities Papers* 40, no. 3 (2012): 357-372. doi: 10.1080/00905992.2012.674014, 360.

six or seven years. In the AANES, numerous Kurdish writers, particularly those from the first and middle generations, have had to depend on self-education in the Kurdish language due to an absence of formal education opportunities. As a result, these writers often encounter challenges and difficulties in achieving proficiency in Kurdish. For example, a respondent in his forties, who leads a writers' union, mentioned that the only resource available for learning Kurdish in the 1990s was Celadet Bedirxan's grammar book, which was authored in the 1930s. However, in the post-2011 period, many grammar books, dictionaries, and Kurdish spelling and orthography resources have been published, primarily to assist institutions and actors in the field of education, thanks to the activities of the Kurdish language institution (SZK). Moreover, through connections established with Kurdish regions in neighboring countries, many of the aforementioned types of books have been brought to Rojava.

An examination of the cultural field in the AANES in comparison to that of the Iraqi Kurdistan regional government can provide valuable insights for evaluating the publishing and cultural field in the AANES in the process of post-2011. The Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) established the first Kurdish Ministry of Culture in 1992 with Law No. 11. However, over the years, Kurdish region of Iraq has experienced considerable social and cultural detachment from the rest of Iraq and the global community, leading to an unstable political and economic environment. Consequently, culture has not been acknowledged as a crucial area for public engagement. The Ministry of Culture and Youth's budget remains minuscule, constituting around 1% or even less of the regional budget, likely due to economic stagnation and fiscal reductions.²⁸

The primary provider for organizational support in the realm of Kurdish cultural activities within the Iraqi Kurdish region is the Ministry of Culture and Youth under the KRG, and more broadly within the political system. In terms of administration, the scope of these key providers' functions operates through a bifurcated model at both central and local

²⁸ Renata Kurpiewska-Korbut, "The Socio-Political Role of Modern Kurdish Cultural Institutions," in *Rediscovering Kurdistan's Cultures and Identities: The Call of the Cricket*, ed. Joanna Bocheńska (Palgrave Macmillan Cham, 2018), 5.

levels. This division is manifested in the existence of two distinct ministries: the Ministry of Culture and Youth, and the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquity.

Stating that all cultural institutions in the Kurdistan regional administration operate under state license, Kurpiewska points out that transferring funds to cultural institutions is insufficient for two reasons and lists these reasons. She notes that first, there are other budget expenditures considered to be much more significant and urgent, such as education and health care, and these are given priority over culture. The second reason is prevalence of misunderstandings between the central government in Baghdad and the KRG on resource distribution, and delays in approving the central budget. This situation obviously poses many problems and prevents the institutions from operating smoothly. It impedes the efforts of individual institutions to plan strategically and discourages management from seeking creative ways of revitalizing their institutions, not to mention covering basic overhead, salaries, and pre-approved projects. Given the structure, the cultural institutions have no financial autonomy in determining the allocation of their resources. Thus, cultural institutions are encouraged to seek extra-budgetary funding from political parties, private sponsors, and foreign sources.²⁹

Cultural institutions are encouraged by the Kurdish authorities to seek extra-budgetary funding from sources outside the government. Subsidies are therefore provided by political parties, private sponsors and foreign—mainly diaspora—sources. Despite the support, artists argue that the authorities lack a serious strategy for developing culture in the region and criticize the focus on representation and coordination rather than decision-making. KRG claims to promote cultural independence, yet political parties like the KDP and PUK hold considerable influence over the cultural sphere. This can be seen through their patronage of nationalist symbolism in art and architecture projects. Even though resources are scarce, the cultural sector in Kurdistan continues to grow, particularly in the city of Silemanî, which has become a vibrant artistic hub. Artists

²⁹ Ibid, 113.

are increasingly engaging in self-organized groups and experimenting with new modes of expression. Kurdish cultural institutions are also gradually reaching out to the international community to promote their art, although this cooperation is often limited to ad hoc exchanges and invitations to individual artists and intellectuals.³⁰

When comparing the number of publications and circulation in the AANES to that of the Iraqi Kurdistan Regional Government, which has a larger population, it is apparent that the field of cultural production in the AANES has progressed despite the various challenges it faces. This is an important consideration when assessing the development of the cultural production field in the AANES.

Sheyholislami notes that “Kurdish periodicals have not been able to secure wide audiences and attract advertising revenues and overcome the linguistic divisions in Kurdistan. A more recent observation suggests that the most popular periodical in Iraqi Kurdistan may not circulate more than 10,000 copies. This low consumption of print materials is also true about Kurdish books. The population of Iraqi Kurdistan is more than 4 million, but the average run of books is just about 1,000.”³¹

Obtaining trustworthy statistics regarding the present state of the publishing sector in the Iraqi Kurdistan region is a formidable challenge. Nevertheless, considering the information provided in Sheyholislami's book, albeit approximately a decade old, and additional sources³² that include the circulation figures of the region's most widely read newspaper, one can infer that the region's cultural production is not particularly vigorous. It is important to acknowledge, however, that when juxtaposed with the AANES region, the Iraqi Kurdistan region might demonstrate a lower degree of cultural production, as indicated by the accessible numerical data.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 116-128.

³¹ Jaffer Sheyholislami, *Kurdish Identity, Discourse, and New Media* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 31.

³² Kurdish Media Watchdog Organization (CHMK) accessed December, 17, 2022, accessed December 17, 2022, <https://chmk.org/iraqs-kurdish-media/>.

In conclusion, this chapter aimed to provide a succinct examination of the primary actors and institutions within the AANES's cultural production field, their respective positions in this field, and the post-2011 evolution of cultural developments within the region. After briefly addressing the impact of the war economy on cultural production in the AANES, it was noted that the essential institutional cultural policies and legal regulations pertaining to the publishing field have not yet been implemented in the region. After analyzing the production and distribution processes in the publishing field, along with the positions of various stakeholders such as publishing houses, writers' unions, and cultural commissions, the AANES's statistical data related to the publishing field was shared, followed by a comparison with the neighboring Kurdistan Regional Government and Turkey. Despite the challenges imposed by the AANES's war conditions and the influence of political actors on the publishing field, a growing publishing and cultural production landscape is evident in the region, although not yet at the desired level, as emphasized by numerous interviewees.

5

The Complexities and Dynamics of Cultural Production in Northeast Syria: A Multifaceted Exploration of Habitus, Capital, and Strategies

The chapter delves into the complexities of the cultural production field in the AANES, placing emphasis on the actors' habitus and roles, positions, and strategies employed by key actors within this field. A thorough understanding of these elements is essential for elucidating the dynamics that underpin the region's cultural production field. The chapter begins by examining various actors involved in the AANES's cultural production field, highlighting their habitus. Subsequently, I explore the cultural and linguistic capital and symbolic power held by the actors and the influence of Arabic in the region's cultural production field. By examining the resources and influence they possess, I try to understand their impact on the region's cultural dynamics and the degree to which they shape the field's trajectory. Lastly, I investigate the strategies and tactics utilized by these actors to secure and maintain their positions within Syrian-Kurdish cultural production field, further illuminating the complex landscape of the domain.

To put it more concretely, this chapter will encompass various aspects of the actors' habitus in the cultural production field. Additionally,

the chapter includes the field-specific challenges, the positioning of actors within the field in relation to the political context, the relationships, and interactions among the actors within the field, the influence of the Arabic language on cultural production, and the interplay between the actors and the autonomous administration through specific mechanisms. In this chapter, I will endeavor to thoroughly explore each of these aspects, providing a comprehensive understanding of the various dynamics at play within the field.

5.1 Types of Capital and Actors' Habitus in Northeast Syria

According to Magnez, the emergence of elites, who serve as legitimate interpreters of practices and representations within a field, can facilitate the field's autonomy and differentiation into distinct spheres of activity. Simultaneously, the autonomization of spheres of activities generates elites possessing a specific type of capital.¹

After the generation of renowned Kurdish writers and poets such as Cegerxwîn, Osman Sebrî, Qedrî Can, and Dr. Nûrdîn Zaza, who wrote for Mîr Celadet Bedirxan's Hawar magazine, a new generation of cultural producers, born in Syria in the 1950s and 1960s, began to produce works and gain recognition. Some of the most well-known individuals from this generation, who are still highly influential in the field of cultural production today, include: Konê Reş, Deham Ebdulfettah, Seydayê Tîrêj, Rezoyê Osê, Yûsif Berazî, Salihê Heydo, Keça Kurd, Berzo Mehmûd, Omerê Lalê, Hadî Behlewî, Helîm Yusiv, Jan Dost, Dilawerê Zengî, Merwan Berakat, Siyamend Îbrahîm, Tengezar Marînî, Ehmed Huseyinî, Xelîl Sasûnî, Beşîr Mele Newaf Derwêşê Xalib, Mehmûdê Sebrî, Heyder Omer, Dr. Ebdulmecîd Şêxo, Pîr Rustem, Rûxweşê Zîvar, Mihemed Hemo, Elî Cafer, Mahîn Şêxanî, Xemgînê Remo, Melayê Kurd, A. Baqî Huseyinî, Qado Şêrîn, and Ferhadê Çelebî. The individuals listed above constitute a prominent and influential generation within the realm of Kurdish cultural production in

¹ Michael Hilgers and Eric Mangez, "Bourdieu's Theory of Social Fields: Concepts and Applications", 6.

Syria. When contemplating the noteworthy figures in Kurdish literature in Syria, these names typically emerge. Some of these literary elites continue to reside in the AANES, while others have relocated to neighboring Kurdish regions or Europe, with Germany being a particularly common destination. Although certain expatriates maintain connections with Rojava, others have severed ties with the region entirely. Concurrently, a new generation of literary and cultural elites has emerged in Rojava. In this analysis, the focus will be on those individuals who continue to reside in Rojava and actively contribute to its cultural production, rather than on those living abroad. Some of these actors are Abdullah Şexo, Xoşman Qado, Neriman Evdike, Gulistan Sido, Ciwan Nebî, Ciwan Qado, Dilşad Murad, Anahita Sino, Ebas Musa, Nergis İsmail, Qadir Egid, Asya Xelil, Narîn Omer, Çimen Eli, Ferid Xelil, Midiye Berekat.

The aforementioned writers have engaged in various aspects of cultural production following the post-2011 period. In addition to these bilingual authors who compose works in both Kurdish and Arabic, there exists a group of Kurdish writers in the AANES who solely write in Arabic. Notable figures within this group include Lokman Mahmud, Eysem Huseyin, İbrahim Mahmud, Merwan Elî, Colan Hacı, Elî Cazo, Rêber Yûsif, Siwar Melle, Miqdad Xelîl, and Meha Hesen.

According to R. Johnson, to enter a field (the philosophical field, the scientific field, etc.), to play the game, one must possess the habitus which predisposes one to enter that field, that game, and not another. One must also possess at least the minimum amount of knowledge, or skill, or 'talent' to be accepted as a legitimate player. Entering the game, furthermore, means attempting to use that knowledge, or skill, or 'talent' in the most advantageous way possible.² With the exception of the latest generation who received Kurdish language education in schools under the autonomous administration, Kurdish writers in Syria acquired their literacy skills in Kurdish through various avenues, such as involvement with a political party, university studies, and changes in political consciousness within their social and personal networks. As noted by some respondents

² Randal Johnson, "Introduction to The Field of Cultural Production", 8.

in the AANES, linguistic capital – specifically, the ability to proficiently use the Kurdish language in their writing – is perceived as a crucial factor in being acknowledged as a skilled writer or distinguishing oneself among peers. This proficiency is frequently considered an essential prerequisite for recognition as a writer or gaining entry into the cultural field.

According to Born, works of art are produced through the interaction between an artist's habitus (or socialized disposition), which reflects her social origins and personal trajectory, and the field as a structured space of competing styles and genres, themselves resulting from the evolution of the field.³ Bourdieu argued that habitus was the product of a person's life experiences and culture, and that it was the result of internalizing the expectations, values and norms of one's society. He contends that habitus had a powerful influence on the way people thought, acted, and interacted with others, and that it was almost like a "second nature" that was acquired through the process of socialization. While the habitus of writers and intellectuals in the AANES may be diverse and varied, it is likely that these individuals' experiences and perspectives are influenced by the broader social and political context in which they live and work. According to a respondent who lives in Qamishli, during the Ba'ath regime, some writers and intellectuals in this region may be particularly attuned to issues of power, language, identity, and inequality that have arisen in the region's history, while others may use their work to challenge dominant narratives and structures of power. Their literary strategies were also shaped within this framework.

Furthermore, the concept of habitus is often used to examine how individuals' experiences, values, and beliefs shape their actions and behaviors within a given social context. It is particularly useful for understanding how individuals reproduce and contribute to the overall culture of their society. In the case of Kurdish writers in the AANES, the habitus can be seen as reflecting the broader social, cultural, and political context

³ Georgina Born, "The Social and the Aesthetic: For a Post-Bourdieuian Theory of Cultural Production." *Cultural Sociology – Cultural Sociology* 4 (2010): 171-208. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1749975510368471>, 177.

in which they operate. By examining the habitus of these actors, it is possible to gain a deeper understanding of the positions they occupy within the field of cultural production and how they are influenced by the larger social and cultural forces at play in their society. I argue that the conceptual reach of habitus is a suitable instrument for reaching broader, more macro-level inferences in places like the AANES, a concept that reproduces the overall social culture. Rather than being restricted to the culture of a particular class or status group, habitus is a useful conceptual tool in understanding positions of the actors and actors in the field of cultural production in the AANES.

A significant portion of those participating in cultural production, spanning multiple generations, consists of individuals who have completed high school and university education. According to brief biographical data shared by an author residing in the region on his Facebook page⁴, out of approximately 140 writers living both in the AANES and abroad, nearly 80% of these writers from diverse generations hold high school diplomas or higher education degrees. Considering the educational obstacles encountered by the Kurdish population in Syria during the Ba'ath era, this percentage can be regarded as relatively high.

Many of these writers, born and raised across various regions of Rojava, pursued their education in diverse departments at universities situated in cities like Damascus, Aleppo, and Latakia. A considerable percentage of them have studied Arabic language or literature. These authors have published at least one book in Rojava or Europe. Both pre- and post-2011, they have been instrumental in launching and maintaining the publication of various journals. Some have joined different writers' associations. A significant majority of those living abroad are based in Germany.

⁴ Even posting a short biography of an author or poet on this facebook page serves as a consecration.

The majority of writers in the AANES experience what Lahire refers to as the dual life of writers.⁵ Almost all writers in the region maintain other jobs to support themselves, except for a select few from the older generation who possess family property and can rely on it for their livelihood. It is not feasible to discuss a cultural market comprised solely of writers and actors who can sustain themselves exclusively through their involvement in cultural production.

According to Bourdieu, linguistic capital refers to the possession of language skills, including the ability to speak, write, and understand languages, as well as the ability to use language in a socially appropriate and effective manner. Like cultural capital, linguistic capital can be converted into economic capital, as proficiency in multiple languages can provide economic benefits and opportunities. For instance, individuals with linguistic capital in a particular language may be able to negotiate higher salaries or have a greater chance of being hired for a job that requires language skills. Furthermore, linguistic capital can also be leveraged to acquire social and cultural capital, as the ability to communicate in multiple languages can facilitate social and cultural exchange and broaden an individual's perspectives. A significant characteristic of individuals involved in the cultural, literary, publishing, or media sectors in the AANES is their linguistic capital, which enables them to exhibit a higher level of proficiency in writing and speaking Kurdish compared to the general population. Generally, these individuals possess advanced reading skills in Kurdish, a strong command of the language, and a thorough understanding of Kurdish grammar rules. These attributes often set them apart from others. A generational distinction can be observed in this regard: while older-generation writers, particularly active in the literary and cultural fields, acquired Kurdish literacy informally and covertly through self-taught methods during Ba'ath regime, middle and newer-generation writers enhanced their language skills through a combination of self-directed learning and the formal and informal education

⁵ Bernard Lahire, and Gwendolyn Wells. "The Double Life of Writers." *New Literary History* 41, no. 2 (2010): 443–65. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40983831>.

provided by the autonomous administration's educational and language institutions post-2011. A writer residing in Qamishli remarked: "We barely learned Kurdish. We acquired it through our own endeavors. Most of the time, we were uncertain whether what we wrote was accurate or incorrect. In fact, our learning is not entirely comprehensive. Nevertheless, today's children are learning much more effectively. My children can speak far better than my mother. They employ diverse vocabulary. They have a superior command of the language."

The younger generation's access to literature education in their native language at the universities and academies presents a significant advantage over the older generation, who did not have this opportunity, and is also highly valuable for the development of the publishing, literary, and cultural production fields in the AANES. Many young writers who learned Kurdish before 2011 share a common experience: most of them acquired the skills of reading and writing Kurdish informally while pursuing their higher education.

For numerous writers in the AANES, writing is frequently viewed as a secondary pursuit, often engaged in during their leisure time while maintaining a primary means of income. In Rojava, where economic stability is lacking, the main priority for many writers is securing the means to support their families and fulfill their daily needs. Writers possessing linguistic capital often find employment in the cultural departments of the autonomous administration, various media sectors, civil society organizations, and educational institutions as a means of earning a living. For those working in such institutions, it is relatively easier to allocate time for writing compared to writers employed in other sectors. Since individuals with strong Kurdish language skills were scarce, the value of Kurdish linguistic capital surged in the councils of autonomous administration post-2011, as well as in other civil and private sectors. Consequently, writers with such capital were highly sought after.

5.2 Agent Positions and Strategies within the Cultural Field

In this section, I will explore the diverse positions and strategies employed by agents within the cultural field of the AANES. By examining the roles, objectives, and tactics of various actors, and discourses and struggles related to the definition of the author, I aim to shed light on the complex dynamics that shape the landscape of cultural production in the region. Through analyzing the motivations and approaches of writers, publishers, and other key figures, I will delve into the factors that influence their engagement in the cultural field and their contributions to its ongoing evolution.

The development of a specific field should not be seen as an inevitable outcome of history, but as a power struggle. For instance, regarding the creation of the literature field and the definition of being a writer, Bourdieu points out that the strictest and most restricted definition of the writer (etc.), which we accept these days as going without saying, is the product of a long series of exclusions and excommunications trying to deny existence as writers worthy of the name to all sorts of producers who could live as writers in the name of a larger and looser definition of the profession.⁶

In the field of Kurdish writing, the proficiency with which an individual uses the Kurdish language is often the first factor considered when evaluating their work. When writers express negative criticism of another writer, they frequently highlight their insufficient mastery of the Kurdish language, including their lack of knowledge of grammar rules and overall proficiency.

The second factor pertains to whether the author is considered "independent." This term of independence is employed by writers in relation to one another, irrespective of their political affiliations, encom-

⁶ Pierre Bourdieu, *The Rules of Art: Genesis and Structure of the Literary Field* (Cambridge: Polity; Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1996), 224.

passing both those who are closely aligned with the autonomous government and those who maintain a distance from it. While dissident writers criticize writers close to the administration as lacking independence and pro-administration, writers who are closely associated with the current autonomous administration also characterize opposition writers as individuals who operate with specific political commitments. In other words, the issue of independence is constructed through different discourses, depending on the political engagement of the authors, in relation to "good literature," or "legitimate literature" in Bourdieu's words. For example, for writers who are close to or sympathetic to the administration, being an independent writer or "legitimate" literature means breaking away from narrow political circles and defending or embracing the Rojava revolution, while for a writer who is distant from the administration, being a good or legitimate writer means maintaining distance from political power, not seeking fame, money, or approaching the administration to publish one's work. Similarly, for example, the *Şermola* magazine, which is close to the autonomous administration, publishes articles calling on intellectuals in the region to embrace and defend the revolution, while the *Pênûsa Azad* (Free Pen) magazine, which is close to opposition groups, publishes articles urging the same intellectuals to take a stand for the "truth".

According to Bourdieu, in general, agents aspire to differentiate themselves from other agents so that they exist in fields only by virtue of difference.⁷ The positioning of actors within the cultural field in the AANES is often determined by their degree of independence and association with political parties. Adopting an independent stance or distancing oneself from political affiliations is perceived as a necessary aspect within the field of cultural production. Conversely, involvement in a political party is seen as diminishing the literary credibility and quality of

⁷ Pierre Bourdieu, "The Political Field, the Social Science Field and the Journalistic Field." In *Bourdieu and Journalistic Field*, edited by Rodney Benson, 29-47. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2005, 39-40.

writers. According to Bourdieu, every artist, intermediary and institution necessarily defines their position and that of the genres or artworks that they advocate in terms of relations of difference or opposition to others within the field, while the field as a whole is “governed by a specific logic: competition for cultural legitimacy”.⁸ In the AANES, for established writers within the field, independence or insisting on writing in Kurdish serves as a means of differentiating oneself from others. Or to put it the other way around, excessive engagement with a political party or writing in Arabic can also undermine an author's cultural legitimacy and the influence of authorship within the field. A genuine author can attain symbolic power by transcending these political factions and engaging with all audiences. Otherwise, the writer risks being confined to the role of a representative for a limited group. These values, attitudes, and positions represent the expressions and expectations articulated by some of my interviewees concerning the ideal characteristics of an author. In a field, symbolic ordering consists in a declarative activity in which agents participate through statements, practices, labelling, naming, interrelating (of actors, actions, qualities, 'seminal works', means, objects, values, etc.). Symbolic orderings constitute efforts at constructing reality.⁹ For example, a Qamishli-based writer who held the position of chairperson in a writers' union for seven years points out: "due to various reasons, the majority of writers in Rojava are not independent and are affiliated with political parties, which prevents them from being recognized as genuine writers. However, those who maintain true independence often face persistent defamation, exclusion, and hostility." On the other hand, another writer from Qamishli reminds the actors of the field about the boundaries

⁸ Pierre Bourdieu, "Intellectual Field and Creative Project," *Social Science Information* 8, no. 2 (1969): 91, <https://doi.org/10.1177/053901846900800205>.

⁹ Michael Hilgers and Eric Mangez, "Bourdieu's Theory of Social Fields: Concepts and Applications", 20.

and autonomy of the cultural field. He said that writers should concentrate on their own work and leave politics to politicians. And their focus should be to develop a common cultural and educational policy.

Upon examining the process of "defining" good or legitimate literature, it becomes evident that these definitions serve as a means of relating to other writers, demarcating boundaries between distinct groups, and establishing one's position within the cultural production field. Bourdieu notes that the majority of notions which artists and critics employ to define themselves or to define their adversaries are weapons and stakes in struggles.¹⁰ As a result, despite sharing many characteristics, actors in the cultural field in the AANES often attempt to differentiate themselves through their linguistic proficiency and political positions. Some writers strive to remain independent from political matters and internal political competition, focusing solely on cultural issues. Others may be more actively engaged in political matters and seek to align themselves with particular political positions.

According to Bourdieu, as the cultural field become more autonomous from external influences, the positions adopted by agents within this field become increasingly shaped by their positions within the field. This is one of main postulations of Bourdieu's field theory. Moreover, the issue of varying positions within the field is apparent in the case of Rojava, where the presence of five distinct writers' unions and the disparities among them are frequently ascribed to contrasting stances on political matters. In this situation, it becomes challenging to address differences rooted in literary or writing styles, and approaches to cultural topics, as political concerns tend to eclipse these aspects. In other words, it can be argued that the positions taken by the actors within the field are influenced not by their standing within the field itself, but rather by external factors such as political engagements in the AANES. However, as previously mentioned, a select number of prominent writers, such as Konê Reş, have managed to remain uninvolved in these political engagements and maintain their positions within the field.

¹⁰ Pierre Bourdieu, "The Rules of Art: Genesis and Structure of the Literary Field", 297.

In the AANES, the field of power continues to exert a considerable influence on the endeavors of actors within the field as they strive for autonomy. Factors such as economic challenges, reliance on financial support from political parties for the publication of their works, and the struggle to meet basic needs complicate the authors' efforts to maintain their own positions within the field. Consequently, the positioning of actors within the field is frequently molded by the prevailing power dynamics.

5.3 The Impact of Arabic on Cultural Production in Northeast Syria

In her book examining the relationship between the post-colonial context and language in South Africa, Botsis notes that the relations of power in the colonial and postcolonial context are particularly pertinent to the constitution of identity in relation to language. Language became an instrument of cultural and political control, particularly through education, because the colonial language was the language through which 'reality' was constituted.¹¹ The use of language as a means of control and manipulation has had a lasting impact on the way in which language and identity are perceived and constructed within these societies. Language is not just a literary tool but also an inherently political instrument. Cultural production is subject to political power through language. Although Kurdish is the language of instruction and the Kurdish media and newspapers have increased tremendously in the last decade, it is important not to overlook the continuing impact of Arabic on cultural production. Nearly half of the books published in the last decade are in Arabic, indicating a persistent dominance of the language. This relationship, exemplified by the prevalence of bilingual magazines, adversely affects the autonomy of the Kurdish cultural production field.

The politicization of language has led to unequal power dynamics in society, particularly in modern nations that have a dominant language

¹¹ Hannah Botsis. "Subjectivity, Language and the Postcolonial: Beyond Bourdieu in South Africa", 77.

for education, administration, law, and other institutional functions. In societies where multiple languages coexist, there is often a discrepancy between the linguistic diversity of the people and the monolingualism of the institutions and states. As a result, minority languages may be excluded or disadvantaged in important social spheres such as politics, cultural production, law, education, and media. These power imbalances between languages are not fixed, but rather shift and evolve in certain contexts. For example, a particular minority language may be institutionalized in local governance but not in national governance; a particular minority group may be entitled to receive primary education in "their" language, but not secondary education or university education; a particular group may be able to publish literary works, newspapers, or own radio or TV channels in "their" language, etc. When it comes to cultural production, cultural artifacts made in the minority languages tend to have a less legitimate and prestigious status. Overall, these language dynamics create hierarchical and sometimes conflicting relationships between different languages, the fields of cultural production, and their practitioners.

In the post-2011 period, some writers and intellectuals have sought to learn, write, and promote Kurdish visibility in the public sphere as a form of resistance, while others have continued to write in Arabic and remain within the Arab cultural field rather than acquiring proficiency in Kurdish.

As noted by several Kurdish writers I interviewed, despite the positive assessments of the autonomous administration's education and language policies over the past decade, some Kurdish actors within the cultural field continue to favor expressing themselves and writing in Arabic over Kurdish. Some bilingual individuals have avoided writing in Kurdish. This linguistic positioning reveals a distinct hierarchy in which Arabic use is prioritized. Moreover, this positioning is influenced by a range of factors, such as the writer's proficiency in Kurdish, the intended readership (which could be exclusively Kurdish, exclusively Arab, or both), and the cultural field in which the writer aims to gain recognition. According to the head of a writers' union, some Kurdish writers prioritize

their inclusion within the Arab cultural production field. This phenomenon can be attributed to a complex interplay of Kurdish social and cultural history that shapes the linguistic practices of Kurdish writers in Syria.

Despite over a decade having passed since the establishment of the autonomous administration in Rojava, the predominance of the Arabic language and Arabic literature persists within the field of cultural production.

The pervasive influence of Arabic has fostered a long-standing affinity for Arab literature among authors in the Kurdish region. Mirroring the circumstances of Kurdish authors in Turkey, most writers in the AANES are bilingual. The assimilation policies imposed by the Baath regime have led to a situation where numerous Kurdish authors possess a more proficient command of Arabic than their native language. Consequently, literary works published in Arabic, spanning various genres, tend to garner a wider readership than those published in Kurdish.

Despite these challenges, the Kurdish language has persisted as a symbol of cultural resistance. Many Kurds who may not be fluent in the language still recognize its importance as an emblem of their identity and a marker of their shared history.

For Kurdish writers and intellectuals, the choice to write and publish in Kurdish is often a political decision, reflecting their commitment to preserving and promoting their cultural heritage. This choice also highlights the resilience of the Kurdish language and its central role in defining Kurdish identity, despite the obstacles it has faced. The adoption of Kurdish by a cohort of intellectuals and writers in the AANES is driven by political choice, a sense of identity, and consciousness rather than being spontaneous or automatic. Many of these writers have become acquainted with Kurdish through specific socialization institutions, such as political parties or universities. The connection forged with Kurdish within these socialization institutions entails perceiving the language as a symbol of Kurdish identity, rather than merely an everyday spoken language, as it was previously regarded.

At AANES, despite the historically hegemonic influence of Arabic literature over Kurdish literature, the increased Kurdish literacy among younger generations, particularly after 2014, due to mother tongue education initiatives, has contributed to a growth in Kurdish cultural and literary production. Nevertheless, numerous Kurdish authors continue to write in both Arabic and Kurdish, with some Arabic works being translated into Kurdish in recent years. Factors such as the limited accessibility of Kurdish literature and the aspiration to reach a broader Arab audience likely contribute to the enduring dominance of Arabic in the cultural field, albeit with a gradual decline. In Rojava, publishing houses produce a substantial volume of Arabic literature alongside Kurdish literature. Under the Ba'ath regime, Arabic was the sole official language, and the use of other languages, including Kurdish, was prohibited in the public sphere, leading to the marginalization of Kurdish to the private sphere, like the situation in Turkey. However, the establishment of the autonomous administration in 2011 has promoted the expansion of Kurdish language education and cultural institutions, such as schools, universities, and academies, as well as the creation of Kurdish language resources, including textbooks and grammar guides. This has enabled the emergence of a flourishing Kurdish publishing field. Consequently, political developments will significantly influence the direction of Kurdish language education and the Kurdish language's future. The growth of a language that lacks institutional support and public presence will undoubtedly be challenging. The success of the Kurdish language and publishing field is inextricably linked to the future of the autonomous administration.

5.4 The Challenges in the Field

In this part, I will attempt to briefly discuss the challenges that emerge in the field of cultural production. These challenges create various barriers to both the expansion of the field and the development of its autonomy. Although some of these barriers are not as effective as in the early years of the autonomous administration, some still await to be overcome. In

addition to the influence of Arabic on the field of cultural production, issues such as the lack of consecration institutions, a limited readership, the involvement of the political field, the issue of censorship, the problem of distribution and interaction with the outside world are the matters that require discussion concerning the field of cultural production. These multifaceted issues influence the conditions of production, distribution, and consumption within the cultural production field, contribute to alterations in the field's autonomy, play a pivotal role in forming field-specific values, rules, and norms, and ultimately leads to a constant change in the positions and position-takings of the agents in the field of cultural production.

According to Bourdieu, the source of symbolic capital is found in what he refers to as "the principle of consecration," which determines the recognition of value within the cultural production field. This principle is based on judgments of taste made by agents with institutional power, such as critics, publishers, and award committees. Despite the recent expansion in publishing and cultural production in the AANES, the presence of established institutions, including literary critics, reviewers, and awards, remains rather limited. A contributing factor is the scarcity of literary critics possessing an adequate degree of cultural and intellectual capital. Although local-level institutions have begun to emerge in recent years, regional and transnational institutions for consecration have encountered obstacles, specifically in the distribution of works published in the AANES to other Kurdish regions and Europe. On the other hand, translation can serve as a symbolic resource for writers seeking prestige and power within the cultural field. In this regard, as J. Heilbron and G. Sapiro point out, translation constitutes a mode of legitimization, in which not only authors but also publishers may be beneficiaries, since "translation is a means of accumulating symbolic power for a publisher lacking economic and cultural capital".¹² Being a translated author also

¹² Johan Heilbron and Gisèle Sapiro, "Outline for a Sociology of Translation: Current Issues and Future Prospects," in *Handbook of Translation Studies*, vol. 1, ed. Yves Gambier and Luc van Doorslaer (Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing, 2007), 93-107, doi: 10.1075/btl.74.07hei., 103.

functions as a consecration, providing an advantage over other authors. The status of 'being translated' serves as an indicator of an author's position in the hierarchy of the cultural production field. At present, it is not feasible to identify the AANES-based writers whose works have been translated into multiple languages. In the majority of instances, Kurdish writers and translators are responsible for translating works from Kurdish to Arabic or vice versa. Simultaneously, the audience for an author whose work has been translated into Arabic remains restricted to Kurdish readers who are proficient in Arabic. Asserting that this circumstance fulfills a consecration role is rather challenging.

Although there are a few literary critics with adequate expertise, one of my interviewees pointed out that many of these critics predominantly write in Arabic, concentrate on Arabic literature, and may lack the necessary proficiency in the Kurdish language to effectively critique Kurdish literary works.

Moreover, some interviewees point out that authors in Rojava tend not to partake in thorough examination and critique of each other's work, which further contributes to the underdevelopment of consecrated institutions. This lack of interaction among authors can negatively impact the growth of literary and cultural establishments. It is crucial to emphasize the significance of inter-authorial relationships and involvement in literary criticism in shaping the cultural and literary field, as well as fostering the development of cultural and literary institutions.

In the AANES, it has been noted that the frequency of literary interviews published in various media channels is gradually increasing. Well-known newspapers, such as Ronahi and Bûyer, have begun to dedicate a page to the culture section in recent years. Moreover, literary festivals, including Osman Sebri, Rojava, Çiroka Kurdi, and Peşbirka Çirokên El-Buhturi have granted recognition certificates and monetary prizes to accomplished authors in poetry and short story genres. A range of events, encompassing festivals, book fairs, panel discussions, and reading days, function as consecration institutions by endorsing authors and publicizing their works.

Political embargoes and the ongoing conflict in the AANES have hindered the distribution of cultural works produced in the region to other parts of the world. The current political climate has also impeded the recognition of these works in other locations. Among those most affected by the lack of vibrant connections between cultural activities and organizations in different Kurdish parts of neighboring countries is the group of actors within the Kurdish cultural production field in the AANES. While this issue has been partially addressed through the participation of Kurdish publishers from other Kurdish parts of neighboring countries in the Martyr Herekol Book Fair held in Qamishli over the past two years, it remains a persistent problem. The ongoing conflict and political instability in the AANES have also hindered the connections of its writers and intellectuals with the rest of the world, limiting the reach and recognition of their works. Moreover, the lack of translations of these works into languages other than Arabic, as well as the limited availability of translations into languages such as English and German, have diminished the ability of region's authors to engage with counterparts in other regions. However, there have been recent efforts to address this, including the preparation of works introducing the Syrian Kurds to the Arab world, creating translation centers and translation projects and targeting literary markets in countries like Egypt, Lebanon, and Algeria.

On the other hand, social media networks have been identified as a significant means for Rojava-based writers to surmount their isolation and foster greater awareness of each other's literary output. As well as face-to-face interactions, the significance of Facebook as a social networking platform is steadily growing in the distribution and promotion of cultural production at AANES. This is particularly true for literary and cultural activities, book launches, and seminars. For the region's writers, Facebook is an essential social media platform that allows them to connect, stay informed, and follow one another's work. Many writers primarily use their Facebook accounts to market and exhibit their work, as well as to disseminate political messages. In addition to authors, Facebook also accommodates cultural institutions, writer associations, bookstores,

and organization pages featuring online magazines and articles. As a result, it appears that Facebook holds a significant position in generating publicity for the field of Kurdish cultural production.

Before 2011 in Syria, the Kurdish population, who were only allowed to attend state schools, received their education entirely in Arabic, leading to a lack of proficiency in languages other than Arabic. Additionally, there has been a shortage of Kurdish-language authors who can write in Kurdish. It was uncommon to find individuals with strong reading and writing skills in Kurdish in Syria until the declaration of the autonomous administration. In Syria, literacy in the Kurdish language has historically been a concern primarily for individuals who are engaged in intellectual or political endeavors. According to a bookstore owner in Qamishli interviewed for this study, literacy in the Kurdish language in the AANES has not yet reached the desired levels, and many individuals continue to rely on Arabic-language works due to the ongoing influence of that language. However, certain literary genres in Kurdish, including novels, poetry, and language reference books, appear to be more popular among readers in the AANES. One could contend that publishing and book printing among Syrian Kurds predominantly constitute cultural endeavors undertaken by a restricted intellectual proficient in the Kurdish language, mirroring the situation in other Kurdish regions of neighboring states. This implies that the primary consumer base for cultural production in the AANES comprises intellectuals, writers, and politically engaged individuals. Additionally, there seems to be limited interaction with the works of other authors or the presence of literary influence among these individuals. As noted by a bookstore owner and translator in Qamishli, those engaged in cultural production in the AANES frequently partake in self-referential writing and reading practices, with minimal engagement with the work of their contemporaries in the same field.

Exploring the history of publishing and cultural production among Syrian Kurds, it becomes evident that political parties have been instrumental in shaping this field, predominantly driven by political objectives. The development of the publishing field in the AANES has been

supported by political parties that finance publications, coordinate cultural events, and establish printing houses. According to Bourdieu, a field is a social space where actors compete for resources and positions. It is important to bear in mind the strong relationship between Kurdish political parties, whether in power or in opposition, and the cultural production field. These political parties have established and promoted cultural production practices with a primary focus on advancing their political objectives. Bourdieu emphasizes that the field is not only shaped by the actions of individual actors but also by the distribution and accumulation of different forms of capital. In this context, the political parties possess various forms of capital (e.g., political, economic, and symbolic) that enable them to exert influence and control over the field. They can allocate resources, provide platforms for cultural expression, and establish networks that support and promote their own political agendas. The dominance of political objectives in shaping the field of cultural production indicates the prevalence of symbolic capital within this specific context. Political parties can utilize cultural production as a means to reinforce their ideologies, establish legitimacy, and mobilize support among the Kurdish population. This aligns with Bourdieu's notion that cultural production is not solely driven by aesthetic or artistic considerations but is deeply intertwined with social and political dimensions. Furthermore, Bourdieu's theory recognizes that power relations are integral to the field. In this case, the influence of political parties manifests through their ability to determine which cultural productions are supported, recognized, and disseminated within the field. They can also influence the criteria for success, impose certain norms and values, and potentially marginalize alternative voices for perspectives that do not align with their political agenda. Overall, employing Bourdieu's theory of the field of cultural production helps elucidate the role of political parties as influential actors in shaping the publishing and cultural production practices among Syrian Kurds. It highlights how the pursuit of political objectives within the field influences the allocation of resources, power dynamics, and the broader cultural landscape within this particular context.

This pattern of political party dominance within the cultural sphere is also observed among Kurds in Turkey. In his unpublished thesis, G. Mülâyim posits that this situation reflects the publishing history of Kurds in Turkey and states that when Kurdish publishing field formally emerged in the early 1990s, not only the literary activities in Kurdish but also any manifestation of Kurdish identity, culture, and language had already been politicized in the hands of a multiplicity of Kurdish political circles and organizations centered around diverse ideologies, imaginaries, and sensitivities. In this sense, it might be said that the Kurdish publishing field was born into the field of Kurdish oppositional politics. It is the actors within that field of politics that have enabled many of the politico-cultural entrepreneurs to engage in cultural production in Kurdish.¹³ In the AANES, political parties, akin to what Mülâyim described for the Kurdish publishing field in Turkey, provide support for writer associations affiliated with them. At the same time, the deep-seated divisions among these political parties also serve as barriers to the development of the cultural production field.

Regarding the difficulties faced by Kurdish writers in Turkey, Scalbert states in her article that using the Kurmanci language is not a given but a more or less conscious choice. It comes with specific political and literary constraints (such as legal obstacles, the absence of a readership, little chance for profits, or no literary heritage on which to build though also sometimes provides new opportunities, such as the chance for innovation.).¹⁴ As Scalbert highlights the challenges of writing in Kurdish in Turkey, similar difficulties are also faced by Kurdish writers in Syria. The interest shown by both older and middle-generation writers in Syria and Turkey in the Kurdish language, driven by political and ethnic consciousness, has resulted in concerted efforts to master the language despite the

¹³ Gökhan Mülâyim, "Publishing the 'Unpublishable': The Making of Kurdish Publishing in Turkey" (master's thesis, Boğaziçi University, Sociology, 2018), 65.

¹⁴ Clemence Scalbert-Yücel, "Emergence and equivocal autonomization of a Kurdish literary field in Turkey." 360.

inherent challenges and obstacles. Similarly, the lack of readership, the challenges in publishing books in Kurdish, and the absence of a literary heritage are issues encountered by writers in Rojava, contributing to the limited institutionalization of the cultural field in the region.

In her article analyzing the field of cultural production in authoritarian regimes, Gisele Sapiro notes that apart from the system of direct gratification (temporal and symbolic) which sought to reward the intellectuals most devoted to the regime, the major instruments of control are centralization of the means of production, unification of the profession, surveillance of professional institutions, and ideological supervision.¹⁵ Also, Sapiro argues, in authoritarian structures, where the economic field is dependent on the field of power, a form of state-controlled professionalization and bureaucratization of culture has exacerbated the heteronomy in the field of cultural production.

Although the AANES may operate under a different form of governance than states governed by a centralized authority, it can be argued that they exhibit a similar style of governance in the field of cultural production as these states. Non-state armed actors may exert significant control over the cultural production in their territories and may use their control of resources and institutions to shape the production of cultural goods in ways that reflect their interests and values. This could involve censorship and the suppression of certain forms of cultural expression, as well as the promotion of cultural practices and values that align with the interests of the autonomous administration. Although the autonomous administration in the AANES has often been criticized by opponents and detractors for being authoritarian and implementing a top-down governance model, it is not possible to talk about a control mechanism of the type mentioned by Sapiro in the field of cultural production in the AANES. Dissident writers and intellectual groups have indicated that their cultural and literary endeavors within the AANES have been

¹⁵ Gisèle Sapiro, "The literary field between the State and the Market." *Poetics* 31 (2003): 441-464. doi: 10.1016/j.poetic.2003.09.001., 445.

unimpeded, particularly in recent years. The leader of a writers' association affiliated to opposition parties stated that they have not faced any challenges in carrying out their activities and have even turned down offers of collaboration from the autonomous administration. Another respondent offers a somewhat different perspective on the situation. This individual, who is also a member of an opposition party and a translator, claims that the autonomous administration seeks to control every aspect of the cultural field, just as it does in other spheres, and avoids engaging with those who do not operate within its framework. The translator, based in Qamishli and highly critical of the autonomous administration, nevertheless perceives this situation as more of a disconnection or non-engagement rather than control or repression. Another respondent, who previously held a leadership position in a writers' union in the AANES and is currently somewhat distant from the autonomous administration, argues that the policy of "if you are not my friend, you are my enemy" is applied not just in the cultural field, but also in other areas, making independent work difficult. Overall, in the AANES, it is not possible to speak of a structure like the one Sapiro describes, which exerts an oppressive influence on cultural production or attempts to regulate the entire cultural field based on its own ideology, although opinions on this subject vary among different authors.

Examining the history of control mechanisms over the publishing field in the AANES over the past decade, we find that in the early years of the autonomous administration, there were some restrictions placed on the publishing houses that were not politically aligned with the administration. To establish a publishing house in the AANES, a working license must be obtained from the autonomous administration's culture commission. In the early years, each book was reviewed by the culture commission prior to publication, and if approved, it was printed and distributed. A respondent points out that the degree of autonomy a publisher enjoyed was more closely related to their relationship with the autonomous administration rather than the content of the books they published. Analogous to the remarks made by a former director of the writers' union

mentioned earlier, he also contends that the policy of "if you are not my friend, you are my enemy" is being pursued.

A respondent who had been involved in publishing in Rojava during the initial years of the autonomous administration but is now abroad, shared the following observation: "In most cases, these restrictions were imposed not by the cultural commission or bureaucratic mechanisms, but rather by security apparatuses. If the publisher or publishing house was not aligned or close to the current administration, restrictive practices were applied not only to books related to politics but also to literature, history, and folklore published by that house. This situation, which made things difficult for individuals who were not supportive of or opposed to the autonomous administration, applied not just to printing and publishing but to other cultural events and actions as well." However, another respondent residing abroad contended that such restrictive practices were never implemented, and that individuals who experienced failure in the publishing field often attributed the autonomous administration as the cause of their difficulties.

The autonomous administration, initially adopting a stringent stance, progressively softened its approach and ceased interfering in the publication and distribution of books and magazines authored by those unaffiliated with it. In recent years, several dissenting authors have declined the autonomous administration's offers to publish their works due to political reasons, despite the increasing costs of printing books. The autonomous administration maintains specific sensitivities concerning political and religious pluralism and the families of martyrs; publications and magazines disregarding these matters are not permitted in the autonomous administration's printing houses. However, this restriction does not apply to private publishing houses. Although considerable concern and attention are given to the aforementioned political issues, the majority of published books and magazines primarily deal with subjects such as history, grammar, folklore, and literature rather than these contentious topics. The cultural products of authors and intellectuals sup-

ported by parties not endorsing or opposing the autonomous administration are printed either in private publishing houses or in regions outside Rojava, rather than in the autonomous administration's printing houses.

Initially, some writers and writers' unions maintained a distant stance towards the autonomous administration. However, over time, favorable developments, and a more inclusive approach in the cultural field, as well as the softening of the autonomous administration's previously rigid attitude, have led these writers to assume new positions in their cultural production activities. Importantly, the rigidity and inflexibility in political divisions have not generally extended into the cultural field; actors and institutions affiliated with different political structures in the cultural field have typically demonstrated a more flexible approach towards collaboration. For instance, some writers' unions that initially held a distant stance towards the autonomous administration have started to participate in the culture and arts festival or book fairs organized by the autonomous administration or writers' unions affiliated with it, whereas they previously only organized their own activities.

Actors in the field of cultural production reassess their positions and position-takings in response to shifting conditions and their relationships with the political sphere over time. These adjustments also serve as attempts to acquire more symbolic power within the cultural production field. In the context of Bourdieu's theory of the field of cultural production, the presence of both individuals and organizations who are close to the AANES and those who are opposed to the AANES but ideologically proximate to the Iraqi Kurdish political parties, can be seen as a manifestation of the struggle for cultural legitimacy and symbolic power in the field.

According to Bourdieu, cultural production is a social field that is governed by its own set of rules and principles, which are shaped by the distribution of cultural capital and symbolic power among its participants. In this context, the presence of both pro- and anti-administration individuals and organizations in the field of cultural production in the AANES suggests a contested terrain, where different actors are vying for cultural capital and symbolic power.

In this context, the struggle for symbolic power in the field of cultural production in the AANES involves the competition between different literary groups and associations that represent different political factions among Kurds and seek to promote their own cultural agendas. This struggle can take various forms, such as debates over the legitimacy, involvement in cultural festivals, quality of cultural products, definition of the author, the allocation of resources and funding, and the recognition and support of different cultural actors.

As a result, in this chapter, a comprehensive examination of the cultural production field in the AANES has been undertaken, delving into the multifaceted and dynamic nature of the field. I try to explore the habitus of the actors involved, their possession and utilization of cultural and linguistic capital, and struggles on definition of a writer's legitimacy as well as the symbolic power they wield. The chapter also scrutinizes the role of Arabic in shaping the cultural production in northeast Syria, and the various strategies and tactics employed by the actors to attain and preserve their positions within the field.

Throughout the chapter, attention has been devoted to the unique challenges within the field, the positioning of actors vis-à-vis the political milieu, the intricate relationships and interactions among the actors, and the interplay between these actors and the autonomous administration via specific regulatory mechanisms.

Considering the above, it becomes apparent that the cultural production field in the AANES is an intricate and ever-evolving realm, molded by a plethora of internal and external determinants. Actors within this field navigate a terrain profoundly influenced by political, linguistic, and cultural forces, which concurrently mold their habitus, positions, and strategic approaches.

In conclusion, in this chapter, I try to offer a thorough understanding of the diverse dynamics at work within the AANES cultural production field. By scrutinizing the habitus of actors, the resources and influence at their disposal, and the tactics they implement to secure and maintain their positions, the complexities of the field have been eluci-

dated. As the cultural production field in the AANES continues to transform, it is essential to remain vigilant to the shifting landscape and the ways in which actors adapt and respond to these alterations.

6

Conclusion

Upon mentioning to a Kurdish linguist from Turkey that my thesis would focus on the cultural production of Kurds in Syria in comparison to Turkey, he questioned the merit of such a topic, asking, "What is there to write a thesis on this subject?". The Kurdish cultural production field in Syria is often seen as relatively unknown and less significant compared to other Kurdish regions. One of the primary motivations for undertaking this thesis was to scrutinize the cultural productions of Syrian Kurds in comparison to Kurdish cultural production in Turkey. While the emergence of the autonomy experience drew significant attention to the region; Kurdish subjectivity in Syria predominantly manifested itself through studies focused on political, historical, and military analyses. On the other hand, the field of cultural production was largely absent from academic study, with only a handful of studies briefly referencing the topic in footnotes or within a few concise sentences. However, during the more than a decade-long autonomous experience, the field of cultural production had established its presence as 'a world apart'.

In this thesis, the development and comparison of cultural production fields in Turkey and Syria has been examined since the establishment of both countries. The Ba'ath regime in Syria viewed the Kurds as a security threat and implemented Arabization policies, leading to economic disadvantage, harassment, and exclusion from political and social

settings for the Kurdish population in Syria. Kurdish cultural production in Syria, particularly before the 1990s, was severely limited due to constraining state policies. Nevertheless, the emergence of a new generation and several regional and international developments in the 1990s facilitated the modest rise of some cultural and publishing activities. It is crucial to underscore that during this decade, publishing endeavors such as book and magazine publications, as well as cultural activities, were clandestinely and illicitly conducted in response to the regime's pressures. Social events and resistance movements in the 2000s intensified the regime's pressure on the Kurds, adversely affecting publishing and cultural production activities. The social movements in Syria, influenced by the Arab Spring in 2011, presented a significant opportunity for the Kurds, culminating in the establishment of an autonomous region that is an unprecedented development in the history of the Kurdish political movement. The Kurdish cultural production field in Syria materialized within this political and historical context. The influence of this novel context and the experience of autonomous administration on social fields continues to be a decisive factor in shaping and developing these fields. Thus, it is essential to acknowledge that the field of cultural production in region is still in its nascent stages, and how the autonomy of the cultural production field will evolve is contingent upon the developments in the political and economic arenas, as well as the future of the autonomous experience.

Syrian-Kurdish cultural production field exhibits a distinctive, multifaceted system with diverse institutions and organizations significantly contributing to the development of culture, education, art, and intellectual pursuits within the region. The region also houses numerous intellectual and literary unions, often affiliated with political parties, although the extent of their collaboration with the autonomous administration remains uncertain.

Upon thorough examination of the trajectory of the cultural production field in the AANES throughout the previous decade, it becomes evident that a dynamic and nascent cultural production field is actively

taking shape. This field has evolved within the distinctive and specific parameters of the AANES, with a concerted effort to construct its own distinct norms, values, and institutional frameworks. At the AANES, despite the obstacles posed by the war conditions and the impact of political actors on the publishing sector, there is a noticeable growth in the publishing and cultural production landscape. However, it is acknowledged by various stakeholders that this growth has not yet reached the desired level, often attributed to the perceived deficiency of quality works.

The field of cultural production includes not only institutions affiliated with the existing self-government, but also multiple writer and intellectual unions, which reflects the division in the political sphere extending to the cultural sphere. These autonomous cultural institutions aim to create a vibrant Kurdish cultural space by conducting studies and projects and organizing cultural events in the form of festivals, often jointly with writers' associations. In recent years, these festivals have started to include a wider range of actors in the field, including those opposed to the autonomous administration. However, some writers and intellectual associations have been criticized for not being active enough in the cultural field or not being able to go beyond holding meetings and seminars. While those close to the autonomous administration acknowledge existing political and economic uncertainties and some deficiencies in the field, they argue that cultural and literary products are developing more and more compared to the first years of the autonomous administration. According to cultural actors who are distant from or opposed to self-government, the quality of cultural production in Rojava is decreasing. They attribute this decline to the current administration's lack of investment in the field and the engaged writers who are close to it. In short, the assessment of the evolution of cultural production quality in the field is contingent upon the positions held by actors within the field and their degree of collaboration with the present administration.

Within the AANES cultural field, the most prominent actors are those born in the 1950s and 1960s. When inquiring about influential fig-

ures in the cultural, literary, and intellectual spheres, interviewees frequently reference a similar pool of names from the aforementioned generation. Possessing linguistic capital, primarily through proficiency in Kurdish reading and writing skills, is the foremost prerequisite for entering the cultural field. While the number of actors with linguistic capital is growing, it remains evident that the cultural capital necessary for productive engagement has yet to be adequately developed. Considering the scarcity of individuals possessing this capital before 2011, obtaining linguistic and cultural capital has become crucial for entry into cultural, intellectual, media, and educational fields. Furthermore, this capital allows individuals to sustain themselves professionally within these sectors.

In addition to linguistic and cultural capital, positions within the cultural field are also reconfigured according to the political landscape. Although divisions among cultural agents are not as pronounced as those within the political field, cultural agents adopt varying positions depending on their perspectives on particular issues. Such issues include definitional debates regarding the role of a writer, the concept of an "independent" writer, discussions on the reasons for the inadequate quality of cultural and literary production, and the perceived shortcomings of cultural actors and intellectuals in defending the revolution. The insufficient existence of consecration institutions, the persistent dominance of Arabic within the cultural, literary, and media spheres, the challenge of facilitating external communication for writers, and the limited availability of economic resources all significantly impact the autonomy of the field.

In this thesis, I examined the applicability of Bourdieu's field theory to the cultural production in the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria (AANES), a region marked by a recently established self-governance system. By adapting Bourdieu's framework to the unique dynamics of the AANES context, I sought to investigate power relations, actors' habitus, capital distribution, and the roles and positions of diverse institutions and actors within the nascent cultural production field. I recognized the difficulties in applying Bourdieu's theory to non-European contexts; however, I contended that it can still yield valuable insights into the AANES cultural field when employed with flexibility and

adaptability, particularly in unstable situations, thereby transcending the limitations of the theory.

My analysis aimed to illuminate the impact of political and social crises on the cultural production field, revealing that its trajectory towards autonomy or heteronomy is contingent upon socio-political context and interconnectedness with the field of power and other social fields. I tried to demonstrate that the AANES case, emerging from the Syrian civil war, represents a distinct situation where the cultural production field expanded despite the crisis, potentially leading to greater autonomy. However, it should emphasize that this autonomy is not universally applicable and should be considered a mutable attribute of a field, influenced by diverse socio-cultural factors specific to different geographies. The study has aimed to portray the Syrian-Kurdish case as a 'special case of what is possible,' recognizing that the focus on autonomy in the French cultural production field does not carry the same significance in north-east Syria. This thesis argued that the emergence and expansion of the AANES's cultural production field resulted from both external factors such as civil wars and the region's specific historical and social context, including the emergence of the autonomous administration and its cultural policies.

The investigation of the genesis of fields in the AANES context has provided insights into the characteristics indicative of the development of the cultural production field, enabling a nuanced understanding of its autonomy. This thesis contends that the perceived necessity for fields to inherently gravitate towards autonomy might itself be shaped by specific social and cultural situations. The case demonstrates the importance of contextualizing and adapting Bourdieu's theoretical framework to suit diverse settings, highlighting its potential to contribute to our understanding of cultural production in unstable environments.

As a result, Bourdieu's theory of cultural production offers a potentially valuable lens for analyzing the cultural production in the region in 2011. This theory, which encompasses the concepts of habitus, cultural

capital, and the field of cultural production, allows for a nuanced understanding of the complex social dynamics and power relations that contribute to the creation and dissemination of cultural products.

Applying Bourdieu's framework to the region in 2011 necessitates an examination of the key institutions and actors involved in the cultural production process, as well as the ways in which they interact with one another. By investigating the distribution of linguistic and cultural capital among these actors and the positions of agents, one can gain insights into the processes that shape the cultural landscape in northeast Syria and the factors that drive its development.

Additionally, it is crucial to consider the specific historical, social, and political contexts when utilizing Bourdieu's theory in this instance. The region's unique experiences with political upheaval, conflict, and the emergence of autonomous administration provide a backdrop against which the cultural production must be understood. Furthermore, the role of language, particularly the use of Kurdish and its impact on the accessibility of cultural capital, is a critical factor to examine in this context.

While Bourdieu's theory of cultural production offers a promising framework for understanding the cultural production in the Kurdish region, it is essential to adapt the theory to account for the region's distinctive features and challenges. In doing so, one can develop a more comprehensive and contextually relevant understanding of the cultural landscape in the Syrian-Kurdish region post-2011.

This thesis has tried to provide a comprehensive examination of the cultural production field in the Syrian Kurdish region in comparison to the Kurdish cultural production in Turkey, offering a theoretical overview of Bourdieu's theory as a framework to analyze the historical, political, and cultural context surrounding the emergence of the cultural production field in the AANES. Through the analysis of key actors and institutions, the role of politics, power struggles, actors' habitus and the position and strategies of Kurdish agents, this study aimed to contribute to wider implications for our understanding of cultural production in northeast Syria.

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