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The sung home : narrative, morality, and the Kurdish nation

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The Sung Home

Narrative, morality, and the Kurdish nation

Wendelmoet Hamelink

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The Sung Home

Narrative, morality, and the Kurdish nation

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Dr. R. Mandel (University of London)

I dedicate this dissertation

to all dengbêjs who were a great inspiration for me
with their passion to never forget:
their kilams, their language,
their history, their music,
and their endless stories.

to my grandmother Akkie Noordzij-Bruin,
and to my mother Lia Hamelink-Hofland,
who taught me the art of listening
and of opening my mind and heart
to new people, places and experiences.

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Glossary

Agha	*Axa* in Kurdish. Landowner, or person in authority.
AKP	*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi* (Justice and Development Party), the ruling party in Turkey from 2002 until present (2014).
Alevism	Alevism is a religious group with origins in Shia Islam. Present day Alevism stems from two historically different groups: the Kızılbaş that formed a resistant movement against Ottoman authority in the early sixteenth century, and the Bektaşi Sufi order. Estimated following in Turkey: 15-25%.
Aşık	Turkish or Kurdish singer-poet, often Alevites.
Dengbêj	Kurdish singer-poet
Dengbêj House	*Mala dengbêja* in Kurdish. These Houses were set up in the 2000s as a performance place for dengbêjs.
Dîwan	A gathering of people in the presence of an agha or notable, usually taking place in the latter's house or guesthouse.
DTP	*Demokratik Toplum Partisi* (Democratic Society Party), the pro-Kurdish party ruling in Diyarbakır and other municipalities at the time of my research. Founded in 2005, banned in 2009 and succeeded by the BDP (Peace and Freedom Party).
Kilam	Recital song in Kurdish
Madrasa	Religious institution that provided education in Eastern Turkey in Kurdish and Arabic. Madrasas were banned in 1924 with the Law on the unification of education, but often continued underground.
NÇM	*Navenda Çanda Mesopotamia*, Mesopotamia Cultural Center, a chain of Kurdish cultural centers in Turkey existing since the 1990s. The centers organize a range of cultural activities. MKM in Turkish (*Mesopotamya Kültür Merkezi*).
Peshmerga	Kurdish freedom fighter in Iraq, lit. 'those who face death.'
PKK	*Partiya Karkerên Kurdistan*, The Kurdistan Workers party, officially founded in 1978. Guerilla warfare began in 1984.
Saz	The long-necked lute, a popular musical instrument in Turkey
Şevbêrk	Lit. 'to pass the evening'. It is used for nights when people gather together, possibly with guests. Also the name of a TV program on dengbêjs.
Stran	Rythmic song in Kurdish
Yezidism	Yezidism is a religious group that stems from the teachings of the Sufi sheikh Sheikh Adi ibn Musafir (11th century), and is also influenced by other belief systems. It developed into an independent religious community that is not anymore regarded as Islamic.

Notes on language use and translation

Kurmanji Kurdish

Most of the people I worked with for this dissertation spoke Kurmanji (Kurmancî in Kurdish) as their mother tongue, the largest Kurdish language in Turkey. I use the word Kurdish in this dissertation to refer to Kurmanji in order to avoid the use of too many foreign-language terms.

Place names

In the Kurdish region in Turkey most Kurdish place names were replaced with Turkish names by the state bureaucracy. Political activists are strict in using the Kurdish names for all places, whereas the average Kurd adopted the Turkish names of the larger towns and cities, but continued to use the former Kurdish or Armenian names of their villages. In the transcription and translation of the kilams, and in interview quotes, I left the place names as they were mentioned, and put the Turkish place names in brackets where necessary. In my own writing I use the Turkish place names with the Kurdish name in brackets. The use of both Kurdish and Turkish place names displays the confusion and politicized character of language use in Turkey.

Person names

In this dissertation I use pseudonyms for all people I interviewed, for three reasons. First, because of the politicized character of the topic I did not want to cause any risk for people involved. Second, my interpretation and analysis of the interviews was not chosen by the people involved. Third, the analysis of my dissertation is based on all interviews and recorded songs, also if I did not quote from them directly. If I would have mentioned real names, people who are not mentioned could feel excluded from my dissertation, even though they were of great help for the overall analysis.
In the appendix I give a list with the real names of all performers who I interviewed, apart from those who wanted to remain anonymous. Also, I use people's real names under pictures and when I refer to specific kilams and their performers.

Translation and transcription

Source, and manner of translation and transcription of the kilams are mentioned for each kilam in a footnote. All interview quotes are taken from video or audio-recorded interviews and translated by myself. I translated all interviews in full and looked at the entire interview for its analysis. The translation is as close as possible to the original text. However, I generally preferred a free translation which conveys its

meaning best in English, since a too literal translation can have an alienating effect. I did not transcribe the interviews but translated them into English immediately. I placed the Turkish or Kurdish original in brackets in the text of the quote when I felt that the original wording is important to know for the reader. If I felt the need to give more than three sentences, or the full Kurdish or Turkish original, I placed them in a footnote.

Transliteration

I use the Kurdish spelling as followed by the (dictionary of the) Kurdish Institute in Istanbul, and for Turkish the official Turkish spelling. Some of the people I interviewed in Turkish did not speak Turkish fluently. Interview quotes may therefore contain unusual language use.

If I copied a kilam or other Kurdish text from others, I mention the source and give the Kurdish as written there, also if it differs from the Kurdish Institute's spelling.

Kurdish pronunciation different from English

Alphabet	Sounds like	IPA
Ç/ç	**Ch**u**rch**	**/**tʃ/
C/c	**J**u**dg**e	/ʤ/
Ê/ê	M**ay**	/e/
G/g	**G**amble	/g/
Î/î	M**ee**t	/i:/
I/i	B**i**t	/I/
J/j	Plea**s**ure	/ʒ/
Ş/ş	**Sh**oe	/ʃ/
Û/ü	Ch**oo**se	/u:/
U/u	B**u**ll	/u/
X/x	**[**Scottish:] lo**ch**	/x/
Q/q	[Arabic Qaf]	/q/

Turkish pronunciation different from English

Alphabet	Sounds like	IPA
Ç/ç	**Ch**u**rch**	**/**tʃ/
C/c	**J**u**dg**e	/ʤ/
Ğ/ğ	[often not pronounced]	/:/
İ/i	F**ee**t	/i/
I/ı	Op**e**n	/ɯ/
J/j	Plea**s**ure	/ʒ/
Ö/ö	S**e**t, but rounded lips	/ø/
Ü/ü	Fl**u**te	/y/
Ş/ş	**Sh**oe	/ʃ/

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Figure 1. The guesthouse that dengbêj Silhedîn built in his village near Van. 2008.

Introduction

i.1 The sung home

The art of the Kurdish *dengbêjs* is the art of storytelling in sung verse. The dengbêjs are the most known oral performers in the Kurdish region in Turkey. Their trained voices picture worlds that can be far from the experience of the public, opening up their imagination to foreign places, or that are about the intimate and nearby, capturing the public's attention for the contingencies of everyday life. Performances are plain and basic: a dengbêj, a voice, a story, and a public. It is this verbal art, in its current form and setting in Turkey,[1] which is the topic of my dissertation.

The dengbêjs form a compelling research topic for a number of reasons. Their songs tell of a distant Kurdish past, and sketch, apart from the adventures of rulers and nobility, also the pursuits of the Kurdish commoner, and give an interesting view on their life world. In the current setting, these songs assume new meanings. For a long time, the dengbêjs and their art were suppressed and forgotten, and only recently did they return into public life. Today the dengbêjs see themselves, and are presented by others, as guardians of Kurdish history and culture. This vision tells much about recent socio-political developments and should be understood in the context of the evolving story of Kurdish nationalism. The dengbêjs and their songs create a tangible Kurdish past, a Kurdish geography, a place of belonging and nostalgia, set within the landscape of the Turkish and surrounding (nation-)states. The dissertation also engages with the life stories of the performers. The dengbêjs are mostly elderly people who can be seen as embodying various discourses and as inhabiting different temporalities. They were looking back and forward from a unique moment of return in public life, and of increasing space for Kurdish cultural production. Such moments of change provoke a repositioning of people within the larger discursive and institutional environment. They also provoke a rethinking of ideas about past, present and future: who are we, where do we come from, and where do we go? As guardians of historical knowledge, the dengbêjs had certain ideas about the past that were different from new political views. Because of their specific position, the dengbêjs and their songs offer a great prism from where to look at Kurdish history, modernity, nationalism, Orientalism, and oppression.

1 I limited my research topic to the context of the Turkish nation-state, instead of the larger Kurdistan region. It would have been an impossible task to do fieldwork in the various countries where the Kurds live, and to study the art of the dengbêjs in relationship to more than one of the nation-states they belong to: "The Kurdish national identity is highly fragmented. It is characterized by the political and cultural diversity of the Other (Turk, Persian or Arab) in each respective nation-state. Consequently, the starting-point for any study of Kurdish national identity must be a localized understanding of its relationship to the respective hegemonic national identity" (Hirschler 2001: 145).

The sung home refers to four partly related issues. First, it refers to the Dengbêj Houses where I conducted a large part of my research, and where the dengbêjs found a new home for their art. Second, it calls to mind the importance of language and traditions as a place of belonging. Third, it refers to the long-term political goals of many Kurds, namely to found a home for the Kurdish nation and to gain acceptance, respect, and legal rights for their existence as a linguistically and ethnically distinct group. And fourth, it indicates that in situations of violent conflict and disrupted lives, songs and stories can become someone's home, a place where s/he pieces together shattered experiences and finds new meaning.

The dengbêjs and their art can be studied in manifold ways. One can for example focus on their literary or musical qualities; on historical developments; or on the music market. In this introductory chapter I outline the approach followed in this dissertation. My main entrance into the topic is through the aspect of storytelling. This choice is first based on the fact that the dengbêjs are storytellers; each of their songs tells a story. But beyond this, the dengbêjs are also *subject* of stories: about their current meaning and place in the Kurdish nation, and in the Turkish nation-state. Institutions and individuals offer certain moral narratives (Zigon 2007, Somers 1994) about the dengbêj art and Kurdish culture. Because of the centrality of the dengbêj art as Kurdish cultural production before the 1980s, its rediscovery in recent years, and the variety of narratives about its meaning, I regard this art as a crossroads signifying larger socio-political developments.

The dengbêjs experienced how the value and meaning attributed to their art changed considerably according to the larger socio-political developments. Many of them lived in villages during their childhood and young adulthood, and experienced the days when dengbêjs were greatly respected for their knowledge and appreciated because of the entertainment they offered. During later years they had difficulty finding a space for performances due to oppression, changing societal structures, and a decreased interest. Since the late 1990s and early 2000s they became a focus of Kurdish political activists who mobilized the dengbêj art as symbols of an 'authentic' Kurdish culture. All these developments took place against the backdrop of Turkish nationalist projects, which regarded the dengbêjs, like any other expression of Kurdishness, for much of the twentieth century as a threat to national unity. Consequently, they either tried to silence them, or to assimilate them to Turkish 'folk' traditions. However, the time of my research saw a gradually increasing space for Kurdish culture which also had its effect on the presence of dengbêjs in public life.

The social changes taking place over the last decades greatly affected the personal lives of the dengbêjs and their performances. These changes resulted in

the need for new narratives about the meaning of their art. Therefore, studying the dengbêj art reveals much about the construction of social identity in the context of the nation-state. It investigates some of the ways in which various stories and storytellers contest each other in Turkey's Kurdish political landscape. The parties involved in this contested field are the dengbêjs; Kurdish and Turkish institutions offering and imposing ideas on folklore[2] and national culture, and these institutions' representatives; and other producers of narratives on the Kurds, the Kurdish nation, and the dengbêjs, most importantly the Kurdish media. As we will see, all of them produced moral narratives about the meaning of the art and the task of its performers. In Kurdish and Turkish nationalist thought, and in nationalist ideology in general, 'folk' culture is regarded as a key to the heart of the nation, and as a tool for the creation of national unity. These ideas gave the narratives evolving about the dengbêj art, and about Kurdish cultural production in general, a strong moral tone. But how did the dengbêjs, at the time of my research, feel about these narratives, and do their stories and performances fit into the framework of contemporary Kurdish nationalist thought? How did they see and value the changes that have taken place? And what meaning did they themselves attach to their art?

Next to the immediate local meaning giving in the Kurdish context, this study also connects to global processes, which gives it a much wider relevance. The narratives that are produced about the dengbêjs place their art in the context of a global path towards nationalism, modernity, and progress. Within this thought, the dengbêj art is understood as 'tradition', 'oral', and 'heritage', words that next to their positive connotation are also charged with ideas about backwardness and underdevelopment. Countering the tradition-modernity dichotomy so dominant in today's global imaginations, I follow the train of thoughts believing that we are all 'entangled in modernity' (Spyer 2000a), and that we are all 'modern' (Abu Lughod 2005). The Orientalist assumption that some people are behind on the road towards progress; contain the 'original traits' of a people; and are not yet entirely transformed by the project of modernity, is misleading in not recognizing the interdependency of east and west, north and south, rural and urban, poor and rich. This dissertation counters such an ideology by engaging strongly with people who are often classified as traditional and backwards. I believe that investigating their life stories, their performances, the songs they sing, their experiences of living on the margins, and their ideas about society and politics, offer a different perspective. Rather than

2 I use the terms 'folklore' and 'the folk' in this dissertation only as ideological terms that serve nationalist ideology. In this ideology, the cultural production of ordinary people, often in the form of oral tradition, was regarded as an important way of creating a national unity. See also below.

placing the dengbêjs and their art outside of the story of modernity, I understand them as being part of what makes modernity.

This dissertation offers an original contribution to two disciplines. It is directed to the field of Kurdish Studies that has grown from a marginal existence into a mature discipline over the last decade. Based on a total of thirteen months of field research in 2007 and 2008 in many towns, cities and villages in Eastern Turkey (see map 1) and in Istanbul, and from 2006-2012 in Germany and Paris, the dissertation gives an anthropological analysis of one of the most important Kurdish traditions in Turkey, and makes use of both Kurdish and Turkish primary and secondary sources. A major contribution is also the large body of material I collected and archived. Video and audio recordings of interviews and performances in Kurdish and Turkish are stored in the archive of the Nijmegen Max Planck Institute and will be made accessible for the general public in the time to come (see appendix). The dissertation also addresses Cultural Anthropology, the field that has been my guide and inspiration during the whole project. It offers an important contribution to the anthropology of morality; to narrative analysis; and to the embodied experience of music. It contributes to a better understanding of nationalism and Orientalism played out in local contexts. It also offers new insights in how people living on the margins of nation-states and global connections experience, negotiate, and give meaning to, that position.

The introduction offers the basic elements for the understanding of the chapters. I start with some notes on a day of field research that illustrates well how my research developed, and what were the main questions that being in the field raised. Then, I introduce the dengbêjs and their art: who are they, and what do we know about their history? Subsequently, I place the topic in the field of nationalism, Orientalism and folklore, and suggest to understand the investigated processes as a form of Kurdish self-Orientalism. I follow with some notes on narrative and morality, which are the main theoretical concepts used in this dissertation. I end this introduction with the outline of the chapters.

It was July 2008 when I once again visited the city Van[3] in Eastern Turkey and met regularly with the dengbêjs of the *Mala Dengbêja*, the Dengbêj House.[4] We had become familiar to each other due to the many days I had spent with them, in the House and with their families at home. They had founded the Dengbêj House in 2003 and it was the first of its kind in Turkey. The opening had attracted the

3 Van is the second largest city in Eastern Turkey with approximately 600.000 inhabitants.
4 This section is based on my field notes and video recordings.

attention of the Kurdish media and an article in the European Kurdish newspaper *Yeni Özgür Politika* had formed part of the little information I had on dengbêjs when writing my research proposal.

The Dengbêj House was situated in an apartment complex at the main road crossing Van's city center, and the core of the dengbêjs visited the House nearly everyday. They were almost always men, and the majority were at least fifty years old or above. The director of the House, and one or two other dengbêjs, would start the day with the common breakfast of Kurdish flat bread with cheese, tahin, honey, and a strong tea while sitting on the carpeted floor. Usually they watched the Kurdish satellite channel Roj TV[5] and often discussed the political developments.[6] At noon, when four or five dengbêjs were present, they began to perform, and continued for at least some hours, their heavy voices competing with each other for the nicest stories and melodies. In the afternoon often more dengbêjs dropped by. Because of its place in the apartment complex that could as well be a normal family house, and the way they used it as a meeting place and even started the day with a breakfast, the House became more than just a performance place. Rather, at least for the core of the dengbêjs, the House felt like their home which they had built by their own efforts.[7] Now and then visitors came by: often elderly men who enjoyed and commented on the performances; sometimes also young people who were interested in hearing the dengbêjs sing. Different from the Dengbêj House in Diyarbakır,[8] the dengbêjs of the House in Van emphasized they had set up and organized the House by themselves, and that it was due to their own efforts that they had managed to find a new place to perform after many years of silence.

It was a hot summer day in the weekend when we went together with three dengbêjs to visit dengbêj Dîlan, the only woman who sometimes visited the House, at least at the times I was there. That night I would stay over with her in order to spend more time with her and her family. We took a minibus to her house in a neighborhood on the outskirts of the city. The neighborhoods further removed from the city center closely resembled village life; the mud houses were

5 Previously called MED TV, currently called Stêrk TV. See chapter 4 and 5 for more information.

6 I often witnessed such political discussions at people's homes while they were watching television.

7 The dengbêjs of the Dengbêj House in Van emphasized this repeatedly in the interviews and performances, one of the founders saying for example during a performance where the core group was present: "With these dengbêjs present here we have opened the Dengbêj House, it was opened by the efforts of these four dengbêjs. I want to thank very much all these people and I want to send my greetings to the culture of Kurdistan, to all four parts of Kurdistan, and to all patriotic Kurds" (recorded performance July 2008, translated from Kurdish).

8 Diyarbakır is the largest city in Eastern Turkey with approximately 900.000 inhabitants. It is often referred to as the 'capital of Kurdistan.'

built as in a village, the gardens leading to unpaved streets where children were playing and women walking from one house to the next to visit their neighbors and relatives. The women made their own bread in the bread oven (*tandir*) which was constructed in a shed in the garden. The invitation to visit dengbêj Dîlan's house was an unexpected surprise for me. A year earlier I had already visited her, together with a female Kurdish friend and two dengbêjs of the House. Although she had invited us, when we arrived her two children unexpectedly showed up and were clearly upset by our presence. We were met with uncomfortable glances during the meal they offered us, and when the meal was finished angry words followed. The son and daughter felt that by our presence, and by my wish to interview their mother, we were discrediting her honorability. But in 2008 I met her several times in the House, once even joined by her daughter who had been so upset the previous year, and I was now invited to stay over at her place.

Our visit coincided with a wedding nearby, and shortly after we arrived we left again to join in the celebrations. Before leaving we had already heard the loud sound of the wedding band, and the festive music accompanied us during our walk. The wedding took place on a nearby empty square in the neighborhood. Some party tents were set up and people were dancing on our arrival. The large circle of dancing people is a familiar sight and vital part of any Kurdish wedding. Women and men line up and hold hands, dancing with complicated steps to the rhythm and melody of the music. The dancer in front of the line holds a scarf which s/he whirls around while taking the lead of the dance. Mostly this is a young person, but this time the front dancer was an elderly man who was dressed in traditional Kurdish suit, and about whom I later understood he was both the father of the groom, and a dengbêj who was famous in his home region. The scarf he whirled through the air had the green-yellow-red of the Kurdish flag. The atmosphere was recalcitrant and the songs spoke of recent political developments. The dengbêjs I came with whispered to me that we could not stay long because of the political atmosphere. But the wedding was large and busy, and I disappeared into the crowds when a young theatre player who was active in the Kurdish cultural center offered to show me around. He introduced me to some of his relatives and explained that the newly wed couple originated from outside of Van; the bride was from Hakkari, a town at the Iraqi border, and the groom from Silopi, at the Syrian border. Therefore, there were many visitors from those regions and the wedding was held according to their customs.

Suddenly I heard the voice of dengbêj Ehmed of the Dengbêj House sounding through the microphone, and I ran back to the central square with my camera. The wedding band had taken a break, and the dengbêjs took their chance for a short

performance. They sat on plastic chairs and a public of about sixty men surrounded them. Although many women had joined in the dancing, they now sat together at the other side of the square. Three dengbêjs sang each in turn, two were my friends from the Dengbêj House, and the third was the above mentioned dancer, dengbêj Xelîl, the father of the groom and thus a relative of many of the people present. Dengbêj Ehmed began by singing a love song, but after the public kept asking for their relative to sing, he handed over the microphone to him. Dengbêj Xelîl had a nice, strong voice and he sang with authority; about the Turkish military that had burned down the house of the song's protagonist, a woman who mourned the loss of her husband and property. Thereafter he recited a poem of the famous political poet Cigerxwîn.[9] When it was the turn of dengbêj Cahîd he sang a love song, and finally dengbêj Ehmed took the floor again and connected to the political atmosphere by singing a song about a battle between the Turkish military and four Kurdish brothers. The dengbêj performance lasted twenty minutes, until the wedding band returned from their break and continued with the instruments and songs typical for Kurdish wedding bands.

I was again walking around with the theatre player, talking with wedding guests, eating in the house of the couple's relatives, and later joining in the dances. After some time someone came to fetch me from the line of dancers, and my dengbêj friends stood waiting for me at the side of the square. Twilight had set in, and they looked clearly uncomfortable and a little angry. They reprimanded me for disappearing for such a long time and wanted to get home urgently. Dengbêj Dîlan had left already. On our walk home they said to me that I should always follow them and stay close to them, that such weddings can be dangerous places, and that they had wanted to leave much earlier. They whispered that they had seen civil policemen at the square, and that 'events'[10] were likely to happen. When we came home to dengbêj Dîlan's house and sat down for a tea, dengbêj Cahîd urged me to erase the part of the video recording where he was performing, even though he was the only one who had not sung a song with a political content. I gave him the camera and let him film for some time during the tea we were having, until our casual conversations had

9 Şêxmûs Hesen (1903-1984), alias Cigerxwîn, is a famous Kurdish poet who wrote political poems in a simple and accessible language about the need for education and unity for Kurds. I did not witness dengbêjs citing Cigerxwîn on other occasions. In the performance discussed in chapter 2 one of his poems was recited, but by someone who was not a dengbêj.

10 People often used the Turkish word *olay* and the Kurdish word *bûyer*, both meaning 'event', 'happening,' when they referred to protests or violence related to political problems. It seemed that, by using these words, they could avoid naming them and speaking about them directly. Instead of saying 'the police might come and intervene', they would say: 'events might happen.'

overwritten his performance. Also previously, at the Dengbêj House, he had asked me not to record his performances, because he was afraid of losing his job.[11]

In spite of the fears, the wedding day ended peacefully, and the two dengbêjs returned to their homes whereas I stayed at dengbêj Dîlan's place. The next day I conducted two interviews. One with dengbêj Dîlan who said that the *saz*, the lute, had extinguished the dengbêj art (*saz dengbêjî îptal kiriye*), meaning that the popular Kurdish wedding bands with their musical performance had replaced the dengbêjs' position at weddings. Dengbêjs used to have a leading role in the old days when the voice was (one of)[12] the only musical instrument(s) people accompanied dancing with. The second interview was with dengbêj Xelîl, the father of the groom. I visited him in the house of a relative. He expressed his deep regret about the loss of the importance of the dengbêj art and other Kurdish traditions, and spoke passionately about his past experiences of performances with other dengbêjs in his home region.

In the early afternoon I returned to the Dengbêj House and we set off by car to the village of dengbêj Abdulqadîr for an evening performance, a two hours drive from the city. I always loved to visit the quiet villages, and I felt that this small village surrounded by farm lands looked beautiful. The houses were painted in dark pink and green. Animals walked around and the gardens with fruits and vegetables were well-kept. Dengbêj Abdulqadîr owned two houses: a large family home where he and his wife stayed; and another house he had built recently as a , a guesthouse, with the specific aim to use it as a performance place for the dengbêjs. We spent the whole evening in the dîwan where four dengbêjs and one aşık (see glossary) were singing each in turn, listened to by dengbêj Abdulqadîr's relatives. Dengbêj Dîlan was also with us, but apart from singing a short song she did not partake much in the performance. It was one of the last days I spent in Van and the dengbêjs were trying to complete the program they had planned for me. From the first day that I had entered the House, the dengbêjs had had clear ideas about what I needed for my research, and I mostly followed them in their plans and had taken up the position of a student learning from the master dengbêjs what the dengbêj art implied. On this last evening the atmosphere was light and enjoyable, and when the relatives had left to sleep the dengbêjs stayed behind for some more time and let me record while

11 When I once visited him at his home and spoke with him, his brother, and his family, they talked lengthy about the possible risks of performing at the Dengbêj House, and also about the risks of my research. They were critical about my endeavors, on the one hand because they felt I was putting people in danger, on the other hand because they felt I should be more politically engaged and that it was my duty to bring the Kurdish question to the notice of the European Union. Especially the latter point was often brought up by people in relation to my research.

12 In many regions, next to the dengbêjs, *dahol* (drum) and *zirna* (oboe) players also accompanied the dancing.

they danced the joyful wedding dances accompanied by their own voices. When the recordings were done they went to sleep together in the dîwan, and dengbêj Dîlan and I found our beds in the neighboring family home where dengbêj Abdulqadîr's wife and some other female relatives were already sleeping.

The days in Van introduce some of the central concerns and complexities of this dissertation, and of the field research it is based on. I had chosen the topic of Kurdish dengbêjs based on my 2004 MA research on Turkish singer-poets, the *aşık*. Their life stories and songs, their position in the larger community they were part of, and the institutional context they were operating in, had offered interesting starting points from where to look at many socio-political developments in Turkey's recent history. Although I had hardly any information about Kurdish singer-poets before I started my research, I hoped they would turn out to be an equally fascinating research topic. They most certainly did. In 2007, when I started my research in Turkey, the dengbêjs had only recently returned to public life after almost twenty years of silence; most dengbêjs I spoke with performed again only since one to five years. It was a time of massive changes in which the dengbêj art obtained new meanings, and in which the dengbêjs were searching for their place and opportunities in a new setting. Following the 1999 arrest of PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan, and the coming to power of the AKP party, the political climate in Turkey showed slow but positive changes for the Kurds, after two decades of extreme suppression. The Kurdish question became increasingly incorporated in the established political field, and cultural activism (Ginsburg e.a. 2002, see chapter 4) became an important way for Kurdish activists to open up a space for a Kurdish voice in Turkey. The newly founded Dengbêj Houses were part of this larger development of cultural activism and of a growing Kurdish institutionalization. Because of the novelty of the development many things were not yet stabilized and the dengbêjs were grappling with their new position. What meaning would be attached to them after having been silenced for such a long time, and what place did they have in the new institutional environment? The time of my research (2007 and 2008) thus formed a particular moment that came to be the backdrop of the performances I attended, and of the interviews and discussions I had with the dengbêjs.

The Dengbêj Houses were a good starting point for my research, as they were part of a recent development in which Turkey's political climate offered an increasing space for the Kurds and other minorities to visibly enter public life. The Houses were also a consequence of the renewed interest of Kurdish activists in their 'origins.' Different from the Dengbêj House in Diyarbakır, the House in Van turned

out to be more independent, run by the dengbêjs themselves, and less structured by the politicized scene of Kurdish cultural activism at the moment of my research.[13] To what extent the dengbêjs were really more independent remained a bit obscure to me. Officially, the House was part of the NÇM chain of Kurdish cultural centers that were highly politicized. In Diyarbakır the Dengbêj House was run by NÇM cultural activists who had a strong presence in its running (see chapter 4). In Van the dengbêjs had fought for more independence, and stated that they had to be the ones in charge, as they knew how to arrange things, and were the experts of this art. At the beginning they had been successful in attracting the attention of the Kurdish media, which came to film in the House. However, over time their independence was not yielding the expected results of a large audience and a good income. The Dengbêj House in Diyarbakır became much more visible and successful than the House in Van, arguably because of the influence of political activists and the support of the municipality, and because of the launch of the Dengbêj Project (see chapter 4).

The (in)visibility of female dengbêjs kept haunting me during my field research. Despite the efforts of the political activists at the Dengbêj Houses to encourage women to join the Houses and to perform there, the reality was that in the many weeks I spent in both Houses women rarely showed up. And despite my own efforts to speak to female dengbêjs, my attempts were often in vain. When I started my research I focused primarily on the most visible and institutionalized forms of the dengbêj art, and the manner in which they had recently been revitalized by the Kurdish movement. I aimed to investigate how the dengbêjs experienced their new position, and how they were presented by political activists in public life. Therefore, apart from asking regularly whether there were female dengbêjs I could interview, I did not emphasize women's absence too much as not to interfere with the at that moment common practice of the Houses.

Dengbêj Dîlan, whom I introduced above, was an exceptional female visitor to the House in Van, but she was not usually regarded as a dengbêj, nor did she define herself as such. She said that she knew many wedding songs, but that she did not know how to sing like a dengbêj. The dengbêjs of the House were 'real' dengbêjs, she said, and indeed only people who know how to sing in the specific style of the dengbêj art are referred to as dengbêjs by others. At the time of the research I had

13 Although the Dengbêj House in Van was part of the NÇM (Navenda Çanda Mesopotamia) chain of Kurdish cultural centers, at the time of my research it led a relatively independent existence. During my first visits in 2007 the main organizer of the House was a young political activist who motivated the dengbêjs and organized events. In 2008 he was gone, and the dengbêjs organized most things alone. Shortly after my last visit the House moved to the newly constructed cultural center in another building and possibly became more firmly incorporated into the center.

difficulty understanding why the dengbêjs had asked her to join in the program they organized for me. Later I realized that this may have been because they were aware of the necessity of promoting female dengbêjs in the current socio-political climate in which they were pushed forward as positive examples on the road towards Kurdish modernity (see chapter 4). On the wall in the Dengbêj House hang the pictures of all registered dengbêjs, among which are several women. However, they did not visit the House and it may well have been that there were tensions between the male and female dengbêjs.[14] It seems that the dengbêjs were afraid of losing their position to female dengbêjs who received more attention. Because of their up to that time often subordinate position, and the taboo of performing beyond the family circle, the sight of a female dengbêj on stage was much demanded by new audiences, who felt it was more special to see a woman perform than a man. Although male dengbêjs seemed to feel threatened by the popularity of female dengbêjs, they did realize their importance in the current context. Therefore, it made sense that the dengbêjs chose a woman to accompany the program they had set up for my research. By choosing someone whom they called 'dengbêj', but would not be regarded as such by the audience, they avoided losing their central position to a woman. It was clear that they did not take her seriously in her role as they hardly ever gave her the floor to sing. Nonetheless, by inviting her they could give me the impression that they gave the appropriate space to women that the new political climate required from them.

I did build up some good relationships with female dengbêjs (see chapter 3 and 5), and besides that women who were not dengbêjs (or of whom I did not know they were)[15] were important for me during my research. I often had the chance to engage with the female relatives of the dengbêjs. I joined them while they were cooking, they showed me around in their homes and gardens, and at night I shared a room with them. Kurdish village houses often have two or three large rooms which at night are used to sleep. Over twenty colorful mattresses are piled up in the store room and taken out in the evening. When there are guests staying for the night, one room is used for men and the other for women. In the city people mostly live in apartments with more rooms, but also there I often shared a bedroom with several women. The women of the houses I visited made my research much more colorful

14 Both in Van and Diyarbakır I noticed that male dengbêjs did not fully respect female dengbêjs, as was confirmed by a female dengbêj in Diyarbakır (see chapter 4). In 2010 female dengbêjs in Van set up a center for themselves (personal communication with Marlene Schafer, 2011), and I heard from several people that the male dengbêjs were against the existence of such a center and tried to block it from being set up.

15 I usually asked the relatives of dengbêjs if they also knew many songs, but mostly they replied that they did not know how to sing. However, once a woman told me later that she had not dared to tell me at that moment because of the men present.

and enjoyable than had I had only been able to spend time with the male dengbêjs. They were fantastic hosts who tried everything to make me feel at home. We laughed together and made jokes, they were curious about my life and I about theirs, and we shared our personal stories. The conversations also enhanced my understanding of the daily lives of the dengbêjs, and I thus owe much gratitude to the many women I came to know who welcomed me, a complete stranger, so warmly into their homes.

During my research I learned that confusion is a central feature of living in a conflict region. In many cases it was unclear how good or bad the political situation was. For example, at the wedding the dengbêjs were afraid of trouble, but the theatre player who walked me around was not. Times were changing and people did not yet feel confident that the positive climate would continue. After decades of conflict people were used to sudden changes for the worse. At the time of my fieldwork Van's city administration was in the hands of the Islamist AKP party, whereas Diyarbakır was run by the pro-Kurdish party DTP. There was a clear difference in atmosphere between the two cities; in Van people were often afraid, and some of my friends were not willing to accompany me to the Dengbêj House which was regarded as a marked Kurdish place and therefore political. In Diyarbakır people were generally less worried about such issues. But in both cases, the many civil policemen present; the frequent road blocks outside of the cities; the presence of soldiers and military vehicles; and the many political prisoners, were effective in creating an atmosphere of fear that scared people off even if nothing really happened. The fears of people varied, as well as their reactions to immediate situations. Some people were at ease during interviews and told many personal details, whereas other people were afraid and kept on the surface. Some people criticized me for doing the research in the first place as they felt it could bring people into danger, whereas others felt I was taking too many precautions which hindered me in carrying out some parts of the research.[16] The conflicting reactions people gave to safety issues left me often confused and in doubt which decisions to take. Although on the one hand there was much more space for expressions of Kurdishness in public life than before, and also for a research like mine, on the other there were still threats, arrests, violent demonstrations, and battles between the PKK and the Turkish army in certain regions.

The moment of my field research thus was a time of a new institutionalization of Kurdish culture in public life in Turkey. Dengbêj Houses were in the process of

16 One precaution I took was that I never stayed too long in one place as to not attract the attention of the authorities. I had decided this because of conversations with other researchers on the Kurdish issue who had recently experienced significant problems such as arrests and expulsion from Turkey.

being set up; television programs were broadcast about the dengbêjs; and in the music market interest in the dengbêj art was rapidly increasing. As the political climate was still often hostile towards Kurdish expressions, and as an open display of Kurdishness was something that needed to be fought for, much of this institutionalizing took the form of cultural activism. People involved in promoting Kurdish culture had a political affiliation and were often overtly propagating political messages. The renewed interest in the dengbêjs had a strong political tone and the narratives evolving about the meaning of the dengbêjs and their art were likewise politicized. However, my dissertation goes beyond the analysis of political narratives. It focuses on the dengbêjs as the main actors, and takes their life world and their art as its starting point. It investigates the concerns of people who often had a different agenda than the people who brought them back on stage. As such the dengbêjs and their songs show a more diverse picture of Kurdish socio-political engagement. While writing the dissertation I have attempted to do justice both to the political atmosphere I found during my field research, as well as to the diversity of personal and social stories that went beyond this.

Area of field research and collected data

My research started in Germany and Belgium in 2007 where I met with Hozan Şemdin and Hakan Akay who provided me with information and contacts in Turkey and abroad. Over the years I conducted interviews with seven dengbêjs and other singers in Germany and France. I built up a long-term research contact and friendship with a family in Germany, whom I visited every year in Germany between 2006 and the present, and once in their village of origin in Turkey (see chapter 5). In general, I focused more on the quality of individual contacts than on speaking with large numbers of people. In total, I interviewed sixty performers, who were forty dengbêjs and twenty other types of musicians. Invaluable were also the interviews and private talks I had with journalists, writers, scholars, political activists and television producers, who helped me find my way in the often complex landscape of Kurdish life in Turkey. Almost all interviews were in Turkish or Kurdish.

In 2007 I spent six months, in 2008 seven months in Turkey where I was based in Istanbul and from there traveled to many places in Eastern Turkey. I spent much time at the Kurdish Institute in Istanbul where Sami Tan and Aysel Çetin taught me Kurmanji, the largest Kurdish language in Turkey. They also offered a great work space when I was in Istanbul. My main destinations in Eastern Turkey were Van and Diyarbakır, where I built up long-term contacts with the dengbêjs in the Dengbêj Houses. I visited them regularly during my research periods. From there

I traveled to other towns and villages in eastern Turkey where I visited individual dengbêjs or aşıks. With some individual performers I built up a long-term friendship that continues until today. I recorded most interviews with performers and others on video or audio. This was helpful in order to do narrative analysis of the interviews, which I translated in full. Although I initially hesitated to record interviews because of the political sensitivity of research in the Kurdish region, many dengbêjs were comfortable with recording. When at the beginning I left my video camera at home, some dengbêjs reprimanded me for not being a serious researcher and for not giving them the importance they deserved. In the end, the dengbêjs are performers who had a high status in the past, and they expect an attitude that appreciates that position.

I also attended and recorded over sixty hours of performances. Many took place in the cultural centers and Dengbêj Houses of Diyarbakır and Van, and one in a Kurdish cultural center on the outskirts of Istanbul. I recorded performances at two festivals, two weddings in Turkey and one in Germany, and a concert of young dengbêjs in Istanbul. Additionally I recorded or attended a number of performances at the homes of dengbêjs whom I visited, in Turkey as well as in Germany and one in France. Sometimes they performed in the evening when relatives and neighbors were present, mostly one dengbêj performing, sometimes with two or more. I also recorded many dengbêjs singing alone in front of the camera as part of the interview, sometimes for hours, and sometimes spread over several sessions. Hanifi Barış was of great help in transcribing, translating, and analyzing dengbêj songs. Zeki Aydın also listened to many songs of my recordings and wrote Kurdish summaries for me.

As additional research material I used the recordings of television programs on dengbêjs of an international and a local TV channel, CDs and some cassettes, Kurdish and Turkish newspaper articles and books written about the dengbêjs, their performances, and their songs and stories. The latter provide sometimes detailed descriptions of performances, and are also helpful in gaining understanding in the way the author, and people in his or her near environment, experienced these. Also, the way in which the Kurdish authors present the dengbêj art reveals much of its current framing.

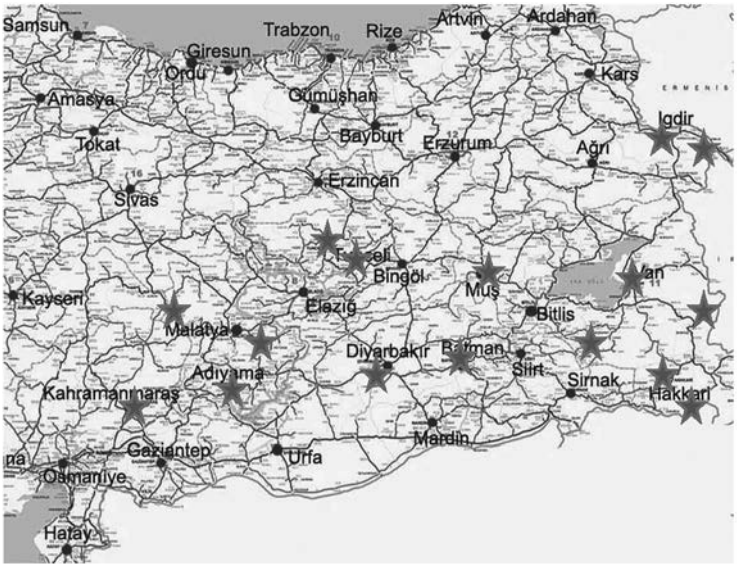

Figure 2. The places in Eastern Turkey where I carried out the research in 2007 and 2008

i.2 Some notes on the dengbêj art

The word dengbêj can be translated with 'master of the voice', meaning voice, *bêj* derived from the verb 'to say'. In the Kurdish region in Turkey it is used for a singer-poet who sings a cappella, or is occasionally accompanied by a *bilûr* (shepherd's pipe) or *mey* (woodwind instrument).[17] He or she has a large repertoire of *kilams* (recital song, see chapter 1), a nice and strong voice, and knows kilams from well-known master dengbêjs.[18] A good dengbêj also composes kilams him/herself and is known by many people in the near environment. The kilams can be about many themes such as love and its complications, local conflicts, battles with the Ottoman and Turkish army, or legendary events.[19] Since the dengbêj art is a secular tradition, their kilams are generally secular songs with few religious references. The dengbêj is not the only oral performer; other performers are *stranbêj* (singer), çîrokbêj (storyteller), and

17 Depending on the Kurdish region different terms are used.

18 Parıltı 2006, Kevirbirî 2005, Kızılkaya 2000

19 In recent years some anthologies have been published, such as Berbir 2007, Karasu 2007, Özalp 2007 and Kevirbirî 2001. The work of Allison (2001) is the first comprehensive study of Kurdish secular oral tradition. Although it is focusing on Yezidi oral tradition, one can also read it as a broader introduction into Kurdish oral tradition, since many stories and songs are shared with non-Yezidi Kurdish oral traditions.

derwiş (wandering dervish with a religious repertoire[20]). Among these performers, the dengbêj seems to have been the most prestigious, and is also the only type of oral performer who is currently active on a wider scale. Dengbêj is a term that can be used for men as well as for women, but performing in public was generally regarded as inappropriate for women. Female dengbêjs performed mostly at home, within the family circle, or together with other women during work or at weddings, and did not have the status of a male dengbêj. Although since recently female dengbêjs have become more accepted, their position is not yet firmly established.

Unfortunately there is hardly any information available on the history of the dengbêjs. Until the 1970s most studies that provide a collection and sometimes translation of Kurdish songs and stories[21] give very little information on the position of the performers as this was not their primary interest. Also, when such information is provided, it is rarely about the region where I did my research. It was often difficult to get access to Kurdistan in Turkey today due to restrictions already under the Ottoman Empire and later the Turkish Republic to allow researchers into these regions.[22] Mann (1906) makes a few remarks on the position of singer-poets in the area where he did his research, in present day Iran. He heard of 'a kind of singing schools' meant to train pupils in 'epic folk poetry'. All he says is that young people went to a master to learn their oral repertoire, and after having served that master for

20 A *derwiş* was someone known for his piety who was either wandering around without having a stable place to live, or had devoted his life to a particular religious order (*tariqat*), and stood in the service of the order's leader. Many people told me how in the past *derwiş* visited their villages, and sang religious songs or told stories with a religious message, with the accompaniment of the *erbane*, the hand drum. They knew old Kurdish poems such as those written by Feqiyê Teyran or Melayê Cizîrî. In return they received some butter or other products. They did not have much prestige; most people pitied them or looked down upon them. I interviewed one *derwiş* who currently lives in Istanbul but originates from Malazgirt. He had learned this art from his father in law, and took pride in it. He played and sang at weddings and other celebrations. He is one of the few remaining *derwiş*; after the abolition of the caliphate (1924), the prohibitions of Sufi orders and the persecution of their adherents, these organizations were marginalized and went underground.

21 Early sources (such as Mann 1906 and LeCoq 1903) are by European researchers who collected songs and stories as linguistic data for the grammars they wrote. Typically, their studies consist of an introduction on the area and circumstances of the research; a corpus of transcribed stories and songs; a translation of the corpus; and a grammar.

22 Mann (1906) for example mentions about his research trips in 1903 and 1904, when he studied the Mukrî Kurdish dialect: "Since I have not been permitted to conduct a study in the Turkish region, I am not in the position to indicate how far to the west the language area of the Mukrî extends" (Mann 1906: xix, translated from German). However, in 1906 he managed to get access to Ottoman Kurdish regions. And much later McKenzie (1961) writes: "It was originally intended to spend an equal amount of time in the Kurdish speaking areas of Turkey and Iraq. In the event, permission not been forthcoming from the Turkish authorities, some 10 months were spent in northern Iraq" (pp. xvii).

some time they could go to one or two additional masters if they were very talented.[23] Also later studies focus on collection and transcription of a corpus of texts, rather than on the lives and position of the performers.[24] Turkish folklore studies directed their attention to the Turkish aşık tradition, which is therefore well researched, and many works have been published in Turkish on the position of its performers. However, as the art of the aşıks is quite different from the dengbêjs, these studies do not help much in understanding the latter's position. Due to the nationalist agenda of Turkish folklore researchers, and the prohibitions on research and publications in and on the Kurdish language, they completely ignored Kurdish traditions as an object of study. Therefore, the only thing we can do to compensate for the lack of studies is by looking at the socio-political history of the Kurds, and combine this with the more recent information we have on the position and lives of the dengbêjs. Based on this information it seems likely that, historically, dengbêjs functioned at different levels according to their qualities. The best performers performed for the Kurdish kings, the mîr, and others performed for lower rulers referred to as agha (see glossary). They accompanied them on their journeys, and also traveled independently to other places to perform. Again others were not professionally occupied with the dengbêj art, but they were acknowledged and appreciated as good dengbêjs in their immediate environment. Today only the last group has remained.

The Ottoman Empire and early Republic

Until the sixteenth century the Kurdish region was politically organized in small dynasties and tribes of mostly Turkic, Kurdish, and Armenian ethnicity, competing for territory. The tribes and dynasties sometimes grew in size and power, but often remained marginal in influence and the level of political organization. The Ottoman Empire was built on the incorporation of an increasing number of these factions into their realm. Between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries, or the heyday of the Ottoman empire, Kurdish emirates (confederations of tribes) enjoyed a high level of independence compared to regions closer to the central

23 "It appears that among the Kurds, next to the schools led mostly by Mullahs (…), existed and still exist a kind of singing schools that practice epic folk poetry. Young people with an appealing voice are apprenticed to a Master (*wastâ*) and learn the repertoire of these masters, that solely consists of oral tradition, by heart. Very few of these bards can read and write, also Rahman did not know the letters. Those who are most capable possibly continue their apprenticeship with a second or third [master] and become their *shâgird*, of course not without pay, be it that these students do house services, or that they show their appreciation by paying in kind" (Mann 1906: xxviii, translated from German).

24 For example Cindî and Evdal 1936, the publications of the Celîl family (2004, 2002, 2001, 1982), Chaland 1980, Blau 1986.

government.[25] Their geographic position on the Persian Ottoman border, in a mountainous region difficult to conquer, turned their territory into a buffer zone between the two empires.[26] It was difficult for the empires to establish firm control, and "until the emergence of the nationalist challenge to state sovereignty after the First World War, and the discovery of mineral resources, absolute control of this very marginalised area was not considered to be of paramount importance" (O'Shea 2004: 17). The emirates derived much of their power from their ties with the Ottoman government, and had thus a clear benefit from remaining loyal.[27] In the seventeenth and eighteenth century they had a large following and had their own political and military organisation.[28] The mîrs, or leaders of the emirates, played an important role as mediators between the tribes under their control, and it seems they were highly respected in that function. Despite their importance I did not come across songs about such mîrs in current performances,[29] probably because it is too long ago, and most songs sung today are from more recent times (see chapter 1).

The emirates had an active court life like the surrounding empires, to which singer-poets undoubtedly contributed; the courts of larger Kurdish principalities followed the model of Ottoman and Persian court life.[30] During (1991) suggests that music associated with the court in the Middle East had a certain uniformity until the first quarter of the eighteenth century. "Formerly, a musician from Tabriz could try his luck in Bokhara or Baghdad (..) They sang in different languages, for in those times – from Istanbul to Kashgar - educated people knew Persian, Arabic and Turkish."

25 The most inaccessible districts got the status of *Kurd Hukumeti* (Kurdish Government), and were virtually independent. They had their own system of rule, and were neither obliged to collect taxes for the state treasury, nor to supply soldiers for the state army.

26 "The pattern of nominal submission to central government, be it Persian, Arab or subsequently Turkic, alongside the assertion of as much local independence as possible, came to be an enduring theme in Kurdish political life." (McDowall 1996: 21).

27 The borders between the Persian and Ottoman empires were established after clashes between the Safavids and the Ottomans in 1511. The Ottomans had won the support of many Kurdish tribes by promising them a better position than they had under the Safavids. Tribal rule was connected to and based on the support of the central state. "The Kurdish tribes do not exist in a vacuum that would allow them to evolve independently. (..) Kurdistan's political history of the past five centuries shows how the important developments among the tribes were always in response to developments at the state level." (Van Bruinessen 1992: 134).

28 In some cases the emirates developed into large confederations, for example the emirate of Bitlis. In 1650 it consisted of no less than seventy tribes, that were led by aga's, of which the largest one alone numbered forty thousand. The emir of Bitlis could assemble an army of several tens of thousands of soldiers (Van Bruinessen 1992).

29 Aghas are sometimes referred to as mîr, in 'lo mîro', oh king. See for an example chapter 2. But this is not because they were mîrs, but to address them with the highest respect.

30 The Ottoman Empire had adopted many of the institutions that already existed in previous Middle Eastern empires. "[T]hey were part of the common cultural heritage of the Middle East in which both the emirates and the Ottoman and Safavid empires shared." (Van Bruinessen 1992: 173).

(During 1991: 31). Popular musicians also performed at the courts, which means that court music and popular styles influenced each other. "Numerous groups made up especially of Jews and Armenians played light music. They also frequented the court and were, therefore, in touch with art music." (During 1991: 33). Kurdish may have been one of the languages of entertainment at the courts of Kurdish principalities, as it seems likely that Kurdish rulers would invite famous performers of the surroundings to perform at the court. Court life was only accessible to a minority; most singer-poets must have been in the service of a tribal agha rather than a mîr. The emirates were the highest level of political organization, after which followed the tribes, which were again divided into clans and lineages. In the late eighteenth century, when the Ottoman Empire was in decline, the Ottoman government attempted to centralize its reign. The majority of Kurdish mîrs, who had played a central role in maintaining the power equilibrium between local aghas, were killed or exiled. They were replaced by Ottoman government officials whose authority turned out to be effective only in the cities and their immediate environment. In all regions conflicts broke out, and the existing power vacuum was filled by Sufi sheikhs who had also previously been influential and powerful. They would play a large role in the Kurdish rebellions after the foundation of the Turkish Republic.

Because of the destruction of the emirate and the eradication of the mîrs, the tribal and village aghas were the ones remaining to support dengbêjs in their art. The Kurdish tribe is "a socio-political and generally also territorial (and therefore economic) unit based on descent and kinship, real or putative" (van Bruinessen 1992: 51). It is unclear how the tribes exactly functioned in the past. It seems that they were especially needed and mobilized in times of conflicts. Tribes were flexible rather than rigid political systems, and kinship was not the only reason to belong to a tribe. In times of (inter-tribal) conflicts, weaker tribes lost many of their members to tribes that proved to be stronger. In such cases, political preferences were more important than kinship ties.

Until the beginning of the twentieth century, most Kurds lived in the countryside and were either nomads or peasants. Peasants and semi-nomadic pastoralists lived in villages, which were the most important form of social organisation. Apart from the need for some handicrafts that were only produced in the cities, they were mainly self-supporting. Villages were relatively small,[31] and one agha could be the leader of more than one village at the same time. Most villages had a dîwan or guesthouse, a place where the community gathered during winter

31 The dengbêjs mentioned between twenty to two-hundred houses in the villages where they had lived during their childhood and young adulthood. Most villages have decreased in size since that time.

evenings, on special days, and when there were guests. The agha was responsible for hosting guests, which was one of the means through which he could strengthen his position.[32] Inviting dengbêjs and other performers was also an important means to do so.

Nomadic groups travelled around, semi-nomads lived in their village in winter, and went higher in the mountains in summer with their flocks. It seems that tribal organisation generally (but not totally) corresponded to a (semi-) nomadic lifestyle; the nomads and peasants living in the mountains were organized in tribes and dominated the non-tribal peasants living in the plains. The word agha was used as a general term for a leader and could be used at all levels; the agha of the village, of the clan, of the tribe. In the areas further removed from the central government and thus more independent, the tribal system was more strongly developed and functioned as the main political entity, whereas in those regions closer to the centre tribal ties were weaker.

It is known from more recent times that aghas supported dengbêjs who could praise and spread their name and fame. They often had a dengbêj in their service whom they provided with a livelihood. The competition among dengbêjs was an important means of defending the agha's honour, and they would therefore search for the best dengbêjs in the region. Chapter 1 discusses this position through songs ascribed to the legendary dengbêj Evdalê Zeynikê, about whom it is said that he was in the service of Surmeli Memed Pasha in Ottoman times. A dengbêj I spoke with from a village near Van told me that his father was in the service of Kor Huseyin Pasha in Iran and traveled with him. These dengbêjs must have been few of the last dengbêj serving an Ottoman Kurdish Pasha. From Republican times on, dengbêjs could still be in the service of aghas, of which the dengbêjs I spoke with gave me some examples. One dengbêj had performed for twenty villages in his area that were led by several aghas (life story 3 in chapter 3). When there was a wedding they invited him, but also at other times they asked him to come and entertain them. He received some payment for his services from the villagers; "they sent grain, money, they cared". However, while speaking about this topic, he spoke more of the villagers than about the aghas, and he emphasized that the agha system has disappeared.

An Armenian dengbêj who worked for a Kurdish agha in the region of Sason mentioned how he had learned most of his repertoire from an older dengbêj (life story 4 in chapter 3). The latter, in turn, had learned his repertoire from a dengbêj who had

32 His son told me that his grandfather became the agha of four villages, even though he did not come from an agha family. He managed to spread his good name by consistently inviting all guests to his place, feeding and entertaining them. This eventually made the villagers accept him as their agha.

been in refuge with this agha in the 1920s, after the sheikh Said rebellion (a major Kurdish rebellion against the Turkish government, see below). The dengbêj was in the service of an agha from Muş, and with some others they had escaped persecution. This story goes back to the 1920s, and it seems that examples of dengbêjs who were provided a livelihood by an agha date the latest from the 1960s. Sheikhs sometimes also supported a dengbêj; it is known, for instance, that the famous dengbêj Reso served sheikh Kiyasetin Emre from Bulanık.[33] However, dengbêjs were secular performers and they were sometimes frowned upon by the religious establishment (see chapter 3 for an example). I have not been able to find more examples of dengbêjs who were in the service of sheikhs.

In the course of the twentieth century the importance of the aghas gradually decreased, against an increasing control of the state over regions in the periphery. The agha system largely disappeared after the land reforms in the 1960s,[34] and many of the old performance opportunities for dengbêjs had already disappeared by then. After the Kurdish rebellions in the early Republican period, many sheikhs and aghas were killed or forcibly deported to western Turkey. Even before the downfall of the agha system economic conditions had changed considerably, and many aghas had moved to the cities and had lost their daily connection with the village population. Also the dîwan lost much of its previous importance and meaning. This is not to say that the opportunities for the dengbêjs had entirely vanished, as we will see below. However, the agha system had been the most important support system for the dengbêjs, and after its downfall the incentive to produce kilams as in the old days seems to have disappeared.

Cultural exchange

The ethnic and religious variety in the Kurdish region resulted in cultural exchange as well as in clashes, a topic that is also present in the songs (see chapter 1). The largest groups next to Sunni Kurds were Armenians, Assyrians, Alevi Kurds, and Yezidi Kurds (see glossary). Until the Armenian genocide, Sunni Kurdish and Christian Armenian villages were situated side by side in many regions. People visited each other's weddings and celebrations and adopted cultural elements. Armenians in these regions often knew Kurdish, and there are many cases known of Armenians

33 He later lived in Ankara and became a member of Parliament for the Democratic Party in the time when Adnan Menderes was prime minister (1950-1960). When the sheikh left to Ankara, Reso lost his support (interview with dengbej Osman in Turkish in Istanbul 2007).

34 MacDowall 1996, Zürcher 1993, van Bruinessen 1992

who became dengbêjs and performed in Kurdish.[35] In the larger region it seems to have been common practice to perform in several languages; in the eighteenth century the famous Armenian poet Sayat Nova performed in Armenian, Georgian, and Turkish (Reinhard 1990: 75), and from the songs ascribed to Evdalê Zeynikê it appears that dengbêjs at times performed in Kurdish and Armenian (see chapter 1). Dengbêj Cihan (chapter 3) also speaks of an Armenian dengbêj who performed in Armenian and Kurdish before the Armenian genocide.

In cities such as Van, Diyarbekir and Urfa, Armenians and Turks were in the majority compared to Kurds, and there were also Greeks, Jews, and Arabs. Mardin had large Assyrian and Arabic communities. These non-Kurdish groups dominated handicraft and trade, and Turks were often stationed in the cities as part of the Ottoman bureaucracy. Yezidi Kurds mainly lived in villages, also often side by side with Sunni neighbours. There are many songs that mention clashes between Sunni and Yezidi tribes, or cases of elopement of a Kurdish man with a Yezidi woman. An example is the well-known song Dewrişê Evdî, about the love between a Yezidi man and a Sunni woman (Allison 2001: 108). The large variety of ethnicities and religions decreased significantly during the 1915 Armenian genocide when the majority of Armenians and other Christian groups were killed or deported. In the course of the twentieth century many other minorities also left for other countries, and the Kurdish region became, as a result, more homogeneous than it used to be.

The major non-Sunni Kurdish group that remains in Turkey until today are the Alevi Kurds. The majority lives in the border zone between eastern and western Turkey; important Alevi strongholds are Bingöl, Varto, Dersim, Adiyaman, Malatya and Maraş. In these regions Alevi and Sunni Kurds and Turks live mixed and traditions have influenced each other. Because of the central role of music in Alevi religious celebrations, Kurdish Alevi music has more in common with Turkish Alevi than with Kurdish music. Singer-poets are called *aşık* or *zakir* instead of dengbêj; they perform with the accompaniment of the saz (long-necked lute); and they often perform in Kurdish as well as in Turkish. I found examples of aşıks who were clearly influenced by the dengbêj art. For example, aşık Yusuf from Adiyaman performed with the saz, but sang many songs in dengbêj style and with topics familiar in the

35 In the 20th century this was often the result of the 1915 genocide. The famous dengbêj Karapetê Xaco was saved by a Kurdish agha, and learned to perform the dengbêj art. I got to know an Armenian from Sasun now living in Istanbul whose father was a genocide survivor and who had become a dengbêj. His mother tongue is Kurdish, and he does not speak another language. Also other Armenians I got to know were fluent in Kurdish and had adopted Kurdish traditions, in an environment often hostile to their Armenian background. However, it seems that before the genocide a more positive and less forced cultural exchange between Kurds and Armenians took place, as appears from some songs.

dengbêj art. He had learned this from his father. Several people in the Alevi region (for example in Pazarcık and Karakoçan) told me how in their childhood years dengbêjs had come by horse from Urfa and Diyarbakır to visit their village and perform. These are indications that exchanges took place between aşıks and dengbêjs.

Although I conducted much research among Alevis in Istanbul and many towns and villages in the Kurdish Alevi region, and among Armenians in Istanbul originating from Sason, I decided to leave most of this material out of the dissertation to keep a clear focus. The Alevi and Armenian musical traditions are both large topics that require separate study. However, it is important to stress that the dengbêjs were not isolated, but were in contact with neighbouring arts. In the case of the Armenians, this exchange was abruptly stopped after the Armenian genocide (see chapter 3). In the case of the Alevis, musical exchange seems to have decreased considerably after the dengbêj art lost much of its former position and productivity.

In the Republic of Turkey

As Kurdish was forbidden for official use, music production, or publication, such opportunities were very restricted for dengbêjs and other Kurdish musicians within Turkey.[36] Much of the music production was informally or illegally organized. Before 1980 dengbêjs and other singers could operate relatively freely in informal networks of performances and production, especially in the countryside.[37] Also in the cities there was some space for cultural expression, as long as it was kept in the informal sphere. In the 1960s and 1970s in Diyarbakır, the only large city in eastern Turkey at that time, a Dengbêj Café existed where dengbêjs gathered to perform.[38] This seems to have been a new development, possibly modeled after the Aşık Cafés[39] that existed in other cities in Turkey.

Another new development, but starting a bit earlier, were the Kurdish radio programs that could be received illegally from Iraq, Iran, and, most importantly,

36 Opportunities for official music production and institutionalized activities became possible only in the 1990s, when "with the lifting of the ban on the use of Kurdish language in 1991, Kurdish cultural institutionalization started in Turkey" (Çakır 2011: 31).

37 Much of the countryside remained outside government control until 1980, which made informal distribution of music possible. "Turkey's state system (..) was in practice rather detached from large parts of the countryside which were outside its control (..) Indeed, many villagers only knew the state from occasional patrol missions" (Jongerden 2010).

38 See also Scalbert Yücel 2009.

39 See for example the description of the Âşık Café in Kars by Reinhard and Pinto 1989.

Armenia.[40] Radio Yerevan began to broadcast a program in Kurmanji in 1955.[41] Part of the program was devoted to music, and the voices of Kurdish dengbêjs performing from Yerevan became famous throughout the region. The radio had an enormous influence on the evolving awareness of Kurdish language and culture,[42] and the dengbêjs played an important role in this. The tradition became less local, people heard songs from many regions.[43] It also obtained a different form; dengbêjs performed with the accompaniment of musical instruments, something that rarely occurred at home.[44] In the 1960s the introduction of the cassette player was another boost for the dengbêj art. From now on dengbêjs recorded songs on cassettes that were recorded by individuals and distributed informally. Until 1980 the circulation of cassettes thrived, but came abruptly to a standstill in the terror of the aftermath of the 12 September military coup.[45] And although radio and cassettes had initiated important changes, they were still marginal forms of Kurdish expression that had been overshadowed by Turkish as the language and culture of the dominant majority.[46]

In 1967, it became illegal 'to own or distribute recordings in a language other than Turkish' (Blum and Hassanpour 1996: 325). The law led to police raids and arrests for even owning an 'illegal' music cassette. Merely singing in Kurdish or possession of Kurdish cassettes became a political act and was liable to punishment

40 Hassanpour 1992

41 Radio Urmia was not often mentioned. Radio Baghdad was also famous, but could maybe not be received everywhere. Radio Yerevan was by far the most mentioned in the interviews. Although I initially thought that radio Yerevan began its broadcast in the 1930s, since there are sources that mention this date, Yüksel (2011) counters this based on his communication with Celîlê Celîl. According to Celîl, broadcasting began in 1955. Yüksel gives the following sources: Celîl, Celîlê. "Radyoya Kurdî li Êrîvanê û Bingehdanîna Wê (Bona 50. Saliya Radyoya Kurdî ya Êrîvanê)." Bîr 3 (Payîz, 2005), 183-195. Celîl, Celîlê. "Radyoya Kurdî li Êrîvanê û Bingehdanîna Wê –II (Bona 50. Saliya Radyoya Kurdî ya Êrîvanê)," Bîr (Zivistan-Bihar, 2006), 124-143 (personal communication and Yüksel 2011).

42 Kreyenbroek and Allison 1996, Hassanpour 1992

43 For example, Zana Farqînî writes about his childhood memories of radio Yerevan: "Especially Radio Erivan got a special place in the memories of many Kurds. Dengbêjs whose fame and name we had not heard of previously visited our houses [through the radio]. Next to local dengbêjs, we got the chance to get to know dozens of other dengbêjs with different voice qualities and resonance" ("Kılamın bir diğer adı" in Özgür Gündem newspaper, 26-01-2013).

44 Exceptions are Urfa where singer-poets perform with the saz (lute) and are called Sazbend, and Mardin where singer-poets perform with the ribab (spike fiddle).

45 "Even though speaking Kurdish had been strongly discouraged at the local level since the 1920s, it was not officially forbidden at the national level until the 1980s (see e.g. Scalbert Yücel 2005: 56-82). The official ban on language occurred with the 1982 Constitution and Law 2932 of 1983 after the military coup of September 12, 1980 led by Kenan Evren. The first softening of the legislation occurred in 1991 under Turgut Özal when Law 2932 was amended, enabling the use of Kurdish language in recording and publishing" Scalbert Yücel 2009: 15.

46 MacDowall 1996, Hassanpour 1992

in those years. Many people, not only dengbêjs, told me how their parents or they themselves buried, hid, or destroyed illegal music cassettes (see chapter 3). Many cassettes were unique recordings lost when the Turkish government attempted to wipe out all traces of Kurdish culture.

While speaking with dengbêjs about their lives and work, I noticed that almost all of them had been silent between 1980 and 2000, and had only recently started singing again. Judging from the stories they told me, and the stories of people working with dengbêjs, I suggest that there were three main reasons for this silence: the dramatic change of structure of Kurdish society; increasing violence and oppression; and the rise of support for the PKK combined with the newly developing Kurdish music scene that was generally very politicized. I will discuss each of these reasons in some detail.

In the decades from 1950-1980 the Kurdish region had already seen significant changes. Agricultural mechanization had eroded small-scale farming in many Kurdish areas and accelerated the process of migration to large cities; thus seasonal labor migration became an increasingly crucial source of income. Yet until 1980, the majority of Kurds continued to live in the countryside and village traditions, like the dengbêj art, continued to be performed. In the two decades after 1980, migration and displacement became a structural feature of Kurdish society when millions of people were on the move in the Kurdish region within Turkey and across its borders:

> In the 1980s and 1990s the migration process was not only further speeded up but changed in nature; much of it no longer was voluntary. Villagers fled from warfare or were expelled from their villages by security forces in the context of counterinsurgency operations. Thousands of villages were destroyed, and the resources that had made traditional life possible along with them (van Bruinessen 1999: 1-2).

Kurds were on the move not only in Turkey, but also in Iraq and on a smaller scale in Iran. In Iraq, thousands of villages were destroyed during the Anfal campaigns in the late 1980s (see chapter 5). More than 100,000 people were killed and many others escaped or were evacuated to resettlement camps. Turkey followed Iraq's policy in the 1990s with the idea to remove PKK support in the countryside (van Bruinessen 1999). Oppression, police raids and arrests were widespread. Combat between the PKK and the Turkish army, police controls, and forced displacements created an atmosphere of terror.

The destruction of village life, together with oppression and violence, left little space for dengbêjs to continue performing. Millions of people were evacuated

to the cities, which caused large-scale social unrest.[47] The violent situation, the turmoil and destruction, made people feel desperate. Many people lost their houses, lands, villages, livelihoods, and in many cases, also relatives and friends. The loss of the living environment they had grown up in, had built themselves and were used to, also meant the loss of performance occasions for the dengbêjs, that until that time were perceived as natural. Many dengbêjs stopped performing and as a result forgot large parts of their repertoire, others continued singing in private, because they could not endure silencing themselves. All in all, it was difficult to continue the dengbêj art and many other aspects of village life. Dengbêjs sang less frequently at public events than they had earlier.

Singing activities depended on how individual dengbêjs experienced the political situation, as well as on their region, because in some regions oppression was greater than in others. A few dengbêjs continued singing in the 1980s through 2000, and did not seem to have encountered trouble. Others were jailed or arrested because of their singing activities. Some of them had a political agenda and sang political songs, but others were arrested for the sole reason of singing in Kurdish. Osmanê Farqînî, a popular singer who bases his music on the dengbêj art and continued singing in years when many others had already given up,[48] fled to Germany in the early 1990s, and lives there since that time. He told me the following about the consequences of the 1980 coup:[49]

> I remember that time, I remember the day of 12 September, we had a Café where I played Kurdish cassettes. They came and did a search, a raid, and openly, in the street, they tortured people for two hours long. They tortured for two hours and then they took all my cassettes and drove over them so that they were all broken. After that I collected all the cassettes and I threw away the broken plastic and I bought new covers and put them together again. In that way I saved many of them. They were the ones on which I had done research. The 12 September period was a barbarian time. Especially in the Kurdish region.

47 'The evacuation of villages should not be considered a side-effect of the counter-insurgency of the Turkish Armed Forces (..) but one of its main constituents, intended to contribute directly to the "environmental deprivation" of the guerrillas' (Jongerden 2010: 86). See also: Jongerden 2007, White 2000, van Bruinessen 1999, Çetin 1999.

48 For example, dengbêj Silêman invited this singer to his wedding in 1987, see life story 6 in chapter 3.

49 Newspapers were closed down, journalists and university professors arrested, former political parties forbidden, archives destroyed "in their zeal to force a radical break with the past" (Zürcher 2004: 279). Within one year 122.600 arrests were registered (Ibid: 294), and many more unofficially persecuted. "The international League of Human Rights… claimed no fewer than 81,000 Kurds had been detained between September 1980 and September 1982. This suggested the problem of Kurdish dissidence was much more widespread than the generals cared to admit" (McDowall 1996: 416).

> Between 1984 and 1992 I have been tortured for at least nine times, I have counted them. I was in prison for one year. I was arrested many times, I have stayed under arrest for forty-two days, for seventeen days, for one week, for fifteen days, and so on. The arrests after the torture. Intimidations, telephone intimidations, family intimidations, everything until 1992. (..) In 1991 I was imprisoned, the reason was singing songs in Kurdish. They gave me a sentence of eight years and four months. But after I had stayed in prison for one year the ban on Kurdish singing was lifted by law. You were allowed to sing Kurdish songs, but not with political content. I was released on parole: if you sing again political songs then you will finish the eight years and four-month sentence. (Osmanê Farqînî, interview in Turkish, Cologne 2007).

Persecution happened on a large and brutal scale, affecting many people in their daily lives.

When organizing a wedding, people needed to ask permission at the local police office or military station, and weddings were controlled and watched closely. It was easier to perform in villages than in cities, but depending on the region and the proximity of police or military to the village, there was control over weddings and singing there as well. Dengbêj Ahmed:

> I was the only dengbêj there [in a little town of several thousand inhabitants], and because it was a little town, not a village, of course you could not sing when there was police around, it was not a village. (So then where did you sing for a public?) That happened in the villages. In places where there was no police. In any case if there was police in a village, you couldn't gather for performance. If you wanted to organize a wedding, and it's still like that, you go to the police to get permission. And then they will say the conditions, how it should be done. For example they say: 'you are not going to sing any political words.' Eventually there is not much of that left now. Of course there is still some pressure, but actually people don't really listen to that anymore (dengbêj Ahmed, interview in Turkish, Batman 2007).

As many dengbêjs used to perform at weddings, the prohibition on singing deprived them of an important performance place. The heightened control and possible repercussions on issues as common as language use caused a general state of fear among people. People were afraid to speak Kurdish outside their homes. The arrests and even torture for singing in Kurdish are indicative of the state of terror the region was immersed in.

Another important reason why the dengbêjs kept silent after 1980 was that they were not connected to the new political ideology that was rising in popularity, especially among the young generation. New politicized music groups in favor of the Kurdish political movement came into existence in those years and to a large extent they began to replace the dengbêjs (chapter 4). Previously, good dengbêjs used to be under the protection of a landlord who provided them with basic needs in return for

performing. Although the landlord-system was in decay in the 1960s after the land reforms, it was still partially functioning until 1980. The dengbêjs were regarded by the new generation of political activists as part of the system of landlords, of tribes and intertribal conflicts; the system they despised and were fighting against. Many dengbêj songs relate conflicts between tribes or between people from various backgrounds and religions. Such songs were seen as not favorable for Kurdish unity the Kurdish movement wanted to create. A dengbêj from the region of Erzurum comments on this situation:

> In 1980 happened two things: there was a coup, and the Kurdish movement came into being. And now the dengbêj art was something a bit opposite to the Kurdish freedom movement. The reality is that dengbêjs are connected to feudalism. They sang for the landlord, for the sheikh, and they sang what the public liked. And this really didn't match with the freedom movement. [The latter] regarded it a bit negatively. They didn't do anything but they judged it negatively. And if the public doesn't want to listen, where will the dengbêjs sing? (dengbêj Osman, interview in Turkish, Istanbul 2007).

The Kurdish movement regarded feudalism as a way of hindering the development of Kurdish society. Old traditions were regarded as contaminated by centuries of oppression, and a new culture and a unified nation needed to be created. The Kurdish movement opposed the 'feudal' and tribal system which they accused of creating divisions and conflicts. Although not everyone gives equal importance to the anti-feudal ideology of the Kurdish movement as a reason for the disruption of the dengbêj art during the 1980s and 1990s, these views were influential at least to some extent. This can for example be seen in how many dengbêjs today are careful to emphasize that they do not support such feudal structures (chapter 2 and 4).

A third reason for the decrease of dengbêj performances was that modern Kurdish music, offering an increasing variety of styles and musical instruments, was on the rise and became an attractive alternative to the music of the dengbêjs. The owner of a music company in Istanbul (see also chapter 4):

> We liked other music more. When music became more accessible we as young people did not much listen to the dengbêjs. We as boys and children, we more appreciated colorful and authentic music. I listened more to that. I also listened to dengbêjs, because there was nothing else. But when other music came, I liked it more and I did not listen anymore to the dengbêjs (Murat Aslan, interview in Kurdish, Istanbul 2008).

Especially in the countryside, where little variety or choice was available, people had continued to listen to and enjoy dengbêj performances. But as soon as other musical

styles appeared, the youth in particular was quite receptive. Depending on the region and the family, traditional Kurdish music continued to be performed at weddings. But wedding bands performing in Turkish (and Kurdish, but this was marginal) became significantly more popular during this period, and pushed the function of the dengbêjs aside.

The Kurdish music scene that developed in Europe in the meantime also became increasingly influential in Turkey. Many of these musicians were in favor of the Kurdish movement and influenced by their ideology (Güneş 2012, Sarıtaş 2010). From the 1980s on the development of a more general and less locally oriented Kurdish culture, initiated by the radio stations, and stimulated by other media, was pursued by Kurds living abroad. In Europe migrants set up and developed Kurdish satellite television, Kurdish (political) organizations, and a modern Kurdish music scene.[50] These developments only sparsely reached Kurds in Turkey in those years,[51] but they became accessible after 1991 and on a much larger scale after 2000. The foundation of Kurdish cultural centers in Turkey's big cities, of local television programs, the production of cassettes and CDs, the publication of books, and propaganda of Kurdish political movements,[52] were very influential in promoting Kurdish language and culture and gave a stage to modern music groups which were at once mushrooming everywhere.[53] The new music groups on the one hand deprived the dengbêjs of the important position they had had previously, but on the other hand created opportunities. The dengbêjs only occasionally sing at weddings today, normally music groups are invited. Also in the villages, many of which were destroyed or lost an important part of their inhabitants during the 1990s,[54] dengbêjs do not sing as before. Nevertheless, over the last decade some new possibilities have emerged. Many dengbêjs perform on local or international Kurdish television and at local festivals. In many cities of eastern Turkey dengbêjs perform in cultural centers, or in a special Dengbêj House. The good ones sell cassettes or CDs, and a few are known in large parts of Kurdistan.

50 Romano 2006, White 2000, Van Bruinessen 1999

51 Due to political measures people did not have access to such media. Speaking about the OHAL (region operating under emergency law) in the 1980s and 1990s: "A raft of measures was employed to restrict political activities in the OHAL region during this period. In addition to routine military and police activities, freedom of press, freedom of expression, and freedom to organize were practically abolished in the Southeast" (Jongerden 2010: 87).

52 Among the Kurdish political organizations, many of which are small splinter groups, the PKK is by far the most dominant with a high level of support in the Kurdish region (Casier e.a. 2011). Following Casier, I will refer to the political complex close to the PKK, including the PKK, BDP and KCK, as 'the Kurdish movement'.

53 Sarıtaş 2010, Aksoy 2006

54 Jongerden 2010, 2007

i.3 Folklore, nationalism and (self-) Orientalism in Turkey

> Nationalism is a discourse that constantly shapes our consciousness and the way we constitute the meaning of the world. It determines our collective identity by producing and reproducing us as 'nationals'. It is a form of seeing and interpreting that conditions our daily speech, behaviors and attitudes (Özkırımlı 2000: 4).

This dissertation focuses on the dengbêj art as a phenomenon at a particular historical moment, namely when the dengbêjs returned into public life and were re-introduced to Kurdish and other possible audiences as an originally Kurdish, authentic, and national tradition. The mobilization of folklore in the service of nationalism is common; since the era of European nationalism songs and stories produced by ordinary people became political resources to support this ideology. In this section I shortly introduce the history of ideas on folklore and nationalism, and continue to discuss its use in Turkey. I then introduce the idea of Turkish and Kurdish self-Orientalism. Throughout the dissertation I develop the argument that the current understanding and representation of the dengbêj art by the Kurdish movement (see below for a definition) can be seen as a form of self-Orientalism. Based on the collected ethnographic material, I offer an alternative understanding of the dengbêj art, and of Kurdish society in general, than an Orientalist interpretation. The latter understands the dengbêjs and their art as pre-modern, as a trace of distant history, and some aspects of it as backwards and tribal. In this dissertation, the focus on specific performance contexts, on individual life stories, on the embodied experience of music, and on the dengbêj art as part of a new institutionalization of Kurdish activism in Turkey, offers a different understanding. It highlights contemporary Kurdish lived experience and shows how the dengbêjs and their art were and are influenced by and entangled in modernity, and how the self-Orientalist representation of the dengbêj art is part of that entanglement.

Before the era of nationalism, oral tradition and other cultural production often had a local political message; it was either used to praise and support local rulers, or as a means to express dissident views that could not be voiced directly, and was therefore disguised in 'hidden transcripts' (Scott 1990). Songs and stories could be mobilized as a direct tool to express certain political and social messages. But with the spirit of nationalism, the political enterpreneurs of nationalist ideology regarded the same songs and stories as a resource for mobilization of the 'masses'. In order to raise the ideological interest and support of the masses for the nation-state, nationalist thinkers focused on the idea of a common history and a common

language of people who previously did not define themselves as 'national'. The nation exists by virtue of a number of myths and imaginations, and by virtue of selective memory and forgetting[55]. It has an assumed historicity; nationalists claim that the nation is "rooted in the remotest antiquity" (Hobsbawm 1983: 14). Moreover, nationalism is based on the (often imagined) collective experience of having a common language. Since print capitalism, language became standardized and shared by a large imagined community (Anderson 1991). Nationalists saw oral traditions as useful tools for generating and mobilizing nationalist sentiments: they were owned by the 'masses', instead of by the elite; they demonstrated a common language; and they expressed shared ideas about history. Songs and stories were thus turned into 'folklore' that had to be collected and archived, as they were transmitted from 'history' and therefore contained the true and 'authentic' core of the 'nation's identity'[56]. The centrality of language in nationalist ideology as one of the main tools to unite people in other terms than religion, and over a vast territory, turned oral songs and stories into resources that could serve as unified cultural heritage in one language, for one people, with one history.

Influential in the development of nationalist thought, and in the way folklore is presented by nationalist ideology, is the grand narrative of tradition and modernity. Contrary to primordialist ideas that understand the nation as a natural feature of humanity, modernist thought regards nationalism as a product "of modern processes such as industrialization, capitalism, industrialism, the emergence of the bureaucratic state, urbanization and secularism" (Özkırımlı 2000: 85). Folklore is then presented as belonging to the pre-modern age in which people were not literate but oral, and untouched by the partly negative consequences of modernity. In folklore, so these thinkers argued, one can find the 'original' and 'unspoiled' features of the people of the nation, reflecting a time before modernity transformed them into modern citizens. Moreover, they felt that folklore could help one develop a more nationalist mindset. In Germany for example, "clubs for the preservation of (..) folk culture played a very large role in what has been called the 'nationalization of the masses' (..) they were a way to actively contribute to the building of new kinds of political communities" and "served as a means to mediate the transformations

55 "Ernest Renan cogently remarked in 1882 that 'forgetting, I would even go so far as to say historical error, is a crucial factor in the creation of a nation.' Homi Bhabha, in his discussion on the 'foundational fictions' upon which all nations are built, argues that the 'strange forgetting' Renan refers to 'constitutes the beginning of the nation's narrative.'" (Zeydanlıoğlu 2008: 162).

56 This also had its origins in enlightenment thinking, which sought for sources of authenticity other than religion. Herder was one of the strongest proponants of the search for authenticity in 'folklore' and in the 'folk'. "On the eve of an industrializing modernity, Herder's work solidified the modern invention of the 'folk' category" (Bendix 2009: 35).

wrought by industrialization and its concomitant social structural changes" (Bendix 2009: 101).

Influenced by developments in Europe, the late nineteenth century Ottoman Empire saw a transition from Ottoman multi-religious and multi-ethnic thinking, that embraced the diversity of languages and cultures, towards nationalist ideology. European ideas on modernization, civilization, and the nation-state spread. With the weakening of the Empire, amongst others by the nationalist rebellions in the Balkans, Ottoman politicians realized the old empire-structure lost ground, and they were forced to start thinking of different ways to make people loyal to a political unity. Gradually, Ottoman identity gave way to a new Turkish identity. Nationalist ideology challenged the disdain the Ottoman elite felt towards the majority of the Ottoman population living in the countryside; they needed them. The masses, seen as poor, uneducated and backwards, could no longer be entirely excluded from the political arena, because the idea of the nation-state requires a broad support base from its citizens. Instead, the masses had to be molded into civilized citizens. Nationalist ideology was thus accompanied by ideas about civilization and modernization. Turkish nationalism became more fully developed in the early years of the Turkish Republic, founded in 1923 under the leadership of Mustafa Kemal. The nationalist ideology and modernization policies developed under him are referred to as Kemalism.

Kemalism saw the common people as resources that had protected true Turkishness and the characteristics of the true Turkish race. It regarded the Ottoman elite with its court culture as a degenerate form of the real authentic Turkish culture. That culture had been preserved by the common people in the countryside who spoke Turkish instead of Ottoman and had their own oral traditions. Collection of oral tradition, with the aim of creating a national Turkish music, was an important spearhead of Kemalist cultural politics. "Music was central to the cultural policies of the early Kemalist State aimed at creating a new, Westernized identity" (Neyzi 2002: 96). The national music had to be 'pure' and 'authentic', and had to be separated from Ottoman cultural expression that was regarded as spoiled by Arabic, Byzantine and Islamic influences. These ideas were strengthened by the popularity of peasantist ideology at the time.[57]

According to this ideology, industrialisation and urbanisation led to degeneration (Karaömerlioğlu 1998a). The true Turkish culture and the pure Turkish race could be found in the villages. In line with peasantist ideology, the singer-poets of Anatolia were seen as a "folk elite, heroes whose living traditions embodied the

57 Turkish peasantists were influenced by American ideas of educating the peasants. "Many works by American specialists on village education were translated into Turkish" (Yüksel 2011: 86).

'Turkish ideal'" (Markoff 1990: 130), and as having a 'national spirit' which they expressed in their art.[58] They were "a major source of national pride (..) After all (..) they resisted the influence of Arabic and Persian and preserved the national language in their works" (Başgöz 1998: 46). Because of the Kemalist focus on Turkishness as the characteristic of the new nation, and the attempt to create a unified national culture, other ethnic or religious identities were denied in the hope they would soon disappear from the socio-political landscape of the Turkish Republic. Turkish nationalist ideology was spread through education: schools, village institutions, and the media. Throughout the twentieth century, Kemalist secularism and nationalism fundamentally shaped Turkish citizenship.

By its very existence, Kurdish music was thus opposing the Turkishness of the Republic. In order to create a national Turkish music, songs in other languages were prohibited and had to be translated into Turkish and standardized.[59] Politics of Turkification, prohibition and appropriation were characteristic of the Kemalist approach towards Kurdish cultural production (Yüksel 2011: 89). Specific records with a political message were banned from Turkey, and Kurdish dengbêjs were regarded a threat to Turkish unity. Some Kurdish singers and poets were forced to appropriate Kemalist ideology and sing Turkish nationalist songs. The early Kemalist approach shows that the Turkish authorities had a deliberate and conscious policy towards Kurdish cultural production, that they tracked the developments in Kurdish music, that they prohibited specific records, that they were anxious about nationalist incitement via Kurdish music, and that they tried to replace Kurdish with Turkish music. The dengbêjs were directly affected by these measures. Some of them were exiled or arrested, and others escaped to other countries.[60]

58 The idea of the national spirit in Turkish oral tradition stems from Fuat Köprülü, an important folklorist of the early 20th century, who followed Gokalps principles (Başgöz 1998).

59 Several people I spoke with had experiences with the collection of Kurdish songs for such aims. For example, Osmanê Farqînî, a popular singer from Silvan who escaped to Germany, told the following story: "When I was still a child I saw how those people from the TRT (Turkish Radio and Television coorporation) came to the village to collect songs. My father asked them once: 'why did you come?' He said: 'we collect what the dengbêjs sing at weddings.' 'So what will you do with it?' 'We will archive it.' 'What are you going to do with the archives, what kind of benefit do you have from it?' 'Well we are collecting it and we will broadcast it on the radio.' 'So will you broadcast it in Turkish or in Kurdish?' 'There's nothing like Kurdish broadcasts', they said, 'we will broadcast in Turkish.' I remember this very well. This conversation was happening in front of our house. I felt the contradiction. They had a tape recorder hanging on their shoulders. They were collecting, they went from village to village, they asked when weddings would happen, they made recordings at weddings" (interview in Turkish, Germany 2007).

60 "Celadet points out that following an armed clash between state forces and Kurds, approximately 10 singers were accused of provoking Kurdish national feelings through their singing of epic songs about Kurdish leaders were arrested and taken to the east" (Yüksel 2011: 66). He has this information from Celadet Alî Bedirxan's book *Kürt sorunu üzerine* republished by Avesta in 1997.

As various scholars have convincingly shown, Kurdish nationalism developed not before the last decades of the nineteenth century, and at that time was only a marginal movement (Van Bruinessen 1992, McDowall 1996, White 2000, O'Shea 2004), that consisted of intellectuals and people from noble families who lived mostly in Istanbul and cities abroad. (The same applies to nationalisms in the whole region, such as - most important in this context - Turkish nationalism.) The Islamic empires in the Middle East had unified their citizens in the name of Islam, not of ethnicity. "The diverse tribes under Ottoman control were unified politically through the medium of Islam. That is, their religion provided them with their primary identity" (White 2000: 55). The Kurdish nationalist position that Kurds have been struggling for the acquisition of an independent Kurdish state for centuries is therefore not supported by most scholars. Kurdish factions were too divided to be able to form a unity. Kurdish rulers often tried to expand their territory, but not with the aim of the establishment of a larger Kurdistan. Like the peoples around them, emphasis was on expanding territory on behalf of a powerful ruler.

In the late nineteenth century, Kurdish intellectuals began to show concern with the specific place of the Kurds among the other ethnic groups in the Ottoman Empire, although they still felt like Ottomans and part of the Empire. Özoğlu (2005) argues that Kurdish nationalism only developed after World War I.[61] The Society for Advancement of Kurdistan (SAK, Kürdistan Teali Cemiyeti) that was founded in 1918 can be seen as one of the first organizations that thought in nationalist terms. Not all of these early modernist thinkers had the same vision; some sought after independence, whereas others wanted to remain part of the Empire.[62] Çakır (2011) gives an overview of how the attitude of Kurdish nationalists towards oral tradition developed, by following Kurdish organizations that often also published a magazine or journal. The SAK published the Kurdish magazine *Jîn* (Life), that "started inventing national myths and symbols in order to create a national history, and the desire for a Kurdish state was expressed for the first time" (Çakır 2011: 19).

61 "Surely, Kurdish nationalists in the twentieth century made many attempts to provide their cause with historical depth by rethinking and romanticizing the nineteenth-century Kurdish movements as nationalist. However, this chapter will demonstrate that the cultural and militant activities of various Kurdish groups prior to the end of the Great War were not nationalistic." (Özoğlu 2004: 69).

62 Özoğlu (2004: 93) writes about the different views of two leading figures in the Society for the Advancement of Kurdistan (SAK). Its president Sayyid Abdulkadir said in an interview that he did not want to secede from the Ottoman Empire and establish an independent Kurdistan. Instead he wated to have autonomy in the Kurdish provinces. Vice president Emin Ali Bedirhani opposed this view and threw him out of the SAK. The Abdulkadir dissolved the SAK and called for a new election. He got broad support from the working class people. These differences, and the (dis)ability to gain a following among the common people, continued to be important issues in the evolvement of Kurdish nationalism.

Like Turkish nationalists, they focused on the need of educating and awakening the common people, who were seen as ignorant and backwards (Strohmeier 2003, Klein 2000). In publications[63] they presented the Kurds as living in 'terrible darkness'. They pointed towards the conflicts between various tribes and felt this was hindering progress among the Kurds. The lack of a standardized language and of a corpus of written literature was seen as the main obstacle in educating the masses.[64] At the time the focus was on written literature which was seen as superior to oral literature,[65] and oral tradition was even seen as possibly leading to mistaken knowledge about Kurdish society.[66] The intellectuals tried to prove that Kurdish culture, like the surrounding cultures, also had a 'high culture' by pointing to important works of literature in Kurdish history, such as the written poem *Mem û Zîn* by Ehmedê Xanî.

However, there was a growing interest in cultural production of ordinary people among Kurdish intellectuals. During the founding years of the Republic, the growth of nationalist ideology, and the increasing distance towards Turkish nationalism, the intellectuals became more positive about the Kurdish common people, who were now regarded as having protected Kurdish heritage against the age-old enemy, the Turks. Oral tradition came to be seen in terms of heritage: the intellectuals "aimed at overcoming the deep divisions between tribal and urban society by propagating a common Kurdish cultural heritage. Part of this heritage was the oral tradition of tales and myths" (Strohmeier 2003: 95). Following upon the failure of the Kurdish rebellions of the 1920s and 30s in the newly founded Turkish Republic, cultural activism grew in importance. The magazine *Hawar* (the Call), published in Damascus in 1932 by Cedalet Ali Bedirxan, had the specific aim to focus on Kurdish language and culture, which it called *qurdanî* and *qurdîtî* ('Kurdism' or 'Kurdishness'), and it left politics to the "compatriot organizations" (*civatên welatî*) (Çakır 2011: 22). However, as we will see below, in modern Kurdish nationalism, and especially in PKK ideology, Kurdish traditions were initially viewed with suspicion, as they were seen as hindering the Kurds from developing towards a

63 Strohmeier (2003) analyzed Kurdish journals and newspapers published between 1898 and 1937.

64 "Kurdish nationalists of the late Ottoman Empire suggested that Kurdish folklore should be written down in order to 'justify' the existence of Kurdish nationhood" (Yüksel 2011: 63).

65 "Educated Kurds would have felt that (..) products of the oral tradition were inferior to written works" (Strohmeier 2003: 30).

66 Çakır (2011) quotes Abdurrahman Bedirxan, a leading Kurdish intellectual, who wrote to the Orientalist scholar Hugo Makas: "I must also tell you that all these [oral] poems are not very famous. I find it unnecessary, perhaps even harmful for you to deal with such poetry because it could lead you to major errors. It is better to deal with the poems of good poets, such as Ehmedê Xanî, the author of Mem û Zîn, etc" (pp.17)

modern Kurdish society. White (2000) and Bozarslan (1992) both locate the start of this modern Kurdish nationalism in the late 1950s and early 1960s.

While in the early stages of nationalism in Turkey the state had a decisive role in developing its contours, in later decades nationalism became increasingly shared and negotiated by its citizens. Within the theorizing on nationalism the nation state has often been understood as a coherent unified entity. But as Askew shows in her book on the use of music in the creation of national identities in Tanzania "nationalism ought to be conceptualized as a series of continually negotiated relationships between people who share occupancy in a defined geographic, political, or ideological space." (Askew 2002: 12). Nationalism is negotiated and performed by people living within state borders, rather than being a one-sided activity of the state's bureaucracy. This vision leaves room for investigating the various ways in which nationalism is experienced and performed by various groups of people within a state. In the context of Turkey Çınar (2005) argues that "throughout the twentieth century the official secular Turkish nationalism of the state was continually challenged by (..) rival projects, including Islamists, Kurdish, and Marxist movements that produced alternative projects of modernity and nationalism" (Çınar 2005: 18). Nationalism in Turkey as well as elsewhere is thus not a stable, one-sided ideology, but negotiated by the citizens of a nation state. Nationalist and counter identities are performed in daily life, in culture, in music, and in storytelling.

Kurdish and Turkish nationalism thus became shared by common people rather than only by a small group of politicians or intellectuals. In both cases, music came to be utilized by musicians to express nationalist identities, and performers of oral traditions developed ideas about their meaning within the context of the nation-state. Folklore as well not only remained a topic of nationalist theory, but was in various ways adopted by performers in their music practice in which they consciously incorporated ideas about nationalism and Turkishness or Kurdishness.[67] Among others, oral tradition remained important as what people refer to as the origin, source or basis of later musical developments.

Neyzi (2002) demonstrates that identity in Turkey is often fragmented, individuals switching between multiple identities with regional, religious, linguistic and ethnic components. In her article on the musicians Metin and Kemal Kahraman she discusses the music of the two brothers. They originate from Dersim (Tunceli), are of Alevi, Zaza-speaking origin, and live in Turkey and Germany. Their music

67 In the dissertation I use the term Kurdishness, Turkishness and Armenianness to refer to all practices that are perceived as part of belonging to, and as producing, a Kurdish, Turkish or Armenian identity.

is based on music of the Dersim region, and "represents not a singular counter identity, but rather the experience of fractured and multiple selves in the modern present" (Neyzi 2002: 91). The various components of one's identity can be shown or hidden according to the circumstances.

> Performing Turkish in the public sphere, each individual may embody a rich ethnic/religious heritage, which may be expressed in particular contexts or remain unknown or denied altogether. (…) thus performing national identity is as much a function of taking up an identity as giving up or *seeming to give up* others, particularly in the public sphere." (Ibid,: 92, emphasis by author).

Some individuals or groups of people identify with state nationalism, whereas others feel alienated and left out from such a project and identify with 'rival projects'. People often identify with various projects at the same time, and emphasize or perform different identities in different contexts.

Within this more dynamic and negotiable understanding of nationalism there was also an increasing focus on the influence of power structures by scholars, and Anderson's concept of the imagined community (1983) became criticized for not recognizing this sufficiently. In her study of television serials in Egypt, Abu Lughod asked attention for inequality and hegemony in how such serials are produced and in what work they subsequently do; "studying television serials in Egypt necessarily entails examining a 'national space' rife with tensions, inequalities, and regionally configured power systems" (Abu Lughod 2005: 9).[68] Power struggles are crucial for understanding the way nationalism is negotiated, produced and experienced among various groups of people in Turkey. In the case of music, it can serve to empower people, when they are able to perform identities they wish to perform, and to dominate others, when music of a dominant group is imposed on them and when the right to perform and produce their identities in music is denied.[69] It thus can serve as an identity-marker for different groups of people in different ways. In Turkey, Kurdish music was banned from all official channels and non-existent in public life throughout most of the twentieth century. Singing in Kurdish was long seen as an overt expression of resistance and could be severely punished. The Turkish nationalist oppression of non-Turkish cultural production within Turkey has

68 About power issues in the Turkish situation Houston notes: "Nation-states such as Turkey are still massively involved in this creation and propagation of a national culture, which includes of course the constant censoring of its 'non-national' forms" (2009: 31).

69 Saada-Ophir (2006) shows in his auto-ethnographic article on borderland music in Israel that people can feel alienated when their identity is left out from the musical scene, "a sense of 'homelessness' is felt by some of the ethnic groups who inhabit the borderland. Such is the case of the Libyan Jews, whose unique musical style has remained largely invisible" (Saada-Ophir 2006: 217).

resulted in its politicization, and caused the activities of performing and listening to the dengbêj art and other Kurdish music to be almost naturally associated with politics and a Kurdish national identity. Hearing Kurdish language and music in the media can retrieve an embodied sense of Kurdishness, and adds to the power of music as an icon capable of rallying a larger Kurdish public.[70]

The Kurdish movement has strived towards a redefinition of Kurdishness as a positive trait that is worthy of being embraced instead of rejected. Music played a crucial role in this redefinition, in what I call, following Bryant (2005), the 'empersonment' of Kurdishness through music (chapter 2). Although initially the dengbêjs were not included in this project, they followed in the last decades and were mobilized for specific parts of it (chapter 4). The village plays a central role in what it means to be a dengbêj, and in the reception of the dengbêj art by the audiences. Attending a dengbêj performance reminds people of village life and connects to experiences they have had in the village. Therefore, I will also pay attention to the embodied experience of music in village life (chapter 5); to how Kurdish media anticipated such experiences (chapter 4 and 5); and to the meaning musical memories carry for people whose lives are characterized by loss, conflict and escape (chapter 3 and 5). In the next section I investigate the experience of Kurdishness through the lens of Orientalism, and discuss the application of this concept to the context of present-day Turkey.

Turkish and Kurdish self-Orientalism

We can regard the approach towards 'folklore' and 'the folk' by Kurdish and Turkish nationalists as a form of self-Orientalism, in which part of the nation is seen as backwards, traditional, and in need of modernization and civilization. I find it important to introduce and stress these different forms of self-Orientalism, for two reasons. First, because it explains the processes at work in bringing the dengbêjs back in public, and how their art was understood and negotiated during the period of my field research. Second, it gives insight into how global meta narratives influence and shape specific national ideologies. What makes ideas about nationalism, tradition and modernity so powerful is their ability to connect to people's imaginations by offering clear and ready-made stories about the increasingly confusing world of flows of people, goods and images (Appadurai 1996). It makes people believe they

70 Governments of nation states have been aware of the fact that "visual and musical iconicities have been especially effective in rallying entire populations" (Herzfeld 2005: 28). This awareness has driven national governments to utilize such iconicities to create a feeling of national identity among their citizens, and to fear the use of such icons by counter movements.

are or can possibly be part of a better world in which they are included in the story of modernity. Because of their easy to understand explanations they are attractive to us when we feel overwhelmed by the rapid transformations we are confronted with.

The simple character of these stories may be attractive to clarify rapid transformations, but also blurs much of the complexity of today's world, and they conceal what power mechanism are at work (Dabashi 2011). The 'rural', 'traditional', and 'backwards' people of this world may even more realize than their 'urban', 'modern', and 'progressive' neighbors that they are part of the story of modernity, day by day experiencing the deprivation of living at the downside of global inequality. Countering (self-)Orientalist models in this dissertation, I attempt to deconstruct easy solutions for understanding the dengbêjs and their socio-political environment, and to give insight into the complexity and impalpability of everyday life in the confusing and painful circumstances of oppression and violent conflict, of loss and the destruction of a society. By investigating in detail both social and personal narratives, and by locating them in specific moral narratives that have their origin in Orientalism, it becomes possible to gain a deeper understanding of the multiplicity of processes of identity formation in Turkey, related to specific histories and times.

Turkey's self-Orientalizing project

The connection between Turkey and Orientalism is ambivalent in that the Ottoman Empire and the Turkish Republic were on the one hand objects of Orientalist thinking, and on the other hand adopted this discursive model for their own power structures.[71] One of the ways in which the Ottomans in the late Ottoman period[72] mobilized Orientalist thought was by presenting the Arab provinces of the empire as in need of progress, civilization and Ottomanization. They perceived the center of the empire as 'western', progressive, well organized, urban and civilized, whereas they regarded the margins of the empire as 'eastern', lawless, rural, and inhabited by people living "in a state of nomadism and savagery" (Deringil 2003: 311). Their self-definition was thus shaped by and created through the image of the uncivilized Other modeled after European Orientalist thought. Contrary to European imaginations, the late Ottomans presented themselves as equal to Europe, "the Ottoman Empire sought to define itself as an equal player on a world stage

71 Makdisi (2002) said about what he calls Ottoman Orientalism: "it discredited Western representations of Ottoman indolence by contrasting Ottoman modernity with the unreformed and stagnant landscape of the empire. In effect, it de-Orientalized the empire by Orientalizing it" (pp. 773).

72 During the Tanzimat reforms starting in 1839, although "much of what was synthesized into the Ottoman modernity project was the result of historical processes and trends which were taking place already in the eighteenth century" (Deringil 2003: 316).

of civilization" (Makdisi 2002: 778). Although the mechanisms of Ottoman power were different from the European colonial powers, the Ottomans did rely on their discourses and "drew inspiration from the methods of Western European colonial administrative machineries" (Üngör 2008a: 23). For example, they sent researchers to the eastern provinces in order to record all the different ethnic and religious groups and tribes[73], with the purpose of gearing their policies accordingly. In what Deringil (2003) calls 'borrowed colonialism', namely conceiving "its periphery as a colonial setting" (pp. 311), and conflating "the ideas of modernity and colonialism" (pp. 312) the late Ottoman Empire attempted to compete with the European powers at a time when the empire was strongly in decline.

Criticizing Said for not having sufficiently recognized the share 'Orientals' had in shaping Orientalism, postcolonial scholars have argued that "through an acceptance of the notion of 'modernity', the basis of colonial dominance, 'Eastern' nationalisms have themselves strengthened and sustained the Orientalist legacy" (Zeydanlıoğlu 2008: 157). They argue that through such discursive models, the hegemony of Western imperialism continued to exist after the independence of the colonies. As the Ottoman Empire never was a colony of Western powers its situation is not immediately comparable. However, since the Empire was the object of Orientalist imaginations, and the late Ottomans and early Republicans adopted Western Orientalist models and performed for an "imagined Western audience" (Ahıska in Zeydanlıoğlu 2008), one can clearly see the Orientalist legacy at work in the discursive space of Ottoman and Turkish political thought.

The post 1923 Kemalist modernization project had its roots in Ottoman Orientalism, but was fundamentally different from it because of its nationalist character. Nationalism "facilitated the introduction of the political culture of European modernity to those outside of the West" (Zeydanlıoğlu 2008: 156). Zeydanlıoğlu shows how the Turkish Republic was built on Orientalist ideas about the uncivilized Other.[74] He quotes Mustafa Kemal who said in a speech in 1925: "Gentlemen, uncivilised people are doomed to be trodden under the feet of civilised people". The Anatolian peasants living in the countryside, which was the majority of the population, were depicted as backward and traditional, child-like and primitive,

73 "In the end, the CUP research programme produced thousands of pages of documented research and commentary detailing various ethnic groups, most of whom were inhavitants of the easteren provinces" (Üngor 2008: 23).

74 Building on Chatterjee (1986) and Bhabha (1994), Zeydanlıoğlu concludes: "Postcolonial nationalist elites in the Muslim world and elsewhere have largely operated on Orientalist assumptions in the realization of their nationalist and authoritarian internal civilizing missions, which often amounted to murderous ethnic cleansing, through the justification derived from the teleology of progress and modernity" (2008: 157).

having remained behind in the evolutionary process because of the negative impact of Islam and the backwardness of the Ottoman past. "The Kemalist elite took on the paternalistic Orientalist view that they must, as the rightful teachers, educate Islamic, ethnic, tribal and rural Others deemed to be outside the sphere of Western modernity" (Zeydanlıoğlu 2008: 159). The new regime organized fieldwork trips meant to collect local knowledge about people living in the countryside. Unlike their Ottoman equivalents, these trips were nationalist in character, as they did not have the sole purpose of deciding how to rule the margins, but also to create a nationalist consciousness among a highly heterogeneous peasant population. This is also where anthropology came in, as the collection of oral tradition and information about peasant culture was done by anthropologists who shared ideas about "authenticity and indigeneity, social boundedness and autochthonic cultural production" (Houston 2009: 31) with nationalist ideology. Houston argues that anthropology has overestimated the power of the West by often defining the discipline in relation to colonialism, and therewith largely overlooked the production of anthropological knowledge in the service of non-Western nationalisms.[75]

Anthropological knowledge production about the Kurds became a Turkish project, meant to define Kurdish culture as a degenerate form of Turkishness.[76] The Kurds were regarded as "insufficiently civilized", as "mountain Turks" who forgot their Turkish origins, their language was a "degenerate language mixed with Persian", and Kurds were fined for speaking Kurdish (Zeydanlıoğlu 2008: 162). Self-Orientalism that presented the eastern part of Turkey as traditional and backwards contrasting with the modern and progressive western part was and is doing important work to maintain, perform, and reproduce the existing power relations of the nationalist and modernist project of the Turkish State.

Kurdish self-Orientalism, and the 'new Kurdish personality'

Building on the arguments of Zeydanlıoğlu (2008) and Ahıska (2003) who present the Turkish modernity project as self-Orientalist, I suggest similar processes are at work in Kurdish political thought and Kurdish activism. First, PKK ideology is partly inspired by European nationalist thought, and partly performed for an

75 "My polemical claim is that the nation-state as an 'institution of government producing culture' (Ong 1999: 50) has been a neglected influence in many narratives tracing the historical development of the discipline" (Houston 2009: 32).

76 People opposing these views were silenced, like Ismail Beşikçi who stayed in prison for seventeen years because of his academic research and writing about the Kurds. "The odyssey of Beşikçi's encounters with Turkey's legal system shows (..) what is wrong with the system, and it demonstrates effectively how the officially proclaimed human rights and democratic values become null and void where the Kurdish question is involved" (van Bruinessen 1997b: 1).

imagined 'Western' audience. According to this ideology Kurdish society needs to be modernized and nationalized and have its own place within or outside the Turkish nationalist realm. Second, this ideology presents the Kurds as having lived under the yoke of oppression for decades and even centuries by three enemies: Islam, the Turkish state, and the Kurdish elite. The liberation of Kurdish society has the aim of freeing the Kurds from these oppressors.

In this section I will give an analysis of PKK ideology, as it has been the most dominant voice in the Kurdish political field until today, and been called the 'hegemonic myth of Kurdish modernity' (Güneş 2012). Since these views are central to the manner in which the dengbêjs returned to the public domain in the 2000s I discuss them here in some detail, and at the end return to my argument concerning the self-Orientalizing nature of such views. The introduction into PKK thought is crucial because it forms an important moral source for the current interpretation of the dengbêj art. Political activists and some of the dengbêjs, implicitly or explicitly referred to PKK ideology. However, the PKK is not the only influential Kurdish organization. In the dissertation I use the term Kurdish movement to refer to the shared goals of a number of different actors. Casier e.a. (2011) use the term Kurdish movement to refer to the 'pro-Kurdish' organizations including the PKK, BDP (or DTP at the time of my research) and KCK. On the one hand, these actors have a variety of visions and political positions, ranging from violent action to electoral politics, but, on the other hand, they operate in some ways as a unified voice promoting and supporting Kurdish emancipation in Turkey, and, as such, have managed to "reinforce their presence" (Casier et al. 2011: 104). I will elaborate on this in chapter 4. In this section I trace the ideas that political activists articulated during my field research to PKK ideology, but in the rest of the dissertation I will use the term Kurdish movement to refer to the more diverse set of Kurdish actors that together occupied the cultural and political arena.

The PKK has analyzed the Kurdish question not only in opposition to the Turkish state, but also to internal enemies. It presents Kurdish society as corrupted by those oppressors who destroyed the original and unique traits of the Kurds. In this context the dengbêjs are regarded as still carrying some of the original Kurdish traits, although in part corrupted as well (see chapter 2 and 4). Therefore, they need to be 'awakened' and reformed into a Kurdish tradition in which its essence is recovered, and where degenerate parts are removed. Since these views are central to the manner in which the dengbêjs returned to public life in the 2000s I discuss them here in some detail, and at the end return to my argument concerning the self-Orientalizing nature of such views. In the following chapters I will not only show

these references, but I will also pay attention to what moral narratives existed before PKK ideology became the hegemonic myth of Kurdish modernity (Güneş 2012).

During the 1960s and 1970s[77] the foundation had been laid for a stronger awareness of Kurdish identity and protest[78] against government restrictions. The 1960s saw enormous social change, it was "a decade of the development of the social movement in Turkey and of its extremely rapid radicalization" (Bozarslan 1992: 97). Migration, industrialization, better communication, the presence of thousands of Kurdish students in the big cities, and the general rise of leftist movements in the context of a multi-party system in Turkey, had radically changed the character of Kurdish resistance.[79] However, those mainly involved in organizing this resistance continued to be tribal chiefs, religious leaders, and intellectuals (Bozarslan 1992).

The *Apocular* (followers of Apo, Abdullah Öcalan), "were unlike all previous Kurdish groups in Turkey in that they were drawn almost exclusively from Turkey's growing proletariat" (McDowall 1996: 420). Marcus (2006) describes Öcalan as a 'nobody' who did not have a powerful family to support him as other political leading figures had. He was born in 1948 and grew up in poor conditions in a village in the Şanlıurfa region where most people were poor apart from the landlord. He was influenced by the growing resentment among the rural population against wealthy landlord families. He became active in leftist political movements in the 1970s, and founded the PKK, the Kurdistan Workers' Party, in 1979 together with friends. They had prepared this moment for several years trying to build a network of supporters for their ideas of Kurdish independence founded on Marxist-Leninist ideas. The PKK wanted to be a movement of 'the people' and not of the landlords and sheikhs, and they recruited actively from the countryside.[80] Benefiting from the 1980 coup

77 The first Kurdish political party founded since the 1938 Dersim massacres was the DPTK (Democratic Party of Turkish Kurdistan). This party was modeled on the Iraqi Kurdish KDP. However, the DPTK did not manage to mobilize sufficient support, mainly because of its intellectual basis and its failure to reach the masses of the Kurdish population (White 2000).

78 According to White, Kurdish resistance had been crushed so heavily in the 1920s and 30s, that it took two decades to recover (White 2000). Kurdish organizations vanished, but "opposition continued in the countryside in the form of civil resistance" (Bozarslan 1992).

79 In 1967, as a reaction on publications denying the existence of the Kurds, or accusing them of separatism, the first Kurdish mass protests since 1938 were organized, the so called 'Eastern Meetings' (*Doğu Mitingleri*). People gathered by thousands in 7 different cities and towns in Eastern Turkey and in Ankara., organized by socialist Kurdish members of the TIP (Turkish Labor Party) and Kurdish nationalists of the DPTK (Democratic Party of Turkish Kurdistan) (Gündoğan 2005). These meetings are an example of collaboration between Kurdish and Turkish leftist protest, but also of protest directed at specific Kurdish problems "instead of the class-based politics of the Turkish left which remained indifferent to the ethnic dimension of the Kurdish problem" (Gündoğan 2005: 2).

80 The *Apocular* "identified the enemies of the Kurdish people as the fascists ..; agents of the state and those who supported them; the Turkish left which subordinated the Kurdish question to the leftist revolution and finally the exploitative Kurdish landlord class" (McDowall 1996: 421).

with its harsh state persecution, they gained by far the most dominant position in the Kurdish political field during the 1980s and 90s.[81] As the initial name *Apocular* suggests, Abdullah Öcalan became a crucial person in the organization, ideology, and policymaking of the movement, "the PKK (..) has always been dominated by Öcalan" (Imset 1992: 9 in Özcan 2006, see also White 2000, Romano 2006).[82] Over the years, Öcalan communicated his ideology through books and manifests he wrote, through his numerous party speeches, and through interviews. Central to his approach is convincing other people of his ideas in public meetings or other face-to-face contact.[83]

In 1978, the PKK defined itself in the first *Manifesto* as "a 'political organization under the guidance of scientific socialism' (..) pursuing the 'holy and historical task' of leading the 'Kurdistan Revolution'" (Özcan 2006: 100). The *Manifesto* analyzes the Kurdish question within a larger political framework as the colonization of working class people in Marxist terms, and from a local perspective as the colonization of Kurdistan by the Turkish state and Kurdish elite.[84] In the first half of the 1980s three books were published with collected teachings of Öcalan, in which he remained "within the boundaries of orthodox Marxism" (Özcan 2006: 105). The third[85] book, *The question of the individual's personality*, is about the 'degeneration' of the Kurdish personality by decades of foreign domination. Because of this degeneration, every Kurd needs to undergo a process of individual transformation, following the example of Öcalan himself who went through the same process. According to Özcan, "the 'question of personality' is of primary importance in the PKK's organizational development" (2006: 106).

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81 The 1980 coup resulted in an increase of support for the PKK, but the coup had also hit hard; 1790 suspected PKK members were arrested (McDowall 1996). In the early 1980s PKK activities were limited to occasional attacks in the border area. In 1983 the PKK was able to establish bases across Turkey's borders after Barzani agreed on a protocol. From 1984 the number of ambushes and raids on soldiers and landlords was increasing.

82 "Öcalan has since [1976] been the 'indisputable' and 'indispensable' acting leader of the movement, to the extent that he was again elected as the 'general president' (...) while he was in a one-man prison in Turkey [since 1999]" (Özcan 2006: 94).

83 "I give a precise opinion; then I do not step back until I convert that opinion into the opinion of the person I am in contact with. This is another secret of my success" (Öcalan in dialogue with Kürkçü in 1995, in Özcan 2006: 95).

84 It describes the main *features* of the revolution as a "national liberation struggle", and a "national and democratic revolution" leading to a "socialist revolution"; the *objective* is to "establish an independent, united and democratic Kurdistan"; the *targets* of the revolution are "the conquerors of Kurdistan (the Turkish state) and its native feudal-collaborators, and the imperialist powers behind them"; and the *manner* the revolution should be carried out is through "the all-in-all use of ideological, political and military forms" (Özcan 2006: 100-101).

85 In the first book, *The role of coercion in Kurdistan*, Öcalan argues that there is no other way to fight the 'Turkish oppressors' than through the use of war. Until 1999 he kept defending this standpoint. In the second book, *About organization*, he outlines a total reorganization of Kurdish society by establishing democratic grassroots 'atoms' in order to change its current top-down structure.

Öcalan's ideology changed considerably over time. During the 1990s, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, he distanced himself from 'world socialism' and his approach became less influenced by Stalinist features.[86] He increasingly focused on the need for individual change, "socialism of the genuine liberation of mankind must 'infiltrate into the spiritual structure of the individual'" (Özcan 2006: 109). Instead of being mainly occupied with national liberation, Öcalan strives for change from within society and the individual. He regards this as the peculiar character of the PKK, which is not only valuable for the Kurds.[87] He thus broadens the scope of the Kurdish struggle to a struggle of humanity[88], in need of a democratic system that wins from nationalist or religious ideologies.[89] This can be reached through self-analysis. Öcalan regards himself as the initiator of the process of remaking the individual (White 2000). Through self-analysis, he discovered his 'lack of ideology', and remade himself into the desired democratic, socialist, ideological and moral personality.[90] The 'work of remaking the self' (Foucault 1988, see below) is thus a conscious process and tool of PKK ideology.[91]

In the task of humanizing all mankind Öcalan sees a special role for the Kurds. This stems from his view that the Kurds, living in the Euphrates-Tigris basin, are descendants of the first human beings. He argues that those who stood at the cradle of civilization can now initiate another important process: the change of societies from within. They need to rediscover the original traits of their personalities, good in essence, but degraded because of foreign domination (White 2000). They lost their ideology and "descended to the level of bestiality because of being deprived of these

86 While the PKK had the 'classical organizational structure of communist parties' in its first decades, it has changed considerably (Akkaya e.a. 2010: 147).

87 "The PKK leader began to globalize the theory of the revolution. On occasion he defines the PKK as a 'Humanization Movement' (Öcalan 1994a; Whilte and Logan 1997) and its aim as founding a 'Republic of humanity" (Özcan 2006: 116).

88 "Materialization of these traits of our movement in the form of a national liberation or a freedom movement will bring out the strength to overcome the problems of the humanity which both capitalism and socialism could not [overcome]… In our case, the nature of development is not a mere nationalization of Kurdistan. The reality of Kurdishness in fact, to a considerable degree, represents the fusion of other nations" (Öcalan 1993 in Özcan 2006).

89 Öcalan 1999: 56.

90 "Why then can I be so effective? I am currently considered to be a miracle; this is because I revealed the state of ideologyness and absence of morale in the Kurdish existence within the framework of my personality, and the extent of my own self-realization through this very unveiling corresponded quite easily with the concrete circumstances of this phenomenal social and political existence" (Öcalan 1998 in Özcan 2006: 120).

91 "The PKK ultimately seeks change through the personal transformation of its followers into 'new men' or 'new women'—that is, men and women dedicated to the PKK's 'revolution' for liberty and socialism, for whom following the PKK's ideology is considered the means to free themselves from their subordinate position" (Casier et al 2011: 121).

basic concepts" (Öcalan 1998 in Özcan 2006: 120). The task of the PKK cadres is to be an example of the new Kurdish personhood,[92] and subsequently to awaken the people and encourage them to rediscover their original characteristics and remake themselves into morally good persons.[93] The PKK trains its cadres in the precise character such a remaking of Kurdish personhood should assume (White 2000). New trainees need to acquire certain habits, and cure themselves from other habits, regarded as stemming from the traditional, feudal and degenerate character of Kurdish society.[94] An important part of the guerilla struggle is to bring the positive traits back to the people and to educate them. According to the PKK, their ideological struggle has resulted in remarkable changes over the last decades,[95] "Kurdishness converted from an entity from which everyone ran away, to an identity of which everyone is proud because of its contribution to freedom, democracy and humanity" (Özcan 2006: 128).

The PKK also developed specific ideas regarding Kurdish culture, art and music. In a speech in the early 1990s, published in his book *Kültür ve sanat devrimi üzerine*,[96] Öcalan (2008) presents the PKK as the key domain for the creation of cultural expression, and notes that there would be "no Kurdish folk songs, no academy, nor any enthusiasm for making art" without the PKK (Saritaş 2010: 66). It is worth giving a substantial quote of this book, as it provides a good impression of Öcalan's ideas and style:

> PKK action as a whole is an artistic action. PKK action is the focus and source of the new art for Kurdistan, and harbors almost all properties of arts in its body. In a Kurdistan without the PKK art is dead, and what would remain cannot be called art. The art of the Turkish Republic is an act of invasion. (..) It is an act of suffocation, assimilation and clearance of the existing traditions and activities of people in Kurdistan by the bourgeois. So, art is dead. Therefore, the emergence of the PKK is the resurrection of art. It is the source of art, and it is the lay-down of its foundation (Öcalan 2008: 11 in Saritaş 2010, English as in original)

92 From the accounts of guerrilla fighters appears they are consciously striving to remake themselves and Kurdish society. In a newspaper article on female guerillas a guerilla states : "We are opening the eyes of Kurdish society", and another woman: "We are not just an example for the women of the Middle East but for women the world over" (source: AFP 2006).

93 "The PKK is primarily the movement of inventing the ideology and morale of the reality of a people whose ideology and morale has totally collapsed" (Öcalan 1998 in Özcan 2006: 121).

94 "The 'democratic revolution' eliminated the tribal-feudal social structure apart from 'some remnants and traditional customs' (Programme 2000)" (Özcan 2006: 128).

95 "The Kurdish people no longer resemble the earlier Kurdish people; 'Kurdistan is no more early Kurdistan' (Beşikçi 1990)" (Özcan 2006: 128).

96 As I unfortunately did not manage to get hold on this book, this part is based on the discussion Sarıtaş (2010) gives of the book and its meaning.

Saritaş notes that Öcalan was still quite influenced by socialist discourse at the time of this speech, which he largely abandoned later on. She also notes how Öcalan regarded art as a means through which the Kurds could regain their beauty that had been spoiled by the colonial powers. The seeds of this beauty are still there, only they need to be advanced and "completed by the revolution. Without the war, political and militaristic activities, arts and cultural activities would mean nothing. (..) [Art] has become a concrete need for the enhancement of the war" (Saritaş 2010: 66/7). According to Öcalan, art works thus two ways; it is an instrument that serves the war by mobilizing Kurds, and it is the seed of Kurdish beauty that needs to be advanced by the spirit of the PKK.

Over the years the PKK transformed from a movement primarily focused on an independent Kurdistan, into a 'humanizing' movement that believes it is changing society from within. The moral appeal of the PKK is meant for all Kurds, and ultimately for all human beings, who are expected to remold their personalities. Opposed to this moral appeal stands the morality of the Turkish state striving to remake individuals into Turkish citizens who feel part of a united Turkish nation. Subsequently PKK ideology comes to differ from the Turkish nationalist approach in the sense that it presents its ideology as transcending the borders of Kurdistan, of Turkey, and of the Kurdish-Turkish conflict.

Why and how would it make sense to understand PKK thought as self-Orientalist? First because of its direction towards an "imagined Western audience" and its reliance on Western and Turkish Orientalist thought concerning the backwardness of 'traditional societies' and their need for progress, civilization and modernization. But Orientalism is also about power structures and domination, and about the mobilization of knowledge for power. I suggest that this combination of factors is present in the way the PKK have dominated the discursive field of Kurdish society since the 1980s. This (often violent) domination has decreased since the 2000s as the Kurdish movement has become an increasingly common undertaking of various parties (see chapter 4), but PKK narratives have long lasting effects on Kurdish narratives and were very present during my fieldwork.

The difference with Turkish and other Orientalisms is what I call a 'reversed process of Othering'. The PKK has created an ideology which presents the entire Kurdish population as backwards and in need of modernization. This is different from Turkish self-Orientalism which locates backwardness in only a segment of its population: the east (i.e. the Kurds) and the countryside. However, this rejection of traits internally present within its own population is done through a definition of external enemies that have contaminated and colonized the originally good Kurdish

society. These external Others would have penetrated Kurdish society and caused destruction from within. By defining Kurdish modernity as a project exceeding the immediate local political conflict and as a solution valid for all humanity, but originating in Kurdish society, the PKK ultimately attempts to de-Orientalize itself.

As we will see in chapter 2 and 4, both the narratives about the exploitation of the Kurds by the Turkish government, Islam and the Kurdish elite, and the moral appeal to remake oneself into a new Kurdish personality, have influenced the way the dengbêjs and their art have been understood and are presented by political activists. In dialogue with this ideology, chapter 1 presents dengbêj kilams that display different moral narratives, from another time and perspective. Chapter 3 present life stories and experiences of individual dengbêjs who have their own way of understanding and negotiating the range of moral narratives that are and were circulating today and in the past. Chapter 5 focuses on the embodied experiences of village life, lack of education, and new performance opportunities.

Studying the particularities of historical moments, and of individual and social situations, is one of the most important ways in which we can avoid Orientalist thinking or othering.[97] Thus, I do not regard the dengbêjs as *the* expression of a unified Kurdish culture, but as one possible expression of Kurdishness at particular historical moments.[98] Moreover, I do not approach the dengbêj art itself as a singular phenomenon, but as understood, experienced, negotiated and performed by various actors in various ways. Throughout the dissertation I use theory and methods that assist in focusing on particular people and moments. The next section gives some notes on this theory.

i.4 Narrative and morality

> Storytelling is never simply a matter of creating either personal or social meanings, but an aspect of "the subjective in-between" in which a multiplicity of private and public interests are always problematically in play. (..) For every story that sees the light of day untold others remain in the shadows, censored or suppressed (Michael Jackson 2002: 11).

97 "Generalization can make these 'others' seem simultaneously more coherent, self-coherent and different from ourselves than they might be. Generalization, however useful for other projects, helps make concepts like 'culture' and 'cultures' seem sensible. This in turn allows for the fixing of boundaries between self and other." (Abu-Lughod 1993: 7).

98 "In anthropology, folklore, and history, discoveries of invented traditions, fraudulent tribes, and nationalistic imaginations undermined notions of cultural authenticity while fueling studies devoted to such politics of culture." (Bendix 1997: 4).

The turmoil that overran the Kurdish regions since the 1980s required new stories, fitting new circumstances. It formed the breeding ground on which Kurdish nationalism grew into a widely supported movement that developed new ideas about Kurdish society. The dengbêjs, most of them elderly people, stand as it were in the midst of a variety of storylines. They are producers and transmitters of stories of 'the old times', but also became the subject and producers of stories about their meaning and value for today's Kurds in Turkey. The various types of narratives of and about the dengbêjs that I encountered during my fieldwork can be seen as a means to negotiate old and new moral narratives. This happens to be so because the dengbêjs were one of the main pre-1980s institutions producing and spreading moral ideas about the order of society. The current by far most influential institution producing moral ideas about Kurdish society is the Kurdish movement. In the changes Kurdish society in Turkey went through after 1980, the old institution of the dengbêjs, and the new Kurdish movement, clashed. As we will see, it took time for them to find a way of cooperation.

My preoccupation with narrative and nationalism connects to a recent increasing interest within Turkey in oral history in the context of the nation-state, in academic as well as in journalistic publications. Academic examples are Leyla Neyzi and Esra Özyürek who, both in different ways, analyzed individual stories countering or supporting official discourses. Such alternative voices are not received without resistance. In the nationalist academic journal *Millî Folklor* for example, Öztürk (2010) criticizes Neyzi for presenting oral history as an 'alternative history', and for generalizing from using only one person's story. But Neyzi (2008, 2005, 2004, 2002) has a story to tell, as each of her articles makes painstakingly clear. Her focus on individuals is so powerful because most of such stories remained hidden from a larger public, or remained untold entirely, until recently. As Özyürek (2006) has shown, people were conditioned to believe they were all part of the nationalist, secularist and modernist project of the Turkish state in which only a limited range of stories were acceptable. Neyzi's attention to individual stories therefore connects with the neglect and rejection that many people have experienced as part of their identity. Her approach has encouraged a more general attention to and openness towards these untold stories, and made people more aware of the diversity within their society. Neyzi gained support within and outside of academia, and her academic articles were followed up by newspaper articles and projects more accessible to the mainstream public (for example the recently launched oral history project www.gencleranlatiyor.org). Independently of academia, newspapers now also often publish articles presenting the life story of someone from a minority, therewith

asking attention for 'hidden' stories of Turkish citizens who could not, or did not dare to, speak up.[99]

My dissertation joins this trend by calling attention to the variety of narratives that have been produced in Turkey, by more people and through more institutions than those that generally have reached the public domain. Through the topic of the dengbêj art, I aim to gain a better insight into the diversity and development of ideas about being Kurdish or Turkish within the context of the nation-state. In the following I outline the two main theories I use in the dissertation: narrative and morality.

Narrative

> Narrative is a social form of speech. This is so not only because narrative is done with others, but also because it is ripe with shared values and meanings. But sociality is not simply sharing; it is a dialogue within a range of possibilities of understanding. It is often through narrative that persons negotiate this understanding, in doing so they navigate the potentially dangerous semiotic waters of difference and similarity. In other words, through narrative persons perform sociality. They can also perform and articulate their moral conceptions, and do so in ways that are both personal and socially recognizable (Zigon 2008: 156).

The narrative approach (Jackson 2002, Somers 1994, Ricoeur 1991) assumes that people narrate their lives in order to make sense of what happens to them.[100] Narration is not purely individual; we always borrow ideas and concepts from others. By linking our own stories to social narratives, we locate ourselves in the narratives that circulate in society at a particular moment. Narrative is one of the important means through which people and institutions negotiate their identities and the relationship between various identities. Although in theory the number of narratives is endless, in practice a limited number of narratives are available at any given time and place. Which narratives prevail at any given time depends on the existing power relations. If meaningful narratives are not available for a given group of people, this may lead to experiences of exclusion, powerlessness and despair. In situations where people feel suppressed and excluded, often powerful counter narratives develop in order to be able to maintain certain values and resist domination. In *The politics of storytelling* (2002), Jackson calls storytelling a 'vital human strategy for

99 One of the numerous examples was the article titled 'Dersim'in kayıp Ermeni kızı' (A lost Armenian girl from Dersim), in the newspaper Radikal about a woman who only in 2010 told her children that she was Armenian and was a genocide survivor (Radikal, May 15, 2012).

100 Following Ricoeur, narrative can be defined as the interpretation and imitation of a past action by selecting and ordering a multiplicity of events into a meaningful unity.

sustaining a sense of agency in the face of disempowering circumstances' (2002: 15). Recreating life through storytelling gives one a sense of control: "to reconstitute events in a story is no longer to live those events in passivity, but to actively rework them, both in dialogue with others and within one's own imagination" (*Ibid*: 15). Even if existing power relations remain in place, the alternative narrative may alter the experience of powerlessness. Counter narratives may seem incapable of changing actual circumstances, but do important work for people belonging to minority groups. Those in power are not without a reason often anxious enough for their consequences, and make every effort to silence and suppress them.

When a society lives through a period of deep transformation, new institutions are created, new narratives arise, and both individuals and groups need to position themselves anew in relation to these institutions and narratives. Narratives are one place where meaning is shaped as people negotiate and rework views of themselves, their immediate environment, and society generally. People thus create their own unique stories linked to social narratives, 'narratives are the articulation of the interaction between a person and her social world' (Zigon 2007: 147). The histories of other people's experiences saturate the various worlds in which we live; and it is with regard to the limits of the narratable that we build our lives and our stories (Steedly 1993: 23). It is through the 'continual negotiation of experience and representation in narrative that subjectivity is produced' (Steedly 1993: 30).

Narratives show the complex intersection of the various ideas people relate to, and this is exactly what makes the narrative approach so useful for my topic. Because of the politicized character of Kurdish society in Turkey, one is tempted to portray the dengbêjs as one category operating as a group with a single aim. Instead I found that the narratives that the dengbêjs tell, show the complexity of their daily lives and experiences. Their life stories show how individual dengbêjs create meaning and order in their lives, each one giving meaning to their particular situation and personal history. Using a narrative approach from the start of my research, I conducted lengthy interviews with dengbêjs. I wanted to gain insight into how what was currently happening affected individual dengbêjs in how they viewed themselves and their art. The focus in every interview was always on the dengbêj art: how they had learned to sing, what it meant to them, and how this meaning had changed during their lives. While analyzing my interviews I noticed two phenomena. First, a number of dengbêjs had a particular point they wanted to make, something that occupied them and to which they frequently returned. Their interviews were arguments that they built up and would not leave until complete. Second, the dengbêjs linked their stories to social narratives, but did so *selectively*;

they only used aspects of social narratives that they saw as meaningful for their own lives. I chose to show the narrative character of the interviews, instead of using the interviews as 'scattered quotations' (as in Malkki 1995). I present lengthy quotations to show how individual dengbêjs construct their story and argument, in order to make the reader understand how they situated themselves in the complex of narratives that were circulating in Kurdish society during the time of my research (2007/8).

In order to use the narrative approach for my data, I use four narrative dimensions distinguished by Somers (1994), although under different names.[101] The four dimensions are personal, social, meta, and conceptual narratives. Personal narratives are about who we are and become, how we situate ourselves, how we define ourselves and define our lives as individuals. Although we often use language that expresses being (I am a student, I am a Muslim etc.), these narratives incorporate time and place and are narratives of becoming, of the ongoing process of our lives. Although told by individuals, personal narratives are still social and interpersonal; they are formed by the society we live in.

Social narratives are narratives 'attached to cultural and institutional formations larger than the single individual, to intersubjective networks or institutions' (Somers 1994: 619). They are webs of narratives of various people who relate to each other, what Charles Taylor calls 'webs of interlocution'. There are innumerable public narratives and they can be short or quite lengthy; for example narratives about one's family, the workplace, government, or nation (Somers 1994: 619).

Meta-narratives are the grand narratives of a specific time, such as narratives about modernization, capitalism, globalization, progress, etc. We are so accustomed to these narratives that we consider them as the natural way to explain society and humanity. Thus people and institutions refer to these narratives as if they were self-evident. Somers argues that meta-narratives have the quality of denarrativization, i.e. they are built on abstractions, taken for granted, and tend to become fixed.

These three types of narratives interact and intersect when we narrate our lives. The fourth type of narrative is the conceptual narrative. Conceptual narratives are the narratives we create as social scientists. In order to explain social reality, we cannot only build on personal, social and meta-narratives. We also need to take into account social forces such as 'market patterns, institutional practices, organizational

101 Somers used the terms *ontological* and *public* narratives for the first two dimensions. For the sake of clarity, I preferred to rename them into *personal* and *social* narratives.

constraints'.[102] Conceptual narratives are how scholars analyze the social forces that create certain personal, public and meta-narratives. Thus, in this dissertation I place a variety of narratives in a social and historical context, and look at the ways they are interconnected.

The narrative approach is quite useful for tracing several levels of narrative, but it lacks the conceptual framework needed to investigate how people manage changes in their lives. To explore this, I use Zigon's ideas about morality (Zigon 2007). The idea of ethical moments addresses how individuals manage moral choices in times of transition. The idea of moral institutions will help locate narratives in specific places, such as institutions or historical processes, and to understand how narratives are established and maintained.

Morality and ethical moments

Ricoeur (1991) said that narrating our lives is a basis for inner understanding, as well as a guide for action; people act on the basis of the narratives they have in mind. I extend this idea by using Zigon's work on morality and ethics. There are two reasons why I felt the need to draw on this theory. First, as I explained above, the ideology of the Kurdish movement, which had a significant influence on the dengbêjs' return to the stage, makes a strong appeal to morality. The discourse the Kurdish movement employs sees dengbêjs as not 'just' oral performers, but as guardians of Kurdish heritage, and as such they have a more elevated task than only singing songs. Thus, the dengbêjs and cultural workers redefined the dengbêj art according to current moral narratives. Second, in times of change, people need to reposition themselves and rework their individual stories. This reworking is clearly present in the life stories of dengbêjs. The interviews I had with the dengbêjs often show, in one way or another, that they felt the need to explain and justify the choices they made and the changes they have lived through. They chose to connect their personal stories to certain social narratives. They tried to give insight into the reasons for their choices, and showed how they had come to certain decisions. Therefore, in order to do justice to the moral side of the stories of dengbêjs, and to the moral appeal of the Kurdish movement, I use Zigon's re-worked and more open-ended concept of Foucault's notion of 'working on the self' (2009: 261).

102 We need 'to devise a vocabulary that we can use to reconstruct and plot over time and space the personal narratives and relationships of historical actors, the public and cultural narratives that inform their lives, and the crucial intersection of these narratives with the other relevant social forces' (Somers 1994: 620).

So what is morality? Building on Foucault, Zigon defines morality as "the code or the rules that a society, or to be more precise, social institutions claim and attempt to impose on its members" (Zigon 2008: 42). In every society there is a range of moralities in distinct forms, articulated by political and religious institutions, media, literature, art, music, and protest, for example. This variety is important, because anthropologists have often equated morality with 'culture', or 'socially approved habits', which gives the impression that people's "role in morality is limited to that of following rules" (2008: 16). Instead, by doing justice to society's complexity and fragmentation and by defining morality as a *practice*, it is possible to study how people navigate among various forms of morality. A fundamental characteristic of human beings is that they are capable of reflecting and reexamining their attitudes and practices. There is space for individual moral choices, albeit within certain limits. People choose from 'a range of possibilities' as Zigon calls it, meaning there are a (limited) number of moral options available in every society, 'structured by a socio-historic-cultural context' (Zigon 2008: 18).

Zigon (2009) distinguishes three aspects of morality. The first is institutional—all (in)formal organizations that wield power over individuals and claim some kind of truth. They often have real influence and power, but should not be understood as totalizing. Although institutions tend to give the impression that their morality is unquestioned and that their members follow them in a united fashion, this is rarely the case. Still, institutional morality is a discourse people often refer to, and which can have significant influence on the moral views of an individual. Second is public discourse, which I call social narratives; all public articulation of beliefs that are not directly related to institutions, but interact with them. Social narratives are "the result of everyday dialogical interactions between persons" (2008: 163). These narratives are in interaction with articulated beliefs of institutions, but lead a life of their own because of their continuous negotiation when people talk about them and support or undermine parts of these beliefs. Third are embodied dispositions—the non-reflective and often unconscious ways of being in the world; people are able to generally behave in a socially acceptable manner without thinking about it.

Although this last aspect is valid in general, there are situations in which individuals are forced to take a step back and think 'how to act morally appropriate' (Zigon 2009: 260). It is these moments that Zigon labels as 'moral breakdowns' or

'ethical moments'[103], and in which he distinguishes morality from ethics: 'Ethics, then, is a conscious acting on oneself either in isolation or with others so as to make oneself into a more morally appropriate and acceptable social person not only in the eyes of others but also for oneself' (2009: 261). It is a creative moment that is put in motion by an event causing conflict with something one previously perceived as morally appropriate, 'the range of possible moralities available do not adequately fit the context' (2009: 263). By seeing ethical moments as a dynamic process that occurs regularly, Zigon redefines Foucault's notion of 'working on the self': "For Foucault this ethical process is aimed at self-mastery and authenticity. In contrast to this, I see the ethical process of working on the self as always open-ended and situational, and therefore as a recurring personal moment throughout one's life that can never end in self-mastery or authenticity" (2009: 261). Zigon also emphasizes that these are moments of freedom and creativity, because people have, even though limited, a choice.

People will always experience ethical moments, simply because their lives are not stable over the years. At such moments, a range of possibilities is present 'to overcome moral questioning'. People can connect to new moral institutions or social narratives and thus reposition themselves in the moral field. An ethical moment can be an individual process, for example, when going through important changes in one's individual life such as a divorce or a job change. But it can also be a societal process, in which a large group of people or a whole society experiences a period of transition. Zigon calls this a 'societal-wide breakdown'. Such moments are especially interesting for investigation because they are moments of reflection during which people create new moral personhoods (Zigon 2009: 262). For both the individual and society, societal ethical moments imply that they are flexible, creative, ambiguous and contradictory moments, and that morality is negotiated.

I see the following connection between both theoretical models. As we have seen morality is negotiated by people and groups of people. An important negotiation is performed through narrative, because through narrative 'speaking individuals negotiate, construct, and come to agree on their moral ways of being' (Zigon 2008: 136), and 'through narrative [people] negotiate the tension between personal and shared experiences of living-through a particular socio-historic-cultural world' (Ibid 156). When we re-examine the various types of narratives as distinguished by

103 I prefer using the term 'ethical moments' above 'moral breakdown'. The latter term suggests a radical, dramatic and problematic turning point, a severe psychological crisis, whereas the moments Zigon refers to do not need to be crisis situations. Ethical moments can be a more subtle transformation into a different viewpoint than the term 'moral breakdown' suggests.

Somers, we can think of the personal narrative as the place where this negotiation takes place on an individual level. In personal narratives, people give meaning to their experiences, negotiate moral tensions that exist among the various moralities they feel connected to, and work on their subjectivity. Next to these personal narratives, in social narratives we can find clues regarding what moral choices are negotiated on a societal wide level. Thus, personal and social narratives provide insight into personal moral choices, but also reveal the range of possibilities existing in a society, and the tensions existing between various moral institutions.

With this in mind, in the dissertation I examine the variety of moral narratives circulating at the particular moment of my field research. In chapter 1 I regard the dengbêj kilams as an older form of morality that reflects a different way of understanding Kurdish society than the more recent moral narratives of the Kurdish movement. In chapter 2 I demonstrate how dengbêjs negotiated different moral views and narratives in performances in the Dengbêj House in Diyarbakır. In chapter 3 I present the life stories of seven individual performers, and show how these individuals talk about important decisions they made during their lives, how they present these as morally just, and how they relate in different ways to older and more recent social narratives. In chapter 4 I focus on how political activists talked about the dengbêj art during the time of my research, and tried to fit this art into their moral narratives. In this chapter I situate the production of these narratives in certain institutions and places, and show what work these places did in the increasing importance of Kurdish cultural activism in Turkey. In chapter 5 I present the songs and stories of three members of one family whose lives were deeply influenced by the ongoing Kurdish conflict. The moral views of cultural activism that redefines the songs they know from their village as knowledge that needs to be protected and archived, gave them a new sense of worth and meaning. Also, their new position in the field of cultural activism made them rework their moral views on the position of women.

In short, in the collected ethnographic material I investigate how larger social and historical processes of nationalism, Orientalism, and conflict manifest themselves in particular places, stories, moments, and individuals. This focus on the particular does not need to prevent us from gaining insight into larger social processes;[104] rather, it assists us in countering generalizations and Othering. The variety of particular stories emphasizes both the different ways in which individuals

104 "Attending to the particulars of individuals' lives need not imply disregard for forces and dynamics that are not locally based; the effects of extralocal or long-term processes are always manifested locally and specifically" (Abu-Lughod 1993: 8).

connect to their environment, as well as the common themes and moral views that bind these narratives together in the different articulation .

i.5 Engaged writing

Following Lila Abu-Lughod (2005), Leyla Neyzi, and Ronald Suny (2001) I hope with my work to be able to engage with current debates in Turkey on nationalism, modernization, minority issues and the Kurdish question. This is not in the first place because I feel that I have something to contribute to the public debate (although I naturally hope so), but because I feel that such engaged writing is the only possible way of writing about this topic. During the writing process I often felt hesitation about whether my analyses would be understood as a support for one or another opinion. For example, when writing about the tensions between the dengbêjs and the organizers of the Dengbêj House; about the 'myths' of Kurdish unity; or about the *kilams* on tribal battles, one could easily understand my analyses as attempts to crush the efforts of the Kurdish movement to create a visible Kurdish culture; to downplay the importance of Kurdish counter narratives; or to enhance internal tension by writing about rivalries belonging to the past. Others could understand the whole undertaking of my research and the representation of the material in my dissertation as an impudent interference in Turkish internal politics, enhancing internal division which according to such views, support European political and economic interests. In order to counter such misunderstandings I decided it would be more fruitful to clearly express my intentions and concerns. I hope this will open up the opportunity to engage in debates with Kurdish and Turkish colleagues and non-academic readership living in Turkey. And although I hope first to gain the interest of people in Turkey, I also wish to contribute to the larger global debate on modernity, nationalism, and Orientalism, as I have outlined above.

The style in which I have written this dissertation and the order of the chapters is related to the choice of engaged writing. Even though my study will probably be far from what the dengbêjs and others I spoke with imagined it to be, I did feel a responsibility towards them in capturing what they found important and what they valued. Therefore, in addition to its theoretical goals, I hope to have written a work that depicts the life world of the dengbêjs in many of its colors and variety, and that does some justice to the value the dengbêjs attach to their art. It was my aim to write an ethnographic account of narrative, in which the variety of narratives circulating in a society at a particular time and place are presented, discussed and analyzed.

Instead of trying to capture everything in academic language, which could possibly break down the (artistic) quality of the work of the dengbêjs and the individual stories people told me, I present first of all literal translations of many of the stories I heard. I alternate conceptual narratives – i.e. my academic understanding and analysis of the various topics – with these (personal) encounters with the dengbêjs. Most chapters start with a story, event, or example that immerses the reader into the material. Although the material presented is naturally always my own selection and interpretation, I have tried to stay close to what the people I spoke, worked and lived with found important and central at the moment of the research. As the dengbêjs are the central figures of my dissertation, their voices are most present. Others I spoke with, such as television makers, journalists, writers, musicians, political activists and cultural workers, also appear in the chapters and sometimes play a central role because of their importance in inviting the dengbêjs back into public life, and in understanding what the dengbêjs and their art mean in present day Turkey.

i.6 Chapter outline

In chapter 1 I investigate a corpus of kilams that I collected during my research based on a number of selected 'figures' such as 'the mourning woman', 'the caravan trader', or 'the local leader'. I will use these figures to highlight the main themes I found in the kilams. The figures convey a (sometimes idealized) social landscape of Kurdish life in the past. The majority of these kilams are about a specific time and character. Many of the events they speak of can be situated in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century and the characters that are described in the kilams are often Sunni Kurdish men and women who lived in the Kurdish region in present-day Turkey. Placed in this specific timing, the kilams give shape to ideas about Kurdishness, identity and belonging. What are the main concerns, dependencies, and loyalties that speak from the kilams? By focusing on the presentation of home and foreign we will see that the kilams demonstrate predominantly local and small-scale attachments and alliances. Although in the kilams the Kurds are presented as a distinct group that differs from surrounding groups, smaller alliances carry more importance in the kilams than the Kurdish identity, and they do not reflect ideas about a larger Kurdistan. Rather, the kilams show the complexities of everyday life in a society in turmoil, in which loyalties and enmities crosscut simple divisions between self and other. I regard the kilams as a source of moral ideas about Kurdish society that differs from current moral views.

In chapter 2 I understand the activities of the dengbêjs as 'performing tradition'. Today's performances evoke a lost village world and try to revive and recall it. And with it, not only the village but also other characteristics that are seen as traditional and as the essence of Kurdishness are revived. I suggest that the celebration of tradition is done through several means. The dengbêjs are regarded as sources of history through their knowledge of kilams from old times. They are seen as bearing the traces of an authentic Kurdish past life through their personal experiences with village life and former times; performances bring to mind an idealized Kurdish past. However, this tradition can only be valued positively by neglecting part of the repertoire. The many kilams that refer to the tribal character of Kurdish society are today often left out of performances. By discarding these kilams the dengbêjs react to current narratives that emphasize the divisive nature of the tribes and the need for Kurdish unity. The anti-tribal sentiments are related to how many Kurds today feel about their Kurdishness. Many Kurds feel partly alienated from their village background and embarrassed because of some of its implications. At the same time they also increasingly feel the need for a recovery and rediscovery of forgotten folk traditions. Performing tradition is thus an act of nostalgia, but one that does not go unchallenged.

Chapter 3 presents seven life stories of individual dengbêjs. This chapter forms the central part of the dissertation and discusses the duality of being silenced and breaking silence so clearly expressed in the interviews of many dengbêjs. What strategies did these individual dengbêjs develop to make a space for performance within the context of their lives? How did they speak of these experiences in the today's social and political climate? What social and moral narratives did they draw upon and how did they use such narratives to give meaning to their life experiences? The themes narrative and morality meet in the stories of individual performers. This chapter bridges the first with the third part by demonstrating what impact societal changes and new moral narratives had on individual lives. The stories reflect important changes taking place in the Kurdish region in Turkey since the 1980s. Many people of the elderly generation are not as connected to social narratives dominant since the 1980s, as are the young generation who grew up during the PKK-government conflict. Their stories offer a diverse picture of performance opportunities and obstructions, and show more than just the politicized discourse on the dengbêj art as it developed over the last decade.

Chapter 4 discusses the reemergence of the dengbêjs in public life after two decades of collective silence. The various sites where the dengbêjs returned on stage became important spaces where Kurdishness was displayed (audio-)visually, and

contested the dominant presence of Turkish nationalism. I argue that central to these sites was, more than the dengbêj art in itself, cultural activism. The chapter also investigates the position of various political activists, mainly through the narratives they tell about the dengbêjs and Kurdish culture, and argues that the reemergence of the dengbêjs was predominantly guided by them, and not by the dengbêjs. I situate these narratives in the context of their lives and recent history, and in the context of the development of Kurdish and Turkish nationalist thought and cultural activism.

In chapter 5 I focus on the life stories and songs of three members of one family, a couple and their eldest daughter who perform regularly in a television program on the dengbêj art, broadcast from Europe. The songs they know traveled with them from their village of origin in Iraq, back to Turkey, to Iran, again to Iraq, and finally to Germany where they have lived since 1997. The embodied experience of oral tradition in the context of (a lost) village life is central to this chapter. What does the performance of the songs bring about for the people involved? I suggest that the act of performing the songs they know, and working on archiving them, helps them to recall their village past in a positive way, and in piecing together the shattered experiences of lives marked by war, violence and escape. This applies especially to women, who gained a different position and visibility through their performance on television.

Part I

Songs and Performance

Figure 3. Dengbêj Ahmedê Aqutê in the Bağcılar neighborhood in Istanbul, where he lives since 2004 after almost eighty years in his village near Batman, over 1500 km from Istanbul. To me, the picture evokes the uprootedness of personal and social memories caused by displacement, conflict, urbanization, and new lifestyles.

Chapter 1

‘My heart is on fire.’
Singing a Kurdish past.

Introduction

Edûlê[105] dibê: Genc Xelîlo heyrana te me
Dilê min liyan e
Îro cewabeka nexêr hatiye dibê:
Pismamê te li welatê xerîb nexweş e
Nexweşekî wayê gelo dîsa pir bê hal e
Li welatê xerîb kesekî xudanê xêra tunene
Xwe jê re bike balîv û berpal e
Ez ê rabim vê sibê
zêrê serê xwe biqetînim
Ji ciwanîkê delalê dilê xwe re
Bikim cotek nal e
Ez ê xizêma pozê xwe derxim
Ji ciwanîkê delalê dilê xwe re
Bikim gelo hûrbizmar e
Ez ê serkezîkê xwe evdalê biqûsînim
Ji ciwanîkê delalê dilê xwe re
Bikim ser kelek û dor hevsar e
Maye li welatê xerîb bila xelqê nebêje:
Gelo çi siwarekî Kurd ê çendî
Bê kar û bar e
Nemaê nemaê nemaê
Ez ê pişti Genc Xelîl
kuramê xwe nemînim
Dilo li dinyayê

Edûlê says: oh Genc Xelîl, I would die for you
My heart is on fire
Today a dark message came, saying:
'Your cousin[106] is ill in a foreign land
He is a desperate patient without strength
In that foreign land no one is caring
To be his support and comfort'
This morning I will stand up
I will break the golden coins from my head
And for the young beloved of my heart
Make a pair of horseshoes out of them
I will take off my nose piercing
And for the young beloved of my heart
Make a little nail from it. Me unfortunate,
I will smash my buckle and hairclip
And for the young beloved of my heart
Make a rein and bridle out of them
He stayed behind in foreign land; let no one say:
'What a useless weak person
is that Kurdish rider'
[Oh God] let me not stay here without him
I will not continue
without my cousin Genc Xelîl
to live my life on earth, oh my heart[107]

The art of the dengbêjs is in the first place an art of the imagination that transports one to another dimension. Together or alone, singing one *kilam* (recital song) after the other, the dengbêjs create a world that calls up and speaks of individual and social living experiences. It is a world in which the geographic location of one's own living environment forms the central stage, and in which regions outside of this geography are presented as foreign. The kilams create a home, a place of belonging that is contrasted with a *xerîbî*, a foreign place. They also sketch a world of village life, local lords, farmers, shepherds, rebellions and warfare that recalls and reenacts a Kurdish past. In this and the next chapter I argue that the home the kilams create is one often far from today's experiences, but close to the image Kurds have of their past. The performances of the dengbêjs offer a connection to that past experiences,

105 These song lines are taken from a performance of the story *'Genc Xelîl'* by dengbêj Salihê Qubînî, as noted down in Salih Kevirbirî's book *Filîtê Quto* (2004: 52). *Genc Xelîl* is well-known and was often performed by the dengbêjs during my fieldwork. Translation: Hanifi Barış and myself.

106 Who is at the same time her husband

107 *Nemaê* is a lamenting phrase used after the departure or death of a loved one, meant to address God and provoke him to ease the pain of the loss. It suggests that one would wish to go after the loved one, as it is unbearable to live without him/her. *Dilo*, my heart, refers to the fact that this part is a monologue in which Edûlê addresses herself.

both through the world of the kilams as well as through the presence of the dengbêjs. The dengbêjs attach most value to historical kilams, rather than new kilams of their own making. They feel their main contribution lies in the transmission of history and culture. During a performance the dengbêjs expect their audience to be silent and to listen attentively to the content of the kilams. Because of the great value they attach to this, I felt the topic of the first chapter had to be the content of the kilams. In this chapter I do not yet pay attention to the performance context, and to what meaning the kilams obtain today. Rather, I felt that a clear focus on the kilam content offers an additional perspective that would get lost by focusing solely on today's meaning-giving. The performance context is the topic of chapter 2, in which we will see that nostalgia about the lost world of the past forms an essential part of the current meaning and attraction of the dengbêjs.

The well-known story *'Genc Xelîl'*, from which the above lyrics are taken, provides a good starting point for introducing the main concerns of the chapter. It also immediately immerses the reader into the colorful world of the kilams. The dengbêj who told this story[108] first introduced it in prose, followed by a long kilam. He told about the days of the Ottoman Empire, when the Padishah and his Sublime Porte reigned over a vast territory, stretching from Greece in the west to the Persians in the east, from the Balkans in the north to Egypt in the south. The kilam does not give an exact timing, but at least the listener knows that it takes place before the foundation of the Turkish Republic in 1923, and thus in a quite distant past. The Empire is at war with one of its neighbors when one night the Padishah sees in a dream how a young man from Diyarbakır, with the name Genc Xelîl (Young Xelîl), conquers seven cities[109]. The Padishah sends his vizier to Diyarbakır to find this young man and talk with him. When he finds Genc Xelîl, he tells him the dream of the Padishah, and asks him to go and fight. But Genc Xelîl, realizing he is in a position to make demands, replies that he is only willing to go to war on one important condition: he loves, the daughter of his uncle, who is the pasha of Diyarbakır. The latter has refused to give him her hand. If the vizier will go to her father and arrange a marriage, then he will go to war and fight. The vizier manages to persuade the pasha and the wedding is

108 I visited and interviewed dengbêj Salihê Qûbînî in his hometown Batman in 2007, and met him several times later on. I recorded a long evening performance in his house on my first visit, on which occasion he also sang Genc Xelîl. The version I present here is taken from the book *Filitê Quto* written by his nephew Salih Kevirbirî (2001). The performance information I added is based on the experience I have with his performance manner, in which he would introduce the songs with a story. Kevirbirî does not give information on the performance details, but also introduces the songs with stories he discussed with his uncle (personal communication with Kevirbirî).

109 In other versions the Padishah sees in his dream how angels appoint Genc Xelîl into the commander of the Ottoman army.

arranged for the same day. The young couple has three days to enjoy their marriage and say goodbye to each other, after which Genc Xelîl leaves Edûlê, his bride, and goes to war. He is appointed chief commander of the Ottoman army. He conquers seven cities, just as in the dream, and after the conquest the soldiers are ready to go home. At that moment Genc Xelîl falls gravely ill and cannot return. He stays behind in the city Damascus.

After this short introduction the dengbêj starts singing a long account in verse about the adventures of Edûlê. She is meanwhile anxiously waiting for Genc Xelîl to return home. She sees how other soldiers are returning from war, but he is not among them. From them she hears the bad news that Genc Xelîl is heavily ill. Edûlê is devastated. She goes to the city center and collects forty girls of her age. They dress in men's clothes that are black, and form a small army of warriors in disguise. They head for Damascus on horseback, a city eight hundred km away from Diyarbakır.[110] On their arrival they search around to find Genc Xelîl who, when they finally find him, is seriously ill and does not recognize Edûlê. She takes him with her on the journey back home. However, on one of the nights, when they are sleeping in a tent next to the road, Genc Xelîl dies. Edûlê is heartbroken, and, not able to imagine a life without him, decides to die with him. She kills herself, and the young couple is taken home by Edûlê's friends and buried in Diyarbakır.

The story is based on one significant event in a past quite long ago; the Ottoman Empire is at war with one of its neighbors. Rapidly after this introduction, the center of attention shifts from the Padishah of the Empire and the war in which he is involved, to a young man far from the empire's court, at its margins: Genc Xelîl, the nephew of the pasha of Diyarbakır. This introduction is a very short part of the story, but implies a large transformation. The dream of the Padishah transforms Genc Xelîl from a man who cannot marry the girl he loves, into the chief commander of the Ottoman army, who is in the position to get his wishes fulfilled. Instead of the Padishah a Kurd becomes the hero of the war, and the Kurdish region, where the storyteller and the audiences live, becomes the central stage of the story, instead of the court of the Empire.

After this initial restructuring of the social and political order, a second important transformation follows. The wedding of the young couple, and the three days they have got to enjoy their marriage, are still only the introduction to the story. The real story starts after Genc Xelîl has left for war and Edûlê is waiting for him. All the kilams in this performance are sung from the perspective of Edûlê. She

110 Crossing such distances seems to have been not unusual because of the caravan trade, although generally probably beyond the opportunities of most women.

is the main protagonist of the story, not Genc Xelîl. This is specifically marked by the fact that she and her forty warrior friends dress in male clothing. For the time being, Edûlê is transformed into a man who has the freedom and agency to behave like a man. This transformation replaces Genc Xelîl as the hero of the story with Edûlê, and places a woman at the center of attention. Tragically, the story ends with her death, when she asserts her agency in the extreme by committing suicide. Her suicide restores her position of being a woman. Her death ends the story and its imagination; a woman is no man, nor is she a warrior.

In the story *Genc Xelîl*, Diyarbakır is the familiar place, the home of Genc Xelîl and Edûlê. The foreign elements of the story are the court of the Ottoman Empire, and the 'foreign lands' where the enemy is. The mentioning of the Padishah and the court of the Ottoman Empire make visible the power structure: the protagonist of the story and his life world form a marginal part of the Empire. By transforming Genc Xelîl into the hero of the Ottoman army, the kilam incorporates the court of the Ottoman Empire into Kurdish experience. Far away rulers unexpectedly notice a Kurd, and choose him as their hero. The second foreign element of the story are the lands of present-day Syria, with which the Empire is at war. Genc Xelîl travels to this foreign land that is depicted as potentially dangerous; not only because of the fighting taking place there, but also because of the lack of people he knows who could give him support when needed. The home is the safe place where Edûlê waits for Genc Xelîl to return, and from where she starts her journey to find him and bring him back. Eventually, the two heroes do return to their home town, but only to be buried there.

Although the home is a safe place, there is another side to this story as well that gives the foreign a more positive connotation. Genc Xelîl and Edûlê have not been able to realize their wish to be together. They are separated by their own kin, who do not allow them to marry. The marriage only comes about through foreign intervention, when the vizier comes to Diyarbakır by order of the Padishah. Also, the adventures of Edûlê and her forty companions can only take place because of their journey into foreign lands. The foreign gives them the opportunity to behave like men, and to experience the long journey to places they have never seen before. On the one hand, the foreign lands forge war, death and disaster, whereas the home was and becomes the (eternal) place of rest and safety. On the other hand, the foreign unites two lovers who would otherwise most likely have remained separate, and gives women the opportunity to experience the freedom of men.

Apart from the depiction of home and foreign, this kilam also speaks of a distant history, when there was still an Ottoman Empire, a Padishah, viziers and pashas. It was a time when people traveled long distances on horseback and fought

with the sword. The story is thus not speaking of current Kurdish experiences, but connects to past times. However, it does so in an imprecise way without mentioning the exact timing and the specific war it is talking about. Instead of attempting to give a precise account of a historical event, the story rather intends to place a local Kurdish community on a larger map and to clarify the connections this community has with the surrounding powers. As such it connects to contemporary Kurdish experiences of marginality, and to questions of political identity. As we will see in later chapters, nowadays the dengbêj art is often presented as an example of authentic Kurdishness, and therewith placed within the framework of Kurdish nationalist ideology and activities. But although *Genc Xelîl* can be explained as a kilam with nationalist sentiments and can link to nationalist feelings of current audiences, I suggest that this and most other kilams do not actually reflect a nationalist mindset.

In this chapter I focus on the kilams that I collected during my research (see below for a discussion of the corpus). The majority of these kilams are about a specific time and character. Many of the events they speak of, can be situated in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century and the characters that are described in the kilams are often Sunni Kurdish men and women who lived in the Kurdish region in present-day Turkey. Although the kilams tell the adventures of both rulers and commoners, most kilams are sung as if from the viewpoint of commoners who comment on the events they witness in their near environment. For example, songs about the battles of tribal leaders often comment on what happened as if from the eyes of a commoner, and from that viewpoint offer both praise and criticism on the leader. The genre of kilams that is sung by the dengbêjs during my research thus predominantly speaks of a character and historical context that is different from today and that is believed to transmit eyewitness reports of a Kurdish past. Contrary to how the dengbêjs and political activists perceive the kilams as coming from a far and indefinite past that represents age-old Kurdish history, many kilams in which a reference to time is given actually refer to a specific time period.

The historical context of many kilams is the downfall of the Ottoman Empire, the First World War, and the foundation of the Turkish Republic. These were destructive and crucial times. Placed in this specific timing, the kilams give shape to ideas about Kurdishness, identity and belonging. What are the main concerns, dependencies, and loyalties that speak from the kilams? By focusing on the presentation of home and foreign we will see that the kilams demonstrate predominantly local and small-scale attachments and alliances. They mention larger political entities such as the Ottoman Empire and later the Turkish Republic and the

surrounding nation-states. However, although in the kilams the Kurds are presented as a distinct group that differs from surrounding groups, smaller alliances carry more importance in the kilams than the Kurdish identity, and they do not reflect ideas about a larger Kurdistan. Rather, the kilams show the complexities of everyday life in a society in turmoil, in which loyalties and enmities crosscut simple divisions between self and other. Such divisions, so present in today's political climate in Turkey in which the Kurdish question is a central and yet unsolved problem, "form the foundational ground on which theories of resistance and political revolutions necessarily reside but are inadequate to understanding the banality of the day-to-day concessions and entangled solutions that are the basic stuff of (..) people's lives" (Spyer 2000: 7). By contrast, the picture of Kurdish history sketched in the kilams leaves room for a more complex and diverse interpretation of the contacts between Kurds and surrounding ethnic and religious groups.

While reading through the many kilams, I discovered recurring figures such as 'the mourning woman', 'the caravan trader', or 'the local leader'. I will use these figures to highlight the main themes I found in the kilams. I call them figures because they are not isolated personalities but return frequently in the kilams, and have the ability to point to larger social developments that speak through them. Because most of these figures disappeared from the socio-political landscape of today's Kurdish society, but are still sung about, they convey a (sometimes idealized) social landscape of Kurdish life in the past, and they display some of the social stratifications as they existed in the late nineteentch and early twentieth century. Also, these figures convey ideas about who are presented in the kilams as belonging to 'us', and who were seen as deviant, different or other. I adopt the idea of figure from Barker and Lindquist (2009) who see the 'figures of Indonesian modernity' they describe in their article as people who "embody, manifest, and, to some degree, comment upon a particular historical moment in the complex articulation of large-scale processes that are not always easy to grasp in concrete terms" (Barker, Lindquist e.a. 2009: 37). By adopting the concept of figure, originally meant to comment on modernity, I underline my point that not only modernity, but also previous times, should be regarded as multiple and complex, and should be studied in their specific historical moments. The decline of the Ottoman Empire and the founding of the Turkish Republic is such a defining historical moment that greatly affected all people living in its territory. The dengbêjs comment on this historical moment from a Kurdish commoners' perspective and thus voice one of the multiple dimenstions through which people experienced the social and political transformations characterizing the time in which they lived.

In the following sections I first discuss the nature of the kilams, and the specific time and character that they sing about. Subsequently I examine recurrent themes, figures and landscapes appearing in the kilams of my selection. In the last section I discuss the repertoire attributed to Evdalê Zeynikê, a legendary dengbêj of the neneteenth century, and demonstrate that these kilams underline the arguments I make in this chapter. Apart from contributing to the chapter's main argument, the overview of the themes, figures and landscapes, and the discussion of the Evdalê Zeynikê kilams, also give a good impression of the overall picture of Kurdish past life the dengbêjs sketch in the kilams. In chapter 2 I turn to the act of performance, an essential topic that complements the current chapter in a dual attempt to make the reader hear, sense, and see the art of the imagination of the dengbêjs.

1.1 Time, place and perspective offered in the kilams

Central to the performance of kilam is that each of them tells a (hi)story; most kilams are understood as real events that happened in a near or distant past. The kilam is the specific field and quality of the dengbêjs. Next to the kilams, they also sing *stran*, and some dengbêjs know *beyt* as well.[111] The word kilam is used for a recital form of singing with a more serious connotation, maybe best called 'melodic recitation'. In a kilam the dengbêjs sing the song lines without clear breaks at the end of the line, keeping their breath as long as possible, which means that the lines are not easy to separate from each other. The *stran* is used for the lighter, more rhythmic songs that can accompany folk dances. They are easier songs that are known and sung by many people. They are primarily love songs, and although they also have a story to tell, they are less elaborate and often not regarded as of special importance. In the past (young) dengbêjs used to perform at weddings where they were the lead singers of folk dances. Two or three lead singers would start singing, and the public would repeat their lines while dancing. Although the dengbêjs were valued for their strong voices accompanying wedding dances, their real importance lay in the performance of the more difficult genre of the kilams.

The dengbêjs emphasized that they learned most of their kilams from one or several masters, who also again learned their repertoire from others. They often had

111 Dengbêjs did not regard *beyt* as part of the dengbêj repertoire, although some of them had learned some or many *beyts*. The *beyt* are songs with a religious connotation and a special form, which are the field of the *derwiş*, see Introduction.

some kilams of their own creation, but they never emphasized this aspect.[112] Kurdish experts I spoke with regarded the dengbêj art as anonymous, and derived from this a sense of collective Kurdish ownership.[113] In the public places where dengbêjs had only recently started performing during my research, such as the Dengbêj Houses and Kurdish television (see chapter 4), the majority of kilams belonged to that category as well. As I chose to study the dengbêj art in its present and most public form, I focus on the collectively shared songs and stories of dengbêjs, rather than on individual compositions.

In the past the dengbêj art seems to have had a more local character than today. Dengbêjs sang kilams about their immediate environment, and the kilams they learned from their masters were also often at least in part from the same region. It seems likely that this local character began to decrease with the increasing influence of radio and cassettes, and later television, which meant that kilams could be shared over much larger distances. Nowadays the local character of the dengbêj art is much less prevalent, although this feature did not disappear entirely. Dengbêjs still often know at least some kilams about their own region, village, or tribe. However, the local character of the dengbêj art is not much emphasized and sometimes denied for political reasons (see chapter 4).

The basis for this chapter are hundred and twenty kilams of my own recordings (see appendix);[114] three books[115] written by Kurdish folklore collectors; the three kilams presented in the dissertation of Metin Yüksel (2011), and a number of CDs with transcribed song lyrics. Although I did not study all these kilams in detail, and can only present a small part of them, I did use the here mentioned

112 As far as I have been able to look through individual compositions of them and others, often released on CD, they show a tendency to follow the developments of the modern Kurdish music scene by focusing on protest songs related to current events, and connecting to current political narratives. Examples are some of the songs at the CDs of Salihê Qûbînî released by Medya Muzik and of the CD *Bavê dilşayê* of Esker Demirbaş released by Kom Müzik.

113 For example the host of a TV program on dengbêjs in Diyarbakır: "Kurdish literature is totally oral. We cannot say who was the composer of a particular kilam. In the same way as proverbs are the common product of a people and not of an individual, the Kurdish kilams are also like that. That is a general rule. And we would not call a song a dengbêj kilam when his [the dengbêj'] name is written under it or occurs in it. That will be a song, not a kilam, that is not the common product of the people" (interview September 2008 in Diyarbakır, translated from Turkish). This romanticized view on the dengbêj art connects to the current emphasis on 'heritage' that is seen as owned by all Kurds.

114 As I was interested in getting an overview of the topics the kilams told about, Zeki Aydın, listened to my recordings and wrote Kurdish summaries of the kilams he listened to. Aydın had good knowledge of dengbêjs kilams, was fluent in Kurdish, and worked for a local Kurdish television channel as a translator. The summaries he wrote were between 150 and 300 words, sometimes longer. As it would have been impossible to transcribe and translate all the kilams one by one, the summaries supplied me with a general idea of song topics.

115 Kevirbirî (2001, Turkish translation 2004), Aras (1996, Turkish translation 2004)

material to get a general overview of topics, storylines and styles. I worked on the translation and interpretation of the presented songs together with Hanifi Barış.[116] He grew up in a Kurdish family that spoke only Kurmanji at home. His father, Ahmedê Aqutê, is a dengbêj with a large repertoire, and Hanifi's interest in his father's kilams means that he has profound knowledge of their meaning and archaich language. Our cooperation began at the beginning of my field research in 2007, and continues until today. Together we discussed all the kilams presented in this chapter and thought well about their meaning. The interpretation of the kilams therefore is a result of our shared interest and study of the kilams. The analysis of this chapter and the choice of figures is my own, and is based on the total body of selected kilams as mentioned above.

The dengbêjs divided the kilams into *kilamên şer* (war songs) and *kilamên evîn* (love songs). Terminology and the meaning of terms varies from region to region, but has become more standardized in recent years due to media attention for this topic (chapter 4 and 5).[117] Following Yüksel (2011), I divide the *kilamên şer* in battle songs (about internal battles) and rebel songs (about clashes with the state).[118] As it is beyond the scope of this dissertation to examine genres, poetic styles, and musical features in detail, I focus mostly on the content. The collective of kilams comment on the local environment of the people they speak of: the lives and loves; the relationship between rulers and commoners; the battles they fought or witnessed. Love songs generally have one or two protagonists who are at the same time the voices of the kilam: the kilam presents a certain event from their perspective. For example, two lovers lament their bitter fate of not being able to be together. War songs have a more complex structure; in these kilams the protagonists are often different from the voices from whose perspective the kilam is presented. For example, a mother (the kilam's voice) mourns the death of her son (the protagonist). While the protagonists can be both elite and common people, these 'voices' of the kilams are more often

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117 For example, Allison (2001) found the word *stran* as the most common term, as it is also mentioned in other Yezidi sources (Celîl 1978). From their description comes that it is comparable to the term *kilam* in south east Turkey. She mentions that "in much of Turkish and Syrian Kurdistan these *stran* are known as *lawiq/k*". Although I occasionally heard the term *lawiq*, *kilam* is nowadays much more commonly used.

118 Allison (2001) divided the topics of songs among Yezidi oral performers in Iraq into three main categories: battle, love and death. Although much of what Allison writes is also valid for the dengbêjs in south east Turkey, the category of death did not totally fit the kilams I investigated. Death is a theme coming up in both love and battle songs, and when I asked the dengbêjs if a certain song was a 'kilamê şîn', a song of mourning, they replied that it was a love or battle song in which someone had died, and not a song of mourning. This seems to be connected to the fact that songs of mourning are regarded as the sole domain of women, as I will discuss later in this chapter.

commoners than elite, and more often women than men. I will elaborate on these themes in the discussion of the figures that emerge in the kilams.

There are kilams of a legendary nature in which supernatural events occur, but the majority of the kilams have a more realistic, down to earth quality. Judged from the range of 'others' that are presented in the kilams, they are mostly sung from the perspective of Sunni Muslims. Yezidis and Christians are generally seen as deviant groups. However, the kilams do not show much connection with religious views, as the dengbêj art is a secular tradition. Religious songs are the field of the *derwiş*, and the two traditions are clearly separated from each other by their different poetic styles.[119] The Sunni perspective is thus more of a common basic assumption than that it is commented upon or discussed in the kilams.

The kilams are seen as important for historical memory; for example those about a specific battle in a specific place. Other kilams explain the genesis of certain places, graves or monuments in the landscape, such as the kilam of the protagonists Mem and Zîn whose graves can still be found in Cizîrê (Cizre) today. Again others are seen as carrying moral lessons about treason and loyalty to ones allies, or about the display of strength and the enduring insistence on revenge. Many kilams are also connected to emotional experiences that people lived through during their lives, or that they witnessed happening to people whom they loved. These are kilams about death and loss, about orphans, about war and destruction, as well as the many kilams about love, longing and despair because of an absent loved one. The opening words of the kilams often reveal something about the content. When a kilam starts with the word *rebenim*, poor me, one knows that a war song will follow in which the protagonist lost a loved one. When a kilam starts with *lo mîro*, oh king, one knows that a kilam of complaint, grievance, mourning, lament and disaster follows, expressed about or towards a leader.

Although the kilams offer the mediated views of a dengbêj on a certain event, and were reproduced and changed in the process of transmission, there are many reasons to assume that parts of the storylines, topics and symbols date from past times. First, the kilams speak of an, although idealized, past social and political world. They speak of caravans, horse riders, past tribal alliances and other features that no longer exist today. Second, in the kilams where a time is given or can be reconstructed, this timing falls primarily between roughly 1850 and 1930 for the kilams of my selection, with some exceptions. The historical events that receive most importance are internal battles taking place in that time period, and the rebellions

119 The *beyts* of the derwiş have a different form, but the dengbêjs also distinguished them from their own repertoire by referring to their religious content.

against the Turkish government between 1920 and 1930. Third, most dengbêjs learned the kilams from their masters and composed only a few themselves, which means that most kilams date back to at least one or two previous generations. Fourth, the political views that speak from the kilams do not have immediate reflection in today's political climate, but seem rather to refer to past moral narratives. And last, there are old recordings of famous dengbêjs like Şakiro, Karapetê Xaco, Reso and Huseyno. Many dengbêjs made use of these recordings to enhance their knowledge, or to learn kilams by heart. The recordings were copied and distributed individually, through radio stations, and nowadays through television. The dengbêjs thus have direct access to at least some older recordings. This does not mean that they uncritically adopt kilams from others. They are selective in what they sing, and leave out certain kilams that are too much in contradiction with current views (chapter 2).

As we will see in chapter 2, the dengbêjs regard the kilams as important historical sources. During the period of my field research, they saw themselves as bearers of history, and they saw it as an important task to transmit this history to today's audiences. They generally did not attempt to present their own views on contemporary issues, but focused on historical kilams. This makes them very different from singers of protest songs of Kurdish music groups who want to comment on the contemporary social and political situation. These groups have their origin in cultural activism and many of their songs are meant for political mobilization (chapter 4). Apart from some of the more recent compositions, the dengbêjs predominantly chose to sing kilams that refer to a socio-political world different from today and thus have a different character than current protest songs. I argue that in their kilams the dengbêjs together build a Sung Home, a Kurdish place of belonging. However, when investigating the kilams in-depth, the home they create has different features than the Kurdish home that is advocated by political activists (chapter 2 and 4), and can therefore be regarded as a different moral framework than the morality advocated by the Kurdish movement (see Introduction for a discussion of morality).

In the following sections I investigate the main topics appearing in the kilams, and for each topics I present a number of figures. What kind of Kurdish history do the kilams sketch? What image of home do they recall? Who belongs, and who does not? The first part of the chapter focuses mostly on love songs, and the second part on battle and rebel songs. Each section ends with some notes that support the main argument. The last section discusses the position of Evdalê Zeynikê, the by far most famous dengbêj figure of former times. In that section, love, battle and rebel songs come together in the repertoire of one dengbêj.

1.2 Women and men

In this section I discuss the manner in which men and women emerge in the kilams of dengbêjs. The gender aspect of the kilams is a complex topic which needs some elaboration, and more research than possible in the scope of this dissertation. The material I collected is a male repertoire[120] in which men generally are much more present than women. In battle and rebel songs men play a larger role: they are more often the main protagonists, they are more often described in detail, and whereas men are often mentioned with their full names and origin, this does not happen often for women. Still, women are very often presented as the voice of the kilam, for example a woman explains the course of a battle, and mourns its often fatal outcome. In love songs the voices of women are heard even stronger. These kilams often take the form of a dialogue in which two lovers praise each other and lament the fact that they cannot be together. Although the female perspective is strongly present in love songs, this is also the song type that pays the least attention to details such as place names, proper names and timing. The female song figures remain much more elusive than the more concrete and elaborate male figures.

In most cases, women are present but also remain invisible: she is present as the main voice of the kilam, and called by her first name. But she remains invisible because we do often not know where she lived, whose daughter she was, and to which tribe she belonged. This turns the women of the kilams into figures who represent not themselves, but the voices of women in general. The song makers stage them as criticizing marriage customs and other social structures, as praising men, and as lamenting their death.

Let us first examine the role of women and men in love songs through the figure of the 'unhappy lovers'. Subsequently I turn to the role of women and men in battle and rebel songs through the figure of the 'woman in morning'. Because of the predominantly male perspective that comes with the figures I discuss later in this chapter, I focus here more on the role of women.

120 Women might play a larger role in songs of their own making which did not reach the repertoires of male dengbêjs, but could be examined through researching women's repertoires (see also chapter 5).

The unhappy lovers

Many love songs are sung about the 'unhappy lovers',[121] two people who love each other, but cannot be together. In these kilams, young women and men are portrayed as feeling powerless to change their situation, and as dependent on the decisions of their fathers or other relatives about their lives. They mourn the loss of love they might have lived, but are not allowed to. In these kilams the woman is often the main protagonist, or at least the one called by her first name, whereas the man often remains nameless. The two lovers are in dialogue, conversing with each other in the kilam about their bad luck and sometimes trying to change their situation. The first kilam is about a woman with the name Dewrê and an anonymous man who love each other but cannot be together for reasons explained later in the kilam. This kilam is a good example of how dialogue is built up in the kilams. The first stanza is sung by the man, and the second stanza by Dewrê.

Dewrê	Dewrê, oh time[122]
Dewrê dewrê ax dewrê dewrê[123]	Oh time, oh epoch
Ax dewrê yê dewranê yê lê de lo lo zemano	Oh, it is one of those times, those eras, oh time!
Dewrê qurban mi go: bihar e	My dear Dewrê, I said: it is spring
Emê lê bi hev re yar bin	and I wish we would be in love with one another
Emê li zozana rûnên	we could sit at the *zozan*,
li ber belekê berfê delal	next to the snowy rocks dear
Gidî li kaniya lo avî sar bin	We would be at cold water springs

The man who is in love with Dewrê tells her his dreams and hopes. The *zozan* is the summer pasture where many people in Kurdistan went in the summers to escape from the summer heat. In the winter they stayed in the village at a lower altitude, whereas the summer pastures are higher in the mountains. The summer pasture and

121 The figure of the 'unhappy lover' is based on the following songs. From my recordings: *Dewrê* by Remezanê Tembelî (Diyarbakir, May 2008, nr.154), *Kejê* and *Têlî Dîlber* by Îbrahîmê Pîrikê (Diyarbakir, May 2007, nr.50 and nr.26), Şêxa Delal by Sidîqê Tilmînî (Diyarbakir, May 2007, nr.98), *Nazê* by Aşık Mihemed (Çaldiran, July 2008, nr.174), *Ehmed û Heqî* and *Kurekî Karwano* by Silhaddînê Q (Van region, July 2008, nr.178 and nr.190), *Heso û Nazê* by dengbêj Seyda (Van, June 2007, nr.118), *Salihê Nafo* by Hesenê Şilbî (Diyarbakir, May 2008, nr.157). From the *Antolojiya Dengbêjan* (2011): *Dewrê* by Hesenê Kufercînî, *Kinê* by Cahîdo, *Lê Dîlberê* by Ehmedê Bêzikê (pp. 107), *Keçika Diyarbekir* by Ekremê Evdila (pp. 112), *Ava gundê me* by Elîcanê Pasûrî (pp. 116), *Gidî Nabî* by Erebê Şûtî (pp. 132), *Li min lo* by Evdileyê Koçer (pp. 140), *Haylo Dilo* by Ezîzê Macir (pp. 162), *Narîn*, Mistefayê Firdeysî (pp. 197), *Lawikê Metînî* by Karapetê Xaco (pp. 223).

122 Dewrê literally means era or epoch, and is not a usual women's name. However, dengbêj Remezanê Tembelî who sang this kilam said that Dewrê should be understood as a woman's name. In this kilam Dewrê is made into a woman's name, thus having the double meaning of time and person. We tried to convey this in the translation.

123 I recorded another version of this song in May 2008 in Diyarbakir, sung by Remezanê Tembelî. As I had no full transcription, I present here a version by Hesenê Kufercînî from *Antolojiya Dengbêjan* (2011: 200). The two versions are quite similar. Translation by Hanifi Barış and myself.

the spring are places that evoke a rich imaginary and are often mentioned in kilams. People have good memories about the joyful warm summer time at the pastures, when fresh food was in abundance, cool water flowed from springs, and when they could forget the hardships of the cold winters. The kilam tells about this time of spring, when one can still see snow on the rocks, but summer is on its way. This is where the man dreams about his lover. Dewrê replies:

Lo lo kuro tu ewqa hespê xwe mebazîne
Wele bi Xwedê sal û zemanê xirab ê
Were malmîrato ti yê pîr bî w'ez ê kal bim
Em ê li ber dîwara rûnên
bi awirdanê cava
Bi xeberdanê dev û lêva
gelo gidî deng bêzar bin
Were dewrê yê dewrê

Oh boy do not let your horse run so fast![124]
By God the years and times are bad
Come on, you doomed, we both would be old
we would sit, leaning on the walls,
staring with eyes that have no sight
When it comes to our mouth and lips
we would have no words and no voice
Oh time passing by! It is the era, the epoch,

She reminds her lover about the reality that does not match his dreams, saying that the times are passing by and are bad. The only possibility to be together might be when they are already old, at a time when such love would not make sense anymore. This way of complaining about the unlucky time one lives in can be found in other kilams as well.[125] Sometimes they refer to specific events such as a disaster or a war, or to a general feeling of unhappiness or being unlucky in one's fate. In this kilam, the passing of time seems to refer to the fact that Dewrê is married, and thus the times are passing by without giving them the opportunity of being united. But the man does not want to give up so easily:

Bê de lo lo zemano axay
Dewrê qurban mi go:
Ez ê quling im rabîme têmê lê ji beriyê
Ez ê hêlîna xwe çêbikim li kûriyê, li şûriyê,
Li zozanê Şêx Elî li ware Medo
Li ber belekê berfê delal gidî
li qarşî mala bavê te zar zere lê we kaniyê
Wele male mi bi xulama bejna zirav
Vê sibê dîsa bîst û çar gulî
avêtiye ber kofiyê ax
Wele mi bi xulama bejna zirav
Xemê dîlbera mi giran e
Gidî xemê demê lê koti yê ax
Ax dewranê Dewrê birîne w'ez dimirim ax ay

Oh, you time
Oh dear Dewrê, I said:
I am a crane standing up
I will build my nest at the abyss, at the wall,
At the *zozan* of Şêx Elî in the Medo area
At the snowy field my dear, woe us.
Across your father's house at the spring
May all I possess be sacrificed for your sake
This morning, again 24 tresses[126]
She hung in front of her headgear
Oh God, me, the admirer of tall posture
The sadness of my sweetheart is heavy
Woe to me, sadness of time, ugly time, oh
Oh the time, oh Dewrê, the wound, I am dying oh

124 Meaning: do not be so dreamy, do not go so fast in dreaming and expecting something nice.
125 Personal communication with Hanifi Barış.
126 This refers to female headgear. One or several large pieces of cloth were wound around the head, and from under this headgear coins, gold pieces, tresses, or other decorations, hang down on the forehead.

He continues his dream by saying that like a crane he wants to build his nest with her at the Şêx Êlî *zozan*, obviously the name of a place close to her father's house. He describes her tall figure and her hair tresses, covering her forehead and appearing from under her headgear. This headgear is only worn by married women and thus betrays the reason of their unfulfilled love. He would sacrifice everything for her, but he also realizes the impossibility to be with his married lover. Dewrê takes this up by complaining about her unhappiness:

Dewrê qurban mi go:
W'ez ê ewrê yêyim lo ne sayî me ax
W'ez rabûme li ber eynê
li cem miskînê heramî mêrî xirab ra
Bi dozde terza li xemilî me ax
Wele gava derî vedike ji mi ra
roj mirin e erd rojîn e ax
Lo lo bavê Gulbihar ez ê çiqas
Bi ser kum û kolosê te da gidî cezalî me ax
Wele bi Xwedê sê jinê te bin
Ya çara ku Xwedê rast bîne
Heta mirinê dîsa w'ez hêwî me ax
Ax dewranê Dewrê birînê w'ez dimirim axay

Oh dear Dewrê, I said:
I am cloudiness, not sunshine
I stand up against the mirror
Next to this dirty, lousy, and evil man
With twelve types of my ornaments
When he opens the door for me
The day means death, the earth means life to me
Oh father of Gulbihar, how much I
am going to be punished for your sake
By God even if you marry three wives
And if God will give permission for a fourth
Then I will still be your fourth wife until death
Oh the time, the epoch, the wound, I am dying oh

Dewrê tells her lover how she feels like clouds, not like sunshine. She sees herself in the mirror with her husband, whom she calls dirty, lousy and evil. She is covered with jewelry, but this does not mean she is happy. Seeing him makes her feel dead, and being 'in the earth', being dead. Being far from him would make her feel alive.

She calls her lover here 'father of Gulbihar', which means that he is married as well, and has children. She says how she will be punished if she were to follow her dreams. But she wishes to be with him, even if as his fourth wife. Being someone's fourth wife reveals much about the woman's position. It often means the woman is from a low class family or has some kind of problem which makes her undesirable as a marriage candidate. But Dewrê would sacrifice her current status and wealth for being in that position, as long as she can be with her lover and be saved from her evil husband. The kilam ends with the following lines:

Dewrê qurban sibê ye mi dî
karwan derdiketin gelo gidî
Lê ji aliyê çem e ax
W'ez biçyama bi ustûxwarî meşiyam
lê diçûm ceme ax
Mi go lo karwano
ti ji ku tê
bare te çi ye? Go:
bare mi derd û kulê dinyayê ne

Oh time, it is dawn, I saw
How the caravan left
From the side of the river, oh
I would go, with my head being lowered
I would go to them, oh
and ask: oh caravan man
from where do you come
And what is your load? He would say:
my load is the sorrows of the world

Serbarê mine xem e ax	My burden is sadness, oh
Mi go lawkê delal a ti lê digerî	I would say: oh dear boy, the one you look for
Serbarê derdan û kulan	the one that brings the burden
w'ez bi xwe me ax	of trouble and sorrow is me, oh
Ti yê were bigre destê min	Come and take my hand
Em ê welatê xwe rizgar bikin herin	We will free ourselves from our country and go
Em ê xwe bavên Girê Kemaliyê	We will go to the Hill of Kemaliyê
derkevin hidûd herin	And we will pass the border
Xilas kin cem birayê xwe nav Eceme ax	and be free among our brothers in Ecem (Iran)
Ax Dewranê Dewrê birînê w'ez dimirim axay	Oh the time, the epoch, the wound, I am dying oh

In summer, caravans crossed tribal areas, packed with goods or animals, traveling to far-away places. The caravan with its heavy load corresponds to how Dewrê feels because of the impossibility of being with her lover. It opens up the limited environment of the village and offers, at least in imagination, an escape route. Dewrê invites the man to elope with her,[127] far from their homeland, maybe following the direction of the caravan. She proposes to pass the border and go to Iran, so that a state border will separate the couple from their respective partners and from social expectations that prevent them from being together. As we will see later, the option of escape across the border is a common topic of the kilams. The caravan symbolizes escape, but it seems to remain an imagination rather than reality. The kilam expresses the sadness of two lovers who see no way out of their situation.

Another example of the figure of the 'unhappy lovers' is the kilam *Kinê*. A woman named Kinê and her lover cannot be together because of the refusal of her parents. Complaints about the marriage system in which parents and relatives decided about the partner of their daughters are very common in people's memories and also in dengbêj kilams.[128] They tell of fathers and other relatives who refuse to give their daughter to the person she loves, and instead marry her to someone else. The lovers dialogue about their unlucky destiny and express their feelings about the situation, and about the dreams they have of being together.

127 Eloping was and is one possible option to resist the refusal of a family to give their daughter. Although it often leads to big problems within families, it is in some ways also a 'conventional' way out of parental hierarchy. Sometimes the relationship between the couple and the parents improves again with time. I heard of several such cases during my field research. However, elopement could and can also have severe consequences, although this seems to happen less and less. Van Bruinessen (1992: 65) describes a case he witnessed in which a couple eloped to Western Turkey. In the absence of the man, revenge was taken on his relatives, two of whom were killed.

128 There could be many reasons for a woman's family to refuse a man, such as difference in wealth, status or religion. Also, "there is a clear preference for marriage with the father's brother's daughter (real or classificatory)" and "there is usually a strong pressure to marry within the lineage" (van Bruinessen 1992: 72, 73).

Lê Kinê[129]	Hey Shorty
Ax lê Kinê li minê	Oh Kinê woe to me
gelîw biraw erqedaşa dibêjin	dear brothers and friends, they say
Sing û memkê delalya dilê min	The chest and breasts of the darling of my heart
Têne ser dikanê Midyad û Batmanê	Came to the markets of Midyad[130] and Batman
Hesenkêfê li firotinê	And Hasankeyf, to be sold
Herçî erqedeşê ku nezewicîne	Those friends who are not married yet
rabin kar û bara xwe bikin	Stand up and get prepared
Em ê herinê li mine lê li ber girtinê	We will go, woe to me, to prevent this

Kinê's lover hears about the plan to give her away to someone else. He presents this act as her breasts being sold at the market. This is a way of criticizing the marriage system by saying it turns women into a commodity that can be bargained for. Kinê's lover imagines preventing this by collecting his friends. The next stanzas are sung from the perspective of Kinê:

Kinê digo; lawik êtîm evdala Xwedê ye	Kinê said: oh orphaned boy, poor me
Kalekî minî baba ye	I have an old father
emrê wî sed û çil salî da	He is 140 years old
ye dayê reben li ber mirinê	And poor me[131], he is just about to die
Dêkî min ê ixtiyar heye	I have an old mother
reqêna tevran û bêran	soon the sound of digger and shovel will be heard
dayê li mine lê li ber veşartinê	woe to me, my mother is about to be buried
Kinê digo; di biray min hene	Kinê said: I have two brothers
Berê xwe dane Qesra Huseynê Qenco	They went to the castle of Huseyn son of Qenco
Li biniya Dêrikê li Seqatiyê	Below Dêrik at Seqatî
Lê lê dayê rebenê lê li ber girtinê	Oh poor mother, they are about to prevent it
Kinê digo: pênc şeş pismamê min	Kinê said: I have five or six (male) cousins
Di gund da hene	in the village
Deyndar deynê xwe ji wan dixwazin	The creditors wanted their debt from them
hatinê wele vayê li ber hînkirinê	They came, by God, and were about to learn about me
Lawik êtîm û evdala Xwedê di gund da	Orphaned boy, poor you, in the village
Ye heft sal e tevî şêx û melew	Since seven years all sheikhs and mullahs[132]
seyda xwe davên deryê	and teachers come to the door of
Mala bavê min rebenê mi nadinê	My father's house, poor me, he does not give me
Wele w'ez ê bêm	By God, I will come
mala lawkê mi li cehnemê ye	To the house of my boy even in hell
Boy Xwedê hûn ê min ê	For God's sake, you grab me
bi ser û piya da bavêjinê	from my head and feet, throw me there [in hell]
bê wey lê Kinê	and say "woe to you Kinê"
Ax weylê Kinê li minê li mine	Oh Kinê, woe to me, woe to me
Kinê digo: dayê ji bona xatirê Xwedê	Kinê said: oh mother, for God's sake
Çima mi nadinê	Why do you not you give me [to him]?

129 Dengbêj Cahîdo in *Antolojiya Dengbêjan* (2011: 98). Translation by Hanifi Barış and myself.

130 Midyad, Batman and Hasankeyf are three towns in the same region.

131 Literally: poor mother. When people complain about things happening to them they often say this in the sense of how bad it would be if the mother knew what happens to her child.

132 Sheikhs had/have an important political role, mediating in conflicts or in personal disputes (van Bruinessen 1992: 68).

Wele Kinê digo: lawiko rebeno	By God, Kinê said: oh poor boy
Delaliyê dilê mino li dinyayê	Darling of my heart in this world
Mi go: mi dilketê feyde nekir	I said: I fall in love but for no use

She speaks of her family situation: her parents are old. Her brothers would like to prevent her from marrying someone she does not love, but they might not have the power to do so. From the kilam we understand that the man who asked for her hand is Huseyn the son of Qenco, a rich man who lives in a castle. Refusing a rich man's wish to marry could bring trouble on a family. Another problem is the situation of the woman's cousins who need money to pay off their debts. Even if the brothers would like their sister to marry the man she loves, they may still feel forced to give her to a rich man to receive a high brideprice and fulfill their cousin's needs. Kinê's lover is an orphan, someone obviously without power and influence, and without wealth and status, making him an unattractive candidate for her relatives. Because he is poor and has no one to support him, he asked 'sheikhs and mullahs' to represent him vis-à-vis the woman's family. Sheikhs and mullahs could support people from poor backgrounds or without relatives to get married, and thus serve as a replacement of relatives who would usually do this. They went to her house 'since seven years' to ask for her hand, but in vain. Still Kinê would have preferred to be with him, even though his situation is bad. That is why she says that she would even follow him in hell. She would prefer to be thrown into hell, than marry someone else. She reproaches her mother who refused to give her to him. But she is powerless to change the decisions of her relatives.

What follows is the man's perspective speaking about how their desire is mocked by their co-villagers. He decides that he needs to give up on her:

Hingî gundiyan û cînara	Then, villagers and neighbors
henekê xwe bi min û te kir	Were laughing about you and me
W'ez rabûme ser xwe	I stood up by myself
Çûme Cizîrê cem mala şêx Mheme Qedrî	And went to Cizîrê to the house of Sheikh Mheme Qedrî
Dayê rebenê mi tobe kir	Poor mother I gave my vows
Min ê destekî tizbiyê wayê sed û yeka	I took a strand with 101 prayer beads in my hand
Tevî gopalekî sofiya şî	And I found for myself
Xwe ra peyde kir	a stick for a religious man
Di salî mi li wê qediya sala sisiya	I stayed there for two years, in the third year
Mi çi qa bêriya wî kambaxê gundê	I realized I missed the ruin too much, the village,
Mala lê bavê xwe kir	the place of the house of my father

In order to escape his unhappiness and the mockery of the villagers, he went into the service of a sheikh and gave his vows to follow him. This was a common way out for poor or orphaned men who needed financial support. But after some years he cannot stand it anymore and returns to his village for a visit. There he sees Kinê:

Ez ê çûme ser devê kaniyê binya mala mi	I went to the spring down our house
Desmêj girt û karê cemaetê xwe kir	I did my ablutions and prepared for the group prayers
Kina mine delal bi meşekî kubar hat	I saw my beautiful Kinê approached with her polite walk
Û ber mi da derbas bû dayê rebenê	And passed by me, oh poor mother
Mi silava li ser milê raste neda	I did not even greet over my right shoulder[133]
Mi xwe ji bîr kir yadê rebenê, silav nekir	I forgot, poor mother, to finish my prayer

He describes the pain he went through when he saw Kinê passing by. And instead of finishing his prayer, he follows her and sleeps with her, as appears from the following stanza which is sung from Kinê's perspective.

Herçî derdê mehbetê dila	Those who have experienced
Li sere wan da	The hardship of falling in love
Hatine gazin û loma mekin	Do not complain about me and do not criticize me
Mi taxima sing û bera	I opened my chest and presented my breasts
Ji delaliyê dilê xwe ra vekir	For the darling of my heart
Yadê wele	Oh by God, mother, I have increased the number
Mi sofi mirîdê dinyayê zêde kir	Of disciples and religious people in the world
Ay weylê Kinê, li minê li mine	Oh Kinê, woe to me woe to me

She says that people who went through the same experience would not criticize her for being together with her lover. She became pregnant and in that way 'increased the number of disciples and religious people in the world'. The kilam ends with Kinê expressing her sadness:

Bê Kinê digo:	Kinê said:
Dayê ji bona xatirê Xwedê be	Mother for the sake of God
De dayê çima mi nadinê?	Mother why do you not you give me [to him]?
Kinê digo:	Kinê said:
Lawiko rebeno delaliyê dilê mino	Oh poor boy, darling of my heart
Li dinyayê w'ez î kin im	I am short in the world
Ji wayê zef dirêj im	But I am quite tall in having sorrows
Weka tayê gul û rihan û nefelê	Like the branch of a rose, of basil, of clover
Li devê mêrg û kaniya	Grows at the side of streams and springs
pelê xwe davêjim	I throw my leaves
Lawiko rebeno delaliyê dilê mino	Oh poor boy, oh darling of my heart
Mi ji te ra nego:	Didn't I say to you:
Were mala bave mi keçikê,	Come to the house of my father
Li kêleka mi rune	Sit at my side
Ez ê derdê muhbetê dila	So that I can tell the sorrows of the love of my heart
Ji delaliyê dilê xwe ra bêjim	To the darling of my heart
Îsal bû çendik	How much time and how many years
Û çend salê mi qediya	Did go by until this year?
Sedem xatirê bejna lawikê xwe rebenê	For the sake of the nice looks of my beloved boy
Wele di mala bavê da w'ez ax dikim	By God, I have been crying in the house of my father
Ji kezebê xûna reş dirêjim	I have been dripping black blood from my lungs
Ay gidî li minê lê	Oh, woe to me

133 When people pray they turn their head over their right and left shoulder at the end of the prayer. Here he talks about that greeting, meaning that he did not even finish his prayer properly.

The house of her father is the place where Dewrê is crying bloody tears, and where she bitterly asks her mother why she did not give her away to the man she loved. The village is the place where people gossiped about the two lovers and from which the man escaped. These kilams are thus not mere expressions of sorrow, but they are complaints about injustice done to the protagonists by their relatives or neighbors. Not an outside force, but the immediate environment was the cause of their unhappiness, which makes it all the more painful.

In the kilam *Kejê*[134] this point is made in a more outspoken way. Kejê is married against her will and is in love with someone else. She tells her lover about her terrible husband and the cruel behavior of her mother-in-law. She says she has asked her father to cancel her marriage. She is now waiting for a meeting to happen, in which important people will gather to decide about this issue, but she is afraid they will not accept. She does not get much support from her lover, who is afraid of the consequences and says it will not benefit anyone to cancel the marriage. Kejê complains how unfair and unlucky she and people like her are. She says she will go to the graves of the saints to realize her hopes, and to Ankara to tell the president of the republic about her unlucky fate. She says: "those who married voluntarily are happy people, but those who married against their will are like shepherds, unhappy and suffering until the evening."[135] Instead of seeing her situation as a personal issue, Kejê puts the societal structure in discussion; it is not only about her, it is about all people who are married against their will. She directs her complaints to the highest authorities she can turn to: to the saints and to the president of the Republic. The fact that she wishes to express her complaint in Ankara is an interesting detail. Whereas in most kilams the republic and its president are presented as foreign entities or enemies, they are here turned to for help. This may be explained as underlining the grudges she feels against the injustice taking place in her own society. The kilam also voices criticism against her cowardly lover who does not dare to take action that could possibly bring them together.

In the famous kilam *Heso and Nazê*[136] a poor lad and a well-to-do girl are in love with each other and meet in secret. One day Heso says to Nazê that they either need to give up on this love, or elope together. But Nazê wants him to at least first

134 I recorded this song in the Dicle Firat Cultural Center in Diyarbakir in May 2007. The singer is dengbêj Îbrahîmê Pîrikê. Listened to and summarized in Kurdish by Zeki Aydın and Hanifi Barış.

135 A similar complaint is expressed in the song *Law Xalo* by Mihemedê Tepê in *Antolojiya Dengbêjan*, 2011: 274. A woman who married against her will and wanted to be with her cousin says: "*wele derdê zewaca bêdil nahê kişandinê rojê carek w'ez dimirim*- one cannot bear to be married against one's will, one day it will become my death".

136 I recorded this story in Van in June 2007, dengbêj Seyda. He told it as a story and did not sing the kilam during the recording. A kilam version can be found in Kevirbirî 2001: 125.

ask her father for her hand, because of the shame elopement would bring to her family. She promises to elope with him in case her father does not accept him. Her father is a clever man who understands that refusing Heso will mean he loses his daughter. He therefore asks for a sacrifice he thinks Heso will not be able to make, namely to be his shepherd for seven years. But Heso accepts this condition and starts working for him. Many things happen before finally, after seven years, the couple marries. However, also this love ends in disaster. Soon after the wedding, Heso falls heavily ill. Already before he dies Nazê's relatives make arrangements about her future by trying to arrange a marriage with another man. But Nazê refuses, takes care of Heso, and says she prefers to die with him, rather than live without him. When Heso dies, Nazê prays that God may take her soul, and follows him to the grave. The status difference between Heso and Nazê, and the powerlessness to fight against the will of Nazê's relatives, are the main themes of the kilam. However much they try to overcome these problems, in the end the family wins. Still, Nazê continues resisting the power of her relatives and chooses to die with Heso, over following the life her brothers arranged for her. Both lovers are presented as heroes who sacrificed everything they had in order to be together.

The story *Salihê Nafo*[137] has a more fantastic character. This time, the lover is not a poor but a rich man. Salih is a landlord who is so critical that no woman is good enough for him. One day he hears that the daughter of the mîr of Ferhanbeg, Kejê, is just like him: she also is not satisfied with any man who proposes to her. This makes Salih curious, so he decides to visit her in disguise to see what type of person she is. He goes to the house of the mîr, asks for a job, and is accepted to make coffee, the only job he knows. He starts working but still does not meet Kejê, until one day he cannot stand it anymore. He meets her in the room where she is saying her prayers, and silently they look at each other. But although they are in love, Salih does not discuss the issue with Kejê's father. Three years pass by with Salih working for Kejê's father, when the son of the mîr of Palo asks for Kejê's hand and marries her. Only after their wedding does Salih speak with Kejê's father, when it is too late.

He leaves from there, but after one year he travels to the city of Palo by caravan and asks for the house of the son of the mîr. He ends up working as a servant for Kejê's husband as well, but is not able to see Kejê. After one year he dares again to visit Kejê in her room, when she is saying her prayers. They sing songs to each other and express their love. Kejê reproaches her lover for not putting his love into action and asking for her hand. She looks down upon her husband who seems to be

137 I recorded this story in May 2008 in Diyarbakır, nr.157. Told by Hesenê Şilbê. He told it as a story and did not sing the kilam during the recording.

a terrible man. The answer of Salih does not show much courage; he defends himself by saying he could not find words to tell her how much he loved her. Kejê keeps asking him why he did not do better, and why he cannot still save her from the hands of her husband. They dream of escaping together, far away from the son of the mîr of Palo, but it is unclear if they are successful.

An important aspect of this kilam is the dependence of women on men. Kejê is unable to decide about her love and life. She is dependent either on her father, or on her lover or husband. Her father decided about her marriage partner. Her husband is treating her badly and does not give her the life she wishes; apart from calling him a dog, a grave insult, she also says she has not even been able to see the city of Palo where she lives. Also her lover is not presented very favorably. He does not take the initiative to speak with her father or to save her from her husband. He keeps wishing and thinking that he will elope with her, but this never gets beyond the stage of dreaming. He is presented as a coward who does not show any courage to save their love.

In the *kilamên evîn*, love songs, dengbêjs thus discuss a range of issues that people experience as hindering them from being together with those they really love. In *Dewrê*, the woman is living an unhappy marriage and wishes to escape with her lover. She complains about her husband who treats her badly and whom she does not respect. Although her lover is also married, he does not complain about his wife(s), but only wishes he could have been with Dewrê. It seems they have fallen in love after they were both married. In *Kinê*, the lovers are blocked from being together because of the poverty and powerlessness of the man. They are both affected by this destiny, but the man has somewhat more options than the woman. He can leave the village to serve a sheikh, whereas she has no choice than that of remaining where she is and suffering from having to live with people who make her unhappy. In *Kejê*, she criticizes social structures, but also the cowardice of her lover. Kejê can only criticize and complain, but she does not have power in her hands to change the situation. Her lover could have done something, and she wishes him to fight for a better future, but he is afraid and backs off. In *Heso û Nazê*, the two lovers manage to overcome the unwillingness of Nazê's relatives. First Heso works for seven years and they can marry. After he falls ill, Nazê is the one who takes action and, against the will of her relatives, takes care of him. However, in the end she is only able to resist their interference in her life by dying with Heso instead of being forced into an unwanted marriage. In *Salih û Nafê*, Nafê feels dependent on Salih's passivity and her cruel husband. She expects Salih to help her out, she herself does not seem to have many options. In some of these and other kilams the option of elopement is

the only way people see to escape from the pressure of their relatives. However, also then the woman is dependent on the action of her lover.

The kilams tell of people who have been married against their will, forced by relatives who had their own agenda, about the deliberately evil or cowardly acts of men, and the dependency of women on men. Although men also criticize women in kilams, the complaints about men by women are much more frequent. Men complain when their love is not requited;[138] when a woman chooses someone else over them; or when their lovers betray them with someone else.[139] But more often women are the ones who complain: about their fathers, mothers and other relatives who do not allow them to marry the man of their choice; about their fathers who try to make money on them; and about their lovers who do not have the courage to elope or escape with them or change the situation otherwise. In the kilams, women are often presented as feeling dependent on the men in their immediate environment. The kilams do not voice complaints about this dependency in and of itself, but about the choices partners and relatives make that have negative effects on women's lives.

Since the material I have collected largely consists of a male repertoire, and since all kilams are the mediated works of the dengbêjs, the critical attitude attributed to women in these kilams cannot be seen uncritically as women's voices or viewpoints. Still we can assume that the kilams served as an outlet to criticize societal structures and to complain about the unhappy fate of many people who were married against their will. Men often also suffered from these arrangements, when they could not change the decisions of the relatives of the women they loved. Below we will see that in some kilams women are presented as having more power to manage their lives, and to influence (powerless) men.

The woman in mourning

In battle and rebel songs women are often presented as the main voices of the kilams. In most cases battle and rebel songs are laments, lamenting the death of one or several heroes who died on the battle field. The figure of the 'woman in

138 For example *Xezal* by Eliyê Qerejdaxî in *Antolojiya Dengbêjan* 2011: 121.

139 For example *Hasan û Asê* by Remezanê Tembelî (recorded in Diyarbakir, May 2007, nr.22) and *Eyşe û Eloş* by Fadilê Kufragî in *Antolojiya Dengbêjan* 2011: 165.

mourning'[140] who voices the kilam is the wife, lover, daughter, mother or sister of the hero and mourns his death, often alone, sometimes together with other women who were closely related to the deceased. In retrospect they describe the battle and the role of the heroes and the enemy combatants. This is often not done in much detail (see also Allison 2001); the emphasis lies on lamenting the hero and voicing his role in the fight. The kilams often start with the woman in mourning expressing her sorrow, then return to consider the events that led to the untimely death of the deceased and speak then of how the deceased was killed, and finally return to the beginning in a repetition of the experienced sorrow. Women are presented as if standing at the side of the battle field, encouraging their heroes to be brave and to continue fighting, or urging them to quit fighting and escape. According to the dengbêjs, these kilams were originally sung as lamentations immediately following the death of the deceased, as is common in Kurdish (and surrounding) cultures.[141] Subsequently, they were adopted by dengbêjs who heard of these laments, and who turned them into a kilam.[142] The lamenting woman, the act of lamentation, and the laments itself have a low status, and lamentations are usually not memorized by other people than those who sing them. But the kilams which dengbêjs produced from such laments are regarded as important and in need of preservation because of the details they contain about the combatants, the battle, and the places where the battle took place. As we will see in chapter 2, these kilams are often controversial today due to their 'tribal' character.

Since many kilams that follow in this and the following chapter are battle and rebel songs in which the figure of the woman in mourning recurs frequently, I do not present the lyrics in full in this section. In the story *Emê son of Gozê,* Emê and his friends who are all young men of the Elîkan tribe, attack Ottoman caravans and post transports. In the attack described, the kilam tells of how Emê dies in a heavy battle between bandits and soldiers. Gozê, Emê's mother, is portrayed as encouraging him during the battle:

140 The figure of the 'mourning woman' is based on the following songs. From my own recordings: *Bavê Salih, Xwîna Şêx Ahmedê, Bavê Heyder Begê, Qudret,* (see chapter 3, recorded in Diyarbakir in 2007, nr.103, 104, 107, 108, I do not present the names of the dengbêjs due to the sensitive content of the kilams), *Silêmanê Mistê* by Ûsivê Farê (Diyarbakır June 2007, nr.109), *Haso Axa* by Ehmedê Aqutê (Istanbul, April 2007, nr.5), *Elî Bavê Şêxmûs* and *Kuştina Mihemedo bavê Meys* by Îbrahîmê Pîrikê (Diyarbakir May 2007, nr.27 and nr.45). From Kevirbirî (2001, pp.23, 57 and 111): *Emê Gozê, Filîtê Quto, Şerê Hethetkê* by Salihê Qûbînî. From Yüksel (2011: 134): Îskano by Reso.

141 For example Aslan 2010, a collection of laments among Alevi Kurds in Turkey, Vahman & Asatrian 1995 on laments in Iran, Allison 2001 on laments among Yezidi Kurds in Iraq.

142 Several dengbêjs told me that they sometimes got requests of relatives of a deceased to make a lament for them. They said that in such cases they visit the family and talk with them, after which they make a song based on what they told. It may also happen that a dengbêj hears the lament straight from a woman during the mourning days, but it seems a visit to the relatives some time later is usual.

Gozê bang li kurê xwe dike:[143]	Gozê shouts to her son:
De lêxe Emê Gozê de lêxe	shoot Emê Gozê,
Enîgiçiyo pozberano de lêxe	shoot my lion, my ram!
Le bavê min o şer girane îro	By my father, today the battle is heavy
Hûnê bi hev re lêxin	You should shoot all together
Le navê nam û namûsê	Become famous in the world,
lawo bi dine xin	make your name heard my son
Navê revê pîs e giran e	Escaping makes a name dirty and heavy
Li pey malbata mala bavê min û xwe nêxin	Let the house of my father not be embarrassed
Dibê: de lêxe Emê Gozê de lêxe	She says: shoot Emê Gozê, shoot!

The figure of the woman in mourning is commonly not described in any detail other than giving her first name and her relationship to the deceased. She is the one who praises the hero, mourns him, criticizes him, and expresses her feelings of anger, despair, love, longing and loneliness in song. She is described as the one left behind in sorrow and agony, but usually the kilams give no information about her personality, her life history and character. With her existence, her agony following the hero's death, and with the lament she sings, she supports the fame of the deceased man, rather than being herself a character in the song.

In many kilams women are thus literally presented as *voices* ('Gozê says' etc.), voicing the deeds, adventures, and deaths of men to whom they were closely related. They do however also play a more active role in these kilams. As we will also see below, women can function as voices of criticism, judging the events surrounding the death of a hero. In the first and last stanzas, the woman in mourning often summarizes her position regarding the events: calling for help, for revenge, praising or criticizing the hero, or both. When she relates the time of the fighting, she shows that she was either discouraging the fighter from getting involved, or encouraging him to be brave and to continue fighting. In *Filîtê Quto* (see below), a mother says to her son in the first stanza: "didn't I say to you: don't go after that caravan trader Mamê Emê." She had warned him to avoid a conflict with him, but despite her warning he challenged and died in the ensuing battle. In *Emê Gozê*, the protagonist's mother incites and encourages him to continue fighting and not give up, even if this would lead to his death. In Îskano (Yüksel 2011: 134) two women search for the lost body of their brother who was killed in a battle. They do not condemn the battle in itself, because 'since the past men have killed other men'. But they condemn how their brother's corpse was hidden after the battle so that they could not give him a decent burial.

Although speculative, one could suggest that the dengbêj' voice is present in the criticism of the leader as voiced through the woman in mourning. The dengbêjs

143 Taken from Salih Kevirbirî's book *Filîtê Quto* (2001: 23). Translation: Hanifi Barış and myself.

could displace their voice by presenting the criticism as belonging to women, and moreover to relatives who were close to the leader and could therefore not be blamed for offering some critical commentary on the course of events. Below I elaborate more on the position of local leaders. As with the kilams in this section, they are praised and appreciated, but not without criticism. In the kilams common people comment on their actions and express the view that they could have done better.

1.3 Elite and commoners

In love songs another common theme is the difference in power between elite and commoner, between rich and poor. We already saw some examples of this theme in the previous section (*Salê of Nafê* and *Heso and Nazê*). Usually kilams in which this theme is prevalent are sung from the perspective of commoners who feel powerless towards the elite. Often the elite are women, and the poor are men. I discuss this theme through the figures of the 'elite woman' and the 'common man'.[144] This section demonstrates that in the kilams the song-makers emphasize the perspective of commoners, and seem to feel less connected to the life world of the elite.

In kilams about rich women, the women are daughters, wives or mothers of wealthy begs and aghas. They are described as renowned for their beauty. Although their beauty and wealth are sought-after by men, these qualities are at the same time portrayed as potentially dangerous for the men involved. One such kilam is *Qîza tuccar axa*, about Seyran, the daughter of a trader, and Emer, a less well-off caravan trader. The kilam, sung in dialogue between Seyran and Emer, starts with Emer coming home from a journey with his caravan:

Qîza tuccar axa	The trader's daughter
Emerkê digo qîza tuccar axa[145]	Emerko said oh trader's daughter
wez ê çûme rêka Halebê bişewite dar û bîne	I went the burned road of Aleppo full of willows
Keçê malxerabê	Girl from a destroyed house
min rêka Halebê nîvî kiriye	I was halfway the road to Aleppo
Wez ê vergiriya	When I returned [home]
me nexweşim halê min tunîne	because I was sick and in a bad situation

144 The figure of the 'rich woman' is based on the following songs. From my own recordings: *Hasan û Nazê* by Seyda (Van 2007, nr.118), *Zembîlfiroş* by Ehmedê Aqutê (Istanbul, June 2007, nr.13), *Qîza tuccar axa* by Seyîdxanê Boyaxçî (Diyarbakir, May 2007, nr.102), *Gavir Mistê* by Sidîqê Tilmînî (Diyarbakir, May 2008, nr.158). In *Antolojiya Dengbêjan* (2011): *Dibê Miho* by Behiye (pp. 91). In Kevirbirî (2004): *Metran Îsa* by Salihê Qûbînî (pp. 15-19).

145 I recorded this kilam in the Dengbêj House in Diyarbakır in June 2007, nr.102. Sung by dengbêj Seydxanê Boyaxçî. Transcription and translation by Hanifi Barış and myself.

Tu rabe cîhê Emokê xwe raxe	Stand up and prepare the bed for Emo
li ewliya jorîn e	on the upper patio
Welle cotê desmala bigire	By god, take a pair of handkerchiefs
li ser çavên Emokê xwe bike ba û baweşîn e	and wave them on Emo's face to cool him down
Hoy hoy li min Seyranî	Poor me, Seyran

The kilam evokes the imagery of the caravan trader who is often travelling to make a living. His life is full of insecurities: the long roads are dangerous, one can fall ill or the caravan can be attacked by robbers, and he would miss out on the fortunes and misfortunes of his family at home. The second protagonist is the daughter of a trader, who enjoys some power and influence because of her wealthy father. She remains at home, and while her husband is traveling she looks for other adventures:

Qîza tuccar axa mal mîratê	Oh daughter of the trader from a cursed house
wez ê rêka Halebê ketime îro li serê çiyê	today I took the road to Aleppo over the mountains
Welle min ê kerwanê xwe girt	I had built up my own caravan
û berê xwe da rêka Halebê	I headed to the Aleppo road
ji xwe re çûme karwaniyê	I became a caravan man
Keçê pêhesandina pêhesiya me	But oh girl I discovered
Te lê bi du min re li xwe kiriye	that you had dressed yourself
qatekî çekê bûkiyê	in your wedding dress
Welle te lê li dosto kiriye	And you had dressed your lover
qatekî çekê min î zavatiyê	in my wedding suit
Keçê malxerabê welle ez ne nexweşim	Oh girl from a destroyed house, I am not ill
Ez ê ji xwe re hatime casusiyê	but I came back to spy on you
Hoy hoy li min Seyranî	Poor me, Seyran

Emer heard the bad news of Seyran's possible unfaithfulness on the road, and decided to leave the caravan and return to see if it is true, pretending that he is ill. When he discloses his suspicions and shows that he is not ill, Seyran tries to soothe him and to distract his attention from her affair to the wealth she can offer him through her father:

Qîza tuccar axa digo	The daughter of the trader said
lo lo Emerko ez bi qurban	oh Emo may I be your sacrifice
Li me hilatî histêrka sibê	The morning star is rising over us
lo histêrka zêr e	the yellow morning star
Şewq û şemalê xwe daye	It spreads its shiny glow over
qesr û qonaxê bavê min Kiçûk Iskender	the palaces and mansions of my father, Kiçûk İskender
Kuro mal mîrato	Oh boy from a cursed house
malê bavê min pir e	my father has many possessions
Bibe çarşiya Halebê	Take them to the market of Aleppo
ji min û xwe re bike zêr û pere	and turn them into gold for you and for me
Hoy hoy li min Seyranî	Poor me, Seyran

The couple is standing in their own house, obviously in front of a window or on the roof, from where they can see Iskender's palace. Emer is not a rich man himself; he is a caravan trader who needs to work hard to gain an income. Seyran promises money

and goods which he can sell at the market in Aleppo. It seems he has benefited before from her position, and maybe it was one of the attractions of marrying her. But this time, Emer refuses to be distracted from his emotions about her affair and tells her he will fight with her and her lover:

Keçê mal xerabê
wez ê ji bav û kalê xwe de rabûme
helalxur im
Welle malê bavê te nabim
çarşiya Halebê
nakim zêr û pere
Welle wez ê îşev li ser serê te û dosto
bikim herb û du sefer e
Hoy hoy li min Seyranî

Oh girl from a destroyed house
I am a descendant of my fathers and forefathers
we are honest people
I will not bring your father's possessions
to the market of Aleppo
Nor will I turn them into gold and money
This evening I will storm
upon you and your lover
Poor me, Seyran

As a reply, Seyran, realizing that she has lost, insults him gravely by calling him one of her father's dogs, which may also refer to a financial dependence on his father-in-law because 'his mouth is still dirty with yoghurt'. She adds that all he heard about her is right:

Seyrê digo lo lo Emerko
rêka Halebê rêyeke rast e
Kuro malxerabo
haşayî cemaetê tu yê ji kulînê derketiye
Mîna kelpê bavê min î dev bi mast e
Malmîrato
welle gotina ji êvara Xwedê
de tu li ser min dikî kast e kast e
Gotinê tu dibêjî lawo
welle mineta min ji te tune temam rast e
Hoy hoy li min Seyranî

Seyrê said oh Emerko
the road to Aleppo is a smooth road
Boy from a destroyed house
you came from your shed, like the mouth
of my father's dog, still dirty with yoghurt
You from a cursed house
Since the evening
you have been barking words to me
The things you were saying boy
all of them were right, and I am not afraid of you
Poor me, Seyran

The story ends with Emer killing her and her lover:

Emo lez dike dilezîne rextê elemanê
Çepo rasto li newqa xwe dişidîne
Qama zîvî di ber saralixa de diçikîne
Xwe berdaye hewliya du jêrîn e
Welle serê dosto xwedê zane
tevî qîza tuccar axa difirîne
Berê xwe da çarşiya Halebê
ji xwe re dilezîne
Hoy hoy li min Seyranî

Emo, in a rush, tied the belt with his German rifle
Quickly from right to left around his waist
He placed the silver knife in the space between his belt
He made his way to the lower patio
And God knows, he indeed flung the heads
of the lover and the daughter of the trader around
And in a rush he headed for
the market of Aleppo
Poor me, Seyran

Both figures, the common man and the elite woman, appear more often in dengbêj kilams. In this kilam, they are portrayed against the background of two landscapes: the steep mountain road to Aleppo; and the palace of Seyran's rich

father. The road to Aleppo and the caravan speak of far-away places that open up the imagination for the unknown. The rich palace is the home, at least for Seyran, the familiar place where her father, Little Iskender, apparently a well-known rich man, supports her. The figure of the elite woman was a woman far beyond the reach of most men, and in a position most women would never obtain. She did not have to work hard like other women; she could afford to have nice clothes and jewelry; she had time for pleasure; and, with the support of her father, she had power and influence. The elite father stands invariably in the background, symbolized in this kilam by his palace that can be seen from the couple's house. In contrast, the caravan trader is a figure standing close to the commoner. In autumn, after the harvest, villages built up a caravan to trade some of their harvested goods for other necessities in the city. It seems most village men had the chance to join these caravans. The caravan trader is thus not an exceptional figure, but a common villager.

The well-known story *Zembîlfiroş*[146] (lit. the basket seller), also has an elite woman as protagonist. The wife of a mîr in Farqîn (Silvan) falls in love with a basket seller who comes to her house to sell his goods. She tries to persuade him time after time to sleep with her, but the basket seller refuses. He is married and lives in a house not far from the palace. The story has a religious connotation; the mîr's wife sees in the basket seller a divine light she cannot find in her own husband. Her love for him is thus explained as something divine and not objectionable. Eventually, when she realizes she cannot persuade him, she digs a tunnel all the way from the palace to his house. When he is not at home she hides in his bed and waits for him to come. Thinking she is his wife, the basket seller lays down with her. As soon as he realizes who she is he jumps up from his bed and runs away. This makes him a good man who is not able to touch another woman out of fear for God. The story ends with the naked basket seller running, and the king's wife running after him. He prays to God to die, as he would rather die than live with this embarrassment. His wish is fulfilled, and the mîr's wife, crazy of love and not able to live without him, kills herself.

In both kilams elite women are portrayed as potentially dangerous for their lovers. Power is here related to money, and to rich fathers or husbands who support the women in their environment. In contrast, the comman man is not well-off and in a way dependent on the elite woman who provides him with some wealth: the caravan trader benefits from his father-in-law's money; and the mîr's

146 Recorded in Istanbul in 2007, nr.13, told and sung by Ahmedê Aqutê. A derwiş I interviewed said the song is a *beyt* and not a *kilam*, meaning the song would be sung by derwiş rather than by dengbêjs. A *beyt* has a different singing- and poetic style. However, I also heard the song performed by dengbêjs in kilam-style, like this one. The repertoires of various performers are not always clearly separated, and they may have borrowed topics or song texts from each other.

wife buys baskets from the basket seller. Typical for the figure of the elite woman is that she brings disaster upon the man she loves or who loves her. In both stories, the relationship of a commoner with an elite woman is unexpected and ends in disaster. Both kilams have a more fantastic character than many other kilams (for example love songs such as those discussed above have relatively few fantastic elements and are often quite realistic). The element of fantasy underlines that they present the elite as out of reach for commoners. The dengbêjs were themselves common people who served their relatively well-off and powerful lords. Although they observed their lords' lives from nearby, they remained part of the commoners and in these kilams seem to remind themselves and their audiences about their destiny. The common man is presented as less able to influence the cause of events. He is also presented as the norm, whereas the elite woman is the deviant, who seems attractive due to her wealth and status, but eventually brings unhappiness and disaster to the common man. The stories entail a warning not to live beyond one's means and not to be blinded by the wealth and beauty of the rich.

1.4 Armenians

As outlined in the introduction, historically the Kurdish region was a mix of peoples from various ethnic and religious backgrounds. The most salient ethnicities were Kurds, Turks, Armenians, Arabs and Assyrians, and religions Christianity, Sunni Islam, Alevism, and Yezidism, all with their own varieties. In the kilams of my selection Sunni Kurds are the norm, whereas Christian Armenians appear as the most common other. I discuss this topic through the figure of the 'Armenian woman'[147] who figures regularly in the kilams. She is often referred to as the daughter of an Armenian minister, and loved by, or in love with, a Muslim. The most famous example is the story *Metran Îsa* (Bishop Îsa), in which Meryem is one of the main protagonists. Other well-known kilams with the same figure are *Bavê Fexriya* and *Evdal û Gulê* (both kilams are discussed in later sections).

147 The figure of the 'Armenian woman' is based on the following songs. From my own recordings: *Haji Musa* and *Bavê Faxriya* by Ehmedê Aqutê (Istanbul, April 2007, nr.7, nr.6). From the cassette *Edûlê* sung by Karapetê Xaco: *Xumxumê*. From Kevirbirî 2001 (pp.17, 57, 107): *Metran Îsa, Filîtê Quto* and *Bavê Faxriya* by Salihê Qûbînî. From Aras 1996, pp.42 and 61: *Evdal û Gulê* and *Lê axçık canê*. An example of a song about an Armenian man is from *Antolojiya dengbêjan* 2007: 173 *Medîna mele* by Mihemedê Dingilhewayî. In this song, a Muslim woman wants to marry a Christian man but her father does not allow this. In the end they get permission when the man converts to Islam.

Prior to 1915,[148] Van was inhabited by a majority of Armenians,[149] and until today the Armenian past of Van is prominently present through the Axtamar Church[150] on a small island in the Van lake. Meryem is the daughter of a wealthy church minister living in the city Van, and was promised to become the wife of Sarkis. The latter does not play any role in the story, but his Armenian name underlines the conflict present in the story. Meryem's beauty was famous in the region, and one day the local governor of Van, the *Vali*, caught sight of her and fell in love. He immediately had a message sent to her parents, warning anyone interested to stay out of her way. However, as time passed by the governor did not undertake any action to arrange the wedding. Out of fear Sarkis' family also gave up on arranging the wedding for their son. Finally, when Meryem got tired of the deadlock, she sent a message to the governor, saying: 'You are not taking me as your wife, nor giving me the chance to be with someone else. Either give up on blocking my destiny, or send someone to bring me to you'.

The governor, not trusting anyone to come close to Meryem, finally decides to send his most reliable servant, the commander Elî, to bring her to his palace. As soon as Meryem sees Elî she falls deeply in love with him. Elî however is poorly dressed and has an unkempt look. Giving the pretext that she is not able to travel to the governor with such a bad looking person, she gives him money to go to the hair dresser and the bath house, and to buy a new outfit. Upon his return, when she sees how good he looks, Meryem falls even more in love with him. She asks him to 'take her for himself' and to elope with her. Elî is shocked by the proposal, and by fear of the governor's punishment. Meryem brings him in an impossible position by threatening she will tell the governor that Elî injured her honor if he will still bring her there. When Elî gives in, Meryem has her plan ready: she wants them to seek refuge in the Axtamar church, situated on a small island in the Van lake.

148 See for more references and information on the 1915 Armenian genocide chapter 3 and 5.

149 Before the 1915 genocide the cities in Kurdistan were dominated by Christians (Armenians, Jacobites, or Assyrians) who were specialized in handicrafts and trade.

150 The Armenian Cathedral of the Holy Cross was built from 915-921 under the reign of King Gagik Ardsruni. It is famous for its carvings with biblical scenes in the external walls. After the 1915 genocide the church was exposed to vandalism, and almost destroyed in 1951 by decision of the government. This was obstructed by the Kurdish author Yaşar Kemal. In 2005 and 2006 the church underwent thorough renovation. The church is named differently by Turks, Armenians and Kurds. I use here the Kurdish name to underline the Kurdish perspective speaking from the kilam.

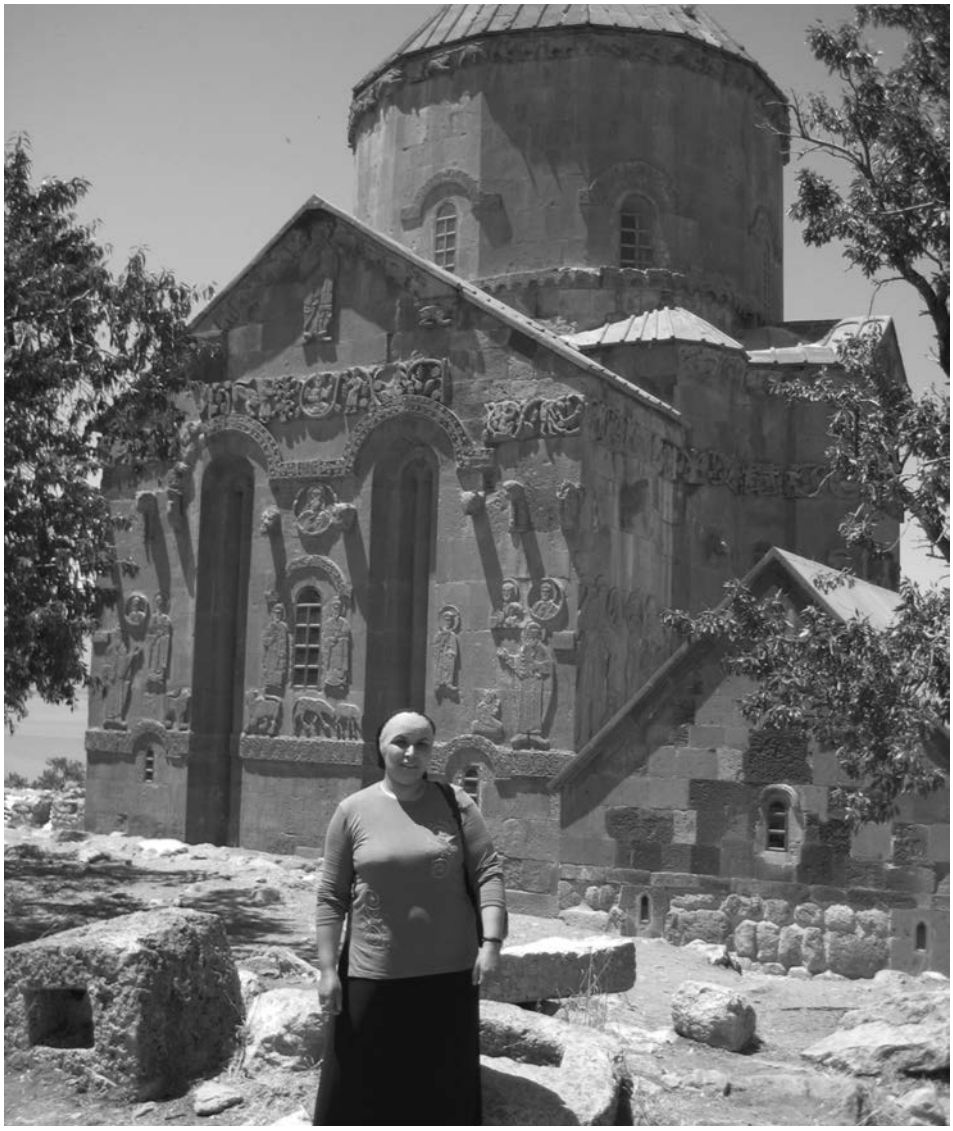


Figure 4. Dengbêj Fehima in front of the Axtamar Church in Van. 2008.

Meyremê dibê: Elîyo sibê ye[151]
Gelo min go:
wa ye çi sibeka bi xêr û bêr e
Rabe qeyîk û gemiyê Metran Îsa
gelo li hev girêde
Emê îro xwe bavêjin
tor û bextê Metran Îsa lo di dêrê de

Meryem says: Elî it is morning,
I said:
What a blessed morning
Get up and prepare the boats
that will bring us to Bishop Îsa
Today we will take shelter
in the church of Bishop Îsa

151 Taken from Salih Kevirbirî's book *Filîtê Quto* (2001: 18-22). This is not the full version, but parts of it. Translation: Hanifi Barış and myself.

Eliyê Qolaxasî	Elî the commander
rabû bi destê Meyrema File	took the hand of the Christian girl Meryem
le qîza keşe, bûka Sarkîs,	the daughter of the minister, the bride of Sarkîs
dostika Waliyê Wanê	the favorite of the governer of Wan
girtî lo mîro ji xwe re lo revandiye	He took her for himself oh king and escaped with her
Minê xwe li Xwedê û li nav û dengê	They took shelter both with Allah
Metranê dêra Axtermanê	and with the famous Bishop of the Axtamar Church
Qesta dêra Axtermanê kiriye	They took the road to the Axtamar Church

The surprised bishop, who on his morning walk finds the Muslim Elî at the foot of the hill on which the church is built, accepts to host and protect them. With his acceptance of the couple he resists and challenges the power of the governor, as we will see below. Elî asks him to marry them, if possible according to Islamic customs.

Eger îro tuyê Meyrema File	If you today, with the Christian Meryem
li min mar bikî li ser dine Muhammed e	marry me in the religion of Muhamed
Sed aferîn dîsa ji nav û dengê te re	May hundred blessings be added to your fame
Heger tu mar nekî ezê qebûl bikim	If you do not marry us, I will accept
Dînê lo Metran îsa	the faith of Bishop Îsa
Heyla delîl delîl lo li vî Metranî	Look how great this Bishop is
Metran Îsa ji wî zemanî heta vî zemanî	Metran Îsa is famous from this era to the next
Nav û dengê lo xwe deranî	He made quite a reputation

The bishop however reacts to his question in a way different than expected. Instead of insisting on giving them a Christian ceremony, he decides otherwise:

Erê, Metran îsa dibê:	Yes, Metran Îsa says:
Eliyo lo wez wiha nakim	oh Elî, I cannot do it this way
Ez vê yekê li dinyayê qebûl nakim	I will never accept this in the world
Wele nav û dengê Dêra Axtermanê	By God, the reputation of the Axtamar Church
kevin e, mezin e, ez xirab nakim	is ancient and widespread, I will not destroy it
Ez vê serêe di nava dînê Muhammed de	I will never let this issue
qet rast nakim	interfere with Muhammad' s religion
Ez ji boyî xatirê kevnejinekê,	For the sake of a woman
dînê Muhammed li ber tu dîna	I won't degrade Muhammeds religion
zelûl nakim	against any other religion
Lawo, ezê îro gazî	My son, today I will call
meleyek û du heb feqiya kim	An Imam and two of his students
Ezê bi qewlê Xwedê,	I will, under the word of Allah,
bi hedîsa Resûlallah	and the hadith of the Prophet of God,
bînim Meyrema File li te mar kim	marry the Christian Meryem and you
Metran Îsa ji wî zemanî heta vî zemanî	And from this era to the next
Nav û dengê lo xwe deranî	Metran Isa made a great reputation

The unexpected reply of the bishop, who does not want to 'degrade Islam for the sake of a woman', gives him a great reputation among the Muslims in the region.

Meanwhile at the palace of the governor all hell breaks loose when the latter hears the news. Bursting with anger he sends a message to the bishop in which he promises him gold if he sends Meryem back and destruction if he keeps her there.

He threatens not to leave a stone standing of the Axtamar Church if the bishop does not listen to him. The bishop refuses to send her, and replies: 'by God, tomorrow at this time Elî will be groom and Meryem bride'. The governor sends his soldiers, and Metran Îsa collects all Christians in the environment. The governor, realizing he is not strong enough to conquer them at once and prevent bloodshed, withdraws his troops and returns home. The next day the bishop performs the marriage of Elî and Meryem according to the requirements of a Muslim wedding.

If we look at the lyrics, we see that the bishop is the most prominent protagonist; two stock elements praising him return each three times. The Axtamar Church is also central in this kilam, as it is called by its full name thirteen times. The kilam is in the first place about the good character of 'the bishop of the Axtamar church', who resists the local governor. The bad character of the kilam is the governor, a Kurdish or Turkish governor who wants to force an Armenian girl, promised to someone else, into an unwanted marriage. Forced marriages between Muslim men and Christian, Alevi, or Yezidi women were a common problem and are a returning song topic. Generally such marriages were regarded as unacceptable by the woman's family. From the man's side it was more acceptable, as the woman would become a Muslim and would be incorporated in the man's family. The difference between Muslims and Christians is a clear topic of this kilam: the lyrics emphasize the fact that Meryem is a Christian, spelling this out several times. But the religious conflict is also solved in the kilam: Meryem does not marry with Sarkis to whom she was promised, nor with the governor who forced her, but with Elî, a Kurdish Muslim man. She prefers him over the governor and Sarkis, and the bishop gives his consent and blessing, and even celebrates the wedding following Islamic customs.

The Armenian woman is in the kilams often (though not always) portrayed as in a position of power.[152] Meryem comes from a rich family and is able to at least partly decide her destiny. She has to bow to the greater power of the governor, but his power is overshadowed by the famous position of the bishop. Meryem skillfully makes use of the power she has in her hands. In the Kurdish region, it was a persistent bias to see Armenians as rich, even though there were many poor Armenian villages. Until today legends circulate in Kurdish villages about the gold and silver Armenians presumably buried during the genocide. Armenian villages were often taken over by Kurds, who hoped that one day they would or will find the gold hidden somewhere. The kilams seem to reflect such ideas by portraying Armenian women as from rich and powerful families.

152 An example is the song Şamirane, about an Armenian woman who is the ruler of the Van region. See chapter 5.

The lyrics thus offer a solution for religious conflict that perfectly fits Sunni Kurdish interests: marrying a Christian woman is presented as immoral when under force. But in case of the woman's consent it is acceptable, and in this case even preferable above a marriage with an Armenian man, whom Meryem does not seem to love. The lyrics give no room for doubting the consent of Meryem with the marriage; she is the one who forces herself upon an innocent Kurdish commander who followed his master's orders. She is the protagonist who is in control. Obviously she could have eloped with Sarkis as well, but instead, frustrated by his fear and her own waiting, she offers herself to the governor. When she falls in love with Elî she seizes the opportunity to escape from her unfortunate destiny and to seek refuge with the bishop together with her lover. This course of events would naturally have been strongly objected to by any Armenian parents, who would see their daughter married off to a Muslim, their Bishop choosing Islam above Christianity, and their religion degraded. Indeed, instead of complaining about the religious difference, the bishop emphasizes the value of Islam, and the kilam even ends in disaster for the Christians and their church:

Ez kekê Bedran, Henan û Yewnan im	I am the brother of Bedran, Henan and Yewnan
Ezê bi kumê metraniyê bigirim li erdê xim	I will take the Bishop cap and throw it on the floor
Ezê laşa sawî Dêra Axtermanê rakim	I will blow the roof of the church of Axtamar
Lawo sibê lad e, wê file bikevin	Son, tomorrow is Sunday, the Christians
Bikişin sûkan û çarçiyan e	will fill the markets and bazaars
Wele sibe vî çaxî	I swear by God that tomorrow this time
Elî zava ye lo ax Meyrem bûk e	Elî will be groom and Meryem bride
Ji diya Metranê Dêra Axtermanê pêştir	Apart from the mother of the Bishop of the Axt.Church
Bila nebêje min çok da erdê	No one shall say: 'I kneeled on the floor
Ji xwe re kurek anî	and gave birth to a son'[153]
Metran Îsa ji wî zemanî heya vî zemanî	From that time until today
Nav û dengê xwe deranî	Metran Isa made a great reputation
Metran Îsa qarşiyê Walîyê Wanê	Metran Isa stood up against the governer of Wan
Di binê Dêra Axtermanê hêja şerek danî	He fought a good fight below the precious Axt.Church

The bishop renounces his faith by throwing his cap on the floor and blowing the roof of the church. In this kilam, the Armenian Other, personified by the bishop and Meryem, is thus transformed into someone supporting Islam and Kurdish interests. The conclusion of the kilam strongly shows the perspective of the song maker and his/her main loyalties.

I discussed the for me rather unexpected ending with dengbêj Cihan, born in 1925 from an Armenian father and an Arab mother. His father survived the genocide and converted to Islam (chapter 3, life story 4). Dengbêj Cihan is a stern Muslim who is proud

153 This sentence means that no one but his mother has the right to say she gave birth to him. As the mother of the bishop she has become famous like him, and no one can claim that fame from her.

of his Islamic and Kurdified identity, but who also talked openly about his Armenian roots and the atrocities of the 1915 genocide. When I asked him if we need to understand the ending of the kilam as meaning that the bishop became a Muslim, he gave a broad smile and nodded convincingly. Of course, he said, the bishop was converted and supported Islam, and indeed, he threw his cap to the floor and destroyed the church. This obviously resonates with his father's conversion and his Armenian background, and may make him feel confirmed in his mixed identity. In Turkey, converted Armenians are sometimes seen as less genuine Muslims because of their Christian roots.

As the main figures of the kilam are the Armenian woman and the bishop, at first sight it gives the impression that this song is a praise song for her, the bishop, and the church.[154] But on a closer look this is a story in which usual power relations are reversed, and in which the position of Sunni Muslim men who wished to marry Armenian women is reinforced. It strengthens the position of Islam over Christianity, by letting an Armenian bishop convert to Islam and by making him destroy the famous Axtamar Church. It also supports the position of the commoner against that of the rich governor, who has power and money, but does not succeed in marrying a beautiful woman under his reign. Instead, he has to bend to the less powerful commander who did not even have the intention of competing with him.

The kilams and figures discussed up to this point were mostly taken from love songs. Often the kilams speak of the perspective of common people who in some way or other were dependent on the decisions of elders, relatives, or elites. The perspective of the common Kurdish Sunni wo/man is therewith often taken as the point of departure. The following sections discuss battle and rebel songs, in which local leaders and the battles they fight play a central role. However, even though these local leaders are the central figures, they are often judged and criticized by commoners who are presented as eye witnesses. As we will see, the kilams should be understood as focusing on the near local socio-political environment instead of on larger political structures. They underline that the kilams create a Kurdish geography from which complex structures of local alliances emerge. Within these structures the kilams present a caste of figures of local leaders, traitors, rebels and fugitives. The kilams also demonstrate who were seen as possible enemies, and in what ways local leaders were connected to larger power structures.

154 A Kurdish Armenian friend had always understood this song as elevating the position of Christians and Armenians. People often do not listen in detail to the actual content, and since the main characters and the returning formulas give that suggestion, one could easily make that assumption.

1.5 Local leaders in battle songs

The leaders of clans or tribes often figure in the kilams as the main protagonists.[155] Sürmeli Mehmet Pasha, Bişarê Çeto, Cemîlê Çeto, Silêmanê Mistê, Memê Emê, Filîto Quto, Ferzende Beg, Eliyê Ûnis; all of these are legendary heroic leaders about whom not one but a variety of kilams exist. When during a performance in which several dengbêjs take part someone sings a kilam about one of those leaders, the next dengbêj may choose to sing a kilam about the same figure in a different version, or about a different heroic act. Most kilams about local leaders are about battles in which they took part, and the kilams are often, but not always, lamentations sung after their death. Heroic leaders may also appear in lamentations about another hero; befriended heroes and enemies of the deceased are often mentioned in the kilam. For example, Bişarê Çeto figures in several kilams in which he is not the main protagonist, but someone else who died in a fight in which he took part.

The battles about which the dengbêjs sing broke out for a variety of reasons. Many kilams relate clashes between tribes, clans or families. Others are about clashes or the collaboration of tribes or individuals with the Ottoman or Turkish governments. The names of the heroes of these types of kilams are of people who lived in a relatively recent past, often in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century in the kilams of my selection. Battle songs are characterized by the many detailed proper and place names which are often part of stock elements and repeated frequently so that they cannot easily be forgotten. The dengbêjs emphasize the truthfulness of the kilams, and of the people they sing about. Because figures of battle and rebel songs lived relatively recent they can sometimes be verified by other historical sources such as written reports, eyewitnesses, or people who had heard about them from eyewitnesses.[156]

Kilams ascribed to the legendary dengbêj Evdalê Zeynikê about his patron Surmeli Memed Pasha give an elaborate impression of the position of a leader. There are many kilams known about Evdalê Zeynikê and about his patron. Here I focus on

155 The figure of the 'local leader' is based on the following songs: From my own recordings: *Kuştina Mihemedo bavê Meys* and *Elîyê bavê Şêxmus* by Îbrahîmê Pîrikê (Diyarbakır, May 2007, nr.45 and nr.27), *Haso Axa Mala Nasir* by Ehmedê Aqutê (Istanbul, April 2007, nr.5), Şerê berxê mala Tûjo û Siloyê Sedikê by Üsivê Farê (Diyarbakır, May 2007, nr.44), *Kilama Xezalê* by Memik Ganidağlı (Pazarcık, May 2007, nr.60), *Dewrêşê Evdî* by dengbêj Bedir (Van, July 2008, nr.192), Şêx Tahir efendî by Apê Silhaddîn (Van, July 2008, nr.195), *Mihemedê birayê Gulnazê* by dengbêj Bedir (Van, July 2008, nr.197), *Silêmanê Mistê* by dengbêj Xalitê Xerzê (Diyarbakir, June 2007, nr.109), From Kevirbirî 2001: *Filîtê Quto* (pp.57), *Emê Gozê* (pp.23), *Evdilê Birahîm* (pp.47), *Bişarê Çeto* (pp.85), by Salihê Qûbînî. From Aras 1996: *Lo mîro* (pp.55), *Minê li hafa nexşê nexşiwanê* (pp.77), *Wey Xozanê* (pp.92), *Evla Begê mîrê zirav* (pp.104). From Yüksel 2011: 134, Îskano by Reso.

156 Kevirbirî (2004) and Aras (1996) for example worked on the historical verification of some kilams.

the picture we get from the patron, below more kilams will follow. Surmeli Memed Pasha was a Kurdish Ottoman ruler from a family that is described by Aras (1996) as a ruling family with long-term Ottoman connections. This was most probably the case, since "the Ottoman state was extremely careful to ensure that power remained in the hands of the same ruling families. This policy was apparently aimed at creating strong leadership free from the challenges of other internal rivals" (Özoğlu 2004: 54). Aras also mentions that the Pasha, although he was named as such, had not received the title Pasha, but remained a Bey, contrary to his forefathers and much to his frustration. According to oral history accounts, Surmeli Memed Pasha is believed to have said about this situation that the fact that his people continued calling him Pasha, proved that he was a pasha of the people, and not a government pasha.[157] This can be seen as a sign of the increasing distance between Kurdish leaders and the Ottoman government, since the latter tried to constrain their power and make them more firmly included in central rule. In the kilams about Surmeli Memed Pasha collected by Ahmet Aras (1996), the Pasha appears a difficult personality to who people did not easily dare to object.

In the kilam *Wey Xozanê*, the Ottomans ask the pasha to join them in their battle against the Xozan (Kozanoğlu in Turkish) family who did not pay their taxes. The Kozanoğlu family had a high level of independence from Ottoman rule, but were targeted by the Ottomans to be more firmly controlled by them. However, they did not give up their independence easily. From 1865 to 1877 there were returning battles with the Ottomans after their refusal to pay taxes. The battles at Kozan also appear in Turkish folk tradition. Eberhard (1955) gives some versions of "the ballad Kozanoğlu" with the following introduction: "About 1870 a feudal lord of the Kozanoğlu family in Kozan, who had enjoyed a high degree of independence, was defeated by the government. As the chief enemy, the lord was executed and the rest of the family was exiled. These events (..) gave rise to a number of ballads." (pp.54). About the particular ballad that he collected Eberhard writes: "A rebel against the government, Kozanoğlu, kept all the taxes for himself and acted as if he were the ruler. The Ottoman government sent a general against him, Kurt Pasha. Finally the people [his followers?] left him, and he was forced to surrender" (pp.54). Eberhard

157 "Piştî mirina birayê min, dewletê rutba paşatyê neda min, tenê rutba 'Begtiyê' da min. Ro bi ro ji hükmê min kêm dike. Lê xelk guh nade gotin û qerara dewletê, dîsa mînanî bav û kalên min, ji min re dibên Surmeli Memed Paşa. Ango ez ne paşayê dewletê me, ez paşayê xelkê me (After the death of my brother, the state did not give me the rank of pasha, but only the rank of beg. Every day the government diminishes my [power]. But the people do not listen to the accounts and decisions of the state, instead they call me, just like my father and forefathers, Surmeli Memed Pasha. So I am not a pasha of our government, but a pasha of our people)" Aras 1996: 54, my translation.

indicates that this episode was also sung about in local Armenian folk traditions. It is unclear who this Kurt Pasha was. Most probably he was a different person than Surmeli Memed Pasha, but the story makes clear that over the years the Ottomans sent armies to them numeral times. The event of this kilam can be located between 1865 and 1877, the period known for the ongoing conflict of the Kozanoğlu family with the Ottomans.

According to the Kurdish oral histories collected by Aras, Surmeli Memed Pasha did not dare to refuse to join the battle because of his fear the Ottomans would explain it as rebellion against their authority. Although he wins, it ends in a total disaster in which the majority of his soldiers die of a cholera epidemy breaking out after the war. In the following kilam the Pasha's wife complains bitterly about the decision of her husband to join the battle:

Eyşan Xanimê digo Memed Paşa[158]
min ji te ra nego
tu berê xwe nede Xozanê
Ji sere sibê hetanî nîvro
sêsid xortê eşîrê
li ser pişтê hespa rih û can da

Eyşan Xanimê digo Memed Paşa
tu berê xwe nede Xozanê
Çarsid siyarê ku te bire Xozanê,
jê heftê heb vegerya male

Minê li Xozanê tevî ewqas siyarî
sê gul wunda kirye
Ji Diharê Sultanê Alo,
ji Şamya Feqî Elyê Pîrî,
ji Misûrya Bavê Xakî

Heyla şewitya Xozanê,
teyê alik deştê yek zozanê
Heyla wêranê te li me anye
koka egitan û xortanê
Gelî biranoezê pirsa siyarekî ji we bikim
Feqî Elyê Pîrî, Bavê Temo,
birayê minî axretê kanê

Eyşan Xanim said: 'Memed Paşa
Didn't I say to you
'Don't go to Xozan'
From the early morning until noon
Three hundred tribal men
gave their soul on horseback

Eyşan Xanim said: 'Memed Paşa
don't go to Xozan
From four hundred riders you brought to Xozan
only seventy returned home'

At Xozan from all those riders
I lost three roses
They are Sultanê Alo from Dihar
Feqî Elyê Pîrî from Şamya
and Bavê Xakî from Misûrya

Oh burning Xozan
one side valley, the other side *zozan*
Oh ruin, you have brought us
the end of the heroes and fighters
Oh brothers, I will ask the riders
Where are Feqî Elyê Pîrî, Bavê Temo,
and my brother in the hereafter?

Again, as we have seen earlier in this chapter, criticism on the Pasha is voiced by a woman, who in this case is his wife. Eyşan Xanim counts the number of soldiers who died, some of whom were relatives or friends. She calls the Pasha to account for the many deaths and reproaches him that he did not listen to her advice. In the kilams about Surmeli Memed Pasha there is not yet talk of betrayal, although this

158 From Aras 1996: 94. Translated by Hanifi Barış and myself.

kilam leans towards that thought. He should have chosen to protect his own people, instead of siding with the Ottomans. In kilams of later date, especially of the time around the founding of the Turkish Republic, all cooperation with the Turks is seen as betrayal, and is much stronger condemned, as we will see later on.

The kilam *Filîtê Quto* is about the argument and battle that follows between the leader of the Reşkotan tribe Filîtê Quto and the leader of the Etmank tribe Mamê Emê. The event probably took place in the first decades of the twentieth century.[159] The latter was on his way from Bitlis to Diyarbekir with his caravan. The Etmank were a settled tribe with grazing lands, but no farm fields. Therefore once a year[160] they set up a caravan and moved from the Bitlis valley, via Baykan, to the Xerzan valley, a 140 km distance. They brought salt from Bitlis, and exchanged it for farm products such as wheat, barley, lentils and chickpeas in Xerzan. In the year of the event of this kilam, there was a shortage of food and the Etmank decide to travel to Diyarbakır hoping they will be able to buy supplies there. During their journey they pass through the area of the Reşkotan tribe, of which Filîtê Quto was the leader. The Etmank set up their tents, and by horse Mamê Emê and his nephew go to the nearby Reşkotan to ask for some water. During this visit an Armenian girl staying with the Reşkotan shows interest in Mamê Emê's nephew. Mamê Emê feels insulted by her revealing behavior, shouts at her, and by his shouting wakes up Filît who was sleeping. Mamê Emê and Filît quarrel, and finally Mamê Emê says before he leaves: if you are a man, challenge me when I return from Diyarbakır.

On the way back the caravan takes the same route and arrives at the Reşkotan area. Filît asks for toll, and Mamê Emê offers some of his livestock.[161] Filît however is not interested in livestock, but in the nice rifle of Mam's nephew that they just bought in Diyarbakır. He asks for the rifle instead of livestock, whereas asking for someone's weapon is a grave insult. When he insists, Mam kills him with one bullet. After this a heavy battle breaks out between the two tribes in which fifty-two Etmank

159 Filîtê Quto's son was the agha of the Armenian dengbêj Karapetê Xaco. The latter was taken into his protection during the 1915 Armenian genocide. Filîtê Quto had already died by that time. A clearer estimation cannot be given based on the sources at hand.

160 There is a lack of academic literature on Kurdish caravan trade. I encountered this theme more often in the songs, but could not find any information on the nature, length, organization and frequency of such caravans. Once a year is therefore a guess based on the kilam *Ezê ji Erzurumê hatim bi kawranî* from the collection of Ahmet Aras (1996). In this kilam people of a certain village once a year set up a caravan.

161 Van Bruinessen wrote about nomads passing through settled areas (1992: 55): "The migrating group (..) has to pay a collective fee (..). There are frequent disagreements on the sum to be paid, and both groups accuse each other of stealing animals. (..) It sometimes happens that the dispute cannot be settled and armed clashes ensue between nomadic clan and village, both soon reinforced by fellow tribesmen".

are killed and only three of them, mentioned by name, escape. The kilam about this event is sung from the perspective of Filît's mother Şemê, mourning her son's death:

Şemê dibê: Filîto lawo dilê min dibê ye[162]	Oh Filît my son, my heart says
Berxê min sed carî dilê min dibê ye	My lamb, my heart says a hundred times
Min ji te re nego neçe	Didn't I say to you:
pêşiya karwanê Mamê Emê ye	don't go after that caravan trader Mamê Emê
Lawo vêga çave jin	My son, now the eyes of their wives
û zarê wan li rê ne	and children are on the road
Ew jî weka te mêrkuj in	They are also, like you, murderers
Lawo karwanî şelê ne	My son, caravan traders are loaded
Dibê dilê min sed carî dilê min dibê	My heart says, my heart says a hundred times
Filîtê Quto bavê Hesen cewrê Şemê	Filîtê Quto father of Hesen, puppy of Şemê
Xwe daye ser taxê ye	You went to their area
Îro ji Mamê Emê Etmankî dixwaze	Today you wanted from Mamê Emê the Etmank
Qedar û baca rê ye	Toll for the road

After this stanza the kilam goes back to what happened before the battle, and presents a dialogue between Mamê Emê and Filîtê Quto about their disagreement. Subsequently we hear Şemê's voice again, telling what happened during the fight, how Filît was killed, and she ends in the same way as she starts, with her lament on Filît. She mourns his death, but is at the same time not uncritical about his behavior leading to it. She tells him how she warned him not to go after the caravan trader.

Another kilam that was very popular among the dengbêjs during my research was *Silêmanê Mistê*, about a young hero from the House of Dîbo of the Elikan tribe who was killed after he looted farms of the House of Faro of the Pencînaran tribe. The kilam takes place in the early decades of the twentieth century[163] in the Xerzan region. Silêman's mother Xatê is the one who mourns his death in the kilam and sings about the battle and its fatal outcome. The information Kevirbirî (2001) gives as an introduction to the kilam tells that the pillage was an answer to an earlier pillage carried out by the House of Faro to his own clan, the House of Dîbo. The kilam itself does not speak about such an event. Xatê starts with introducing her son:

Erê ha dayê ha dayê[164]	Oh mother, hey mother
Xatê dibê Silêmano lawo memanî	Xatê says: Silêman, my dear son[165]
Ji kula dilê min re lawo xweş memanî	My heart's desire, my wonderful son,
Silêmanê Mistê; Bavê Xelîl,	son of Mistê, father of Xelîl
bavê Faris Silêman,	and Faris Silêman
Bavê Ezê, Kekê Bedê	Father of Ezê, brother of Bedê

162 From Kevirbirî 2001: 63-67. Translation: Hanifi Barış and myself.

163 The timing is based on the fact that Cemîlê Çeto died around 1926 according to an unchecked source on the internet (https://www.facebook.com/MalaFaroAsireti), where also a letter is published, written by Mustafa Kemal and addressed to "Garzan'da Cemil Çeto Beye", dated August 13, 1919.

164 From Kevirbirî 2001: 11-16. Translated by Hanifi Barış and myself.

165 We have not been able to find the meaning of the word *memanî*, which she seem to use to describe the good qualities of her son Silêmanê Mistê.

le Gula mala Dîbo	you are the Rose of the House of Dîbo
Kum û kolozê xwe girêda lawo bi romanî	He wore his turban and cap in the Turkish way
Lawo kum û kolozê xwe girêda bi romanî	Oh son, he wore his turban and cap as a Turk

Xatê, the mother, introduces Silêman by mentioning the names of his sons and brother, and she calls him the Rose of the House of Dîbo, a division of the Elikan tribe. 'Rose' is more often used in the kilams to refer to the most courageous fighter, the most handsome and manly man. From this description she continues to tell about his preparations for a fight:

Destekî cilê şevê li xwe kir,	He had dressed in a set of clothes for the night,
wê rojê hilanî	which he had picked up that very day
Rext û qatiya girê dabû	He had taken on his arms and amours
Destê xwe avête qayişa Tivinga Elemanî	And reached for the strap of the German Rifle
Xwe berdaye Sîxûra	He descended to Sîxûra,
Malê binyê mîrata Mizareşê	down to the damned houses in Mizareşê
Birek devrûtê Mala Dîbo	He then fetched some devotees of the House of Dîbo
Ji kezebşewitya Reysê Derwêş	who had no moustaches, they were Reysê Derwêş
Cindiyê Hacî, Birahîmê Mamûd	Cindiyê Hacî and Birahîmê Mamûd
Lawo van şevgeran	My son, he had those night-riders,
dayê bi xwe re hilanîn	oh mother, as his company

He dresses up and arms for the battle, he is well-prepared. She describes which road he takes from his house to another village from which he picks up three other men of the same clan, who come with him to the battle. They are young men, who have no moustache yet.

Xwe berdaye Pîra Memikan,	Then they descended to the bridge at Memikan
li Borê Qumaro de derbas bûn,	They passed through Borê Qumaro
Li warê gundir de hevraz bûn, derketine	They went up to the Gundir terrain, and climbed
Gaza Çiyayê Kolik, Zengayê Mamo	Upon the Hills of the Kolik Mountain, at Zengayê Mamo
Li hafa Deşta Xerzan	And sat down across the Plain of Xerzan
di warê Simê de rûniştin	On the terrain of Simê
Şêwr û mişêwireteka giran danîn	Then they engaged in tough bargains and discussions
Sê heb şade şûtên Silêmanê Mistê	The three hot-shot gunmen of Silêmanê Mistê
Bavê Xelîl, Gula mala Dîbo hene	Father of Xelîl, Rose of the House of Dîbo
xwe berdaye Deşta Xerzan	They descended to the Plain of Xerzan
Peşiya terş û talanê Xatimiyan	And they looted the Xatimîs
Peşiya terş û talanê Mala Keran	They looted the House of Keran
Peşiya terş û talanê Mala Faro	They looted the House of Faro
Ga û gamêşê nozde cotan ji Gola Modê	Oxes and bulls of nineteen farms of the Lake Modê
Ji xata diya xwe re lawo	And they presented the pillage, oh son,
vê sibê diyarî anîê	This morning to Xato his mother as gifts

In detail the kilam describes the road these four men took from their houses to the hills in the Kolik mountain, including all place names that must have been known by the people hearing the kilam. In the hills, Silêmanê Mistê and his three companions sit down to discuss what to do, and how the booty will be divided. And when they

have outlined their plans, they descend from the hills to the plain of Xerzan and go to nineteen farms that belong to the Pencînaran tribe. Xatê says that after the pillage, they bring the booty to her as gifts. From the following, it seems that this part is added as a possible scenario that did not really take place, because it seems the men stayed in the mountains and came into trouble there. But in the kilam, the imagined home coming of Silêmanê Mistê to his mother, gives Xatê the opportunity to say the following:

Were ha weylê ha weylê	Come, oh my! [expression of deep grief]
Xatê dibê Silêmano lawo	Xatê says: Silêman, my son
Carê bi nezanî terş û talanê Xatma neynin	Never again loot the Xatma, it is ignorance
Talanê Mala Faro ye	Because it is the looting of the House of Faro
Herçî Mala Faro ne mêrî ne, mêrkuj in	The men of Faro are no gentlemen, but murderers
Terş û talanan tînin	They, too, loot and pillage
Hûn xweyê bavê min bûyo	You, my dearest
Terş û talanên xwe vegerînin	Return the booty you have taken

Xatê rebukes Silêman, telling him it was 'ignorance' to loot farms of the House of Faro, as they are murderers. By inserting this stanza about the encounter between Xatê and her son, she has the opportunity to warn him to return the booty so that the fatal outcome of this kilam might have been prevented. But in reality, the four men were still in the mountains and appear to be in great trouble, as told by a messenger who comes to Xatê to tell her:

Lê Xatê dibê Silêmano lawo memanî	Xatê says Silêman my son
Ji kula dilê mino te re berxêm	You my son, the lamb,
lawo xweş memanî	My wonderful son
Vê sibê peyakî derketî ji Xopana Xatma	A man has come from that damned Xatma this morning
Lawo ji xwe re bi hewar û gazî	My son, he was calling for help
Hewar daye Gozelderê, Marîbê, Eynqesrê	He called upon Gozelder, Marîb, and Eynqasr
Cemîlê Çeto Bavê Feremez	And Cemîl Çeto, father of Feremez
Di Qesra Eynqesrê de rûniştin	Set a meeting at the Eynqesr Palace
û şêwr û mişêwireteke giran danîn	And consulted the matter (with his court)
Le qirara kuştina Silêmanê Mistê	The decision to kill Silemanê Mistê
Bavê Xelîl Gula Mala Dîbo lawo	Father of Xelîl, Rose of the House of Dîbo
Bi xwe re hilanîn	was taken by them
Xwe berdaye Deşta Xerzan dayê bi giranî	He then, heavily armed, oh mother
Lawo xwe berdabû Deşta Xerzan	descended to the Plain of Xerzan, my son
dayê bi giranî	heavily armed, oh mother
Ewî qiirekî dabû	He had called upon
Li Mûsikan, li Weliyan,	the Musikan, the Weliyan
Lli Kejikan, li Ferxikan,	the Kejikan, the Ferxikan
Li Terxaniyan, li Miradan, li Mala Şemdîn	the Terxaniyan , the Miradan, the House of Şemdîn
Li heft bavên Pencînaran	Upon the seven families of the Pencînaran tribe
Xwe berdane Deşta Xerzan	And they came down to the Plain of Xerzan
Bîra Kurêdiya, girtine Pozê Xatma	to the well of Kurediya, took hold of the Xatma hill
Rêçiyan rêç û dews û çepera	The trackers then tracked down my Silêman,
Silêmanê min deranî	And uncovered his post and position

Cemîlê Çeto is the famous leader of the House of Faro, a controversial figure (Üngör 2009: 61) who allied with the government and lived in the Eynqesr Palace. He was the brother of Bişarê and Gencoyê Çeto. Bişarê Çeto was also an important leader who lived in the Baxems Palace and fought as a rebel against the government (see below). Cemîl held a meeting to decide what to do after he heard of the pillage by Silêmanê Mistê. During the meeting they decide to kill him, and after mobilizing seven other families, they go after Silêmanê Mistê.

Were ha weylê
Xatê digo Silêmano lawo
Wezê diyarê Çiyayê Kolik
bi Zengayê Mamo
Ketim lawo li vî banî
Bala xwe bidê Cemîlê Çeto
bavê Feremez
Bi siwariyên hespê li xulaman
lawo dikir gazî
Bavî mino hûnê mêr in mêrê çê ne,
çê bixebitin
Bi sê denga li Silêmanê Mistê Bavê Xelîl
Gula Mala Dîbo dikir gazî
Dibê, lawo ezê îro
wê yekê bi serê we de bînim
Tu rojeka wekî roja îro
Li terş û talanê camêra nedî
Ji xwe re nebî lawo bi mêranî
Îro giran e dengê têzê tivinga
ketine Çiyayê Kolik
Zengayê Mamo li ser serê Silêmanê Mistê
Bavê Xelîl Gula Mala Dîbo
lawo îro kirine kafirstanî

Oh my!
Xatê said Silêman my son
I took off to the Kolik Mountain
and [the place] Zengayê Mamo
I came to these heights
Look how Cemîlê Çeto
Father of Felemez
Ordered his servants
while leading his cavalry
[He said:] My men, you are the greatest of men,
do well
Then he shouted to Silêmane Mistê, Father of Xelîl
Rose of the House of Dibo
He says: my son today
I will hit you so hard
that no other day
You may dare to loot and pillage anyone
And take the booty with you
Today the sound of heavy gunfire
filled the Mountain Kolik
And at Zengayê Mamo, guns fire on Silemanê Mistê
The father of Xelîl, Rose of the House of Dîbo
My son today, he found himself in a dire situation

Cemîlê Çeto collected his men and went to the place where Silêmanê Mistê was hiding. The Kolik mountain was owned by the Pencînaran tribe where they were well prepared for battle on their territory, as they had dug trenches on the mountain. They knew their way and had the advantage over Silêmanê Mistê. Cemîlê Çeto shouted to him that he would never again be able to loot his villages.

Le Xatê dibê: Silêmano lawo
Carê te digo, hevza xwe bike
lawo ji hemî hevzî
Hevza xwe bike ji kozikên
serê Çiyayê Kolik
Lawo kozikê Mala Faro ne
Lawo nîşanê Mala Faro zehf in pir gelek in
Temamî bi kimkevej in
Destê wana bi sustem in

Xatê says: Silêman my son
You used to say, my son
That one should beware of,
Beware of the trenches
on the Kolik Mountain
They are the trenches of the House of Faro
There are many sharp-shooters among the men of
the House of Faro, they hold the rifles
They have the 'sustem' rifles[166] in their hands

166 A rifle type that also appears in other songs.

Dê rebeno nîşançî ne	Your poor mother, they are good marksmen
Serê kewa berenadin	They hit birds on the head

Xatê tells how Silêman had himself once warned of the trenches of the House of Faro, and of their sharp-shooters, who were even able to hit birds from afar. In the meantime, Xatê is waiting at home, looking from far at the Kolik mountain, wishing to see what happens.

Xatê dibê Silêmano lawo	Xatê says, oh my son
Dêhn û bala min lê ye min dît	My attention was drawn and I saw
çend peyayê Mala Dîbo	that some men from the House of Dîbo
li serê Çiyayê Kolik lawo dageriyan	returned from the Kolik Mountain,
Ezê rabim cerê xwe hildim	I will go and fetch my waterjar
Li pêşiya van xweşmêrên	and wait for the heroes
Mala Dîbo bisekinim	of the house of Dîbo to come
Ezê dibêm, di bextê we û Xwedê me	I say, for the sake of you and God
Silêman û Ebê, Reysê Derwêş,	Silêman û Ebê, Reysê Derwêş,
Cindiyê Hacî Birahîmê Mamûd	Cindiyê Hacî and Birahîmê Mamûd
kane lawo ne xwiya ne	they cannot be seen anymore, my son
De lê Xatê rebenê Silêman û Ebê,	Oh mother, my poor mother, Silêman and Ebê,
Reysê Derwêş, Cindiyê Hacî,	Reysê Derwêş, Cindiyê Hacî
And Birahîmê Mamûd	and Birahîmê Mamûd
Li serê Çiyayê Kolik	On the mountain Kolik
ji xwe re kemîn vedane	They have layed an ambush

Xatê sees from far how some men of the House of Dîbo return, and she is waiting for news. But when they come closer she cannot see Silêman and the three companions he took with him. From here the kilam turns to another figure, Emê, the half brother of Silêman. He comes to Xatê to tell.

Lê Xatê dibê, Silêmano lawo	And Xate says, Silêman my son
Ezê bi Çiyayê Kolik, bi Zengayê Mamo	I came to the mountain Kolik, at Zengayê Mamo
Hafa Deşta Xerzan ketim	across the plain of Xerzan
Qasê Koro, pismamê xayîn	to Qasê Koro, and I said: treacherous cousin,
heyra min go ha hewar e	I said to him: help!
Emê va ye Silêmanê minê	Emê, from here I cannot see
lawo ne xwiya ye	my Silêman anymore, my son
Tivinga Emê li mila ye	Emê has his rifle on his shoulder
Tivinga Silêmanê minê reben	I see my poor Silêman's rifle in the hands of Emê
Ezê bi kewkî lawo bi desta ye	I wish I were a partridge [to see what happened]
Xatê dibê, Emê di bextê te û Xwedê me	Xatê says, Emê, for the sake of you and God
Silêmanê min ka ye lawo, ne xwiya ye	Where is my son Silêman, I cannot see him anymore

Again it seems that this part takes place in Xatê's imagination. She is anxiously waiting for news and imagines in the kilam that Emê would have come to her, with Silêman's rifle on his shoulder, from which she understood what has happened.

Dibê: Xatê rebenê, termê Silêmanê Mistê	Emê says: you poor Xatê, the corpse of Silêmanê Mistê
Bavê Xelîl Gula Mala Dîbo	Father of Xelîl, Rose of the House of Dîbo

Li serê Çiyayê Kolik	Has remained on the Kolik mountain
li Mexera Bênderokê mayê	In the small forest of Bênderokê
Were ha weylê	Oh my!
Xatê dibê, Emê lawo memanî	Xatê says, Emê, my son
Ji kula dilê te re berxêm	My heart's desire, my dearest lamb,
lawo xweş memanî	my beautiful son
Tu bala xwe bide Cemîlê Çeto	See what Cemîlê Çeto,
Bavê Feremez bi tan û niça îro	father of Feremez, today
çi bi serê kekê te ve anî	has done to your brother
Tu bavê diya xwe bûyo lawo	You became the father of your mother, my son
Şerê xwe bikin îro bi giranî	Fight bravely and tough today
Belgî Xwedê Teala siûd û îqbalê	May God bring the oaths and chances
ji te re li hev dû anî	on your side
Te heyfa Silêmanê Mistê Bavê Xelîl	You may revenge Silêmanê Mistê, father of Xelîl
Gula Mala Dîbo bi destê xwe hilanî	Rose of the House of Dîbo, with your own hands

Emê tells that Silêmanê Mistê is killed, and how his body was left behind in the bushes. Through the conversation with Emê, Xatê has the chance to call immediately for revenge, something she would have done if indeed she would have been close to the battle place. She asks Emê to return to the battle and avenge his brother. From the following stanza we understand that Emê is still hiding in his trench, and comes out by himself to take revenge by killing a young fighter of the House of Faro:

Belê tana Emê hilanî	Yes Emê picked up the turban
Li serê xwe li serê kevirê kozikê de deranî	Tied it around his own head and got out of his trench
Derbekî daye bejn û bala Gêncoyê Çeto	and he hits Gêncoyê Çeto with a shot of his rifle. He lays
Zavê destbihene termê Gencoyê Çeto	the corpse of the newly-wed groom Gêncoyê Çeto
Bi ser termê Silêmanê Mistê ve danî	Just next to that of Silêmanê Mistê
Le bi sê denga li Ehmedê Îskan	Then he shouts to Ehmedê Iskan
Li peyayê Mala Faro	The man of the house of Faro,
li Bavê Misto dikir gazî	the father of Misto
Dibê: Bavê Misto, tu dagere	And says: father of Misto, come back!
Heyra nizanim tu çewanîê	I dont know what kind of man are you?

Emê kills the brother of Cemîlê Çeto, who had recently married and was one of the valuable men of the House of Faro. And after he has laid his corpse next to that of Silêmanê Mistê, he shouts to the murderer of Silêmanê Mistê, a man named Ehmedê Îskan, to challange him:

Te digo, ezê herim	You said: I will go
di Qesra Eynqesrê de rûnim	to the Eyhnqesrê palace, I will sit down
Pesn û wesiyetê xwe bidim	And boast about myself
lawo bi mêranî	and my manly deeds
Te digot, ezê bêjim	You said that you would say afterwards:
Li terş û talanê xwe da	I got back this booty that was taken
li pêşiya heval û xweşmêrên	Before any of my friends or brave men
Mala Dîbo deranî û anî	You wanted to say that you took it back from Mala Dîbo
Yekî weka SIlêmanê Mistê Bavê Xelîl	From someone like Silêmanê Mistê Bavê Xelîl
Gula Mala Dîbo serekvanê nijdevanan	Rose of the house of Dîbo, leader of the fighters
Lawo îro di gerewa talan te danîn	My son, today you did this as an answer to the plunder

Tu nabêjî
min xortekî weka Gêncoyê Çeto
Zavê destbihene[167]
îro di gereva Silêmanî Mistê de danî
Tê dagere sed carî
bi serê bavê te kim
Derbeka daye li bejn û bala Gêncoyê Çeto
Zavê destbihene le zavekî bîst û çar roja ye
Hêja hena zavatiyê li desta ye
Îro min heyfa kekê xwe bi destê xwe hilanî

But you won't say
that you left a young man like Gêncoyê Çeto
The newly-wed groom
Today in exchange for Silêmanê Mistê
[Before doing that] you will return hundred times
I swear on your father's head
that I shot Gêncoyê Çeto
The fresh groom of twenty-four days,
Who still carries the groom's hennah on his hands
Today I avenged my brother with my own hands.

Emê shouts to Ehmedê Îskan, the killer of Silêmanê Mistê, that he knows what he had been thinking. He had imagined to run to the castle of Cemîlê Çeto and to tell the leader about his great deeds; how he had been the first of all men to kill Silêmanê Mistê, and how he had taken the booty back. He would have been able to boast about his courage and manhood. But before he could enjoy his success, Emê avenged his brother's death on the most valuable of Cemîl's men. The death of Cemîl's young brother would make it impossible for Ehmedê Îskan to run to the palace and show off his courage. Instead, he would first think a hundred times before even going there, since the one who died in exchange for Silêmanê Mistê is Cemîl's own young brother, who was just married, the henna still fresh on his hands.

The song ends with the lament of Xatê, about the death of her son, and about the disrespect they paid to his body:

Were ha weylê
Xatê dibê Silêmano lawo
Bila şereka giran
li me çênebûya li Çiyayê Kolik
Zengayê Mamo, li Hafa Deşta Xerzan
Lawo vê sibê li diyarane
Heyfa min nayê li kuştina Silêmanê Mistê
Bavê Xelîl, Gula Mala Dîbo,
heyfa min tê li vê hêyfê
Çardara Silêmanê Mistê
Bavê Xelîl Gula Mala Dîbo
Girêdane, dar nebû çar darên Gêncoyê Çeto
Birine Eynqesra Bavê Şebo
Lawo bi xwe re birine nav beyara

Oh my!
Xatê says Oh Silêman my son
If only such a heavy fight
Would not have happened on the Kolik Mountain,
at Zengayê Mamo, on the Xerzan plain
My son, this morning around here
I am not sad because of the killing of Silêmanê Mistê
The father of Xelîl, Rose of the House of Dîbo
But I am sad for another reason:
didnt they have any wood to use for a stretcher
for Silêmanê Mistê, father of Xelîl, Rose of Dîbo
Like they did for Gêncoyê Çeto
And carried him to Eynqesra to the father of Şebo
Whereas they took my son and left him in the open

Were ha weylê
Xatê dibê Silêmano lawo
Bila şereka giran
li me çênebûya li Çiyayê Kolik
Zengayê Mamo, li Hafa Deşta Xerzan
Lawo vê sibê li diyarane
Gênco bi gîzme, bi qondere ye

Oh my!
Xatê says Oh Silêman my son
If only such a heavy fight
Would not have happened on the Kolik Mountain,
at Zengayê Mamo, on the Xerzan plain
My son, this morning around here
[While] Genco has his boots, his fancy shoes

167 Lit.: his hands freshly dyed in henna

Wê xelq bêje:	These people will say:
Silêmanê Mistê bi çopikê çolê ye	Silêmanê Mistê had trash on his feet
Bi çarox û bi gore ye	He has these old shoes[168] and [old] socks
Pirs bike wê êşîra bi xwe re	Ask your own tribe: on the day of the battle
Roja şerê Çiyayê Kolik Zengayê Mamo	on the mountain Kolik at Zengayê Mamo
Silêmanê Mistê	Wasn't Silêmanê Mistê
beramberî Gêncoyê birayê te ye	an equally good man as your brother Gênco?

After Gênco was killed, Cemîl's men layed his body on a wooden stretcher, one that was usually used to carry dead bodies, and brought him to his brother's palace. It seems they washed him and dressed him in nice clothes and good shoes, they took care of him properly as one is supposed to take care of a corpse. But they had left Silêman's body lying in the bushes. They had not brought him home on a stretcher, and he was not yet washed or dressed. Xatê reproaches Cemîl and his men for not giving him proper treatment, whereas he was as much a good man and fighter as their own man Gênco. A similar complaint is expressed in the kilam Îskano (Yüksel 2011: 134), when two sisters go to the three leaders who were involved in a battle between the House of Faro, the House of Quto, and the House of Dîbo. Their brother Îskano died in the battle, but they cannot find his corpse. Only after they have gone to the courts of all these leaders, they find out who killed their brother, and that his body is still on the battle field.

Silêmanê Mistê's plans to pillage a large number of farms of the neighboring tribe can be seen as a direct challenge to the authority of the famous leader Cemîlê Çeto. Everyone knew that the latter was a powerful man. The kilam describes him and his House as holding good trenches on the Kolik mountain, many armed men who are good sharp-shooters and who are equiped with heavy arms. Silêmanê Mistê himself had warned against them. But still he decides to challenge him by going to his mountain, and by pillaging a large number of farms at once, in one single night, together with a group of youngsters. As mentioned above, the pillage may have been an answer to an earlier pillage, although this is not said in this kilam. But the Pencînaran and Elikan tribes were known for animosity towards each other, and such feuds could continue for many years. Xatê does not condemn the pillage in itself, which also may point to it being a retaliatory action. In the kilam, Xatê wishes she could have held her son back from pillaging the House of Faro. Or, if she would have been able to see him even after the pillage, she could have urged him to bring the loot back to the House of Faro. This time, the mother is not presented as close to the fight, but as someone watching anxiously from afar, wishing she had bird's eyes, to

168 Simple shoes made of cattle leather

see what happened to her son. That Silêmanê Mistê was indeed challenging Cemîlê Çeto proves the latter's reaction: he does not leave the revenge to the concerned farms, but collects seven Pencînaran families and debates with them what to do. With a large armed force they go after the looter, and kill him from their trenches. However, the revenge is also harsh, as Cemîl loses his younger brother.

From the discussed kilams, of which more examples will follow below, the figure of the local leader emerges as a leader with at least some fame, someone who had the lead over a smaller or larger clan or tribe. The smaller chieftans stood close to the common people with whom they fought side by side. The larger chiefs such as Cemîlê Çeto were less approachable; they lived in a palace and had power through their ability to call upon many clans in their area in times of need. The kilams Filîtê Qûto and Silêmanê Mistê are examples of the many kilams about tribal disagreements which could lead to many deaths. The kilams demonstrate how the dengbêjs do not only praise their heroic leaders, but also often criticize them in the kilams. Kurdish leaders are not presented as blameless heroes; they perform many heroic deeds but sometimes fail in their endeavors, or do things that cause harm to themselves or others. In the nineteenth century Xozan fight, the choice of the Pasha to join the Ottomans leads to the death of over three hundred soldiers. In the story of Filîtê Quto and Mamê Emê, the aggressive behavior of both men leads to fifty-five death. In the case of Silêmanê Mistê, a longstanding feud seems to have been the reason for his challenge to Cemîlê Çeto. It shows that also famous and important leaders could be challenged by people with a lesser position.

Despite all criticism they are presented as their own leaders, whereas the Ottomans and Turks are outsiders with whom leaders had an uneasy relationship, as we will also see in other kilams in this and the next chapter.

1.6 A Kurdish geography: place names and landscape marks

This section forms an intermezzo on the sections about kilam figures, and discusses how the kilams as a collective create a Kurdish landscape by drawing an imaginary map of the geography of the local environment. As in the kilam *Genc Xelîl* with which I began this chapter, in which Diyarbakır becomes the center of attention instead of the court of the Ottoman Empire, so does the totality of kilams create a landscape in which the Kurdish local environment occupies center stage. Through the continuous mentioning of place names and physical marks in the landscape during a

performance, the dengbêjs draw a map of the Kurdish region. This mapping may have functioned as reference points for past listeners, as the kilams could make one aware of the larger picture of one's own living environment. It also shows that the local environment was perceived as a reality of its own, without immediate reference to the states and larger political systems it belonged to. As I explained above, the dengbêj art seems to have had a much more localized character in the past, when dengbêjs sang about their immediate environment, about their tribes and local heroes.

In battle and rebel songs place names are often carefully mentioned. For example, if we look at the song collection of Kevirbirî, in all eleven kilams the places of the events are mentioned, in battle songs more precisely than in love songs. Conversely, in love songs landscape marks are more prevalent (for example the spring, the *zozan*, the summer pasture, or a certain mountain). I discuss here the battle song about the fight between Filitê Quto and Mamê Emê, and show how the kilam takes us from place to place on an imaginary journey. As I already described the story in the previous section, I focus here only on the presentation of place names and landscape marks, and on what this could possibly bring about for the audience of the kilams.

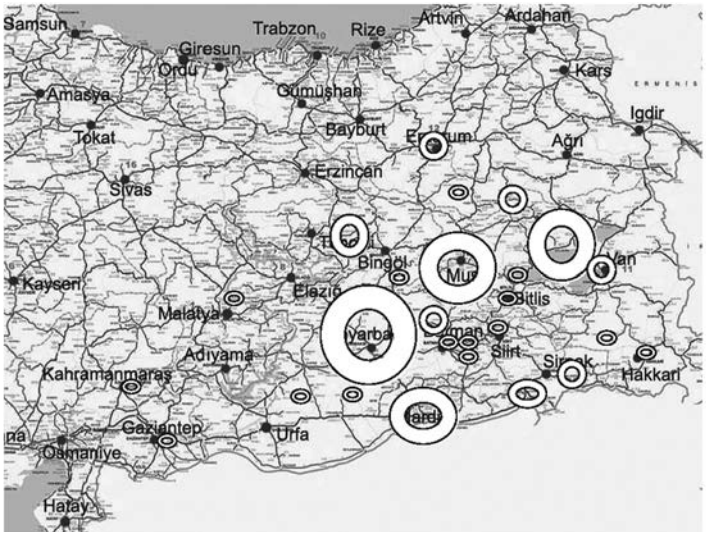
Starting in Bitlis the Etmank tribe needs to pass Baykan and Xerzan in order to arrive in Diyarbakır. One night they set up their tents at the Badareşê spring, which is on the road to the village Tapiyê close to Beşîrî. They are now in the area of the nomadic Reşkotan tribe which possesses larger and nicer tents because of their nomadic existence. By horse the Etmank leader visits the Reşkotan leader and asks for something to drink. After the disagreement between the two leaders the Etmank continue their journey to Diyarbakır where they manage to exchange their salt for grain. They also buy a rifle at the Sûka Şewitî, a market in Diyarbakır. On the way back they again set up their tents in Reşkotan lands, this time at Bileyder village close to Beşîrî. This is where a heavy battle starts between the two tribes. People from the neighboring Pencînaran tribe from the Şêxevinda area of the mountain Kolik hear the sounds of battle and hurry to the battle field to see what is going on. Seeing the arrival of yet another tribe, the Etmank assume they have no way to escape and stay at the battle field. Most of the Etmanks get killed; only three men manage to escape. They follow the Beşîrî River to the north and reach Baykan via Xirabajar village.

Hearing the kilam with all its details, (past) listeners[169] from the Xerzan region would have been able to follow the journey in their imagination. They could visualize the settled Etmank tribe with their salt caravan coming from Bitlis, a famous old settlement with rocks and castles which they may have never seen and only heard about. They could see them travel to Baykan and from there to their own region, imagining the stone road through the dry mountainous landscape. Here the story nears the region where they lived, Xerzan, of which they knew every village, river, spring and mountain. At this point the kilam gives more specific place names: names of villages, a river, a spring and a mountain. They could visualize how the Etmank leader goes on horseback to the Reşkotan, their large dark brown tents of goat hair grouped together in a valley. After the disagreement they saw how the next morning the Etmank caravan continues its journey to Diyarbakır, the famous old city that some of the listeners may sometimes have visited. Either from hearsay or from experience, they could see the Sûka Şewitî market in their imagination with the traders, the goods, the colors, and the basalt (often Armenian) houses around.
This is how the kilam created a map of the local environment with the villages and landscape marks the listeners knew, and some towns and cities further away they may have only heard off. Especially from the book of Kevirbirî, in which most kilams are taken from dengbêj Salihê Qubînî, it becomes clear that kilams about the region the dengbêj comes from are filled with detailed place names and landscape marks, whereas in kilams about places further away only place names of larger towns and cities are mentioned. The centre of his kilams is the nearby local environment. Kilams about distant places are more imaginary and less detailed. Dengbêjs sometimes pointed to mistakes they heard in kilams sung by others. Coming from the region the kilam was telling about, they immediately heard the mistakes in village names or landscape marks. Singing about their own region they could better remember the exact locations, whereas singing kilams about other regions made them less accurate.

169 I am referring to the time until the 1980s when the social structure of villages was still vibrant in south east Turkey, when the dengbêjs still played an important role for people living in the small villages, and when it was difficult to travel to other regions. After that the dengbêjs lost much of their past importance, and could not easily find the same attention as before. Nowadays many people have difficulty understanding the kilams and visualizing the stories, and feel disconnected from the life world the dengbêjs refer to.

Figure 5. Place names mentioned in 84 kilams

Aydin	Entab (Antep)	Kayseri	Mîrezilya	Tersus (Tarsus)
Besra 2 (Basra)	Erdîş	Kevir	Mosul	Tetwan (Tatvan)
Batman	Erzirom 3 (Erzurum)	Kilîskende	Murade rivier 2	Tirkiye 2 (Turkey)
Bedlîs (Bitlis) 2	Farqîn 2 (Silvan)	Kolê village	Muş 11	Tûtax (Tutak)
Bêkende mountain	Firat river 2	Kop	Nardizî	Qaf mountain
Beirut 2	Gire Xane	Kosedax 2	Ridwana river	Qamûşla (Qamishli)
Beytulşebab	Girîdax 2	Licê	Şam 4(Damascus)	Qaranliq
Bexdad (Baghdad)	Goksu	Medina	Sarusiya	Qazgol
Bilêderê village	Gola Xelîl	Meka	Şengal mountain4	Qerejdax 3
Bingol 6	Hama	Melazgir 5	Şerefdin 4	Qerekilise(Karakilise)
Bireka Qîrê	Hamûdê 3 (Amuda)	Meletiye (Malatya)	Serhed 8	Qers (Kars) 2
Bişêrî	Hauran	Meleto	Sêrt 2 (Siirt)	Qubîn
Botan 3	Hedhedik	Memediyan river	Şînoza	Wan 2 (Van)
Bulanix 2 (Bulanik)	Heka (Hakkari?)	Meraş (Maraş)	Sîpan	Xinis (Hinis)
Bursa	Heleb 5 (Aleppo)	Mêrdîn 7(Mardin)	Swerêg 2(Siverek)	Xozan
Cizîra 3 (Cizire)	Hezro (Hazro)	Meteranî	Stembol(Istanbul)	Xuruc village
Dêrezorê	Iran	Midyad	Sûriye/Binxetê 3	Yemen
Dêrik 3			Şûşan	



In the kilams of the selection I made from my own recordings, I encountered 55 kilams with place names. Most of them are situated in Eastern Turkey, and only a few outside of the Kurdish region. Because I do not have full transcriptions of these kilams, which means that there are probably more place names mentioned than I counted, I also examined the first 84 kilams of the *Antolojiya Dengbêjan* (2011). I listed them in the table above, and placed them on a map which shows which place names in the Kurdish region were mentioned most often. The numbers behind the place names refer to the number of times they are mentioned in the kilams. Place names without numbers were mentioned only once.

This list of place names mentioned in the kilams demonstrate that most kilams are about south east Turkey with Diyarbakır, Muş, and the Serhat region as its center. From the total of 180 times that a place name was mentioned, 36 times these were places outside of the Kurdish region in Turkey. From these 36 times 17 times they were places in Syria, which therefore seems to be the main reference point for Kurds rather than places in Turkey, which are mentioned 8 times. The foreign places are usually mentioned in the kilams as to refer to something the place symbolizes. For example the prison of Bursa; the oranges of Dortyol; the traders of Damascus and Aleppo (Şam and *Heleb*); the Yezidis of the Şengal mountains; the border of Turkey (*hidûdê Tirkiyê*); the Turks from Istanbul (*Stembol*); Mecca and Medina as religious places; the government of Syria; and Iran and Syria also as places to where one can escape. Ankara is mentioned twice and Istanbul just once.

It seems justified to conclude that the imaginary landscape of the kilams centers around Kurdish socio-political experience, and that the centers of the Ottoman Empire and Turkey, the states the Kurds belong(ed) to, do not appear as important places in the kilams. This Kurdish geography does not take the shape of a larger Kurdistan as a socio-political entity, but of smaller local structures that must have resonated with the dengbêjs' and their audiences' reality.

1.7 Kurdish rebels and the Turkish state

Next to the many kilams about relationships among the numerous tribes that made up the Kurdish socio-political landscape, there are also many kilams which thematize the relationship between the Kurds and the Ottoman/Turkish state. I discuss this relationship through the figures of the *fugitive*, the (unsuccessful) *rebel*, and the *traitor*. As we will see, these figures again display sensitivity for the multiple dimensions of both heroes and villains. I did not encounter many kilams in which Ottoman and Turkish individuals are personified. Mostly, they are referred to as soldiers, as *Rom* (the most commonly used term to refer to Ottomans/Turks in the kilams), as *hukumet* (government), or as Mustafa Kemal (who is hardly ever referred to as Atatürk). This again points towards the distant relationship displayed in the kilams between the Kurds and the state.[170]

170 "The central government officials were, and are, distrusted, and have not been able to replace the traditional authorities" (van Bruinessen 1992: 69).

State borders and the fugitive

State borders are often mentioned in the kilams as places of escape. In many kilams the Ottoman or Turkish borders are presented as places not to stop but to cross. One could take advantage of the political reality of borders by exchanging one tax system for another one, by escaping one government and hiding in another country until the impending punishment was barred or forgotten, or by hiding in one country until the time was ready for revenge in the first country (see for examples also chapter 2). Until today, the nation-state borders in the Kurdish region are the terrain of conflict and battle, and of smuggle and escape (see also chapter 5). The dengbêjs kilams form an interesting source of Kurdish perception of these borders. I will discuss them through the figure of 'the fugitive', a figure most prevalent in rebel songs.[171] The way state borders come up in the kilams demonstrates how many Kurds perceived the political geography of the states they belonged to as foreign, and not as part and parcel of Kurdish social reality. This follows on the previous section about the centrality of the Kurdish region in the kilams. Both points demonstrate that the Kurds experienced the larger Kurdish region, rather than the Ottoman or Turkish state structures, as what mattered to them economically, socially and politically.

An early kilam in which the figure of the fugitive is present is a kilam ascribed to Evdalê Zeynikê about the above introduced Surmeli Memed Pasha. In the kilam *Lo Mîro* the Pasha and his son Evla Beg escape from a battle they joined in the region Erzurum. Without knowing the context of the battle, it is still clear that the two are in an awkward situation, attacked by groups from all sides. The only chance for escape seems to be the Iranian border, even though the relationship with the Iranians is also far from straightforward. The kilam sheds light on the troubled position of a Pasha with conflicting loyalties.

Lo Mîro[172]	Oh King
Hayde bavo, axayo de sîyar be	Hey father, mount your horse, oh agha
Mîrê min sîyar be	My mîr, mount your horse, mount mount
Ji siyara siyarekî rindî karîbar be	Be the most handsome and ready riders of the riders
Di ser dêlbujyê Erebî hur da xar be	Lean down on your horse crazy Ereb's neck (..)
Bavo bajo! Axayê min bajo!	My father, ride! My agha, ride!
Mîrê min bajo!	My mîr, ride!
Konaxa kekê min Iran e bajo!	Your destination is Iran, ride!

171 The figure of the 'fugitive' is based on the following songs: From my own recordings: *Bavê Faxriya* and *Musa Beg* by Ehmedê Aqutê (Istanbul, April 2007, nr.7 and nr.15), Îsmaîlê Êyo bavê Orhanê by Seyidxanê Boyaxçi (Diyarbakır, May 2007, nr.49), *Xêlya* by Salihê Qûbînî (Doğubeyazıt, June 2007, nr.120), *Bavê Salih* (Diyarbakır, June 2007, nr.103), *Bavê Hiznî siwarê Beşo* by dengbêj Xalitê Xerzî, (Diyarbakır 2008, nr.203). From Kevirbirî 2001: Çûro û Fesîhê Mihê Mîrzê by Salihê Qûbînî (pp.117), *Ferzendê Beg* (pp.137). From Aras 1996: *Lo mîro* (pp.55-59).

172 From Aras (1996: 56-57). Translation: Hanifi Barış and myself.

Binê bavê Evla Begê Mîrê Zirav da	Under Evla Beg's father, the tall king,
Şev-xûn lêketye	[the horse] became sick of exhaustion
Zîn û pûsata weldigerîne	He is anxiously shaking his harness and weapons
Dikim-nakim teng û bera qe nagire	No matter how hard I try, I cannot get the saddle steady
Evla Begê bi sê denga kire gazî	Evla Beg called over and over:
Go: Surmeli Memed Paşa bavo!	Surmeli Memed Pasha, father!
Wê ji hal û hewalê me çawa be?	What is going to happen to us?
Li kêleka me ya rastê esker Romê ye	On our right side are Turkish soldiers
Li paşya me eskerê Hecî Usiv Paşa yê Sîpikî	On our back there are the soldiers of Heci Ûsiv Pasha from the Sipikî tribe
Sofî Paşayê Hesenî, Temo yê Cibrî ye	And Sofi Pasha from the Hesenî, Temo from the Cibran
Wê ji hal û hewalê me çawa be?	What is going to happen to us?
Surmeli Memed Paşa digo:	Surmeli Memed Pasha told Evla Beg:
Evla Beg lawo tu bajo!	Son, just ride,
Bavê te me, kilê çavê Eyşan Xanimê me	I am your father, the coal of Eyşan Xanim's eyes
Ez xwedanê şanzde agirê me, lawo tu bajo!	I am the owner of the 16-shot. Son ride!
Bavê teyê Şev-xûne li Ereb xe	Your father will make Ereb sick of exhaustion
Di ware Husên Begê ra lêxe	He will enter through the lands of Hesen Beg
Di Sînega Êzdiya û Çemçê ra derbas be	Pass through Sinega of the Yezidi, and through Çemçe
Bi sibê ra konaxa bavê te Pîrkend e	At sunrise your father will have arrived at Pirkend
Axayê min sîyar be! Mîrê min sîyar be!	Mount your horse my Agha! Mount your horse my Mîr!
Ji bo malê dunê ne sefil	Don't be miserable, and don't feel stressed
Ne jî tengezar be	about the properties of this world
Bira felek bi t era yar be	May fortune be your friend
Nebû bira çend saleka li erdê Iranê	In Iran they have not been brothers for many years now
Kafirê Ecem bi te ra neyar be bajo!	May these infidel Persians be your enemies. Ride!

Surmeli Memed Pasha is rousing his horse until he is sick of exhaustion. On the anxious call of his son Evla Beg he promises that they will make it. On their right side are Ottoman soldiers, on their back the soldiers of three Kurdish tribes. The Han of the Circassians is also hunting them. Altogether the situation is quite desperate, but father and son seem to be able to reach Iran before they get caught. The kilam demonstrates that Surmeli Memed Pasha and his son are persecuted from all sides: the Ottomans, enemy Kurdish tribes, and Circassians. At the moment of the escape, all of them are described as enemies. Like van Bruinessen (1992), MacDowall (1996) and others have shown, Kurdish tribal leaders made alliances with a range of different parties, be them Kurds, Turks, or other groups.

The fugitive plays also an important role in kilams of the beginning of the Turkish Republic. After the Kurdish rebellions[173] taking place in those years, people tried to escape from the hands of the Turkish government by fleeing across the border. Most fugitives fled to *binxetê*, a synonym for Syria meaning 'below the line',[174] the railway, which is much more often used in the kilams than the name Syria. This is an interesting detail demonstrating that the state borders as they were drawn in 1923 were not immediately perceived as social realities by many Kurds. A very well-known kilam, which was sung by many dengbêjs during my research, is *Bavê Fexriya*, 'Fexriya's father'. The kilam's main protagonist is Sabrî, the son of Hecî Mihemed, who was again the son of Mistê Quto. Sabrî was the leader of the Reşkotan tribe, a descendent of Filîtê Quto (see previous sections), and is known as 'father of Fexriya', his daughter, and 'rider of Gêjo', his horse[175]. According to Kevirbirî's research, he had taken part in battles with the government, and had for that reason lived as a fugitive in the mountains for many years. At a certain point, together with other Reşkotan people, he crossed the border to Syria to stay safe of government persecution. Years later, after a general amnesty, he returned to Turkey with his family.

Kilams about fugitives are often not about the fugitive's situation during his absence, but about the emptiness he leaves behind in the hearts of the people who love him, and about the news they occasionally hear about him. Theme of such kilams is the despair and helplessness of his people who cannot reach him and who cannot do anything to help out. *Bavê Fexriya* is about an Armenian woman called Zero, who secretly fell in love with this married man, and keeps loving him when he is out of reach in a foreign country. In the kilam she tells what happened to Bavê Fexriya when he was still in Turkey, and how he left for Syria. She expresses she feels his absence and would like to be with him.

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173 After the downfall of the Ottoman Empire in WWI, and the division of its territory among European powers, in the Treaty of Sevres (1920), "the colonial powers promised the Kurds autonomy, or – if the Kurds wished – fully independent statehood." (White2000: 70). Mustafa Kemal had promised recognition of the Kurds and even "some limited forms of 'Autonomous Administration' by the Kurds in a Kurdish region centred on Kurdistan" (Ibid. 73). However, these promising plans were fully discarded in the Treaty of Lausanne, which was signed after laborious negotiations in July 1923. Turkey emerged as a soverign state, but the Kurds were bitterly disappointed by the Treaty, in which none of the promises made to them had been fulfilled (White 2000: 73, Zürcher 2004: 170). The sultanate was abolished, and Kurdistan was divided over Iran, Syria, Iraq and Turkey. The profound feeling of disappointment and lost hope among the Kurds led to a series of rebellions in the first ten years of the new republic. See also chapter 2.

174 This term refers to the railway line crossing Kurdish territory, and parallel to the Turkish-Syrian border.

175 Important people are often called the 'father of..'. It is a form of respect not to say someone's real name. Heroes are also identified with their horses, as Allison (2001) remarks.

Bavê Fexriya ew bihar e wextê cota[176]
Ji xêra mala xweziyê Xwedê re
Min sere xwe daniya
li sere çokê Bavê Fexriya
Min kil û derdê rezîl têr jê re bigote
Bavê Fexriya ew bihar e
Ji kula dilê min re xweş bihar e

Bavê Fexriya it is spring, time of the work on the land
I wish in the name of God
That I would just have laid my head
on Bavê Fexriya's knee
That I could just have told him how full I am with sorrow
Bavê Fexriya it is spring
Spring is my heart's desire for the wound of my heart

Then she tells how Bavê Fexriya got wounded in an attack and tried to warn the people of his village by going on horseback to a high place above the village to give alarm because of an imminent attack of Turkish soldiers:

Min dî bavê Fexriya, Kekê Yaho,
Torinê Mala Ezo[177]
Ji mal derket li Gêjo siwar e
Gêjo di bin Bavê Faxriya de dîn û har e
Derket Kavanê Qîre
bi sê dengan kir hewar e
Min nizanibû Bavê Fexriya,
Kekê Yaho, Torinê Mala Ezo
Bi sê gulê Romiyan birîndar e

I saw how bavê Fexriya, the brother of Yaho
the grandchild of the house of Ezo
Left the house and mounted [his horse] Gêjo
Under bavê Fexriya [the horse] Gêjo gallops like crazy
He left for Kavanê Qîrê
Loudly calling 'Help!'
I did not know that bavê Fexriya,
Yaho's brother, grandchild of the house of Ezo
Was wounded by three bullets of the Turks

Zero wanted to help him and heal him, bring him to a doctor she knows, and offer herself as a cure for his wounds. She imagines how she would have taken care of him if she would have had the chance, how she would have gone to his house and make him feel comfortable. And she dreams of the possibility of being with him:

Bavê Fexriya, heyra
bejna te zirav e
Ji xoxa xemilandî
-Min rojê sê cara
pê girtî ji eşqa dilê rezîl-
Bi ser xwe de daweşandî
Rabe sala îsal bi destê min
xemşê min karxezala
Ji xwe re bigire birevîne
Bavêje Xeta Sûrî
nav Erebên lêvdeqandî

Fexriya's father, beloved one,
you have a tall and handsome figure
From the peach tree in full blossom
-Three times a day
I am caught by the love of my wretched heart-
I am shaking its fruits over my head
Stand up, take my hand
my young gazelle, my young deer,
and elope with me this year
Let us go to Syria
among the Arabs with their lip piercings

She cannot stop loving him, she is caught by it, her heart is tearing apart. She imagines eloping with him, going with him to Syria, where foreign people live. She wants to be with him even if she cannot be his first wife. She prefers love above money or the status of being the first wife. And she continues dreaming of

176 From Kevirbirî (2001: 108). Translation: Hanifi Barış and myself.

177 Van Bruinessen notes that "only lineages descending from very powerful persons" are called *mal* (1992: 62). Mala Ezo, the house of Ezo, must thus have been an important lineage. See also note 44.

how it would have been to be with him during the many years he was roaming the mountains as a fugitive:

Ji xêra mala xweziyê Xwedê re
Hikûmeta Cimûryetê
fermana min jî rakira
Ez ê çend saleka
Bavê Fexriya re
Bi mehkûmê sere çiyê
Min ê pê re sere xwe daniya
Li ser dara mîrata modoliyê

I wish in the name of God
That the government of the Republic
would also issue an order over me
So that all those years
I would have been with Bavê Fexriya
The fugitive in the mountains
Together with him I would have laid down my head
On doomed wooden branches [as a pillow]

Zero wishes that she would have been convicted like him, so that she could have joined him in his destiny. Clearly, she regards the conviction of the man she loves, or possibly of herself, not as dishonorable or condemnable. The 'government of the republic' is not *her* government, but a foreign power deciding about her and her lover's destiny. Instead of siding with that government, she sides with the convict and prefers to be convicted with him and join him as a fugitive. In the last part of the kilam she goes back to the time before he left, and from there we understand that he was hiding in her father's house. Maybe that is how she got to know him and fell in love with him. She recounts how she was taking care of him and fetching water for him to bring to his hiding place:

Bavê Fexriya, heyra
dora kaniyê dora min e
Bila serê heft bavê min bixwe
Zendê min tev bazin e
Ez çi bikim cerê ave li milê min e
Bavê Fexriya Kekê Yaho,
Torinê Mala Ezo
Li binya kaniyê tî ye
ji xwe re li hêviya min e
Tirsa min heye ji wê tirsê
Yekî derbekê lê xe bejn û bala
Bavê Fexriya Kekê Yaho,
Torinê Mala Ezo
Wê ew jî bibe cirmekî
bikeve ser mile bavê min e

Bavê Fexriya, beloved one,
it is my turn at the spring,
May seven fathers be taken away from me
Or my arms full with bracelets[178]
What can I do, I have the pot of water on my shoulders,
Fexriya's father, Yaho's brother
grandchild of Ezo's house
Is below the spring
thirstily waiting for me
Only there is this fear inside me,
That someone will shoot the nice figure
Of Fexriya's father, Yaho's brother
grandchild of Ezo's house
And that this will be counted
as a crime on my father's shoulders

She tells how she was waiting at the spring for her turn to fetch him water. He was hiding in a place 'below the spring', and waiting for something to drink. She is afraid that he might be seen by soldiers and shot. If something would happen to their

178 This is an expression meaning that otherwise worthy things, such as here the bracelets on her arms, become worthless because of the wish of her heart. It means that she could have easily given away her golden bracelets, or seven of her forefathers, if she could have him in exchange.

precious guest her father would get the blame for it. But the time that Bavê Fexriya was hiding in her father's house has passed, and the kilam ends with the realization that her wishes are dreams and not reality:

Bavê Fexriya, heyra
çem û çemê Omeriya
Binêre ji xwe re li Sûriyê
li keriyê berx û miya
Min dî şeva nîvê şevê
destekî sar ê cemidî
Li bava taxima sing û berê min geriya
Min got, qê Bavê Fexriya
bi xêr û silamet
Ji Xeta Sûrî
ji mekûmiyê ji firariyê
Li ser çavên min ve dageriya
Min nizanibû 'Keçika Şevê'
bû bi min keniya

Bavê Fexriya, beloved one
oh river, oh river Omeriya
Look to the side of Syria,
look at the herds of lambs and sheep
I felt how in the darkness of the night
an icy cold hand
Was wandering over my breasts
I thought that it was Bavê Fexriya
in good health and with peace,
Who came from cross the Syrian border
from conviction, from escape,
And returned with my great happiness
I did not expect that the night's devil [a dream]
Would become my delight

She is always looking in the direction of Syria's border, looking from far at the herds of sheep in the valley that goes to Syria. And one night she dreamt he had returned, and came to her to be with her. But unfortunately, it was just a dream. Maybe this kilam has become so well-known because the longing for a fugitive is its central topic. During my research Kurds often expressed the experience of longing for a loved one who is out of reach because of migration, exile, or imprisonment. In other kilams the fugitive is only one of the figures, whereas here he is the main protagonist.

The kilams about the figure of the fugitive, of which more examples will follow in chapter 2, demonstrate how the state borders were perceived as chances to escape from government persecution. However, escaping to neighboring states had its down sides. They were not necessarily safer than the homeland as we could see in the kilam *Lo Mîro*, in which Surmeli Memed Pasha and his son did not know if they would be safe in Iran. Moreover, it was difficult to reside far from relatives and land, as *Bavê Fexriya* shows. Also, battle could be more acceptable than escape, because the latter could easily be regarded as cowardice. This is related to the fact that the Turkish government was seen as the enemy. In most kilams, the government is not present as a just or legitimate authority but as a brutal and foreign force.

The (un)successful rebel

Naturally, not all rebels[179] managed to escape. Some were caught, and many were executed or forcibly exiled. A hero one often hears about in the kilams is Bişarê Çeto, the leader of the Pencîran tribe, and for some time on the run for the Ottoman government. After his first arrest he finds a way to escape prison, but he is arrested again. This kilam takes place after the second arrest and is a good example of how a hero is criticized for being caught, and challenged to do better. Bişar, son of Çeto[180], is in the prison of Bitlis and his father comes to see him.

Çeto dibê: Bişaro lawo[181]
Bejna Bişarê Çeto, Bişarî Axê
Kulîlka di nava kûnciya
Hêşîn dike li Gozelderê, li Marîbê,
Li 'Eynqesrê, li Kêşa Xerzan, li Birinciyan
Dema ku Bişarê Çeto, Bişarî Axê
Dibû mehkumê sere çiya
Gelekî dilê min bi rehma Xwedê xweş bû
Min digo qê wê bigîje eskerê Eliyê Ûnis
Bibe qewmê Çiya

Çeto says: hey Bişar my son!
The tall figure of Bişarê Çeto, the Agha of Bişarî
Is a flower among seeds
He makes fertile Gozelderê, Marîbê,
'Eynqesrê, the Xerzan plain, and the Birincî
When Bişarê Çeto the Agha of Bişarî
Became a fugitive[182] of the mountains
I felt good in my heart about God's blessing
I thought that he would surely join Elîyê Ûnis' soldiers
And become a part of the mountain people

First, Bişar's father Çeto tells the important position of his son and his pride of him. But after he learns Bişar was arrested he is deeply disappointed that his famous son did not manage to stay out of the hands of the government. 'People of the mountains' is a term used for those who are on the run for the state, rebels or fugitives who are praised for their heroism because they were able to escape (see above), whereas arrest by the government is embarrassing and brings shame over his family. Çeto describes how Bişar is arrested:

Min nizanibû ji axe û axelera
Xwe girtiye Hesoyê Birahîm
Axayê Bişêriya
Roj li nîvro du heb cendirmê Romê

I did not know that from all possible aghas
He would hide at Heso of Birahîm,
the agha of Bişêrî
At noon two Turkish soldiers

179 The figure of the 'rebel' is based on the following songs: From my recordings: *Seydxanê Ker* by Îbrahîmê Pîrikê (Diyarbakır, May 2007, nr.25), Şerê Navala Kela Reşê by Mihemedê Şêxanî (Diyarbakır, May 2007, nr.47), Şerê serhildana Zîlanê and *Ferzendê Beg* by Memê Bazîdê (Doğubeyazıt, July 2007, nr.122 and nr.130), *Rizayê Xêlîd* by Alî Tamince (Van, July 2008, nr.199), *Bavê Salih*, *Xwîna Şêx Ahmedê*, *Bavê Heyder Begê*, *Qudret*, (see chapter 2, recorded in Diyarbakır in June 2007, nr.103, 104, 107, 108, I do not present the names of the dengbêjs due to the politically sensitive content of the kilams). From Kevirbirî 2001: *Bişarê Çeto* (pp.85), *Raperîna mala Eliyê Ûnis* (pp.93), *Ferzende Beg* (pp.137).

180 Üngör (2009) writes the following about Bişarê Çeto that he had provoked the feud between the Elikan and Pencînaran tribes, he had: "telegraphically expressed his joy over the 1908 revolution in the hope of being left alone by the government. Together with his equally trigger-happy brother Cemil Çeto they were known for their extortion ofArmenian, Kurdish, and Syriac villagers in the region."

181 From Kevirbirî (2001: 85-89). Translation: Hanifi Barış and myself.

182 The first meaning of the word *mehkum* is prisoner, but its second meaning refers to outlaws and fugitives, which is the right translation regarding the content of the song.

Bi destî Bişarê Çeto, Bişarî Axê girtin
Wî derxistin ji nava ciya û balgiya
Destê wî xistine darê kelepçê
Berê wî dane Hepisxana Belîsê
Li qarşî Seraya Hikûmatê
Destê xwe avêtine kosteka saeta
Ji berîka te deranîn
Ji gotinê 'alemê lawo
Destê xwe li hev didan
Lawo ji xwe re bi te keniyan

Took the hands of Bişarê Çeto, the agha of Bişarî
Took him out of his bed and pillows
Chained his hands in handcuffs
And brought him to the prison of Belîs
Across the government buildings
They grabbed to your watch
and took it out of your pocket
Oh son from what the universe said
They clapped their hands
My son, they laughed at you among themselves

He accuses his son of not having watched out better, of hiding with the wrong person, and of letting himself be arrested. Bişar feels insulted by his father's reproaches and defends himself by reminding him of all his earlier heroic deeds. When Çeto continues insulting him, Bişar tells him to go back home and tell his wife Gulê to visit him in prison and smuggle a gun inside. In another kilam about this same event, the dialogue is between Bişar and his wife Gulê, which goes in a similar vein. Gulê challenges Bişar and tells him how he used to think big of himself, and she believed his bold words:

Gulê dibê Bişaro heyla malxirabê[183]
Tu tim û dayîm li kêleka min rûdinîştî
Te halana li xwe dida
Te ji min ra digot ez mêrxasê mala Dîbo me
Te digot ez ribazê mala Faro me
Te digot ez peyayê mala Quto me
Te tim û dayîm ji min re digot
Ez mêrikî ji mêranî dîn im
Te digot
li dinyayê mere fena min tu nîn in

Gulê says: oh Bişar, may your house be destroyed,
You used to always sit by my side
You used to boast about yourself
You would say to me: 'I am the hero of Dibo's house'
You said 'I am the rooster of the house of Faro'
You said 'I am the man of the house of Quto'
You used to always say to me:
'I am a man of the crazy type'
You said:
'There are no men like me in the world'

But she felt heavily disappointed after seeing that he could not save himself, and blamed him for being arrested and for embarrassing his house and her name:

Lê heyla malxerabo îro min nizanibû
Tu qelsê temamî mêran î (..)
Îro dor li te girtin, te bi hêsîrî digirtin
Destê te girêdan navê te ji min ra
Îro bi hêsîrî anîn

But oh house destroyed, today I didn't know
you are the weakest of all men
Today they surrounded and captured you,
Handcuffed you, and, to me, your name
was told today as 'prisoner of war'

Also against the accusations of his wife, Bişar tries to defend himself by mentioning all the heroic deeds he accomplished and by trying to remind her that he is not the weak person she imagines him to be after his arrest. Both his father and his wife challenge him, and seem to want to make him strong to escape his situation. Because finally, when he manages to break out, he is praised as the big hero:

183 From the CD *Ji bo bîranîna dengbêj Husêno* (2003) by Delîl Dîlanar. My translation.

Min dît Gula Bişar şar û xêliyê xwe[184]	I saw how Gulê of Bişar wrapped a shawl
Li xwe kir ji mal derketo	Around her head, left the house
Berê xwe daye Hepisxana Belîsê	and set off to the prison of Belîs
Li qarşî Seraya Hikûmatê	Across the government buildings
Roj li nîvro demançe da	Today at noon she gave the gun
Destê Bişarê Çeto	in the hands of Bişarê Çeto
Hepsa Belîsê têr î tijî ye	The prison of Belîs is overfull
Xilas nabe ji tirka, ji kurmanca,	It never ends: the Turks, the Kurmanc,
Ji axe û axalera	the agha's and landlords,
Ji teketûkê qizilbaşa	and a few Qizilbash
Bişar di 'eynî deqê de	At that same moment Bişar
Gazî dikir li topa erqedaşa	called all the *arkadaş (friends)*
Temamî destê xwe li hev didan	All of them clapped their hands
Digotin: yaşa ji te re Bişar Axao, yaşa	They said: *yaşa* Bişar Axa, *yaşa! (live long)*
Ji wê rojê hetakî weak îro	From that day until today [this event] was written down
Yazmiş bûye li paytextê tirko	[In the documents of] the Turkish capital,
Li Xopana Enqerê	In that ruin Ankara
Li qapiyê Hepsa Belîsê qeyd bûye	It is registered at the door of Belîs prison
Li kitûkê Mistefa Kemal Paşa	And in the logbooks of Mustafa Kemal Pasha

In the story of Bişarê Çeto, the criticism of his father and wife made him so angry that he regained his strength, and became again the hero they wanted him to be. The last stanza sketches the relationship with various others. The prison of Bitlis was filled not only with Kurds, but also with Turks and some Qizilbash[185] (who did not live in near proximity and may therefore have not been many). The mentioning of imprisoned aghas points to the harsh measurement of the government towards the ruling class many of whom were killed, forcibly resettled, or imprisoned. The kilam turns Bişarê Çeto in a hero not only for the Kurds but also for the other prisoners, who did not speak Kurdish and congratulate him in Turkish. The kilam says his rebellion was noted in the government registration, and ridicules the new capital Ankara ('that ruin'), and the leader of the Republic.

To conclude, the state is foreign to Bişarê Çeto and his father and wife. Imprisonment by that state means he will lose face and destroy the good name of his family. Escaping from the hands of the state turns him into a 'person of the mountains', a hero on the run, and someone who will be remembered for that.

184 From Kevirbirî (2001: 89). Translation: Hanifi Barış and myself.
185 Qizilbaş, lit.redheads, were adherants of a Shiite sect, today known as Alevi, see glossary.

The traitor

Another regularly recurring figure in kilams about clashes with the government is the figure of the 'traitor'.[186] This figure betrayed his own people (often relatives or members of the same tribe) to the government. The topic of betrayal points on the one hand to frequent collaboration with the government, and on the other to the fact that this is judged negatively, and often strongly condemned. A famous example is that of Emînê Pêrîxanê, also known as Emînê Ehmed. Emîn and Evdile are two of the six sons of Pêrîxane[187] who competed for succession. The two have the same mother but different fathers due to the early death of Pêrîxane's first husband. Evdile is portrayed as a good and popular man who is expected to become the leader of their tribe, the Reman. Emîn is jealous as he himself wants to be the leader of the Reman tribe. For long he has collaborated with the government, and it is said that because of his collaboration with the cruel Turkish commander Samir Bey, hundreds of houses were burnt and destroyed by soldiers in the villages of the Reşkotan and Sînikan tribes. Samir Bey came to this region after he played a role in suppressing the Zilan rebellion which caused many people to flee to Syria. Evdile joined them to bring his mother Pêrîxane to a safe place, but returned to take revenge. Another kilam is about his revenge on Samir Bey, whom he killed and whose head he brought to his mother. However, unfortunately he also falls into the hands of Turkish soldiers, after his own brother Emîn betrays him. The kilam I present here is the lament of Pêrîxane about her son Evdile.

Perîxane dibê: wey li mine axao[188]	Perîxane says: woe me oh agha
Kula li ser kula derda li ser derdao	Sorrow is added upon sorrow and pain upon pain
De rabe kuştiyo bê heyf mao	You murdered but not avenged
Kula Emînê Ehmed birayê xayîn	You who went with the grief inflicted by Emînê Ehmed,
di dil de mao	That treacherous brother, in your heart[189]
Perîxane dibê:	Perîxane says:
Evdile ter e bab û bira bi min ter e	Evdile is young, my father and brother, he is young
Min ji te re nego	Didn't I tell you

186 The figure of the 'traitor' is based on the following songs: From my recordings: *Bavê Salih*, *Xwîna Şêx Ahmedê*, *Qudret*, (see chapter 2, recorded in Diyarbakır in June 2007, nr.103, 104, 108, I do not present the names of the dengbêjs due to the politically sensitive content of the kilams). From Kevirbirî 2001: *Emînê Pêrîxanê* (pp.47), Şerê Newala Qeremûsê (pp.75). From *Antolojiya Dengbêjan* (2007): *Mala paşê* by dengbêj Cahîdo (pp.25), *Lezgîn û Ebûbekir* by Emînê Hecî Tahar (pp.54), *Dayê dêranê* by Evdilhadiyê Arzûoxlî (pp.74), *Tahir bira* by Îbrahîmê Pîrikê (pp.154).

187 Üngör (2009): "There were also intra-tribal intrigues and power struggles, most notably in the Reman tribe. Its famous female chieftain Perikhan, widow of Ibrahim Pasha, had sic songswho competed for succession (..). In order to succeed their mother, the sons had to outclass each other in the ability to exert power and express leadership qualities. Of all her sons, Ömer was known for his ferociousness. (..) In the summer of 1914, the government declared him *persona non grata*" (pp.61)

188 From Kevirbirî (2001: 51-52). Translation: Hanifi Barış and myself.

189 This means that he died without having had the opportunity to avenge the betrayal of his brother.

gava tu coyî xopana Elihayê	when you went to doomed Eliha
Çend peyayê kezebşewitî bibe bi xwe re	To bring with you some brave men
Tu nizanî Emînê Ehmed xayîn e	Don't you know that Emîn of Ehmed is treacherous
Bi Qereqola Elihayê li sere Samîr Begê	At the military post of Eliha with Samîr Beg
Li ewraqê kevn û nû tev digere	Is he all the time searching in old and new documents

Pêrîxane says how the pain about the killing of Evdile by his treacherous brother remained in her heart because there was no revenge. She tells of how she warned him in advance to take precautions, that she warned him about Emîn. Then she describes what happened on the day of the killing:

Perîxanê dibe: Evdile lawo esker rabû	Perîxane says: Evdile my son, the soldiers stood up
Ji xopana Girîdaxê bi giranî	And were nearing slowly from doomed Girîdax
Min dî Emînê Ehmed derketî	I saw how Emîn son of Ehmed left
Ji Qereqola Elihayê	from the military post of Eliha
Bi sê tîpa bi xwe re esker anî	He brought with him three squads of soldiers
Hate Barisla Evdilê Birahîm	Up to Barislê, the village of Evdil son of Birahîm
Bavê Ehmed beranê kejê zerî	Father of the heroic ram Ehmed,
Bi sê ciya çadir kuta	Set up tents at three places
Ji xwe re êwir danî	to host them by himself

Emîn arranged soldiers and came with them to the village of Evdile. Pêrîxane says that she is especially sad because of the way they treated her son without any respect after he died:

Heyfa min li kuştina Evdilê Birahîm	My heart does not burn for the killing of Evdil of Birahîm
Babê Ehmed beranî kejê zêrî nayê	Father of Ehmed, blond ram
Heyfa min tê li wê heyfê	But my heart does burn for this:
Min dî bi qeflê xulaman girtin	I saw how a group of servants carried his corpse
Laşê vî xweşmêrî kişandin bi erdê re	How they dragged the body of this hero over the floor
Ji devê Evdilê Birahîm Bavê Ehmed	How they from Evdil's mouth, son of Birahîm, father of E
Derxistin cotek diranê zêr e	Hit out a pair of golden teeth
Serê Evdilê Birahîm jê kirin	How they cut off the head of Evdil, son of Birahîm
Birine şarê Diyarbekir	And brought it to the city Diyarbekir
Bi xwe re birin bajêr e	They brought him to the city by themselves

They dragged him over the floor and looted and mutilated his body.

In chapter 2 we will find more examples of the figure of the 'traitor.' The figures of the fugitive, the rebel and the traitor demonstrate how the state appears from the kilams as a foreign force that one should fight, from whose hands one should escape, and with which collaboration is heavily condemned. From the fact that the Ottomans or Turks are generally not described in detail, but referred to as soldiers or as the state, it appears that the distance with the state was rather big, and that they were not seen as part and parcel of Kurdish experience but as playing the role of the outside enemy. At the same time, we do not yet see a nationalist ideology emerging in the kilams. There is no reference in the kilams of my selection to a common Kurdish cause or to a greater Kurdistan. Political songs about a united

Kurdistan emerged in songs of Kurdish music groups *koms* that started performing in the 1970s, and cannot yet be traced in dengbêj kilams, apart from those composed later by individual dengbêjs who identified with the Kurdish movement.

1.8 Evdalê Zeynikê: the dengbêj as a figure

The figures I have discussed up to now give an impression of the social and political landscape that emerges from the kilams. But how do the dengbêjs themselves appear in the kilams? Due to the abundance of material and the limited number of studies that have been carried out on this topic, it was beyond the scope of my dissertation to investigate the repertoires of individual dengbêjs of the current or the previous generation, such as Şakîro, Reso, Husêno, Karapetê Xaco or others. I will, however, briefly discuss the kilams ascribed to Evdalê Zeynikê, as he is the most famous dengbêj of the nineteenth century to which many current dengbêjs trace their knowledge. He became a legendary prototype for what it means to be a dengbêj, and because of this position he can be regarded as a 'figure' in his own right.

The dengbêjs call him the great master, and all of them know at least several kilams ascribed to him. The Evdalê Zeynikê kilams discuss his position and fame as a dengbêj, his life story, and the adventures of his patron, Surmeli Memed Pasha, and give therefore a better impression of the personality and activities of a dengbêj than is known of other dengbêjs. His fame made him the topic of several books[190] on the dengbêj art, and he is well-known among many Kurds. A film was made about him and released in 2010, winning several international rewards.[191] In the 1930s some Kurdish intellectuals living in Armenia collected Kurdish folk songs which they published in the anthology *Folklora Kurmanca*. The anthology contains many kilams about Evdalê Zeynikê, showing that he was a well-known dengbêj also in those years. The kilams have many of the same topics and speak in the same way about Evdalê Zeynikê as the kilams the dengbêjs sing today.

Ahmet Aras, a Kurdish folklorist who did research in the 1960s and in 1980, spoke with many people who had known him, relatives and neighbors who had spent time with him or had seen him performing. In his book (in Kurdish) *The legendary Kurdish poet Evdalê Zeynikê* (1996), he combined the collected information with the lyrics of the many kilams about him. I use his book as the basis of this section. Some of these kilams were sung regularly by dengbêjs during my research, for example

190 Aras 1996, Uzun 2005.
191 Film: "Evdale Zeynike", director: Bülent Gündüz, production: cinepotamya, year: 2010.

the kilam about Evdal and the crane, Evdal and Gulê, the blind Evdal in his older days, and Evdal and Temo. The publication of the kilams in *Folklora Kurmanca* in 1936 demonstrates that the kilams are indeed from an early date and can be seen as giving some insights into previous moral narratives. Apart from the timing of the kilams, the Evdalê Zeynikê kilams also support my argument that the kilams often give the impression that they are sung from the perspective of the Sunni Kurdish common wo/man.

If we look at the twenty-five kilams published in Ahmet Aras' book, and the versions published in *Folklora Kurmanca* together with the kilams of my collection, they all strongly relate to the life story of Evdalê Zeynikê, much more than other kilams which often do not reveal much about the personality of the dengbêjs.[192] This feature makes it possible to say more about the figure of the dengbêj and his position. Aras (1996) ordered the kilams in his book chronologically. I roughly divide them into three periods, starting with how Evdal discovered his singing talent, his first performances and his coming to fame. The second period of his life begins when he enters service with Surmeli Memed Pasha and becomes his personal dengbêj. This period ends with the death of the pasha and later his son Evla Beg. After the latter's death Evdal goes blind, and in this last period of his life people seem to have forgotten about his former fame.

Aras estimates that Evdal's birth date was in 1804, and his death a few years before the First World War.[193] His father died when he was still a young child, and since his mother , Zeynê, raised him on her own he became known as 'Evdal the son of Zeynê/Zeynik'. According to Aras' information, he was from the Pazûki clan from the Meman tribe, was born in the village Cemalvêrdi, and made a living from farming. When he was about thirty years old it is said that he had a dream which was explained by an elderly man of the village as meaning that he will become a great dengbêj. Soon thereafter he falls heavily ill, and stays in bed for about six months. One day

192 This reminds strongly of the Turkish *aşık* tradition (see Introduction and chapter 3 and 4). Aşıks compose many songs by themselves and always mention their name in the last stanza. The personality of the Aşık, and his personal story, receive much more attention than is usually the case in the dengbêj art. It seems likely to me that Evdalê Zeynikê was influenced by aşıks in his living environment, since he lived not too far from places where Aşıks were active. The story of the way in which he became a dengbêj also resembles aşık stories about the god given character of their art which made them suddenly capable of playing the saz and singing songs. I did not encounter similar stories among the dengbêjs of my research. More research is needed to support or contradict such claims.

193 From the interview Ahmet Aras (1996) conducted with Evdal's grandson Emre, it seems he lived from approximately 1804-1914. His birth year may have been later, but it seems likely that his year of death is accurate, as Aras spoke with several grandchildren, relatives, neighbors and friends of Evdal.

he feels he has healed, and asks his wife Eyşe to bring him fruit juice. He drinks the juice and starts to sing marvelous songs. From that moment on his name spreads and he becomes a famous dengbêj who is invited to many dîwans, celebrations, and weddings. Many aghas ask him to become their private dengbêj, but he refuses all. He wants to be free and travels around on his own while giving performances.

In the kilams Evdal is described as a common man who in the kilam *Ezê ji Erzurumê hatim bi kawranî* traveled from Erzurum by caravan and is hosted by a family in the village Çulyê. One of the girls of the house embarrasses him by remarking on how short he is. Also in other kilams Evdal is described as a short, insignifigant person who does not receive much female attention. This contrasts with his excellent singing qualities. Several kilams are love songs in which girls fall in love with him because of his voice rather than his appearance. There are more kilams about caravan travels, which depict Evdal as a common village man who joins his fellow villagers in setting up a caravan to sell farm products and buy necessities in faraway places.

But meanwhile his fame as a dengbêj is spreading, and reaches a turning point when he dares to compete with two of the most famous dengbêjs of his time: Gulê and Şêx Silê. Gulê is an Armenian female dengbêj in the service of Surmeli Memed Pasha who has promised to marry the dengbêj who can beat her. The competition between Evdal and Gulê is one of the most well-known dengbêj kilams. It fits the figure of the Armenian woman discussed above who is a possible marriage candidate for Kurdish men.

Gulê:[194]

Evdal merûmo, cavê mine reş in, reş-bela ne	Oh Evdal, deprived man, my eyes are deep black
Minê rojê sê cara bi kilê Subhanê kilda ne	I paint them three times a day with Subhan coal
Gelle dengbêjê mîna te,	Would a dengbêj like you
ji bo mi jinê xwe berdane	Leave his wife for me
Wey can Evdal, wey can Evdal	Oh dear Evdal, oh dear Evdal
Heyla kirîbê Evdal ez heyîrî te mam	Dear *kirve*[195] Evdal, I am your admirer

Evdal:

Heyla Gulê ez hatim Xamûrê, lê ha li hember e	Oh Gulê I came from Xamûr to compete with u
Minê bala xwe dayê,	I looked well and saw
Gulê yeke bejn-zirav e, garden zer e	That Gulê is tall and smart, with a golden neck
Minê sond xwarye bi încîla Îsa	I swore by the book of Jesus
Bi Qurana pêxember e	and by the Qur'an and the prophet
Bi sere sibê ra Gulê wê boxçê xwe	Against the morning Gulê will have
Hilde bi mi ra were	surrendered herself, come with me

194 Aras (1996: 44), my translation.

195 A *kirve* is the person who supports a boy during his circumcision. The kirve institution creates a lasting relationship between two families. Referring to someone as *kirve* is also used in cases where there is no other relationship such as kinship or being from the same tribe or neighborhood. It is meant to say 'we are not total strangers', and in that way creates a bond and makes people feel comfortable (personal communication with Hanifi Barış 2013).

After 'three days and three nights' the competition ends in victory for Evdal, who says that he cannot marry her because he is already married. His victory results in Surmeli Mehmed Pasha asking Evdal to become his dengbêj and to move to his estate together with his family. After some hesitation Evdal indeed joins him, and is now tied to the leader's life and battles.

I already discussed two kilams in the above sections where we saw that, along with praise, also criticism regarding the exploits of the pasha is part of the kilams. In most kilams that deal with the Pasha the relationship between the Pasha and Evdal is a topic of discussion. In the kilam about Evdal's competition with dengbêj Şêx Silê, who serves the Kurdish leader Tarxanê Qelenyê in Iran, the two leaders compete about the quality of their private dengbêjs, and Evdal wins from the famous Şêx Silê. The dengbêj here is presented as someone who directly defends the honor of his patron. Another famous kilam of Evdal's adventures with the Pasha is *Dêrsim e xweş Dêrsim e*. The Pasha and Evdal are on one of their journeys, and reach the region of Dersim (Tunceli),[196] which tells us something about the existing relations with the various neighbors: the Turks and the Persians.

Dilêm lo lo, Dêrsim e lo xweş Dêrsim e	Oh my soul, my soul, how beautiful is Dersim
Avên çeman û kanyan tên ser me da	The water of its rivers and springs
Gim-gim û zime-zim	Stream over us with beautiful sounds
Ezê li Dêrsima jêrîn rastî sê zerya hatime	In lower Dersim I came across three girls
Yeja Tirk e, yeka Kurmanc e, yeka Ecem e	One was a Turk, one a Kurd, one a Persian
Bextê we da me birano,	They gave me their fortune my brother
Wana bi avirê çava ez kuştime	With a glance of their eyes they killed me

After this stanza he describes each girl in detail, and finally discusses the difficulty of forced marriage and the fortune of being able to marry one's choice.

Evdal spreads the fame of his pasha, but the latter also brings fame to Evdal's name. This becomes especially clear after the untimely death of the Pasha and his son. When the Pasha dies, Evdal remains serving his son Evla Beg, but when he dies as well, Evdal loses his support network and returns to his home village. Around this time a war[197] was raging the country, forcing him and his fellow villagers to leave the village. On the run Evdal finds an orphan whom he adopts and gives the name Temo. When Temo is seven years old Evdal falls blind, and from this time onwards

196 The official Turkish name is Tunceli. The name Dersim was a taboo name for a long time because of the 1938 massacres in Dersim in which thousands or even ten-thousands of people were killed. Since recently (in the last few years) the taboo about this topic was broken, and newspapers began publishing articles about the size and horror of the event. They also began re-using the name Dersim.

197 Aras (1996) speaks here of wars between the Ottomans and Russians, and the Ottomans and Iranians. This must have been in the second half of the nineteenth century

Temo becomes his guide. Evdal, now without patron, and without eyesight, looses all his former fame. Again, as in the old days, girls laugh about him. When he finally is healed he regains some of his old fame, and makes some more kilams about leaders and tribes in his environment. However, the glory days are over. According to Evdal's grandchild Emer, whom Aras interviewed, Evdal spoke the following words on his deathbed: "I have never given importance to material goods. That is why I am poor. I have only left you my name; that is your treasure. As long as the world exists my name will be there. Each of my works is worth gold. Even after 1000 years their value will still be there. With time my kilams may be forgotten, but from two kilams I do not want that to happen: Dersim and Xozan." He sings these kilams repeatedly until his son and grandson have learned them by heart. Then he passes away.

When looking at the Evdalê Zeynikê kilams in their totality, we see that also these kilams present the Kurdish Sunni commoner as the character that voices the kilams and concerns. In this case that common Kurdish Sunni man is the dengbêj Evdalê Zeynikê. Before coming into the service of his patron he lived a village life and joined in caravan trade. His fame was enhanced through the fame of his patron Surmeli Mehmed Pasha, and diminished when his patron's son Evla Beg died. Evdal's fame was thus linked to that of a rich and famous leader. As I suggested in the Introduction, it seems that dengbêjs would try to tie their name to a famous patron and would attempt to join in his fame by praising him and his battles. But although the Pasha's life and endeavors are indeed discussed in the kilams, Evdal's own perspective is what dominates.

The kilams predominantly speak of Evdal's life and work. In the kilams about his patron the Pasha, Evdal's perspective is still often present. The kilams also show a dominant male perspective. In cases where a woman is introduced, she is always introduced as in some way related to either Evdal or the Pasha. In the kilam *Evdal û Gulê* the female perspective is most dominantly present, but is still clearly related to Evdal's interests. The kilams also demonstrate that presedence is given to a Kurdish perspective. They are about the position of Surmeli Mehmed Pasha who is a Kurdish leader who negotiates his leadership with the Ottomans. In the kilams, the Kurds are seen as different from various others, such as the Armenians, Arabs, Persians, Turks and Alevi. This partly overlaps with the religious identity: the Sunni voice is dominant, although generally not much is expressed about religious views.

Conclusion

This chapter focused on the kilams and their figures, and the ideas they convey about the home and the foreign, about places of belonging and alienation, about self and other. The kilams show how the Kurdish song-makers defined their home, what features they regarded as positive and valuable, and how they looked at social problems and power struggles in their society. As such they offer insight into some of the moral narratives existing in times when talk about modernity and tradition, and about Kurdish and Turkish nationalism, were not yet popular or locally available. Also, they are presented as told from the perspective of the Kurdish commoner rather than the elite, and therefore display an otherwise difficult to locate perspective. Although the kilams give a partial and idealized access to these views, mixed with the views and selection of the dengbêjs who perform them (see chapter 2), they do display at least some of the views and moral narratives of the time in relation to which the songs can be situated.

The selection of songs that I used for this chapter were taken from my own recordings and from recent publications in Turkey. This selection demonstrates that currently the focus of (mostly male) dengbêjs lies on old kilams not of their own creation. They speak of a distant past, but one that is still imaginable for people today. This past can still be traced back through the voices of old people today, who were the grandchildren or children of people who lived through those events. Even the kilams of Evdalê Zeynikê, who is seen as one of the oldest dengbêj who can be remembered, and as standing at the beginning of today's dengbêj art, are still traceable to the memories of his grandchildren, children of neighbors, or other acquaintances who had heard people speak of him and his life.

The figure of the 'unhappy lovers' found in love songs reveals some of the social dynamics of village life, of a world in which young men and women often felt deeply unhappy with their powerlessness to influence the decisions made by relatives and elders about their marriages. The enormous amount of such kilams points to the deep discontent and critique present among many people. Most kilams on this topic give the impression that there were few ways out: discussion with relatives often led to no result, elopement was dangerous, and relatives sometimes felt pressured by the wishes of rich and powerful men in their environment, or by other relatives. In chapter 2 we will see that the popularity of these kilams is also related to the interests of the Kurdish political movement that regards the structure of Kurdish society as often problematic and backwards.

Together with the figure of the 'unhappy lovers', the figure of the 'woman in mourning' demonstrates that men rather than women are the central figures of the kilams. Women often appear in subordinate roles. In love songs they are not mentioned by their full names, and historical facts such as place names and timing are often absent. At the same time, the kilams seem to have functioned as important 'hidden transcripts' (Scott 2008) in which people could voice their criticism about the social conventions they suffered from (see also life story 4 in chapter 3), via the voice of the dengbêj. The kilams often display heavy criticism towards the lovers, husbands, fathers, and other relatives, who hindered women from living the lives they desired for themselves. In battle songs, women are often present as voices who mourn the death of a loved one in battle. They describe the battle and the untimely death of the men they loved and lost. In these kilams women are presented as if standing at the side of the battle field and witnessing the battle. They describe the hero and the deadly battle in detail, also mentioning place names, timing, and the names of the hero and his offspring. The difference between the obvious presence of these men, and the subordinate presence of the women who sing about them, underlines the invisibility of women in the kilams (see chapter 5 for a more female centered perspective).

The figure of the 'elite woman' is presented as out of reach for most common men, and in the kilams where a relationship developed between a commoner and an elite woman this would eventually lead to disaster. The warnings these kilams convey and the fact that they are characterized by more fantastic and supernatural motives makes it likely that they were made by commoners who had no direct access to the elite. One could dream about such relationships, and sing kilams about them, but better stay away from such endeavors in reality. Another reason for the popularity of these kilams may have stemmed from the elite who wished to be portrayed as far and unapproachable from the common wo/man, and keep up their position.

The most noticeable Other in the kilams are the Armenians. They are part of the Kurdish geography and therefore not defined as foreign, but they are Other because of the religious difference. The figure of the 'Armenian woman' offers a glimpse of the Sunni Kurdish perspective on these Others they shared their geography with. Armenian women are presented as possible marriage partners, although this was often opposed by the women or their relatives. The kilams mostly display Sunni Kurdish interests, and do not offer much by way of an Armenian perspective. In the kilam *Metran Îsa* the usual power relations are reversed by presenting an Armenian girl as the one who decides about her destiny. The kilam has an Armenian girl marry a Muslim Kurdish man, turns the Bishop into a convert, and lets the famous church

be desecrated. Also in other kilams the figure of the Armenian woman is rather one who supports the position of the men she sings about, than a strong character in her own right. The Sunni Muslim, Kurdish, and male perspective dominates and the Armenian Other is incorporated into Kurdish experience.

The 'local leader' appears in the kilams as someone remarkably close to his people. He is praised, but also criticized. Praise is given regarding the battles in which he took part and the way he courageously fought with a host of enemies. The kilams voice criticism of unnecessary battles and risks and of people who lost their lives without reason. This is often articulated via female characters who are relatives of the leader. This may have been an acceptable way for song-makers to voice criticism for which common people otherwise had no outlet. The kilams about leaders sketch a socio-policital world in which local and small-scale connections occupy central stage and overshadow larger political concerns. Tribal enmities and battles are presented as an accepted part of society, even if criticized for failures and unwise choices.

The 'rebel', 'fugitive' and 'traitor' are all figures that help to clarify the relationship between the Kurds and the Ottoman and Turkish state. These figures convey the message that the state and its representatives were regarded as foreign and as enemies. Being a 'person of the mountains', a runaway who hides in the mountains to escape government persecution, is seen in the kilams as an honorable position rather than a crime. By contrast, cooperating with the government is presented first as dubious and later as treacherous. For example, the kilams about Surmeli Memed Pasha demonstrate that towards the end of the nineteenth century the Pasha's cooperation with the Ottoman government had problematic aspects to it, but was not outright condemned. When the Pasha and his son were on the run from a battle and tried to reach Iran, their enemies were numerous: Ottoman troops and Kurdish and Circassian tribes. In kilams that date from the founding years of the Turkish republic, the enemy of the Kurdish fugitive or rebel came to be more defined as the Turkish state exclusively. Kurds cooperating with the government were seen as traitors and clearly condemned for their betrayal. We also discovered a Kurdish geography embedded in the kilams, one that focuses on the local environment of Kurdistan, rather than on the states the Kurds belonged to. The many songs about fugitives and border crossings also demonstrate that the state borders were not seen as legitimate by many Kurds.

In the songs ascribed to Evdalê Zeynikê, the legendary figure of the dengbêj who is taken as an example for dengbêjs today, turns out to be a common Kurdish Sunni man who becomes famous through the support of his patron Surmeli Memed Pasha. Evdal praises his patron, but also voices criticism. His kilams are situated in

the nineteenth century and give a seeze of the social and political structures of that time. They speak of caravans, horse riders, pashas, local wars, and a troublesome relationship with the Ottomans. They also tell about the personal lifeworld of a dengbêj who achieved legendary fame, but could easily fall from that high position as soon as his support was lost due to the death of the Pasha and his son. Also the famous dengbêj is presented as a commoner who could observe the lives of the leaders, of the rich and the famous from close, but who remained at the sidelines of that life world.

In current narratives about their meaning, the dengbêjs are seen as sources of ancient Kurdish history (see chapter 2 and 4). That history is often presented without reference to specific time periods, and understood as 'thousands of years old'. However, from a closer look at the content of the kilams, it appears that the majority of kilams that indicate a timing, speak of events in the late nineteenth and beginning twentieth century. The content of the kilams concerns a past that is still within reach of contemporary listeners, through the memories of their parents or grandparents. The kilams display concern with the situation of turmoil Kurdish society went through in that time period. They show that the increasing control and interference by the state in local affairs gave birth to increasing enmity between Kurdish leaders and the Turkish state. Although the concept of a larger Kurdish identity, that includes all types of tribes and religious orientations, is not present in the kilams, they do show an increasingly clear opposition between Kurds and Turks. The enmities become more obvious and less prone to change: the Turkish state needs to be fought, and the Kurdish rebel is the hero. This can be understood as a direct reaction to the curtailment of Kurdish independent rule, and to the way Kurdish rebellions were crushed.

The kilams also voice discontent with social structures in which inequality in age, gender, religion, and wealth caused many personal tragedies. Also in this respect the dengbêj art can hardly be seen as a timeless tradition that displays an undefined or general Kurdish pre-modern history. Rather, the kilams demonstrate a strong engagement with social problems and mostly with those of the commoner. The destruction of the emirates, the many intense wars fought on Kurdish soil, the downfall of the Empire and the foundation of the Turkish republic, and the loss of important religious institutions uprooted social structures, and deeply altered the lives of individuals. Hypothetically, such transformations and instability may have given more space than in earlier times to voices of criticism and discontent.

The kilams are a different genre of narratives than most Kurds are used to today, and therefore not so easy to access. One needs to listen attentively to

the kilams to be able to understand them. By studying in-depth a large body of kilams that I collected during my field research, it became possible to gain a better understanding of what they convey. From the kilams discussed in this chapter, the Kurdish home as sung by the dengbêjs offers ideas about what Kurdish society, a Kurdish place of belonging, should look like. It emerges as a home based on local ties and loyalties, with the political system of tribes at its center. The kilams sketch a local Sunni Kurdish life world that is seen as separate from other ethnic and religious groups in the region, albeit not in the form of a larger Kurdistan. The songs about internal battles and switching alliances show a complex and diverse interpretation of the contacts between Kurds and surrounding ethnic and religious groups.

Since the kilams offer ideas about the right and wrongs of Kurdish society, they can be seen as a source of moral narratives that had a certain value for the dengbêjs and their audiences at least until 1980 when the dengbêj art was still thriving. As we saw in the Introduction, the Kurdish movement also developed strong moral narratives about what Kurdish society should look like. From that contemporary moral ground political activists listened to the kilams of dengbêjs and regarded them as outdated and partly unsuitable to support their cause (see chapter 4). They felt that the moral ideas that the kilams display offer outdated and degenerate views on what it means to be Kurdish, and on how Kurds should behave. In the discussions between political activists and the dengbêjs about their kilams two different types of moralities and temporalities met. In the following chapter we will see how both groups approached these differences in moral and temporal perspective.

Figure 6. The entrance of the Dengbêj House in Diyarbakır. Behind the gate the dengbêjs and some visitors sit in the courtyard of the House where they were often singing kilams. 2008.

Chapter 2

‘It would disappear within a moment.’ Performing tradition.

Introduction

> In everything [the dengbêjs] told was rhythm. The songs and epics were all on rhyme and music. And in addition to the rhythm in the words, they added a bodily rhythm. (..) The rhythm made it easier to remember the decorated words and the music that was connected to it. It was as if they knew that if they would not repeat their knowledge in a loud voice, it would disappear in a moment (Muhsin Kızılkaya[198] 2000: 23, translated from Turkish).

Diyarbakır, October 2008.[199] I awoke at 7.30 in the house of a friend. She lives in a quarter of the city that is inhabited by migrants who recently arrived from the villages. I heard the Kurdish voices of women and children outside. Many children were playing, even that early in the morning. Women talked with each other through open windows. The houses were old, a grayish brown, three or four storeys high, with little stairs outside climbing up each of them. On each floor there lived a family, two or three small rooms full of people. I left the house later in the morning, as I did on most days when I was there and took the minibus to Dağkapı. This is one of the large gates in the old city wall, built in antiquity and restored by Constantine in 349 CE. The beautiful city wall and the old restored houses and mosques give Diyarbakır the atmosphere of a distant past. From there I walked in the direction of the old bazaar, filled with people. The sun was burning hot, giving the streets and people a clear-cut sharpness. Small children followed me and tried to sell me packages of tissues or chewing gum. In front of the big mosque, built in the eleventh century by a Seljuk Sultan, old men sat on benches. Many of them wore small knitted caps with blue or red patterns.

I passed the mosque, the bazaar, turned right and walked until I saw the familiar brown sign saying 'Dengbêj House', in Kurdish, Turkish and English. To the left was the small shop of a music seller who played dengbêj music as if preparing the passersby for their visit to the House. When I approached the small entrance to the Dengbêj House I heard the voice of dengbêj Qadîr. His voice sounded old but was still amazingly loud. I could not stop being amazed by the volume, even after all that time. One man singing a cappella can be heard clearly from a distance of more than a hundred yards. I entered the courtyard of the old building with its typical grey basalt stones. The restoration of this old Armenian building took place the previous year and the opening of the Dengbêj House was in May 2007. Twenty to thirty people were sitting on wooden chairs, about ten of them dengbêjs. Most of them were over fifty years old, and all of them were men. They greeted me warmly

198 Muhsin Kızılkaya is a Kurdish journalist and writer currently living in Istanbul. He wrote a book about the dengbêj art, inspired by his brother who was a dengbêj.

199 his section is based on my field notes and video recordings.

and invited me to take a seat. Dengbêj Qadîr continued, his songs never ended, his voice never seemed to break down. In between the stanzas most people joined in humming a small tune, marking the end of the stanza. When he finished the kilam another dengbêj continued, and so on. While the dengbêjs sang, people sitting nearby remained silent. I put my small camera on the table, only pointing it in the right direction when another dengbêj began to sing. They allowed me to film because they knew me and because I had obtained permission. Without permission it was forbidden to make recordings. In this way, the organization of the House aimed to protect the dengbêjs from possible copyright abuses.

At the first sounds of the call for prayer, emanating from the big mosque just next to the House, the dengbêj stopped in the middle of his kilam. Most men stood up to attend the prayers. It was a natural break in the performance, a small movement in a day otherwise passed by in a chair. Often new visitors would enter right before or after the prayers. These were dengbêjs or audience members who had a break from work, who had something to do in the city center and quickly dropped by, dengbêjs coming from the villages around Diyarbakır, or sometimes from other towns and cities. They joined in the concert of voices, in the artistic expression of language, in the colorful play of imagination and recollection.

Dengbêjs do not need much for their performance, and most of what they need is already present in their body: their voice, memory, sense of rhythm, imagination, and social skills. Apart from this they might need a glass of tea with a sugar cube, so that they can take the sugar between their teeth and slowly sip the tea through it. And of course, they need an attentive public, people sitting around them and watching, listening, encouraging their dengbêj by joining in the wordless chorus, singing *ahiaaaaaaa*. Often performing alone in the village setting as it existed until about 1980, and without any other instruments than what they carried in their own bodies and minds, they were expected to entertain a large public for many long hours.

The most important instrument of the dengbêjs is their voice. Because of the lack of a musical instrument, and the solo performance, they train their voices until they are loud enough to keep even the listener who sits in the furthest corner or outside attentive. The second equally important instrument of the dengbêjs is their memory. A dengbêj performance is based on the principal of continuous repetition of sound and words that should not be forgotten. The transience of the oral word is crucial for grasping what it means to be a dengbêj. As in the quote above of Kızılkaya, "it was as if they knew that if they would not repeat their knowledge in a loud voice, it would disappear in a moment". I use the meaning of this sentence here not only to

point to the nature of dengbêj art, but also to the village world and structure that for long formed the stage of the dengbêjs and that indeed did 'disappear in a moment', in a process of profound and rapid transformation that began in the 1980s. Today's performances evoke that lost village world and try to revive and recall it. And with it, not only the village but also other characteristics that are seen as traditional and as the essence of Kurdishness are revived.

I suggest that the celebration of tradition is done through several means. First, the dengbêjs are regarded as sources of history through their knowledge of kilams from old times. Second, they are seen as bearing the traces of an authentic Kurdish past life through their personal experiences with village life and former times. Seeing elderly people perform reminds people of a different life. Performances bring to mind an idealized Kurdish past, a different social structure, and the life world of the villages where most dengbêjs and many members of their audiences grew up. And third, tradition can only be valued positively by neglecting part of the repertoire. The many kilams that refer to the tribal character of Kurdish society are today often left out of performances. By discarding these kilams the dengbêjs respond to current narratives that emphasize the divisive nature of the tribes and the need for Kurdish unity. The anti-tribal sentiments are related to how many Kurds today feel about their Kurdishness. The traditional life world to which the dengbêjs refer stands in contrast with the life world of the 'modern' Kurd. Many Kurds feel partly alienated from their village background and embarrassed because of some of its implications. At the same time they also increasingly feel the need for a recovery and rediscovery of forgotten folk traditions. Performing tradition is thus an act of nostalgia, but one that does not go unchallenged; the recollection that a dengbêj performance occasions forms a contested field. Through the manner of their performance the dengbêjs navigate this charged field of emotions.

I use performance here as a broad term that not only covers the act of singing and the way a stage or performance place is set up and decorated, but also the manner of (self-) presentation when relating to others at moments outside of the performance context proper. Most of the ethnographic material presented in this chapter is taken from performances and interviews that took place in the Dengbêj House in Diyarbakır. The point of departure here are the dengbêjs and their views, rather than those of the organizers of the House. Although the organizers and political activists encourage the dengbêjs to 'perform the nation' (Askew 2002), I understand the dengbêjs as 'performing tradition'. Both groups have different aims, and are therefore often in disagreement. These disagreements are the places where negotiations occur and where people articulate their respective viewpoints.

I focus on three layers of performance, first on the main performance location in Diyarbakır: the Dengbêj House. How does the dengbêj art take shape in and through the House, and how do the dengbêjs and their audiences feel about the performances that take place there? Second, I discuss the self-presentation of the dengbêjs; how do they present themselves to others? What do they say about their role, meaning and position, and how do they perform their role as dengbêjs? I demonstrate that the dengbêjs present Kurdish traditions and history, village life, and their experiences with this life world, as a central and heroic part of their identity. I also discuss how the dengbêjs deal with the part of their repertoire that is currently regarded as dangerous and backwards, that is, kilams about tribes and warfare. Third, I present the details of a performance in the Dengbêj House in which the dengbêjs sang many kilams and discussed them. I chose to focus on this particular performance because it touches upon many issues that were important for the dengbêjs during my research. The performance brings to life the topics discussed in the first half of this chapter. However, before going to the ethnography, I discuss the main theoretical approach that I use in this chapter, namely the 'empersonment' of Kurdishness.

2.1 The empersonment of Kurdishness

Singing and listening to singing is an activity that invokes the whole body. The repetition of melodies and movements that accompany music begin to be experienced in early childhood and give a sense of belonging that becomes deeply entrenched in (bodily) memory (Bilal 2006). They can therefore evoke strong emotions, both positive and negative, in later life. The way music is experienced in the body makes it into an especially powerful instrument for experiencing identity, whether national, religious, ethnic, or any other feeling of belonging. Since music in general, and folklore in particular, were mobilized for nationalist purposes, the performance of music and folklore also at times assumes a nationalist dimension. Bryant's article about *saz*-learning (long-necked lute), an instrument regarded as a symbol of Turkishness, explores the bodily experience of music in relation to the creation of national identity. She argues that Turkish music students when they learn to play the *saz*, are involved in a "self-conscious molding of the self" (Bryant 2005: 224). The learning process involves more than mastering the technique of playing, it also involves learning how to "become a good Turk" (Bryant 2005: 224). Bryant emphasizes the self-conscious nature of this process, 'empersonment' instead of embodiment, the latter being a more unconscious

process. Embodiment and empersonment, both part of musical performance, can thus be seen as part of the process of shaping (national) identities.

Many Kurds feel ambivalent regarding these same processes, because they were taught to 'emperson' Turkishness and to see Kurdishness as a fraudulent and backward part of their identity. This is why in recent decades the Kurdish movement has put so much effort into representing and reinventing Kurdishness as a positive feature, as something to be proud of (see introduction). This is also why 'becoming a good Kurd' is a different process from that of 'becoming a good Turk.' The latter is a process through which one becomes at the same time a better Turkish citizen, a better nationalist, and a better person. Instead, 'becoming a good Kurd' means first that one becomes *less* Turkish, and that one's status as a Turkish citizen, a nationalist, and a 'good person', decreases, at least in the eyes of the Turkish establishment. From this 'outlaw' status one can then proceed to 'become a good Kurd.' However, also this Kurdish status is ambiguous in itself, insofar as it first needs to be cleansed of elements that are defined as backwards or contaminated by outside influences. Thus, the PKK emphasizes a conscious remodeling of the self in order to become a better person and a better Kurd, as they argue that Kurds lost their true identity following centuries of domination (see Introduction).

These two processes of becoming a good Kurd and of feeling the need to overcome backwardness and contamination are also prevalent in the representation of the dengbêj art. Dengbêjs are supposed to transmit a sense of authentic Kurdishness, of what a Kurd was in past times, when Kurds were still 'original'. They are presented as people who are in touch with some of the original Kurdish features, and can therefore play a part in recovering aspects of the essence of that lost identity. This can be identified in how certain gestures and bodily postures are seen as typical for dengbêjs, and are held to define their identity as Kurdish performers, for example, the placing of the hand to the ear while singing. The quality of the dengbêj' voice (its pitch and strength) is perceived as being naturally shaped by the environment (mountains or plains) where s/he comes from. The often tragic sound of the kilams is seen as a natural expression of the deep suffering of the Kurdish people. Ideas about the dengbêjs as being somehow closer to nature, to history, to Kurdish suffering, and to origin, are repeated frequently in interviews, in TV programs, in CD booklets, and in books about the dengbêjs (examples follow in this and other chapters).

The celebration of tradition is done through the continuous repetition of figures and landscapes of past times, the accompanying sounds of the voices, the use of Kurdish and common phrases, and the performance setting. The dengbêj art is framed as a nostalgic activity in which both the performers as well as the content

of the songs and stories, are placed in a time and place outside of the contemporary. During a performance they evoke and emperson a life world that is lost or hidden, but needs to be recovered, revived, and remembered. The repetitive element of the dengbêj art connects the world of the imagination with bodily practice. Those who witnessed village performances in the past are reminded of former days through the presence, voices, and bodily movements of the dengbêjs. More than enjoying performances in the present, which they regard as poor substitutes of past experiences, dengbêjs and public alike enjoy the *remembrance* these performances bring about of past performances and the life world in which these performances were staged.

Dengbêj performances are thus seen as having the ability to trigger and symbolize ideas about Kurdishness, origin, authenticity, and the past. This is important, as many Kurds feel they have lost that direct connection to the Kurdish past. Many Kurds do not speak Kurdish, and did not grow up in a Kurdish environment. They feel they missed out on experiencing that Kurdish life world from within. Bilal (2006) argues that the loss of memories and experiences of Armenians in Turkey who were not allowed to remember produces feelings of a lost identity among the younger generation of Armenians; "the loss itself becomes the experience of being Armenian" (p. 67). Because the voices of the dengbêjs were silenced for so many years, and with them many other cultural expressions, hearing these voices may call up a similar feeling of a lost identity among the younger generation of Kurds who felt brainwashed by the Turkish education system. For other people, performing and listening to the dengbêj art may trigger memories of their past village life, often destroyed because of migration, resettlement or scorched earth policies, and now only existing in their memory.

But dengbêjs are also seen as representing the old traditional, tribal, and backwards Kurdish society, a past people do not like to be associated with. In the view of political activists that are dominant in the current representation of the dengbêjs, these less fortunate features need to be erased from the dengbêj art. Kurds need to 'learn' to become better moral persons, and the dengbêjs, together with everyone else in a public function, bear the task of educating the people in that. This means that activists expect from today's dengbêjs that they focus on the positive features of Kurdishness, but omit those that are seen as negative. This is also why they expect the dengbêjs to dedicate themselves voluntarily to the Kurdish cause (see life story 3 in chapter 3). The self-Orientalism articulated by the activists and inspired by PKK ideology first accepts an Orientalist definition of Kurdishness as primordial, tribal, and backwards. Only after having thrown off these negative

elements, can one become a 'modern Kurd' who can be of use in building a modern Kurdish society. The dengbêjs and their kilams are in part perceived as exemplary of the tribal and backwards nature of Kurdish society, and can only be of use if they turn themselves into modern subjects, and if they recreate their tradition along wholly positive lines. However, at the time of my field research, not all dengbêjs subscribed, or felt connected, to these views. They used their newly established position to attract the attention of audiences, but did not necessarily follow the line of thought of the activists who had brought them there. Also, most of them did not share the ambivalent attitude towards their past or towards their rural, village background. They felt that the Kurdish past as they knew it from their kilams was not as problematic as it is portrayed in current narratives. They also were rather proud of the knowledge and experiences they had obtained in a village setting and wished to transmit this specific experience to the younger generation. In this chapter I investigate these dynamics from the perspective of the dengbêjs; in chapter 4 I turn to consider the perspective of political activists.

2.2 The Diyarbakır Dengbêj House and its dengbêjs

The story of the Dengbêj House that opened in 2007 in Diyarbakır begins with the *Navenda Çanda Mesopotamia* (Mesopotamia Cultural Center), a nationwide chain of Kurdish cultural centers in Turkey. These centers aim at educating Kurds about their cultural heritage, and at enhancing the visibility of Kurdish culture in Turkey's public life (see chapter 4). In Diyarbakır, such a center was opened for the first time in 1994 with the symbolic name Dicle Firat, after the Tigris and Euphrates rivers.[200] After its opening, the Dicle Firat center was closed and banned several times, and some of the people working at the center had been imprisoned. Since 2004 the center has enjoyed a relatively stable existence. The Dicle Firat cultural center has several functions that are comparable to the other centers I visited.[201] It is a meeting place for Kurds who are interested in Kurdish culture and language; cultural activities such as concerts and theater plays take place here; the cultural center supports its own music, dance and theater groups; and one can buy Kurdish books and music releases that are not easy to find elsewhere. In the early 2000s the interest in Kurdish tradition was on the rise and the managers of the center began looking for dengbêjs

200 The name emphasizes the old history of Kurdish habitation in the region, and the link with the empire of the Medes who are seen as the Kurds' predecessors in social narratives.

201 Apart from Diyarbakir I visited the centers in Van and Batman and two branches in Istanbul.

and inviting them to come to the center to perform there. The cultural center became a meeting place for the dengbêjs, who had not had such an opportunity before.

Although this was much to their pleasure, it appeared that it was not always easy to share the place with popular music groups who often practiced at the center as well. When they played their music, the dengbêjs could not continue their singing and felt overwhelmed by the louder music of the groups.[202] In the meantime the organizers of the center had been cooperating with the Diyarbakır municipality in setting up a plan for a heritage project. This resulted in the *Dengbêj ve Dengbêjlik Geleneği Projesi* (the Dengbêj and Dengbêj Tradition Project) funded by the European Union and the municipality of Diyarbakır. One of the aims of the project was to set up a Dengbêj House where the dengbêjs could have their own performance location. In chapter 4 I discuss the institutional aspects of this project and the House in detail. Here I focus on the activities of the dengbêjs and on the House as a place of performance.

The opening of the house happened to take place during my first fieldwork period. Before the opening, I visited and interviewed the dengbêjs in the cultural center. At that time, in spring 2007, the preparations for the new Dengbêj House were in full swing, and the dengbêjs were excited about the prospect. They regularly passed by to see how the renovation and construction work was coming along. Finally, during the seventh Diyarbakır Cultural Festival in June, the House was officially opened. A crowd of some two to three hundred people stood in the courtyard of the House. The opening speech was given by the Mayor of the Diyarbakır larger city municipality, Osman Baydemir. He said:

> In every culture, in every region, there are some valuable things that become the reason for a culture and a language to live on, that become the reason for progress of the people. One of those are, in our region, the dengbêjs, for [the progress of] our culture and language. Indeed, we are very much indebted to the dengbêjs who have prevented from dying out this language I am now speaking, this language that today still exists.[203]

The Festival's host then introduced the new House to the people of Diyarbakır, and four dengbêjs, three men and a woman, were chosen to each sing a famous kilam.

202 "When it is very crowded and there are people talking the dengbêj feels demoralized. Because when people don't listen, he feels demoralized and he will quit. For a dengbêj it needs to be quiet, when he sings, noone should raise his voice. That is the rule of the dengbêjs" (dengbêj Ramazan, interview in Turkish, Diyarbakır 2007).

203 "Di her çandî da, di her kulturî da, di her herêmî da, hinek tiştên giranbuha hene, ku dibin sêdem jibona jiyana çandê û jiyana zimên, û dibin sêdema pêşketina gela. Yek ji wan jî, li herema min, jibona çanda min, jibona zimanê min, dengbêj in, û dengbêjtî. Bi rastî, em gelekî dengdar in ji dengbêjan, ku bi rastî wunnebûna, dibik ev zimanek niha ez pê biaxivim, ev zimana îro nîm mana" (recorded speech by Osman Baydemir, May 2007, Diyarbakır Dengbêj House).

After this official opening, the dengbêjs moved from the cultural center to the House. The Dengbêj House is situated only 500 yards from the center, in the old city center. The building is surrounded by a wall and upon entering its only gate one finds oneself in a large courtyard. In the courtyard are tables and chairs for visitors and the dengbêjs to sit on, and a small building where tea is prepared for them. On the left side of the courtyard one sees a stage that is used on special occasions. On the right side there is a spare room where in 2008 the dengbêjs began to eat their lunch, provided by the municipality. There are also a few other spaces where the dengbêjs gather: two rooms with an official character which are beautifully decorated; and a large basement where the current performance took place, used on hot summer days. Upstairs are a few rooms that serve as offices for personnel from the municipality, among others the tourist office. Since its opening, the Dengbêj House has become an important tourist attraction of Diyarbakır.

Most of the twenty-four dengbêjs officially registered (see chapter 4) at the Dengbêj House grew up in villages near Diyarbakır. The twelve dengbêjs I interviewed were born between 1937 and 1966. They formed the core of the dengbêjs who often performed in the House. Two still lived in their villages and visited the House when they came in Diyarbakır for business or other purposes. The others had lived in the village until they were between twenty and fifty years old and then moved to the city for a variety of reasons. Some did not have their own fields which made it hard for them to make a living, others had to leave their village in the 1990s because of military operations, and still others continue to have a house and some fields in the village, but also found a job in Diyarbakır. The villages they come from are located in the surroundings of Muş, Kulp, Lice, Mardin and Batman. Two out of twelve dengbêjs attended primary school, others did not go to school at all. While in the village most dengbêjs made a living of farming, shepherding, and cattle breeding. Those who moved to the city had various occupations: trade, tailoring, construction, and some were again working as a farmer or shepherd. Although none of these twelve dengbêjs made a living from their art, three of them had released cassettes previously, and one of them had made one of the first Kurdish LP productions in Turkey in the 1960s. It was a marginal production but nonetheless important because of its unique character. Since the early 2000s, the dengbêjs of the House had been invited regularly to attend television programs and festivals. The Dengbêj Project had also contributed to their fame, as a CD was released with their voices, and an anthology of kilams in which sixty-six living dengbêjs are included, as well as the names and kilams of seventeen dengbêjs who passed away. The anthology consists of an introduction to the dengbêj art and a photograph and two kilams of each dengbêj. In a short time

the dengbêjs had thus gained much attention and interest from a large public spread across many regions. For most of them this was a new phenomenon, since in the past their audience had often been limited to people in their immediate environment.

In both places, the cultural center and the Dengbêj House, performances mostly took place in open air in the buildings' courtyards. After moving to the House they continued performing in more or less the same way as at the cultural center. At least some dengbêjs were present almost every day, varying from a few to a dozen at a time. When there were enough dengbêjs present (around five) they would sing and that could continue for hours. Most dengbêjs I spoke with had begun performing again as recently as one to five years before. There was still an atmosphere of surprise and delight among them about the sudden revival. The following quote is from a dengbêj whom I interviewed only shortly after the opening of the House:

> I invite everybody to come to the Dengbêj House in Diyarbakır. To see what we are doing, to listen to us. That's what I say. (Is the Dengbêj House and the cultural center important for the dengbêjs?) Yes it is very important. Until now we had to do with a situation where the dengbêjs of our home regions (*memleket*) were unknown. Nobody knew them. But after the cultural center was opened, it was called the place of the dengbêjs. I only came here after they had told me about it. Dengbêjs didn't come together in any place, and no songs were sung. But after [the House] was opened, things expanded. Where ever there was a dengbêj, he came to this place. We got to know each other. It has become very nice" (dengbêj Silêman, interview in Turkish Diyarbakır 2007).

The dengbêjs had only recently realized that their art was being revived, and that they had their own special place to perform, 'the place of the dengbêjs'. After years of invisibility, 'nobody knew them', they were at once visible players in the public domain. When one approached the cultural center of Diyarbakır one could already hear their voices in the streets. A special program was made about them for local television and they were invited to festivals and cultural evenings. The Dengbêj House made their presence more established; the municipality, cultural center, and even foreign institutions (see chapter 4) gave them their official recognition for representing a tradition of importance. In newspapers and magazines they were presented as the guardians of Kurdish culture.[204] They were not yet accustomed to this new visibility and audibility and were trying to define a new space for themselves within all these developments.

204 For example Salih Kevirbirî writes in an article published on Zaphaber.com: "Kurdish culture, literature and language have survived and were prevented from extinction because of the dengbêjs, like in the meantime hundreds of intellectuals and linguists also have stated. These 'word hunters', these 'speak wizards', or better said the 'hard discs' of Mesopotamian literature, constitute the origins of the history and culture of the soil where they were raised" (April 13, 2008, translated from Turkish).

At the same time, even though they felt inspired by the new attention, there was among most dengbêjs also a strong sense of dissatisfaction with the lack of genuine interest among their audiences. They had a place to perform, but often did not feel sufficiently appreciated. Among many dengbêjs there was a deep sense of difference between current performances and the memories of the past. Many dengbêjs felt that the audience lacked understanding, encouragement and appreciation. The audience, on the other hand, blamed this on the dengbêjs. I often heard the complaint that the current generation of dengbêjs lacked quality, or could not be called dengbêjs at all. People felt that the real dengbêjs had lived in the past and not today. Another reason for the lack of encouragement on the part of audiences was that most of them preferred to listen to other music in their daily lives than to that of the dengbêjs. Many people preferred to listen to musical groups, with their various instruments and voices. These groups were generally much more popular than the dengbêjs. The lack of appreciation was, of course, demotivating for the dengbêjs. The negative attitude of the audience meant that the dengbêjs could not recover the satisfaction and pleasure they had gotten out of performances in their younger years, notwithstanding the new platform they were being offered. I will demonstrate this more clearly below.

The feeling of being misunderstood and undervalued is related to the effort it takes to be a dengbêj. They often told me: 'being a dengbêj is not easy'; it requires much dedication and motivation to keep on memorizing their repertoire. None of the dengbêjs I spoke with had ever written their kilams down, and many were illiterate, or only literate in Turkish and not in Kurdish. They saw the oral character of the dengbêj art as its central quality. When I asked if they had ever written down a kilam, or if they would like to do so, they immediately rejected this idea. Apart from seeing it as unnatural and unnecessary, the dengbêj here also sees a spiritual dimension to the dengbêj art:

> No! Nothing, no writing. The memory is strong. Dengbêjs do not write down. It is a kind of writing that has been given by God! Now, a lawyer gets a training, you get training as well. Now the dengbêj receives training by God. It is a training from God. There is no writing. Singing from the morning to the evening, it is an inspiration given by God, a training. We can sing from the morning to the evening and it does not finish (dengbêj Memo, interview in Turkish, Diyarbakır 2007).

The idea of writing down the kilams seemed to be entirely foreign to the perception they had of their art. Some even expressed the view that kilams *cannot* be written

because they are too long and complicated.[205] And even if it were possible, it would not make any sense since the kilams are stored in their memories anyway:

> (Did you ever write down your kilams?) No I didn't. (Why for example didn't you write it down?) Well, I of course know how to read and write, but I have never felt any need to write it down (*hiç merak etmedim*). It was not necessary, as it remained anyway in my memory. I have never found it necessary (dengbêj Îsa, interview in Turkish, Van 2007).

But the same dengbêj emphasized later in the interview that he needed to continuously rehearse the kilams in order not to forget them, and that, because of the decades in which the dengbêj art had almost passed into oblivion in public life, he and many others had already forgotten large portions of their repertoires:

> We have opened here [the Dengbêj House in Van] in July 2005. But most of the dengbêjs have died. And most have forgotten what they knew. All of us, I am saying this also about myself. I have lost many things, I have forgotten many. If you cannot sing you forget. So what we are doing here, we are bringing it to life since only recently. Before that we didn't have the chance (dengbêj Îsa, interview in Turkish, Van 2007).

For many dengbêjs the time of silence could not make them hold on to the effort it takes to rehearse and remember in detail the many kilams they had once learned. Some dengbêjs expressed how they felt when they realized they would forget their repertoire. They described the process of forgetting as something causing emotional and physical pain and discomfort:

> I didn't sing songs for twenty years. But at home also within those twenty years I continued singing. (Not to forget?) If I don't sing songs I have headaches, so I have no choice than to sing them. At home, when I sleep next to my wife, I sing songs. She says to me, 'what is this singing of yours?' And I say, 'if a song comes to mind I have to sing it'. She didn't want it, but I said, 'if I don't sing I have headaches, I become ill' (dengbêj Abdulqadîr, interview in Turkish, Van 2007).

One of the people I worked with most intensively is dengbêj Cihan, an elderly dengbêj born in 1925, who lived in Istanbul with his son's family. His wife passed away and now in his old age he depends on the care of his children. As his children told me, and as I also witnessed during my frequent visits over the years, he has an insatiable desire to sing, even when no one in the house comes to listen. Often when

205 "He said to me, you sing it, and I will write it down. And I laughed and I said: 'you want to sing it from writing? It is impossible. Do you think you will be able to sing from what you have written?' He wanted a song about a tribal conflict, Silêmanê Mistê. And I started to sing and he wrote it down, and he wrote so much and he said: 'is it still not finished?' And I said: really [*vallah*], it is still not finished". Dengbêj Salih, interview in Turkish, Batman 2007.

he wakes up he starts singing, and also late at night before falling asleep he sings. He has a large repertoire and can, in spite of his old age, sing kilam after kilam. He attaches great importance to what he thinks is the correct version of a certain song, and hearing someone singing mistakes on television (such as mentioning incorrect place or person names) can upset him. During my visits, his sons were glad that he could sing for me so that he had the chance to express himself, saying 'it works as a therapy for him'. The continuous rehearsal of the songs is an emotional and physical need. Therefore, the time in which dengbêjs had abandoned singing in public life was a painful experience for many of them.

The current performance places are new opportunities for the dengbêjs to let their voices be heard, to take the time to remember old kilams which they had not sung for many years, and to discuss their kilams with each other. Most of them did not have the chance to meet with this many dengbêjs before; even when the dengbêj art was still popular only the most talented dengbêjs could travel to faraway places and meet many others (see Introduction). Another new development is the archiving of their songs in books, CDs and television archives. Although dengbêjs generally indicated that they did not feel the need to write down their kilams, they do appreciate seeing their kilams, names and pictures in anthologies and CDs. It gives them a sense of being respected and of contributing to the new visibility of Kurdish culture. Still, also these new opportunities cannot fully compensate for the disappointment the dengbêjs often feel. Dengbêj Osman for example, who lives in Istanbul and is an apprentice of the famous dengbêj Reso, voiced his ideas about the current atmosphere and audience as follows:

> There are no meetings (*cemaat*) as in the past, no places where people come together and dengbêjs sing songs. Not like today with wedding dances and wedding songs, but dengbêj like in the past, sitting down. I do not see such kind of meeting. (..) When a dengbêj does not feel affected (*duygulanmazsa*), he cannot sing. If in such a place dengbêjs can sit down and feel affected, in that case he can sing nicely. But now if it is only to yourself, to whom are you going to sing? (dengbêj Osman, interview in Turkish, Istanbul 2007).

Dengbêj Osman says the meetings of the past cannot be found anymore today. He makes a distinction between such meetings, and wedding dances and songs. At past weddings there would be a separate place apart from the dancing crowd, where people gathered to listen to the performance of one or more dengbêjs. Such a gathering is called dîwan, and the group of people who gathered is called *cemaat*. Instead of the rhythmic wedding songs, *stran*, the dengbêjs would perform the longer kilams to which one cannot dance, but one needs to listen to attentively. Those were the times

when dengbêjs had interaction with the audience. Without this dimension dengbêj Osman feels there is no place where the dengbêjs can show their abilities:

> For that reason according to me there is not much dengbêj art at the moment. They are not affected, they cannot sing. (There is not much in Istanbul, but..) In the home regions there is nothing at all! (But what about the Dengbêj House in Diyarbakır?) Yes that is what I mean, those are institutions. Institutions (*kurum*), institutions, there are also institutions in Istanbul. They indeed call them Dengbêj House, but there is nothing like the old meeting places where one felt affected, there is no such mechanism. (*Yani mala dengbêja diyorlar, yani eski cemaat duygulanıp öyle birşey yok, bir mekanizma yok*) (Because..? People don't listen?) Yes. That's why dengbêjs… Look for example at me, they call me, I sing, but I do not feel affected (*beni cağrıyorlar, ben söylüyorum, ben duygulanmıyorum*). They do not give me support, they don't say things like 'you sing well'. They don't feel affected. For that reason I also become, I become cold (*Onun için ben de şey oluyorum, ben soğuyorum*). (dengbêj Osman, interview in Turkish, Istanbul 2007).

Despite the new places and performance opportunities, this dengbêj felt that the public is still different from the past, he does not feel affected by them. He dissociates himself from the Dengbêj Houses by saying 'they call them Dengbêj Houses'. There are 'so-called' Dengbêj Houses, but they do not come near to past experiences. He also emphasizes that they are *institutions*. It seems he feels the institutions cannot replace the places and experiences of past performances. Even when they invite him to sing, he does not feel they are really supporting him, and he does not feel inspired to give his best. He describes the past interaction between the dengbêjs and the public as a kind of mechanism that got lost. Because of the lack of that mechanism, he feels that he is 'becoming cold'. It is not only about the people present, but about the manner in which they are present, about how they encourage the dengbêjs and take part in their performance. According to the dengbêjs the current atmosphere has lost its taste and color.

Both the dengbêjs and their audiences remember a time when performances were more special and appreciated than today. Every dengbêj had stories to tell about performances he attended of his masters, and special memories of own performances. Memories of the joyful atmosphere present when a dengbêj visited a village, of the high expectations of the public, and of the gifts they received as signs of respect and appreciation. Also elderly people I spoke with who were not dengbêj often had vivid memories about dengbêj performances they had attended in the past. For example Fatih Kılıç (born appr. 1950) from the region of Maraş who remembered dengbêjs performing when he was a child:

> "Generally the things that I have heard were old songs. (..) There are differences in interpretation (*yorum*). According to me the best was Kurêş, and the second Salmanê Adul. Memik has a very good knowledge, but if it is for the style the others were much better. When I listened to Salmanê Adul I experienced the event, it was one of the enjoyments of my childhood. I felt as if I myself was present at that war [he sang about]. (..) He performed the dengbêj art and accompanied himself with the saz, he also lived in the summer pastures. With his voice he could imitate soldiers in war, the sounds of the soldiers' swords, he hit the saz, he held his plectrum upside down and in that way he could produce the strangest sounds. When you listened to him it was as if two armies were in battle; as if Sinan Pasha came from Baghdad; you would feel as if Shah Ismail and Yavuz Sultan Selim[206] were in battle"[207] (Fatih Kılıç, interview in Turkish, Pazarcık 2007).

Experience and imagination are central to a dengbêj performance. For Fatih Kılıç this feature of the dengbêj art made it into one of the enjoyments of his childhood. Listening to a performance could make him feel present at the event that was sung about; it gave him an embodied sense of being in another time and place. For him dengbêj performances were all about creating that experience, which made him judge Salmanê Adul as the best one as he was most successful in that respect. The details with which the story was told, the special use of his voice, and the way he played his saz, were the elements that brought about such vivid experiences. But also for Fatih Kılıç, it is a memory of a past experience that cannot be relived today.

2.3 Performing the village

> When I was young, being a dengbêj was very valuable. When you were a dengbêj, there was no one as valuable as a dengbêj in the world, at that time [*dünya'da dengbêj kadar kimse kıymetli yoktu o zaman*), thirty to thirty-five years ago. And before that it was even more valuable. There was no television, no radio, no cassette player. There was no electricity. Only dengbêjs. (...) What is the dengbêj art? For example you plant a tree. The tree gives apricots, or peaches. Look, everyone benefits from that tree.

206 These are all figures in the Ottoman-Safavid wars in the 16th century. These wars carry special meaning for the Alevis. They originate from rebel groups that were affiliated with the Safavids.

207 Fatih Kılıç (pseudonym) is a Kurdish Alevi. He was one of the people who showed me examples of the musical exchange between Alevi Aşıks and Sunni Kurdish dengbêjs, see Introduction. In the regions where Alevi and Sunni Kurds meet (for example Adiyaman, Elazig, Malatya and Maraş), dengbêj and aşık styles are sometimes mixed. I recorded some performances where the performer sang in dengbêj-style, but accompanied himself with the saz. The dengbêj Fatih Kılıç tells about seems to have had a similar mixture of styles. He played the saz, but sang in dengbêj style. The song topics he mentions are taken from Alevi tradition. Additional research in these regions is needed to understand the dynamics of the exchange between Alevi and Kurdish performance styles.

> Next to its fruits, the tree also gives shadow. The dengbêj art is like a flower, like a lake, like a garden, like a fruit tree.[208]

Dengbêjs often presented the past, when the dengbêj art flourished, as a time that has been lost. They described this lost past as a time of small villages, few opportunities, a lack of education and health care, bad roads and difficult transportation, and a different attitude among the people. In this small-scale life world the dengbêjs fulfilled a crucial role and were therefore highly respected. In this section I present the story of dengbêj Mahmut (see also chapter 3) in which the nuances of the nostalgic framing of past performances in a village context become particularly clear. His story also reveals how the dengbêjs and others detect a difference between people from the past and today's Kurds, and between people living in villages and those living in the city. I consider the interview as a performance in itself, and therefore call this section 'performing the village'. Dengbêj Mahmut is relatively well-known and has been interviewed before. He is a good story-teller who presented his life story as a developed storyline rather than as a purely personal account. Later on I discovered that he had used some phrases almost exactly the same elsewhere in a newspaper interview.[209] Speaking of his art and his position is a presentation that I came to see as part of the overall performance he and other dengbêjs give. They perform not only by singing, but also by being present in the House, by talking about their art, and by their whole self-presentation.

I conducted the interview in 2007 in Turkish at the cultural center in Diyarbakır, just before the opening of the Dengbêj House. In order to give a good impression of how dengbêj Mahmut elaborately talked about his art as something belonging to another time and to a different type of people, I cite relatively large portions from the interview. Although I present the story of only one dengbêj here, others expressed similar views, and the story therefore conveys a sense of how many dengbêjs spoke about the value of their art.

Dengbêj Mahmut was born in 1956. During the Russian-Ottoman war his forefathers came to inhabit a former Armenian village[210] where de ngbêj Mahmut lives until today. He makes a living from farming and trade. Dengbêj Mahmut

208 This and the other quotes in this section are taken from an interview with dengbêj Mahmut conducted in May 2007 in Diyarbakir. Interview in Turkish.

209 Unfortunately later on I could not remember where I read his interview and have not been able to trace it. However, I do remember well to have read it because initially I felt disappointed that my interview with him was not 'unique'. Later on I realized that I could also see it in a different way; not as reducing the value of the interview, but as seeing the whole interview as a performance. This is why it fits well in this chapter on performance: it is not just a personal story, but a performance in itself.

210 See life story 4 in chapter 3 for context information about Armenian villages and the Armenian presence and absence in Turkey.

Figure 7. Dengbêj Ûsivê Farê performing in the courtyard of the Cultural Center in Diyarbakır. 2007.

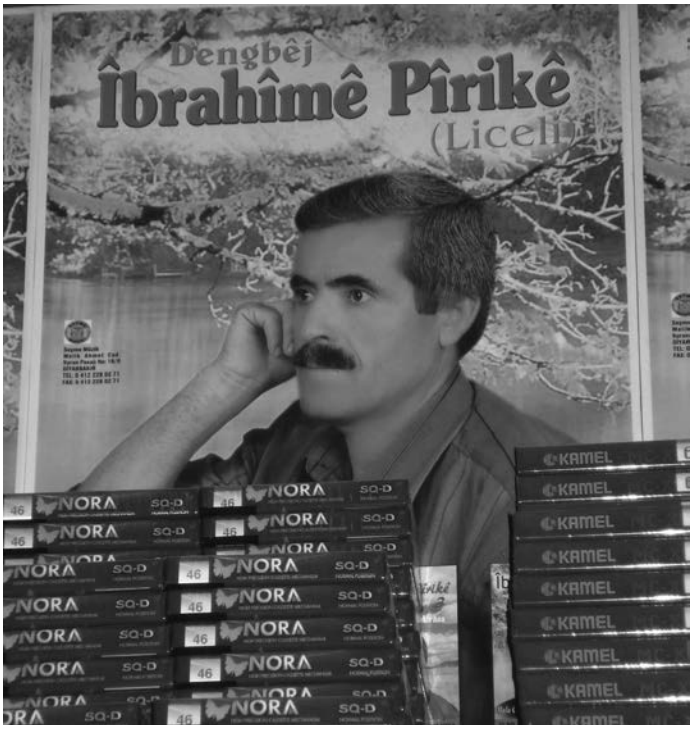

Figure 8. Advertisement in a music shop in Diyarbakır for a cassette of dengbêj Îbrahîmê Pîrikê. 2007.

began the interview with the above quote about the high value of the dengbêj art in society when he was young, and added: "and before that it was even more valuable." With this last phrase he creates the imaginary of a far away past, further back in time than his own youth, an origin, in which things were different than today. He connects the value of the dengbêjs at the time to the lack of other media like radio and television: there were "only dengbêjs," whom he compares to a fruit tree "from which everybody can eat and sit in its shadow." He saw dengbêjs thus as having a very important role in feeding, entertaining, and reviving people. But, he felt, the dengbêjs lost this central position because of new media and electricity that came to the villages. Herewith he presents a direct connection between technological progress and the dengbêj art. Dengbêj Mahmut continues speaking about his early interest in the dengbêj art:

> When I was about twelve years old, I let my shoes be polished in front of the café. I gave some extra money so that the shoe polisher would sing me a song. I was young and had a bright mind. (..) At that time there was a Dengbêj Café (*dengbêjler kahvesi*) in Diyarbakır. Like we now have the cultural center, there was a Dengbêj Café thirty five to forty years ago. It belonged to Mihemedê Hazroyê. The dengbêj came there often, they all went there. He played LPs, it was the only LP-player at that time in Diyarbakır. At that time I was very keen [on getting to know more] (*o zaman çok meraklıydım*). I traveled ten km by foot to go there. I came there and all the dengbêjs came there and I saw them all alive (*hepsi gördüm, canlılar gördüm*). Believe me I recorded everything in my mind (*beynimde kaydedildim*) at the time they were singing. And then I said to myself: I wish that I could also be a dengbêj, that I could also sing in society (*keşke bir gün olursa ben de böyle dengbêj olayım, ben de toplum davaya bir yerde söyleyim*).[211]

Living close to the city dengbêj Mahmut had the opportunity to see famous dengbêjs performing from nearby, and to learn from them. The examples of the dengbêjs in the Café gave him the wish to be a dengbêj as well, and to 'sing in society'. This phrase refers to the task the dengbêjs feel they have. They are not only performers, but also feel they serve the people by bringing them historical and other knowledge, and by voicing their experiences, emotions and complaints. Subsequently Dengbêj Mahmut summarized what has changed since that time:

> Şakîro and the other old ones have died. The only one left is Zahiro (..). And in Diyarbakır Seydxan Boyaxçî, and in Batman Salihê Qubînî. [Apart from them] the dengbêj art had vanished from the market (*dengbêjlik piyasada kalmadı*), nothing was left. But one day when I was at home, somebody called me, and said: 'you have to sing on television'. I said: 'if I come on television, what can I do? I have not sung for ten to fifteen years, I have abandoned it, I have forgotten.' But he said that I definitely had to come, he said: 'if you say once more that you don't come then I will come and

211 All quotes in this section are taken from an interview with dengbêj Mahmut conducted in Diyarbakır in 2007. The interview language was Turkish.

> bring you by force. You have to sing' (When did this happen?) Two years ago, in 2004 or 2005. So I went there, and there were six dengbêjs who had gathered. All of us sang one song. After that everybody had seen us on television. They said, look there are dengbêjs again in the market (*dengbêj gene piyasada çıktı*). After that we started to sing two or three times every week, and it was sent to the television. And after that [dengbêjs] came from the small towns, from the villages. There are now fifteen or sixteen dengbêjs here, who are connected to the Dicle Fırat cultural center in Diyarbakır. But there are dengbêjs who are even more famous than us, and who have an even better voice and sing nicer (*ama fakat bizden daha fazla, bizden daha üstün, bizden daha namlı veya fazla güzel söyleyen var*). But they feel embarrassed and don't come, because no one attaches value to it (*utanıyor gelmiyor. Kıymet vermiyorlar ki!*). Not the government, not the municipality, not the people.

In this part dengbêj Mahmut gives an overview of what happened with the dengbêjs over the years: most of the old generation of dengbêjs died, only a few good ones are still alive; the dengbêj art had 'vanished from the market'; recently they were invited to sing on television; the dengbêjs are back in the public domain; but still he concludes that 'no one attaches value to it'. This summary works as a counterpoint to what he tells subsequently. From the overview of what happened to the dengbêj art, dengbêj Mahmut returns to his own life story, and to the time when he was learning to become a dengbêj:

> When I was around twelve to fifteen years old, first I went secretly. We had a lot of animals, and a lot of work. In the morning I hid myself, and then I escaped and ran all the ten km way to Diyarbakır. The gate was closed at seven in the evening, and opened at six in the morning. I came and the Dağkapı gate was not opened yet. As soon as the gate opened I went to the Café. I listened there to a few songs, maybe two or three, not much, I listened and then I ran back home. During the time that I was running the kilometers home, I memorized (*ezberledim*) those two or three songs.
> One day my father said to me: 'my son, every time you get lost. What should come of the animals? Where are you going?' So I told him that I was learning kilams. My father also knew it, sometimes he would sing. When I told him this I said to myself: 'he will hit me now.' But he was very happy. He said: 'my son, now that you have started you have to learn it'. He said: 'show me, sing one for me'. I sat down next to him and sang a kilam. Of course people feel embarrassed in front of their father (*tabii insan babandan utanıyor, babandan çekiniyor*). The first kilam I sang not so well, because I was nervous (*heyecanlandım*). The second kilam went a little bit better. Then my father said: 'either don't sing at all, or if you sing, don't feel ashamed towards anyone (*ya söyleme, ya söylediğin zaman hiç kimseden utanma*). You even feel shame in front of your father'. After that he was very happy and he kissed me. He said: 'my son, when you sing, do it in the right way (*dürüst söyle*), without mistakes. Learn one song [at a time] in a very good way, and sing it in a very good way'. From that time until my father died, he gave me money every day. At that time a father would not give money. I was the youngest of the family, my father loved me very much. From that time onwards my father sent me. He sent me to places where

> dengbêjs were, ten dengbêjs together, and said: 'learn it'. In that way I went there and learned it, I was 'opened' (*açıldım*).[212]

He depicts himself as a young hero who was very keen on learning, and who made great efforts to reach his goals (running 10 km back and forth from his village to Diyarbakır, being at the gate before 6 am). When his father found out why he was often missing in the morning, he received his full support and love, "he loved me very much". Because of his father's support, he could devote himself to learning. Dengbêjs often contrast their commitment and dedication to the little efforts of the current generation of youth. Later in the interview Dengbêj Mahmut remarked how small the effort of learning is today, now that he can record songs on his phone and repeatedly listen to them whenever he likes. The past world he describes is one untouched by technological progress, when he did not take a car to the city, but just ran there.

In the next section he demonstrates that he gained recognition from a large public when he started singing during a stopover in the town Muş:

> Once when I was in Muş at the station I was waiting for the train to set off. But the train didn't go. We went out and I stayed at the train station of Muş. There were five hundred people at least, everyone had to go to other places. And we were all waiting together. I was eighteen years old. I started singing a song, and one more. An old man stood up and said [to someone who was talking]: 'don't speak, it is disturbing for the man. If you want to speak, go outside'. But of course no one wanted to leave because it was snowing and in the train station it was warm. He said to me: 'okay uncle, continue, I am sorry' (*tamam dedi amca ben özür dilerim*). I sang for five hours. There were girls, women, men, young people, old people, and no one spoke a word. I would give something to have that time back, really at that time it was better than now (*o zamana kurban olayım, o zaman şimdiki zaman iyi gibi değildi?*).

Although he was only eighteen years old, someone asked for silence and called him uncle, a sign of respect for his function as a dengbêj. Different from today, "no one spoke a word. Really at that time it was better than now." In the next section he spells out this difference by focusing on the importance of research on the dengbêj art:

> For researchers like you I would like to say that it is good that you collect this information, let the people hear about us, because after us no dengbêjs will remain (*bizden sonra dengbêj kalkmaz, mümkün değil bu kırımdan sonra*). I am here [in the

212 Dengbêjs use this phrase for the experience that their voice and mind are ready to sing. At the beginning of a performance, they still feel a bit ill at ease. Their voice and access to their repertoire are not yet 'opened'. They say that, after some time of singing, they have the experience of 'opening up', and can continue for hours without a break. (In Kurdish they say: *dengê min lê vebû/germ bû* or *ez lê vebûm/germ bûm*). In this case dengbêj Mahmut used this expression for the beginning of his singing career, for his 'opening up' for the dengbêj art.

> cultural center] since four years, but unfortunately until now there hasn't been even one young person who came to me and asked me to sing a song to learn it. (..) This means that after us no dengbêjs will remain in Turkey or in the world. But the dengbêjs have a very old history and are a very old culture (çok eski bir tarihtir, çok eski bir kültürdür). I told you before about Abdulhadîn and Huseyno. If they came to a village, the ten or twenty neighboring villages would also come to listen. But if a dengbêj is singing nowadays, people say: 'what is that man over there screaming?' (*bu adam ne bağrıyor ya?*).[213]

According to dengbêj Mahmut it is important to collect and archive kilams, because after this generation "no dengbêjs will remain in Turkey". He emphasizes that this is caused by the lack of interest of the youth, in spite of the fact that dengbêjs are so important. He clearly feels people have a total lack of respect and understanding, saying "what is that man over there screaming?". They do not recognize him as a respected elder, as someone with a special talent and knowledge, and have no idea about his art. He then mentioned other examples of his motivation and of past experiences in which he was recognized as a great performer:

> This is what it is to be a dengbêj: it is interest (*dengbêjlik meraktır*). I was so motivated that I would sit in a corner when the dengbêjs were singing, and when someone finished a song I went outside to practice. Sometimes I did not have time for that, but still it remained in my head and I would sing it in my sleep. My family is my witness. When I awoke the next morning my wife said to me: 'what are you doing, are you growing crazy, you keep me from my sleep with your songs'. She said: 'go to another room'. (..)
> Often I sang at weddings. I was young. When they went to fetch the bride,[214] with her black dress and red headscarf, I sang this song [he sings it]. Two girls took the hands of the bride, they got a horse, this song was sung and they led the bride to mount the horse. The girls sang this song, and the boys fired their guns, and they continued to do so for the whole way, sometimes the road was long between the villages of the bride and the groom. Today with the car it takes five or ten minutes and it is finished. I wish that people from today could see how it was, believe me, now that it comes to my mind I could cry. It was that [special]. The people loved each other. The cheerfulness of those weddings was so different from nowadays. And for the

213 In the interview dengbêj Mahmut several times used phrases that seem to belong to the life story of Evdalê Zeynikê (see chapter 1). Once, when the latter was making a journey on horseback and meanwhile singing kilam, he overheard a girl saying "who is that old miserable man on horseback? Goodness, when he starts screaming, you think either he is a madman or a jinnee" (*ew kale şerpezê li ser pişta hespê ki ye? Malxirabo ku dike qîrîn, meriv dibê qey dîn e yan cinnû ye?*) A friend who is with her reprimands her and tells her the passer-by is actually a famous dengbêj (Aras 1996: 148). By using such phrases it seems that dengbêj Mahmut situates himself within the dengbêj tradition by connecting his own life experiences to those of the famous master dengbêj.

214 It was common practice that on the morning of the wedding the groom's family would go the house of the bride, which could be in another village, and take her to the house of the groom on horseback. A variety of songs was sung to guide the process. The dengbêj had an important role in this ceremony as a song leader.

> dengbêjs the same is true. (*keşke bir film ya birşey olaydı, şimdiki insana dinletseydi. Inan ki, ben şimdi ağlayım, aklıma geldi, ben ağlayım. O kadar.. Insan birbirlerini çok seviyordu. Millet, gençler, kızlar, ne diyeyim, o zaman düğünlerin neşesi şimdiki bambaşkadır. Dengbêjler gene öyle, gene öyle*).

He draws attention to the special character of past weddings which were unforgettable events. He connects this again to progress: people today cannot understand the deep experience of former weddings, when the road was long because there were no cars. The emergence of technology has erased the opportunity to experience things as they were in the past. Dengbêj Mahmut makes a direct link between technology and emotions: 'I wish that people today could see how it was. It was very special. The people loved each other. The cheerfulness of those weddings was so different from nowadays'. He speaks first about bringing the bride on horseback instead of by car, and subsequently about the love of those days, the love and joy. He regards these deep emotions as out of reach for the current generation. Many dengbêjs expressed the same sentiment: people today do not know what love is. They feel that the deep love of former times is, as it were, hidden in their experience and knowledge, and that *they* are still capable of capturing that love.

The value of the dengbêjs lies thus not only in their factual knowledge, but also in their emotions and embodied experiences. The act of performing means testifying to the deeply felt love, pain, anger, jealousy, and joy of a time that no longer exists. The dengbêjs feel they bear the knowledge and experiences of people living in that time, and have also, in the past, experienced such deep emotions themselves. This turns them into living witnesses of a lost but precious era. They see this era as characterized by hardship: the suffering caused by the lack of many things that are taken for granted today. They feel that the lack of education, media and technology, and the hardship of village life, made people more appreciative of the good things of life, and made them live in terms of a deeper level of emotional experience that is hard to grasp for people today.

In the last section of this part of the interview dengbêj Mahmut points out that not everything is yet lost. He gives an example of some recent experiences he had in a village setting in which he did feel appreciated for his efforts, as in the past:

> I went to a village near Karacadağ, for a wedding, and they took me to the dîwan, and no one stayed at the wedding, everyone came to listen. That much value (*o kadar değer ve kiymeti vardı)* was attached [to the dengbêjs]. It was about ten years ago when I went there. I said that I had abandoned it, that I didn't sing (*ben terk etmişim, ben söylemiyorum*), but some elders of the village came to fetch me, they said: 'just sing whatever comes to your mind' (*ne aklına gelirse illahi söyleyeceksin*). So I started singing and nobody remained at the wedding. And the drum (*dahol*) and

> oboe (*zirna*) players came to me and said: 'Agha, nobody has stayed'. They wanted to earn something, but the people said: 'a dengbêj has come', so they listened [to me], some from outside, and some came inside.

When dengbêj Mahmut started singing in the dîwan, he says people left the drum and oboe players to listen to him.[215] The latter complained about this, afraid they would miss out on earnings. He was proud of the public he managed to attract as an elderly dengbêj. His success continued that day when he left the wedding:

> After that I got in my car and went to another village where I had a friend. I knocked at the door and he asked me where I came from and I told him that I came from a wedding and that I had sung there. Immediately he slaughtered a lamb. I said: 'don't do that my brother'. But he continued and he called various people with his mobile phone and said: 'come here, our brother Mahmut has come. He says that he comes from a wedding'. You know it was already twelve o'clock in the night. He said to me: 'really Agha, you cannot go to sleep now, really you have to sing'. So I started to sing and to sing. I had escaped from the wedding where they had not left me alone, and now I was here and they didn't leave me (*yine bırakmadılar*). Half of the village had come. It became morning and we had forgotten about the lamb, I said: 'I want to pray and sleep, bring our food' (*namaz kılacağım yatacağım, yemeğimizi getir*).

Coming from the wedding dengbêj Mahmut was tired and went to a friend to rest. However, when he arrived his host was already slaughtering a lamb, a sign of respect and recognition that forced him to start performing again. In both cases the recent signs of respect and joy given to a dengbêj performance stemmed from village people. Dengbêj Mahmut feels that some of them still know how to appreciate him.

According to the dengbêjs, for city people the dengbêj art became history, as they lost their ability to understand the deep emotions and experiences stemming from the hardship of Kurdish village life and expressed in the kilams. What remains for them is nostalgia for a lost world they have never known themselves. Acknowledging the disability of today's city Kurds to understand the real quality of their art, the dengbêjs try instead to connect to their sentiments of nostalgia. They feel that by attending a dengbêj performance people can get a sense and taste of past experiences, and that a dengbêj performance can retrieve hidden memories by

215 In the past there were often two types of musicians performing at weddings: in some regions there were *dahol-zirna* players (drum and oboe played by Roma) and the dengbêjs. The dahol-zirna players accompanied folk dances, stirring up people to dance on the loud sound of the zirna and the fast rhythms of the dahol. Young dengbêjs at the start of their career would also accompany wedding dances and take on the role of song leader. People danced thus partly on the music of the dahol and zirna, and partly on the sound of voices. The elder and more established dengbêjs would sit in the dîwan (a large gathering) and perform there. Usually the dancing would attract more visitors than the diwan. Nowadays the most prominently present performers are modern Kurdish music group; second come the dahol-zirna players; and third the dengbêjs, who perform only rarely at current weddings.

connecting to bodily memories people have of performances they witnessed in the village in former days. Also, they see their deeply felt love and emotions as moral qualities that make them examples for other people. Celebration of, and nostalgia for, village life, can be seen as a strategy that the dengbêjs mobilize to increase the value of dengbêjs as bearers and transmitters of a lost past that cannot be experienced other than through their intervention. However, it is not only a strategy. The dengbêjs also genuinely value the memories of past times in which the dengbêj art had a different position than today.

The story of dengbêj Mahmut does not refer to the social narratives of the Kurdish movement. He does not speak in the terms the political activists do in their presentations of the dengbêj art. He does not refer to the PKK's new morality of enlightenment, of the awakening of the Kurdish people, or to Kurdish nationalism in general. He also does not speak in terms of a personal development, a personal turn in which one discovers one's national identity, like political activists do (see chapter 4). Dengbêj Mahmut and most other dengbêjs I spoke with did not frame their activities as political or nationalist but instead felt that they had another strength, a quality that other Kurds, including political activists, missed: the embodied experiences of village life.

2.4 Tribes and battles

As we saw in chapter 1, songs about tribes and their leaders form an important part of the dengbêj repertoire. The legendary dengbêj Evdalê Zeynikê stood in the service of Surmeli Memed Pasha, and many kilams concern tribal leaders such as Filîtê Qûto and Bişarê Çeto. The many songs about tribal battles, and the former position of dengbêjs as praise singers of their tribal lords, meant that the dengbêjs were associated with the tribal past. The tribal history of the Kurds has been a topic of imagination and debate since Ottoman times. Both Turkish and Kurdish educated elites equalized tribalism to being backwards, savage and uncivilized. Until today the association of Kurds with tribalism plays an important role in how the Kurds are depicted. The assumed tribal nature of the Kurds, which is associated with irrational killings, honor crimes and internal rivalries, is a frequent topic that comes up in the Turkish media and in Turkish television serials. The latter often use characters situated in 'the east' and understood by the public as Kurdish, but not labeled as such. Tribalism is seen by many as the keyword and evidence of the backwardness of Kurdish societal structures. Tribal fights, blood revenge, and the oppressive power

of aghas were and are seen as the central problems that hindered the Kurds from following the road towards development and modernity. The labels of tribalism and blood revenge assist in creating the image of Kurds as backwards, and make the modern Turkish citizen feel that the underdevelopment of 'the east' is due to Kurdish mistakes, rather than part and parcel of Turkey's internal power struggles.

As outlined in the Introduction, breaking down the tribal structure and incorporating tribal people into non-tribal Turkish communities was one of the spear points of late Ottoman and early Republican policies.[216] Not only in Turkish nationalist thought, also among Kurds, has the tribal and feudal character of Kurdish society been a continuing worry. Early Kurdish nationalists opposed tribal rivalries and saw the tribal divisions in Kurdish society as one of the main obstructions towards forming a (national) unity. They associated the tribal system with primordial ties and the inability to think in terms of nationhood. The PKK continued this line by not only fighting the Turkish state, but also the Kurdish tribal elite. From its start PKK leaders said they opposed the tribal structure of Kurdish society.[217] They said that they refused to lean on it, and that they attempted to mobilize the working class that, so they hoped, would eventually overthrow both the oppression of the Turkish state and of the Kurdish elite.[218] The lack of unity of the Kurdish rebellions in the 1920s (see below), which partly undermined the successes these rebellions could have become, became a trauma for Kurdish activists who tried at all costs to reconcile all Kurdish factions. Therefore, the dengbêjs, who sang about disagreements between tribes, about betrayal, bloodshed and revenge, were seen as disturbing for the revival of Kurdish nationalism in the 1980s. They were associated with tribalism because they were often in the service of aghas, praising them, and singing kilams that could awaken rivalry.

216 For example, "In April 1916, the CUP ordered the mass deportation of Kurds from the eastern provinces through a sweeping quadripartite decree. For the Kurds 'not to live their tribal lives and preserve their nationalities where they are sent' the CUP deemed it 'absolutely necessary to separate the tribal chieftains from their people' (Üngor 2008a: 25)."

217 In its founding years the PKK has deliberately tried to mobilize tribal sentiments for their own gain. There are cases known where they stirred up tribal rivalries in order to win tribes over to their side.

218 "With this style of war the PKK has brought about a change in the Kurdish revolutionary tradition and shown that, rather than relying on a particular tribe or tribal leader or this or that foreign power in the traditional way, it can continue to exist on the basis of its own resources (Öcalan 1999: 56).

During my fieldwork I understood soon enough that referring to the tribes was a taboo topic and could be interpreted as stirring up divisions.[219] Therefore, I did not often ask questions about this topic. Only later on in my fieldwork I began to ask whether dengbêjs knew kilams about their tribes and if they could sing them for me. Once I asked a well-known dengbêj whether he could sing some songs for me about his tribe. I had met him several times, and the year before I had been a guest at his home where I had met his children and other relatives. We had thus built up a certain degree of trust. He agreed to sing a few songs for me about his tribe, but only after I had switched off the video recorder. When he finished he motioned me to switch it on again, and continued with other kilams. He said such kilams could bring trouble and should therefore not be sung in public. Obviously, self-censorship about the topic of tribes had become quite strong. Also the organizers of the Dengbêj House encouraged the dengbêjs to leave out such songs. For example, in the dengbêj anthology published in 2007 by the Diyarbakır municipality and the House, most kilams are love songs. The anthology gives the impression that the dengbêj art consists predominantly of love songs, even though this is far from true. Apart from avoiding kilams that sing about tribal divisions, the focus on love songs in itself also has a political dimension. As we saw in chapter 1, many love songs tell the story of the impossibility of two lovers to be united, caused by traditional societal structures. Since PKK ideology strongly opposed the traditional ruling class, a focus on the negativity of these structures supports their ideas.[220]

I encountered another example of the avoidance of battle songs when watching a television program on dengbêjs, made by the local television channel Gün TV in Diyarbakır. I had interviewed the program's host and he offered me some copies of his programs. During the show, one or several dengbêjs were interviewed and invited to sing some kilams. The audience could also contact the program, as it was broadcast live, and ask for certain songs to be sung, or to give a comment. In

219 An example of the type of responses I encountered when I asked about tribal affiliation is the following interview quote, from a dengbêj who lives in a village near Van: "(Do you also have a tribe?) Our tribe is the Brukî tribe, it is a large tribe. But nowadays tribes have not remained. Nowadays, wherever you see a Kurd you love him and he loves you. (So everyone is the same?) Everyone is the same. Our tribe has between five and seven hundred villages. It is a large tribe. But we do not anymore follow tribal customs (*biz aşiretin ayakından gitmiyoruz*) I don't say: 'I have a village, I am the owner of a tribe, go that way, I will hit you etc.' No, we don't say such things. We live like normal civilians, like you and me." (dengbêj Nejat, interview in Turkish, Van 2007).

220 Çakır (2011) makes the following comment about a series of love songs that were published in the monthly newspaper *Dicle-Firat* (1962-?): "their subject matters were the suffering of lovers on the hands of the rules of the traditional society, which in some of the stories made it impossible for lovers to be together (..). Given that one of the main themses of Kurdish nationalism at the time is the critique of the traditional ruling classes, especially the *axas* (..) this selection of folk tales does not seem to be done haphazardly" (pp.24).

one of the programs I watched, a well-known dengbêj was invited in the TV program on the World Peace Day (Dünya Barış Günü).[221] The host introduced the program as follows:[222]

> This week we have a very valuable dengbêj in our program who is also often seen in festivals and programs. He is from the region of Karapetê Xaco, that is famous for its loves and its bloody fights, we are welcoming dengbêj [Fatih] in our program. With him we will speak Kurdish as he doesn't know Turkish. I greet everyone and I wish everyone a world without killings and without blood, peace for everyone.

Listeners sent text messages to ask for particular songs. It appeared however difficult for them to avoid battle songs and to stick to the topic of the day; they kept asking for songs that were seen as inappropriate by the program's host. The following exchange took place between the dengbêj (D) and the host (H), after listeners, through phone calls and text messages, had already several times requested battle instead of love songs:

> H: Many songs of the Xerzan region are about battles and wars.
> D: This song [requested by a listener] is from the region of Farqînî, I can sing it.
> H: Is there killing in it? Yes. Unfortunately we cannot sing it, let us ask for love songs valuable friends! (..)
> D: I don't want to sing about war, I will sing about love.
> H: Yes because today is the Day of Peace.
> D: I hope that in the whole world the wars will stop, the killings and blood. This is our wish.

In this short conversation the host recognizes the fact that many songs of the region where the dengbêj comes from are battle songs. The dengbêj at first agrees to sing a song, obviously without realizing straightaway that the song would be disapproved off. The host however, who was an expert on the kilams, knew the requested kilam as a battle song, which made it undesirable for the program. This short conversation also demonstrates the influence of the host on the dengbêj. Although the dengbêj first wanted to sing the song, the host decided the contrary. After this decision the dengbêj followed the discourse of the host by stating his wish to sing about love rather than war. This is one of the many instances in which a (young) political activists 'corrects' the agenda of a dengbêj.

In a long interview with the host (in Diyarbakır in 2007, interview in Turkish), he explained to me why the dengbêjs nowadays avoid singing battle and rebel songs. In the first place, he said, "they avoid singing about tribal battles and

221 Turkey holds September 1 (the invasion of Poland by Germany in 1939) as the World Day of Peace, although in other countries around the world September 21 is recognized as such.

222 Broadcast September 1st, 2007 by Gün TV, translated from Kurdish.

personal controversies because battles are still lived by their children and the next generation. It may plant a seed of hatred to sing that between them and it may stir them up again". In the second place, he said that the many songs about "deportations, exile and massacres that happened to the Armenians and Yezidi on this soil before 1914" were prohibited, and many were therefore forgotten. He also said that in case such (often anti-government) songs are sung in the program it will be closed down by the government. Because of these reasons he said, dengbêjs nowadays prefer love songs: "since love songs are more sung today, and since Kurdish life has modernized, the emphasis is on love songs".

Another time I asked for songs about tribes I was working with a group of dengbêjs in the Dengbêj House in Diyarbakır and recorded their performance. It was in the final days of my fieldwork and we had got to know each other well. I had postponed the topic until that day, and when I asked for tribal songs the reaction was clear: they refused to sing them. One of the dengbêjs of the House gave an interesting and lengthy explanation of their refusal, which was met with agreement by the other dengbêjs. In spite of the length of the quote it is advisable to read it through because it gives much background for understanding the next section. It also gives a good impression of the moralistic character of such utterings.

> Dear friend Wendy, our kilams from the past, about the tribes that fought with each other, now show that there was grave ignorance (*gelek nezanî bûne*). Why? Because they oppressed, you know, their friends, their fellow men, they did bad things to their neighboring tribes (*zordestîyê hevala xwe kiriye, li merwêya xwe kiriye, li aşîre keleka xwe kiriye*), to become stronger and become the sovereigns of their region. The struggle for power should have been abandoned, but they could not abandon it. Therefore, you must not show any interest in them. The songs of our time, now, for instance those about the House of Seydxanê Ker, you know they rebelled, the state oppressed them, the state killed their babies (*kilamên a niha, ewê wek mala Seydxanê Ker, tu dizanî, ku rabûne, dewletê li wan zilmê kirine, tu dizanî, sepîyê wan qatîl kirine*). Even their pregnant women were stabbed and killed; they killed the babies in their mother's womb. You should be interested and concerned about those [kilams], because they are not like the kilams that involve tribal fights in which we fought with each other, it was ignorance.
>
> Between me and you, do not show any interest in those [tribal] kilams, give more importance to those kilams which refer to the oppression of the state of us, which tell the story of the oppression we have gone through (*gelek li ser wan a pir nesekinin, yê ku zilm û zor, zaxt li ser me hebû negire, em pir wi li ser wan bisekine, em ê aşîretîyê wê derê pêk da mesela*). For example, there were some tribes like the House of Seydxanê Ker, like the House of Yusuf Seydo, like the House of Ali son of Yunus who had taken refuge in the mountains, for instance, you know, the war in Dersîm and Wan, those people rebelled against the state, they demanded rights and fought for their cause, they struggled for decades (*bi hevsala mucadele kirine*).

> Because the corruption was inside our community, our people were corrupt (*kurmîtî di nava insane me de hebûye*), there were people who allied with the state, some of us took the side of the state (*hebûne ku hevaltiye bi dewletê kirine*), you know, because of their alignment and friendship with the state agents and powers, others had to struggle again and again, they had to fight with the state once more for decades, many people were killed and perished, but again the struggle had managed to gain a lot of new people (*cardine wê dane alîkarî berfireh bûye*).
> Now, we want to give importance to those good people, we want to cherish the memory of those people who stood up against the state and fought for Kurdistan, who fought for a cause, who fought for human rights, who fought for humanity (Îca em dixwazin ku li ser van insanên baş, insanên derlî ku rabûne, dawa Kurdistane kirine, dawa haqqakî kirine, dawa haqqa insana kirine, insaniyetê kirine). Now, we would like to sing and talk about these sorts of things. Yes, the kilams about revenge and fights between us, which has done nothing good to our people, should remain there [i.e. should not be paid attention] (*Belê klamên heyfa heyf û yên berê me bi xwe bi xwe eva kiriye gelê ma na alîkarî, em wê derê bihêlin*). We leave them there. (Another dengbêj interrupts and repeats: We don't sing them!). We don't sing them, we leave them there, and we want to sing about those (other) things (dengbêj Silêman, interview in Kurdish, Diyarbakır 2008).

This dengbêj urged me to concern myself with the right type of kilams in my research and not to ask for tribal songs, I "should not show any interest in them". Instead, I should focus on rebel songs, on the courage shown by those people who were fighting the government and fought "for a cause, for human rights, for humanity". Some dengbêjs, like the one in this quote and others performing at the House where these issues were often discussed, were well-informed about the ideology of the Kurdish movement and adopted their narratives. Many others were less interested or did not agree, and continued to sing battle songs.

Also in the past, battle songs had been a topic of debate. Although not immediately relevant for dengbêjs in Turkey, I present the following part because it demonstrates how large a proportion battle songs used to be of the repertoire of a dengbêj, and it shows that in the past, love songs were considered inappropriate to sing in front of a general audience. Kevirbirî (2005) interviewed the famous Armenian dengbêj Karapetê Xaco[223] about his performances on radio Yerevan that broadcast a daily Kurmanji Kurdish program starting in the 1950s. Although at that time the communist regime in Armenia tolerated and even stimulated minority languages and cultures, radio broadcasts were bound by certain regulations. Everything that could incite separatism instead of communism was banned. Xaco mentions that he was

223 Karapetê Xaco (1903-2005) was 7 years old when the Armenian genocide took place, and he was adopted in the family of the son of Filîtê Quto, a famous tribal leader (see chapter 1). He learned the dengbêj art in this Kurdish family and continued performing in Kurdish after he migrated to Armenia.

not allowed to sing battle songs, and instead was asked to sing love songs.[224] This confronted him with a dilemma, because he felt that love songs were not meant to be sung in public:

> They said, 'sing love songs, songs about girls'. I don't understand anything about communism. Whatever song I sang, they said all the time 'not this one, take another'. Whatever I did, it didn't become what they wanted. So what on earth could I sing? Next to me sat an Arab boy who spoke Arabic. He said to me in Arabic, 'uncle Karapet, do you know this or that song?' And I said to him: 'I swear my son, I sang that song in 1915 on the mountains and slopes when I worked as a shepherd [meaning that he sang those songs in isolation, when no one was around]. I felt embarrassed to sing this song in front of the people. And I also feel embarrassed here in this place. It's a shame to sing this song'.
> [I said to them:] 'Do you know what a kilam is? A kilam is what a dengbêj sings about a heroic person (*tu dizanî kilam çi ye? Zilamekî mêrxas e xelk li serî dibêje*)'. (...) That day again I sang my songs on the radio and returned home. In the village they said to me, 'We said to you, sing this kilam and that *stran* [song]. Why didn't you sing the songs that we wanted you to sing?' I said to them, 'they don't let me, what can I do? I am just gods poor slave, how can I resist a whole government?' (...) Now we are free. Now we can sing whatever song we like (Karapetê Xaco in Kevirbirî 2005: 54-55, my translation from Turkish).

As it appears from Xaco's story, battle songs formed a significant part of the dengbêj repertoire, and were the first he would choose for a performance. These were the songs he was proud of and wished to sing for the radio. When he explained to the radio program's host what a kilam is, he gives as a definition "what a dengbêj sings about a heroic person". Obviously he saw battle songs as the main form of kilams, and as the most desirable type of kilam to sing in public. Also people in his environment were used to asking for battle songs and criticized him when he did not sing the requested songs.

Thus, while battle songs were regarded by the dengbêjs as the most important part of their repertoire, today they feel discouraged from singing them, which also means they cannot show their full potential. Although some dengbêjs ascribed to the current social narratives about the undesirability of such songs, there were still many dengbêjs who did not want to be limited by others in their choice of kilams. In the next section I elaborate on how this topic emerged in a particular performance.

224 Çakır (2011) notes that in the 1970s Kurdish intellectuals escaping to Europe came in contact with Soviet Kurdish intellectuals. The Celîl family, a sister and two brothers who studied and published Kurdish folk music, was active in this field. Cemîla Celîl wrote a section called *Stran û Leylan* (Songs and melodies) in the monthly magazine *Azadî*. Çakır: "the selection of the songs published in this section is also curious. They are all dance (*govend*) songs, performed in wedddings or other celebrations. (..) The selection of such songs ovre, for instance, historical songs, which accomodate elements of the structures and power holders of Kurdish traditional life, is not surprising" (pp.27). So also in this case, songs that referred to tribes and traditional power structures were avoided.

2.5 Rebellions and tribes in performance

The performance context

It was the beginning of June 2007, a few days after the opening of the Dengbêj House, when I was again visiting the House. Because of the extreme heat, the dengbêjs had gathered in the cool basement that was decorated as a dîwan. Benches were placed along the four walls, and had embroidered pillows to sit on. Along each of the two longest walls sat around twelve men, some were dengbêjs, others were visitors. I came in when they had just started singing, and sat down in a corner to record two hours of their performance. The (elderly) men present were all trained listeners and enjoyed listening to the elaborate kilams. During the performance, they encouraged the dengbêjs to continue singing by joining with the chorus and by saying encouraging phrases such as "may you be healthy" (*seheta te xweş be*). Before turning to the performance itself, I provide some information on the events happening in the weeks and days preceding the performance that will help to understand its meanings. The analysis shows the connection between the topics of the kilams that we examined in chapter 1 and current events and discussions, and it shows some of the exchanges between the dengbêjs during a performance.

The festive opening of the House two days earlier, which I introduced above, had occasioned much discussion among the dengbêjs and the organizers of the festival. The dengbêjs felt the organizers did not give them space to do it their way, whereas the organizers felt the dengbêjs were not capable of understanding what a festival performance should look like. The dengbêjs wanted to invite dengbêjs from other regions, so that each regional style would be represented. By contrast, the organizers invited only four dengbêjs from nearby, which the dengbêjs understood as a way of avoiding paying for transport money and accommodation. The dengbêjs also felt dissatisfied with their choice of people, as one of them was a dengbêj not often present at the House, and one of them a female dengbêj who was not held in high esteem by most dengbêjs. If the organizers wanted to save money, the dengbêjs had at least wanted to perform together in a big dîwan, each of them getting their turn. Another reason for dissatisfaction was that the dengbêjs had heard that some of the famous singers who would give a concert at the festival received huge amounts of money for their performance, whereas the dengbêjs would not receive anything. They felt this was a clear expression of the lesser respect for their art, whereas as elders and trained dengbêjs they should be more rather than less respected for their efforts. They expressed the opinion that, whereas the dengbêj art was a much harder task than the 'simple' songs of popular music groups, the latter received more

support, praise and attention, at the cost of the position of the dengbêjs. The weeks before the opening they therefore often complained about the injustice of all this[225] and some even refused to attend the festivities.

Figure 9. People listening to a dengbêj performance in the basement of the Dengbêj House in Diyarbakır. The basement is decorated in the style of a dîwan, a traditional guestroom.

The start of the performance

But during this performance the atmosphere was cheerful and the hard feelings seemed to have softened a bit. The dengbêjs were delighted to have their own place, and despite the frustration of some who had not performed at the opening ceremony there was still a general feeling of pride because of the increased recognition and visibility. Even the most offended dengbêjs were present that day and seemed to be in good spirits. Following the formalities of the opening, and without the interference of the managers of the House, there was also a feeling of being among friends. This is an important point. As I argued before in this chapter,

225 For example: "Really, it cannot satisfy me. There is something lacking. The municipality is organizing a festival here. The one who organizes it should do it well. But what do they do? They get people from all over the world and give them lots of money, and those people give concerts here in the city. But if a dengbêj sings he gets only very little money. (..) I have said to them, invite dengbêjs from every region. Record it on video and show it to the world. Let them do some effort, let them pay some attention. But no they only take some four dengbêjs from here. I mean is this a real opening? I don't like it". Dengbêj Mahmut, interview in Turkish, Diyarbakır 2007.

the dengbêjs often felt misunderstood in their efforts. They have different aims than the modern Kurdish public which is often more interested in the display of nostalgia and authenticity than in the qualities of the dengbêjs. In the performance I discuss here, the dengbêjs were surrounded by elderly men who were all experienced listeners who enjoyed listening to the elaborate kilams.

The eldest dengbêj present, dengbêj Nejat, was a respected person, and there was some talk of him becoming their official spokesperson. I had not seen him performing before with the other dengbêjs, but now he acted as the leader of the performance.[226] When I entered[227] he was singing a song about his old age, about the hardships of being old. He may have chosen this song for several reasons. The opening of the House in some ways emphasized the elderly age of the dengbêjs, because it separated young and old from each other. Now that they moved to the House they would no longer be disturbed by the younger people, but at the same time were also more clearly set apart as elderly people who did not fit in the popular music scene. Another reason for this song may have been the emphasis during the opening on the dengbêj art as an old tradition, with performers testifying to old times. In this context old age was a positive feature that enhanced knowledge of the distant past. Also, dengbêj Nejat may have wanted to reassert his position as the oldest person and therewith as the leader of the dengbêjs. Dengbêj Nejat is not regarded as a real dengbêj by everyone. He was one of the first to be involved in the modern Kurdish music scene and he changed the character of the kilams considerably. He sang short songs that would not 'bore the public', as he claimed in the interview we had, and composed some songs by himself. These self-composed short songs are in a rather atypical style for a dengbêj kilam. Throughout the performance he urged the dengbêjs to keep their songs short, something I did not witness during other performances, where he was never present.

After his kilam, dengbêj Nejat gave the turn to dengbêj Fatih, the second oldest of the dengbêjs present. I discussed the kilam he sang, *qîza tucar axa* (the daughter of the trader), in chapter 1. At the end of the kilam, the crowd applauded, someone commenting: 'you have so many nice kilams and you did not sing them that night we were together!,' referring to a previous performance. And already the next dengbêj began to sing. With him a series of four kilams started about a single topic: the Kurdish rebellions against the Turkish government in the late 1920s, just after the foundation of the Turkish Republic.

226 Depending on the people present, sometimes one dengbêj would take the lead and direct the others.

227 I had just recorded songs of an individual dengbêj whom I had interviewed the previous day. After the recording we walked together to the other dengbêjs who had already started.

It is not easy to give a good description of a dengbêj performance, since the main activity taking place is the singing itself. Often there is not much discussion in between the kilams; this performance was even somewhat of an exception in that respect. Usually the dengbêjs sing each in turn, and people listen silently to the performer. The performer is most often seated, and focused on the activity of singing itself, on the sound of his voice, and on holding his breath as long as he can. The content of the kilams, and the sound of the voice, is what matters most to a performance. Therefore, the only way to explain what a performance is about, is by presenting in detail the content of the kilams, as that is what the dengbêjs are focused on, and that is how they respond to each other. By singing kilams with similar topics or similar formulas, they reply to the previous performer and in that way together bring to life a certain event. However, apart from the content of the kilams, I also wish to convey the discussions among the dengbêjs and the audience that took place between the kilams. Because of these two aims I place the four kilams discussed here in tables. By reading the tables one can understand how the dengbêjs responded to each other in content. The parts of normal text, outside of the tables, forms the debate that unfolded between the dengbêjs and the audience. That part is meant to convey the atmosphere of this particular performance, and the debate that was related to the kilams and to the newly opened Dengbêj House.

Four songs about rebellions and betrayal

The dengbêjs were responding to each other by selecting kilams about events in the 1920s: the Sheikh Said rebellion and its aftermath. Kilams about the rebellions are popular among current Kurdish audiences. Such kilams are much preferred over the many kilams about tribal fights, because they emphasize the unity of the Kurds, fighting together against one common enemy, the Turkish government.

The Sheikh Said rebellion was the first rebellion in the young Turkish republic. It was initiated by the new clandestine organisation 'Azadî' (freedom), founded by people from the ruling families and by Kurds who had been in the Hamidiya special forces.[228] The latter were far more nationalist than the former, but felt that a religiously inspired revolt would be more successful, and therefore

228 In 1891 Sultan Abd Al-Hamid established the Hamidiya special forces, consisting of Kurdish horsemen who got a special training in Istanbul. The Sultan wanted to create a buffer zone between Russia and the Ottoman Empire, and at the same time win the Kurds for his own case, as some Kurds had been supporting the czar in the recent past. For the Kurds, it was attractive to serve in these forces receiving many privileges. They were always drawn from already existing Sunni Kurdish tribes, leaving the social structure intact. In the mid-1890s the Hamidiya numbered about 47,000 men, in 1910 about 53,000 (Olson 1989 in White 2000: 61).

supported a prominent role for the sheikhs.[229] The uprising began prematurely and was not supported by enough people to have the effect the organisers had hoped for. It was suppressed by the Turkish army that sent 35,000 well-armed troops, supported by air bombings (Van Bruinessen 1992: 290). After the revolt was crushed, reprisals began. Many villages were destroyed and inhabitants killed. Revolt leaders were executed and "large numbers of Kurds, more than 20,000 in all, were deported from the southeast and forcibly settled in the west of the country".[230] Many rebels tried to escape to Syria.

The first kilam of this part of the performance was sung by dengbêj Îzzet, and is called *Bavê Salih*, Salih's father. It is a well-known kilam that I discussed later with my eldest respondent, dengbêj Cîhan. The latter was born in 1926 and well-informed about the events.[231] According to Cîhan, the group of rebels of whom Salih's father was part was from the Zîlan valley. They were fugitives from the Agirî rebellion which took place from 1926-1930, and survivors of the twenty-five villages in the Zîlan valley that were destroyed by the Turkish army. They had settled in the village Talorî, south from Muş. Bavê Salih had been one of the leaders of the rebellion. Many of his fellow men had escaped. In the aftermath of the rebellion the Turkish army was searching for specific individuals who they believed had played an important role during the fighting. However, as the army was afraid of instigating more unrest when they would openly search for those men, they attempted to motivate local agha's to go after the rebels. In this case they were some leaders of the Badika tribe, and all of the Xiya tribe, among whom was also an agha with the name Emerê Mihê. The latter

229 "By their very participation the shaikhs would give the rebellion a religious appearance, and it was expected that they would thereby attract support or even participation from much wider circles than their personal following alone" (Van Bruinessen 1992: 282). Sheikh Said was one of the powerful religious leaders of that moment, and was chosen to lead the revolt. He started a tour to raise support, visiting many aga's personally. However, his largest following was among Zaza-speaking Kurds.

230 "From now on, the existence of a Kurdish identity was officially denied." (Zürcher 2004: 172). Although the Sheikh Said rebellion did not reach its goals, it became a legendary event in Kurdish nationalist history (Van Bruinessen 1992: 266). And the brutal way in which the revolt was crushed, and especially the deportation to western Turkey, caused more, not less resistance (McDowall 1996: 199).

231 Dengbêj Cîhan learned much about the aftermath of the rebellions through the contact of an uncle who told him about the events and taught him many kilams. Moreover, he belongs to the Xiya tribe that is spoken about in this kilam, and he knows about their history. See life story 4 in chapter 3.

features in several other songs as well. These leaders had the order to kill Bavê Salih, and were thus collaborating with the Turkish army in hunting the rebels.

When Bavê Salih hears about the conspiracy he decides to fight. His brother, nephew and son had already escaped to Syria. During the battle Bavê Salih got killed, and the survivors followed their relatives to Syria. This kilam starts with a common opening for kilams about war and fighting, *rebenim* (poor me), a lament.

Rebeniiiiiiim[232]	Poor me, poor me
Ez ê bi rebena bavê Salih	I feel pity for Bavê Salih
peyayê mala Ûsivê Seydo	the man of the house of Ûsivê Seydo
Li welatê xerîb ji xwe re	He is in foreign lands
bê piştmêrî maye	without any support of his fellow men
keko dikesiriyê de aaaaî	in despair, my brother.
Hedo bi sê denga dikir gazî	Hedo was calling over and over again, saying:
Digo Têlo rebenê sibe ye	Poor Têlo it is morning
şereke li me çêbû	a fight came upon us
qaleke li me qewimî	an incident occurred.
li çemê Xezaliyê	[It started] at the river of Xezaliyê,
li pira Batmanê	[it went from there] to the bridge of Batman,
Bi kûra Seyida dikete bi kendale	[continued] to the valley of Seyida and climbed the hill.
Dema ku bavê Salih li hespa xwe siwar be	When Bavê Salih mounted his horse
Bi sonda qesemê, bi navê Qur'anê,	I swear to God, to the name of the Qur'an
bi telaqê jin berdanê	to the holy bond of marriage
Heta îro li orta meydanê	until today he has not been killed
ne kushtinê	in the middle of the battle field.
Li ser oxirê nazivere lo keko nayê malê	He is on his way and he does not return, my brother.

The kilam starts by informing us about its topic: Bavê Salih is caught in an emergency situation. He is involved in a battle in foreign lands, *welatê xerîb*, a term used when one is not at home or in one's place of origin. Next to being far from his home region, his relatives are in Syria, which means Bavê Salih is left behind without support. The narrator is called Hedo, who probably is Bavê Salih's wife. She describes the situation to Têlo, who might be a relative or friend. This first part of the kilam presents Hedo as if standing on the battle field, sketching the situation of Bavê Salih, and the place of the battle: where it started and how it developed. She describes Bavê Salih as a good fighter who has been strong until now. She continues:

Dengê tivingan li ser sere egîtê	The sounds of rifles are banging
mala bavê min de	upon the head of the hero of my father's house
Kale kale, nale nale	Bang bang, poof poof

232 Transcribed and translated by Hanifi Barış and myself.

Kesekî xwedanê xêra tune	There is no one of good will
cihabekî bişîne binxetê cem bavê Silho	to send a call beyond the border to Silho's father
birayê dilşewitî	the brother who cares and supports
Ez ê bi Tirkî nizanim	-I do not know Turkish,
Bi Kurmanji reqamam ra	and I cannot write in Kurdish
dibêje Seydxanî kale	says the old Seydxan-
Dibê mala te xera bibê	She [Hedo] says may God destroy your house
Agirê kulê bikeve	May the fire of devastation
mala Emerê Mihê lawê Perîxanê	besiege the house of Emerê Mihê, the son of Pêrîxan
Eşina Xiya, giregirê Badika	And also the Xiya tribe and the leaders of the Badika
Derbek dane li bejn û bala Bavê Salih	They shot Bavê Salih
peyayê mala Ûsivê Seydo	the man of the house of Ûsivê Seydo
Di mala de mêr nemane	No men remained in the house, oh brother,
Çend rojên dina	Who some days later
ji peyayên mala bavê min	For the men of my family
Evdalê xwedê re keko	for me, poor creature
bibe balîv û berpal e[233]	could become a pillow and support
Çend rojên dina	When the day comes he would
darê tivinga xwe bij.. li çiya û baniya	take up his rifle and go to the mountains and heights
Li hewar û gaziya	Go after the call for help
peyayê mala bavê min here	of the men of my father's house

Bavê Salih is involved in a fierce battle, bullets whiz past his ears. As he was hiding alone in this foreign place there is no one who can come to his rescue. Hedo explains that help should come from across the border, where Silho's (Silhadîn) father stays, who is Bavê Salih's brother. But neither can she find anyone who wants to go to give notice, nor can she write him a letter. After we have learned that Bavê Salih does not receive any support, Hedo returns to the reality of his death and starts cursing the tribes that have killed him. Now he is dead, she says, and who can take care of the family? Who can now become a support for her and her relatives?

When the kilam ends the public thanks dengbêj Fatih with the words: may you be healthy *'seheta te xweş be'*. One of the visitors, who seemed to be there for the first time, remarked: "I said to my friends here before that I am not a dengbêj but a poet". With these words he attempted to find a space during the performance to recite some poems, but the public seemed to feel the behavior of the man is inappropriate and laughable, and they mocked him now and then. Dengbêj Nejat told him he will have the chance to recite his poems later on, and first invited dengbêj Fadil to sing.

233 After this line he repeats the first two stanzas, and finishes the kilam with the below four lines.

Dengbêj Fadil sings the second kilam of this series, *Ha dayê* (Oh mother) telling what happened after the events of the previous kilam, in which Salih's father got killed. He selects this kilam thus as a reaction on the previous one, and therewith contributes to the picture the dengbêjs sketch of the events of that time. It is a kilam about a group of thirteen men who came from Syria to carry out revenge for people killed during the rebellions. One of these thirteen men is Silhadînê Dibendîn, Bavê Salih's nephew, who is also mentioned briefly in the above kilam. His personal aim of joining the thirteen men is to revenge his uncle. The kilam's narrator is a man who laments the death of the thirteen companions, and in particular of Sheikh Ahmed who was probably the youngest of the men, 'the newcomer in the wheat fields'.

Dibê ha dayêêêê, ha dayêêêê[234]	He says: oh mother, oh mother
Hetanî ez sax bim	As long as I am alive
li dem û dewrana dinyayê	On the times and histories of the world
min digo	I said, the heavy feeling
xwîna Şêx Ahmedê delal,	about the blood of my dear Şêx Ahmed
xortê nû hatî roja nava genima giran e	Who was the newcomer that day in the wheat fields
min digo ji dilê min dernayê	I said will never leave my heart
Dibê ha dayê..	He says: oh mother, oh mother
Sibeye tu bala xwe bidê	It is morning, watch carefully
mini dît dibê ji xwe ra,	what I said to myself:
Silêmanê Edilpadir, Emera Koperiyê,	Silêman the son of Edilpadir, Emer the son of Koperiyê
Ûsivê Rehîmê	Ûsiv the son of Rehîmê
Min dît rabûne berê xwe didan qereqolê	I realized they were heading to the military post
Min dît bi sê denga dibê	And they were calling
li başçawîş dikirin qîrîne	upon the commander
Digotin başçawîşo tu zani	They were saying: oh commander, do you know
sêzdeh peya vegeriyane ji binê xetê	That 13 men have returned from beyond the border
Wanê li gola Emo çûn jin û mêr	They are at the lake of Emo (..)
Li rasta Mirêdare, li çola Perîşanê	At the plain of Mirêdar, at the desert of Perîşanê
Ji xwe re dibên	They say to themselves
wane di nava da'le de derbas bûne	they passed through the bushes and say
Divên wanê di nava genima de	They are in the wheat fields
di xewê de ne	where they are asleep

The kilam starts with 'oh mother', meaning a lament will follow. Again the narrator is presented as a witness of what happened, as if standing at the sideline of the events. He describes how in the morning three men, mentioned by their full names, went to the military post to betray the thirteen companions. The three men told the commander their exact location, where they are hiding in the wheat fields. They are asleep and can thus easily be caught. The thirteen men "have returned from beyond the border", from Syria where they had escaped to.

234 Transcribed and translated by Hanifi Barış and myself.

The commander reacts by asking information about the four most sought after of these thirteen men:

Min dit başçawîş dikire qîrîne digot	I saw that the commander was shouting, saying:
Silêmanê Evdilqadîr, Emera Koperiyê,	Silêmanê Evdilqadîr, Emerê Koperiyê,
Ûsivê Rehîmê	Ûsivê Rehîmê
Win zanin di ve sivingê	Do you know who this morning,
ji wan sêzdeh mahkûman	who of these 13 men,
Çarhevê wan kî û ki ne?	are the four men [we are looking for]?
Yekê re dibên Şerîf	They call one of them Şerîf,
ew torinê mala Şêx Ûsiv e	he is the grandson of the house of Şêx Ûsiv
Peyayê didoya jê re dibêjin	They call the second one
Cemîlê Seydo	Cemîl, son of Seydo,
Bavê Evdilbahrî ji xwe ra li cîh ye	he is the father of Evdilbahrî among them
Peyayê sêyan jê re dibêjin	They call the third man
birê Şêx Seid Efendî Şêx Silheddîne	the brother of Şêx Seid Efendi, Şêx Silhadîn
dibên li dawa dîn	He is fighting for the cause of religion
digere serê xwe li ber datîne	and he sacrifices his head for that
Peyayê çaran jê re dibêjin	They call the fourth man
berxê mala Ûsivê Seydo	the lamb[235] of the house of Ûsivê Seydo
Dibê Silheddînê Dibendîne	They say to him Silhaddîn the two wings
Li heyfa apê xwe digire	He seeks to revenge his uncle,
li kuştina Emerê Mihê	the killing of Emerê Mihê
Mire digo daima duca'dîne	which he has always been pursuing

We now learn the names of the four men who the commander wants to find most urgently. The third is the brother of Sheikh Said, Sheikh Silhadîn, and the fourth is another person also named Silhadîn, the nephew of Bavê Salih. The latter "wants to revenge his uncle", but like his uncle he becomes victim to betrayal and does not succeed in his wish for revenge.

Were ha dayê..	Come and see oh mother, see oh mother..
Tu bala xwe bidê min dît xeberekî hat	Are you aware that I saw how news arrived
Dibê qolordiya Diyarbekir	Saying that this dawn they saw
ve şeveqa sibê	how the whole battalion of Diyarbekir
Di jêr da di jor da min dit	Came from the plains and the highlands
Dibê ji xwe re halan dane	Shouting and intimidating
Kele kela nava rojê tîna Hezîranê	It is noon and the June sun heat is boiling
Sêzdeh peya kirine nava genima	They surrounded the thirteen men in the wheat field
Min digot ji xwe girtine	I said, they captured them alive
bi saxîtîagîr berdanê	and set them on fire

The commander apparently requested help from the military forces in Diyarbakır, who sent a whole battalion. The narrator describes the movement of the soldiers coming from several sides, surrounding the thirteen men in the

235 Berx (lamb) is used for a young man rising to power

wheat field and setting them on fire in the June sun heat. The description of the movement of the soldiers to the wheat field creates a vivid imaginary of the events leading to the heroes' deaths. From the description of the capture and killing of the companions, the narrator again laments their deaths. As in the previous kilam, he shouts for help in retrospect, help that will not come. After that, in an imaginary turn, he describes visiting a graveyard and so connects the current deaths with those who died before them.

Bêje hewar hewar heware lawo	Say help! Help! Help! My son
Wele gazî kirin lo îmdat nayê	They pleaded for rescue but help would not come
Kesekî xwedanî xêrê tunîne rabe bilezîne	There was no one of good will to set out quickly
Xeberê bi axê mezêlan	To take the news
û kendalan re bigîne	to the soil of the graves and heights
Bi Tewfîq û Elîşan û Seyidxan re	There where Tewfîq, Elîşan and Seyidxan lay
Bêje mala we xera nebûya	Say: may god bless your house
Serê xwe rakin ji axa mezelan	Lift up your heads from your grave
Û bala xwe bidinê	And take a good look
Li ser serên xortan bûye	At the heads of these young people
Rokî ji roja qiyametê	It is a day like the day of the last judgment
Bêje ha dayê ha dayê..	Say oh mother, oh mother
Wele gazî kirin lo îmdat nayê	They called but no one is coming

The kilam is about a time of rebellion, fighting and destruction. One death is followed by the next. It seems there is no place anymore to go to for help. As the possibility of asking help from the living is exhausted, the narrator imagines now turning his attention to the dead. They are the ones whom the thirteen companions came to revenge, and whom he calls upon to see the sacrifice the young men brought for them. He calls upon the dead to 'lift up your heads from the grave' to see how these young men have fought in their place, showed courage, but unfortunately lost the battle.

When dengbêj Fadil finished and the public applauded for him, a young dengbêj took over, someone who was still learning and nervous to sing in the group of experienced masters. He started a song about Evdilqadîr, maybe the one mentioned in the previous song, but after a few lines he had a blackout and could not remember the song anymore. He gave up and said that he was singing about Evdilqadîr, but that the man across from him had the same name and this made him laugh. Everyone started laughing. Now the poet, who had asked for attention before the previous kilam, began with a short speech. Therewith he interrupted the course of the performance. Although not welcomed by the dengbêjs and the public, his speech is interesting for the aim of this chapter.

> Dear listeners, if you allow me I want to recite to you some poems. If you ask an educated person to lead even animals, he could [manage to] educate them. But if you ask an uneducated person to lead an educated society he would make them uneducated. I am a poet. The kilams that I sing, the poems I recite, a few are about the past but I composed all of them myself. I myself, and I am confident about this, have made thousands of poems. This is the first thing. The second thing is that our culture and art (çand û hunera me) is like a sea. (..) If you ask an educated person to lead even animals, he could [manage to] educate them. But if you ask an uneducated person to lead an educated society he would make them uneducated.

Dengbêj Nejat, who continued having the lead of the performance, interfered by saying: 'can you *do* something now?', urging him to start with his poems instead of giving a speech. There was some commotion among the people present and they laughed a bit, but the poet stubbornly continued:

> Yes.. now a kilam.. the dengbêj and the poet are different from each other (*dengbêj û şaîr ji hev cudane*). How are they different? The dengbêj is the voice of the people (*dengbêj dengê xelkê dibêje*). For example Apê Nejat made a poem and I learned it from him. He is a dengbêj. And now the poet, he makes poems by himself. He composes poems. Now me personally, I don't want to sing kilams that are about Kurds, about Kurmanc, who fight and kill each other (*ez bi xwe, ez li ser kurmanca ku li hevdane, ku hev kûştine, ez bi xwe van kilaman naxwazim bêjim*). Maybe you will ask why I don't want to sing them. It is not a good thing. Until when will we continue killing each other?

The poet was an outsider who was only listened to out of politeness, as he was a visitor and should be given an ear. Clearly most people present felt that it should be over quickly. He was an elderly man and looked unkempt. They did not take him seriously and were waiting and urging him to finish with his speech and poems. For us, the speech of the poet is interesting as he voices a commonly heard discourse about dengbêj kilams.

He began his speech with an expression that means: someone with education could make the dumbest society wise, but an uneducated person could make the smartest society dumb. Then he spoke of his own position; he is a poet, and obviously feels he is someone belonging to the 'educated' category. He gave proof of his skills by saying he composed 'thousands of poems', and he repeated the same expression about wisdom. He tried to command respect, sensing that the public was mocking him. Even though he was interrupted, he continued as he had not yet made his point. There is a difference, so he said, between the dengbêj and the poet. The dengbêj is 'the voice of the people', but the poet makes poems himself. He implied, -although carefully by first praising the skills of the performance leader- that just being the voice of the people is not always a sign of wisdom. He himself, so he said, did not

want to follow their example of singing kilams about Kurds killing Kurds: "it is not a good thing, until when will we continue killing each other?" This is a crucial sentence articulating the view according to which dengbêjs would belong to the old feudal structure as I discussed above.

After these last words the youngest dengbêj present, who tried to sing a kilam but could not remember the words, interrupted him by asking for a poem. His question distracted the poet from his speech, and he abandoned the topic, asking how many poems he should recite. Several people reacted, saying that one was enough, and the performance leader warned him not to make it long. He started by reciting a poem about love. Then he sang a song:[236]

> Oh my mother, oh my mother, Gulê was saying:
> The Turkish soldiers came and killed us,
> If we have a memory and belief,
> If we are a unity we cannot be defeated.
> This evening my father did not come home.
> No one brought good news.
> Gulê showed her green and red and yellow
> To the people who are around her family.
> She says to the people in the village:
> Look at this spilled blood of the hero of my family.
> I am calling out to the patriots.
> Let the blood of our hero not remain without revenge

This is a recent political song, speaking of a woman named Gulê who laments the death of her father by Turkish soldiers. She calls upon the people in her village, upon their "memory and belief", upon the "green, red and yellow" of the Kurdish flag, to form a unity that can stand strong against Turkish attacks. Calling upon the death of her father, she asks for revenge. With this song the poet reacted to the kilams that were sung previously, and he enforced the argument of his speech. The dengbêjs were singing kilams about betrayal; Kurds betraying Kurds. Such kilams are, so he wanted to say, destroying the unity of the Kurds who should instead make common cause against the Turks. With his speech, he clearly connected to the social narratives of the Kurdish movement that condemned such kilams. He openly tried to educate the dengbêjs, whom he accused of being uneducated. And he sang a recent political song, making clear that this is what counts nowadays, and not the old kilams of the dengbêjs that are about battles, blood, and division.

236 At the time Hanifi Barış and I worked on this performance we did not transcribe, only translated the song into English, as I did not expect that I would include this song in my dissertation.

The performance leader cut the poet short in the middle of his song, saying that it is not necessary to sing kilams in total, and that 'we keep it short'. The next dengbêj began to sing before the poet could continue; the third kilam of the row. His kilam connected again to the kilams that were sung before. No one responded to the arguments of the poet, and no one seemed to be surprised about what he was saying. They were used to this discussion, did not see the poet as a serious discussion partner, and quickly continued with their own program.

The third kilam is about the death of Bavê Heyder Beg and his two companions, who joined in the Sheikh Said rebellion and were killed by the Turkish army.

Lo mîro...mîro	Oh king, oh king..
Heylo dayê rebenê sibe ye	Oh poor mother it is sunrise
Min dît Kewê bi sê denga dikir gazî	I saw how Kewê was calling
Digot Zeynebê mala bavê te xera bibe	Telling to Zeynep, may God destroy your house
Welatê me yê Serhedê wezê bi diyarê	I have been wandering all around the lands of Serhat,
Kela Milazgirê şewitî ketime	Around the doomed castle of Milazgir
sere vê payiza rengîne	at the beginning of this colorful autumn
Tuyê bala xwe bide	Look carefully around
ji kil û kedera dilê min	look around for my sake
Û te re vê sibê li min dîsa berfê lêkir	how well and nicely it is snowing at this very morning

Kilams starting with 'oh king' are usually about battles, either among tribes or with the state. The kilam's narrator is Kewê, who is telling her story to Zeynep. Kewê is probably the wife or daughter of Bavê Heyder Beg, who is the king in this kilam. Zeynep might be another relative or friend. It is a colorful autumn morning at sunrise, it is snowing lightly, but it is clear that despite this seemingly peaceful landscape a disaster has happened. Kewê says she is 'wandering around the lands of Serhat, around the doomed castle of Milazgir'. This way of telling is more often used in laments, and expresses the misery and pain of the narrator. In her imagination, Kewê is wandering around the places where the battle took place and where her heroes have died. They are desolate places, 'doomed' because of the recent fighting, and they only recall loss and death. It would be better, so Kewê feels, if these places would not exist anymore, if they would be destroyed, so that she will not be reminded continuously of the agonizing pain that she can hardly bear. The colors of autumn and the white of the snow contrast strongly with the destruction.

In her imagination, Kewê goes back to the moment before the battle started, and tries to redo the event in order to forge a different ending.

De wezê cilê bavê Heyder Begê	I will pick up the fabric
xwe hilînim	for the clothes of Heyder Beg's father
Berê xwe bidim Şêrima Şêxa	I set off to the village Şêrima Şêxa
Cilê Keremê qolaxasî	where I will pick up those of commander Kerem,
Berxê mala Musema Begê hilînim	the lamb of the tribe of Musema Beg
Ezê berê xwe bidim çemê Hevrenga	I will set off to the river Hevrenga
Cilê Silêmanê Mihemed	where I will pick up the fabric of Silêman
Bavê Kanemîrê zirav hilînim	the son of Mihemed, the father of tall Kanemîr
Ezê berê xwe bidim	I will set off
çarşiyê kele û kopê Mûşa birengîne	to the useless market of colorful Muş
Cilê van egît û efada bidim ser dikanê	where I will give the fabrics of these heroic warriors
Van terziya	To the tailor shops,
ji kul û kedera dilê xwe re	and I will have them made up perfectly
Ji bejn û bala wan re çêkim	Fit to make them look very good

Kewê introduces the three heroes about whom she laments. They are Bavê Heyder Beg, the commander Kerem, and Silêman of Mihemed, the father of Kanemîr. She imagines ordering beautiful tailor-made clothes that will fit them well and make them look like brave warriors.

Heyla Kewê bi sê denga dikir gazî	Oh Kewê was telling over and over again
Digot Zeynebê bila mala bavê te xera bibe	Saying to Zeynep, may God destroy your father's house
Lê wezê cilê van egît û efada	I will collect the clothes of these heroic warriors
ji bejna wan re çêkim bigrim li bejnê kim	And have them dressed up perfectly
Berê van egîta bidim	And I will direct these heroes
kurê Egrîd Axayê şewitî	to the son of doomed Egrîd Agha
Lo derbaz bikim hidûdê Îranê bi mahkûmî	And have them pass the Iranian border like fugitives
Bi firarî	Like criminals on the run
sitû xwarî lo bavo	with their heads dropped in shame oh my father
Çima bi nava Ecema de birê kim	Why didn't I have them sent among the Persians?
Heyla dayê wezê çi bikim	Oh mother what can I do?
Heyfa min li kuştina egît û xweşmêran	I don't pity the murdering of these great warriors
Lê heyfa tê li we heyfê wezê bi diyarê	But I pity that I have to wander throughout
Kela Milazgirê ketime	The castle of Malazgir
çi bikim Şemsedîn Zarûk e	what could I do, Şemseddîn is only a child
Ez ê temîniya cotê xanima	To whom could I give the care of two wives
komê xutam û xizmetkaran	and a group of servants
Û a dîwana mezin	And the great dîwan
ji kul û kedera dilê xwe re li kê û kê kim	To whom could I give that responsibility[237]?

After having them dressed up like heroes, Kewê imagines sending these three men to Egrîd Agha, someone obviously capable of helping them cross the border. She strongly wishes she could have sent them to safety before the battle took place, even

237 The meaning of the last sentence is not totally clear, and the translation is a guess.

though it would have felt like a failure, as if they were criminals. They would have been embarrassed by their retreat, but in retrospect she wishes she could have sent them there. After this regret, she turns back to the reality of the 'murdering of these great warriors'. The expression 'I do not pity the death of.., but I do pity..' (*heyfa min li kuştina .. naye, lê heyfa tê li we heyfe ku..*) is common in laments for warriors. The death of a warrior is regarded as a possible consequence of a heroic battle that is naturally very painful, but can in a way be accepted. What is harder to accept is when women or children die in battles, when houses or villages are burned down or destroyed, or when as in this case, the household of the hero is left behind in disorder. The only man in the family, Şemsedîn, is still a child who cannot take care of the house. Bavê Heyder Beg's wives and servants are left behind without care, and the 'great dîwan', his guesthouse where people used to gather, is now empty. The kilam ends with praise for Bavê Heyder Beg, and some criticism:

Heyla Bavê Heyder Begê min	Oh father of my Heyder Beg
wele tu sultan î	you are surely the sultan
Tu gula Eshediyan î	You are the flower of Eshedî[238]
tu milûkê Kurdistan î	you are the king of Kurdistan
Ji xwedayê min re	It is well known by my God
aza û besir e	who sees and understands everything
roja şer û cengê giran	That on the day of the great war
li orta meydanê tu yê	you were in the middle of the battle field
Mêrek î bîkefîl	You are a man worthy of ages
û şert û bi deman î	and many men can testify to your greatness in war
Ez ê çi bikim e Maqûlo	But what can I do, my wise man
bila mala te xera bibe	may God destroy your house
Lê roja Şerê Şikefta	On the day of the battle
Bêngana şewitî mal xerabo	at the cave of doomed Begane
Tu yê li pêşiya qanûne	You didn't stand up against the rule
Hikûmata Romê	of the Turkish government
Eskerê Cumhûriyetê lo mil hilnanî	And against the soldiers of the Republic

Kewê praises his heroism, his bravery in the battle field, and his experience. The last lines seem to be sung out of pain, cursing him because he was not able to beat the 'rule of the Turkish government and the soldiers of the Republic'.

The public had listened quietly, joined with the humming refrain after each stanza, and applauded after the last sounds fade away. Two men stood up to leave, the performance leader asked 'who is next?', and the next dengbêj began to sing the fourth kilam.

238 Other name for Serhat, the name for the highlands around Muş and Van.

The fourth kilam is about the arrest of Sheikh Said during the rebellion, which in time took place before the three previous kilams.

De lê lê, Qudretê bi sê denga bang dikirî	Hey hey,[239] Qudretê was telling over and over
De lê lê Muhbetê lê xwê	Hey hey Muhbet, my sister
Wezê biketama bi Kelê,	I wish I would have wandered all around Kelê
bi Kopê, bi Milazgirê	Around Kopê and Milazgir
Bi Muşê, bi Vartoyê, bi Xûnûsê	Around Muş, Varto and Xûnûs
xwedê bi sere me da xera bike	may God let them collapse on our heads[240]
Lê li şerê, li qewgê,	Look at the war, at the battle,
li qotikê, li qotînê	look at the massacres and the destruction
Li vê zilmê, li vê zilametê	look at the oppression and cruelty
Bila kula xwedê bi kul be	May God's diseases and troubles
bikeve beyta mala	fall on the house and family
Misto Kemal Qumandarê Cûmhûriyetê	of Misto Kemal, the commander of the Republic

This kilam begins in a manner similar to some parts of the previous kilam, which may have triggered the memory of the dengbêj about this particular song. The narrator Qudretê's lament is addressed to her sister. She says that she wishes to see the destruction of the places where the rebellion took place, mentioning all the place names. She feels in shock because of what happened, because of all the people who died, and she hopes that the places which remind her of the cruelties will be destroyed. She wants to die with them, as after all this destruction living seems useless and cruel. She also curses Mustafa Kemal, the leader of the young Turkish Republic, whom she holds responsible for the catastrophe and the arrest of Sheikh Said. In the following lines she turns back to what happened before their death.

Min dît destê bavê Şêx Elî Riza,	I saw that the hands of Şêx Elî Riza's father,
Bi tevî sed siwara kiriyê dare kelemçê	Along with one hundred cavalry, were handcuffed,
Haniye kavila Diyarbekir daye	brought to the ruins of Diyarbekir
ber daraxacî	and placed next to the [hanging poles]
Lo lo bira min dît êvarê ji xwe re girt	Brother I saw how in the evening they were arrested
Û bê sûc û xeta	Without any crime or misdeed
avêtiye kaxila nezaretê	and he [Mustafa Kemal] put them in custody
Ax nemînim	Ah, I don't want to live anymore
Weyla Axao wezê nizanim nemîne	Hey my Agha, I don't know how to survive
Li pey kiyan û kê ra	with whom and for whom
Wezê nemînim li pey Şêx Seid Efendî	I don't want to survive after [the death of] Şêx Seid Ef.
Bavê Şêx Elî Riza,	The father of Şêx Elî Riza [Sheikh Said's son]
ortaqê Şêx Evdilayê	the companion of Şêx Evdilayê
Meleka berxê mala Şêx Eliyê Palûyê	The great warrior of the house of Şêx Elî from Palû
Bavê Pakîzê ra dewrane	The father of Pakîze [Sheikh Said's daughter]
mire min dewran e	my king it is doomsday

239 In Kurdish this exclamation addresses a woman

240 These places are known to the people, they live there, and after what happened it is like torture to see the places and continue living there. So they say let them collapse on our heads, and let us also be dead with them. Your beloved one is gone so what is the use of staying alive.

Sheikh Said was arrested and handcuffed together with hundred cavalry. Qudretê praises him, calling him by the names of his most important relatives and connections, and says she cannot survive after his death. After this lament she gives some more information about the circumstances of the arrest.

Bila kula xwedê bi kul be bikeve	May the wrath of God befall upon the houses
Beyta mala fesad û şeytanên	of the devilish snitches
me Kurmanca	among us the Kurds
De dîsa çûne Kavila Diyarbekirê rûniştine	They have gathered again in the ruins of Diyarbekir
Min dît de dîsa	I saw how again they reported
şikayeta bavê Şêx Elî Riza	about the father of Şêx Elî Riza
Kalê Nûranî Qutvê çiyayê Bîngolê	The Divine Elder, Wise Man of the Bingol mountains
Teyrê Sipî, Şêxê Îrşadê	The White Eagle, the Sheikh of Divine Enlightenment
De wanê ji xwe re	They reported about the father of Pakîze
şikayeta Bavê Pakîzê kiribûn, wan gilîkir	and informed his whereabouts [to the authorities]

Despite the complaints of the poet that the dengbêjs were singing kilams about the division and fights among the Kurds, this kilam continues in the same vein. It talks about the 'devilish snitches among us the Kurds' who betrayed Sheikh Said and 'informed his whereabouts' to the authorities. The kilam implies that he could have conquered the Turkish army, if not for the betrayers who repeatedly did not side with him but with the enemy. The words the dengbêj uses to praise Sheikh Said refer to his religious position and to the religious meaning the narrator attaches to him. He was the Divine elder, the Wise man, the White Eagle, the Sheikh of Divine Enlightenment. This way of praising Sheikh Said is not common in the discourse of the Kurdish movement, let alone in PKK thought. The kilam instead praises his religious qualities and thus combines Kurdish nationalist and religious sentiments in ways one would not usually hear from political activists.

Lê kesekî xêrxwaz tune	But there was no one of good will
kaxezekî yazîbike	to write a letter
Bişîne ba Seydayê Nêriyê	and send it to Seyda of Nêriyê
Seydayo bila mala te mîrat be	Seyda may your house be destroyed
Min dît Bavê Şêx Elî Riza,	I saw the father of Şêx Elî Riza
Kalê Nûranî, Qutvê Çiyayê Bîngolê,	The Divine Elder, the Wise Man of the Bingol mountains
Teyrê Sipî, Şêxê Îrşadê	The White Eagle, the Sheikh of Divine Enlightenment,
Berê xwe dibû riya Îranê	Set off to Iran,
Rêka xwe bi nivî kir	he was half way
Bila kula xwedê bi kul be	May God's diseases
Bikeve mala fesada û Şeytana	befall upon the houses of these devilish snitches
Min dît destê Bavê Şêx Elî Riza kirin	I saw how they handcuffed the father of Şêx Elî Riza
Darê kelepça bi tevî sed siwarî	Along with one hundred cavalry
berê wî da bûn	and brought them
Kavila Diyarbekir ber daraxacî	to the ruins of Diyarbekir

According to the kilam Sheikh Said was on his way to Iran to escape, but was intercepted by soldiers who, following the directions of the betrayers, arrested him and his men and brought them to Diyarbakır.

Min dît dused siwarên me sirgûn kirin	I saw how 200 of our cavalries were sent in exile
Berê wan dane nava Lazan û Tatan	sent towards the Laz and Tat
De min dît dîsa serê Şêx û Melên me	I saw how they captured all our Sheikhs and Imams
Tenami girtin ji xwe re bi baltê jêkirin	And they beheaded them with axes
Ax nemînim nemînim nemînim	Ah I don't want to live anymore
Ezê nizanim nemînim	I don't want to survive
li pey kîyan îs kiyan	with whom and for whom?
Wezê nemînim li pey Şêx Seid Efendî	I cannot survive after Sheikh Seid Efendi
Bavê Şêx Elî Riza	the father of Sheikh Elî Riza
De dîsa ortaqê mi da Şêx Evdilayê Meleka	The companion of Sheikh Evdila of Meleka
De Kekê Xiyasedîn Bavê Pakîzê re	the brother of Xiyasedîn, the father of Pakîze
Dewrane dewrane	Nothing will ever be the same

The narrator saw him as the great hope for victory, and therefore after his death living did not seem to make sense anymore. The Sheikh Said rebellion was indeed put down harshly and had enormous consequences due to the large number of people killed, exiled, and displaced.

Freedom in their own House

At the end of the performance the public praised the dengbêj, and discussed who would sing next. The previous topic was abandoned and a new series started: they collectively decided the next kilam should be *Silêmanê Mistê*, a well-known and frequently performed kilam about a battle between the Pencînar and Elîkan tribes (see chapter 1). Someone in the public opposed this choice, saying it is 'too long'. For some minutes they discussed:

A: Sing Silêmanê Mistê!
B: No, Silêmanê Mistê is too long!
C: It is not necessary to make it long, long and short is in our hands!
D: It is in my mother's hands to make more buttermilk!
E: I won't give up singing kilams until the end!

This short exchange points to the presence of dengbêj Nejat who had the lead of the performance. The dengbêjs knew his preference for short songs, which he had already stated several times before. Some felt they should continue singing full versions, whereas others wanted to follow the line of dengbêj Nejat.

After the interruption dengbêj Mahmut starts singing about the battle between the house of Faro of the Elîkan tribe and the house of Dîbo of the Pencînar tribe. Silêman son of Mistê of the house of Dîbo wants to revenge the livestock theft,

eventually leading to a war between the two clans, in which Silêman gets killed (chapter 1). The narrator of the song is the mother of Silêmanê Mistê who laments the death of her son. But in this version she also laments the death of the enemy hero, and sings about both of them when Bişarê Çeto asks her to do so. Following the topic of this kilam, the next dengbêj sang *Bişarê Çeto*, which I also discussed in chapter 1. It is followed by another kilam about tribal battle. The dengbêj began to sing, but after the introductory *way way* he interrupted himself. There was some noise coming from outside that was disturbing the performance, some people in the courtyard talking to each other. Dengbêj Mahmut reacted to the fact that previously they were disturbed by other musicians, whereas in the new Dengbêj House they are the ones in charge:

Dengbêj Mahmut:	This is our house and no one can stop us! So shall I sing at the top of my voice or not? Do you dare to sing at the top of your voice [directed to the other dengbêjs]?
The public:	Sing! Sing!
Dengbêj Mahmut:	Oh of course, sing! Sing at the top of your voice, you are free!

Enjoying the freedom of having their own House instead of feeling like guests at the cultural center, the dengbêj continued his kilam at his loudest volume and thus drowned out the voices outside. After the kilam finished there was some discussion between the two oldest dengbêjs present about their position and about a performance of the second oldest on television. But dengbêj Mahmut tried to interrupt them, he was not finished, he had something more to say:

> I had a shepherd[241] and he left his home after he married. And he said to me: 'you didn't tell me how nice it is to live apart [from my family]. My father cannot tell me anymore what to do. He cannot wake me up in the morning. He cannot send me to work'. His father had kicked him out of the village. Sometime later I saw him again with a handcar and he looked so poor and I asked him: 'how are you doing?' And he said to me:[242] 'Brother, brother, you fucked my mother. You didn't tell me how hard it is to live apart from my family. One of them wants trousers, the other one wants shoes, the next sugar, oil, tea.. I became a beggar. Can you ask my father Haci Ramazan if he can take me back to the village'? This is our house, we can sing loudly and no one can say anything to us. We are seven meters under the ground! Let's sing, sing! When you are at home you are at ease and free, and you can do whatever you like![243]

241 Farmers often hire a shepherd to take care of their herds (often several farmers do so collectively). This dengbêj lives in a village outside of Diyarbakir and owns land and livestock.

242 At that moment he turned into my direction and said to the others: 'yes there is of course a woman present here', as to excuse himself for the words he was going to say. But it was my first fieldwork period and I did not understand much Kurdish. He apparently felt he could continue without feeling awkward, as everyone knew I would not understand. This is a nice example of cultural coding. He feels he can only use such a sentence in the presence of men, and even though a woman is present, my inability to understand excuses him for using it.

243 Literally he uses the expression "this is the neighborhood of Köroğlu", which comes to this meaning.

The public was laughing, and someone reacted: 'we are under the earth, as in Istanbul!'.[244] The story was meant to illustrate how comfortable one feels when one is at home. To the shepherd it seemed pleasant initially to be far from the obligations of home, but eventually he had to admit that he would rather live at home with his father interfering than to have to carry the load of his family on his own. At home one feels supported, free, and at ease, and that is how the dengbêjs felt that day in the new Dengbêj House. They could sing as loud as they wished because it was their own home and no one could interrupt them or drown them out.

I hope that this rather lengthy and detailed account of one performance was useful first in gaining an impression of the structure of a dengbêj performance, and second in highlighting a number of issues that are central to understanding current performances. I conclude this section by discussing each of these in turn.

The newly opened Dengbêj House provoked comments on the new location and organization. The dengbêjs saw this as a new start in which they had a place of their own and a new visibility in public life. They were no longer sitting in the courtyard of the cultural center where they had felt outnumbered and drowned out by the modern Kurdish music groups. Having their own House made them feel more at home and more able to define their performances as they saw fit.

At the same time, their separation from the cultural center and the pleasure they felt at having their own place underscores the opposing interests and views between the dengbêjs and other musicians (see also chapter 4). They now have their own house, spoken of by dengbêj Mahmut who told the story of the shepherd who wanted to return to his father's home. The story emphasizes the importance of one's own place, and is a good example of the way in which the dengbêjs 'perform tradition.' They feel connected to the village imaginary of the shepherd story and more at home in a place that is not dominated by people by whom they do not feel understood.

The interaction between the dengbêjs in the four kilams presented above demonstrates in how they construct the imaginary of an event, one that takes place at a specific time and place beyond current circumstances. Each dengbêj remembered a different song about the same event and repeated some phrases and expressions voiced by the previous dengbêj, in this way connecting themselves to each other, both in song topic and in vocabulary. Each kilam provided additional information and additional images about the unfolding events. The opening of the Dengbêj House some days before had, due to its political character, most likely triggered their

244 He probably refers to the Basilica cistern of Istanbul, a famous ancient cistern beneath the old city center.

interest in singing these songs at this moment. Songs about the rebellions linked the dengbêjs to the primarily political interests of the activists who had facilitated the new House. They knew that such kilams were popular among the activists, and could bring them some name and fame. However, although the topic of the kilams was indeed connected to the interests of the activists, their actual content was less so. The poet, who interrupted their enthusiasm, pointed towards some of the tensions present in the kilams.

The kilams concern a significant event in Kurdish political history, but they are based on local alliances and loyalties rather than on nationalist ideology (see chapter 1). Even though the Sheikh Said rebellion was the most important Kurdish rebellion of the early Republican time and became symbolic of the Kurdish struggle for freedom, the kilams paint a different picture than the social narratives about Kurdishness and unity would like to stress. The kilams do not conceal the obvious tensions that existed among Kurdish tribes and which prevented them from uniting against one enemy. They recover rather than hide the betrayal and disharmony among different Kurdish factions and do not point towards the so sought-after Kurdish unity.

The dengbêjs are therefore caught in a trap: they emphasize their knowledge of Kurdish culture and traditions which is regarded as positive today. But in doing so, elements come up that do not fit today's dominant ideology and that are condemned by political activists. Although the poet is clearly not a person of authority for the dengbêjs, his speech does demonstrate that the dengbêjs are seen as in need of education and change. They are expected to connect to current narratives of patriotism, Kurdish unity, and the condemnation of internal rivalry. However, during this performance the dengbêjs continued to sing their kilams. The second kilam sung after the speech of the poet was Silêmanê Mistê, which is a kilam not about rebellion but about tribal conflict. Obviously, at that time the dengbêjs did not feel they should modify their repertoire in line with the ideals of the Kurdish movement.

Conclusion

> "Apê Qado (uncle Qado) was my first dengbêj, if I do not count my grandfather who had a decorated long *bilûr* and a *kaval* [both shepherd's flutes], or my father who told me epics of the old times on sparkling evenings in the summer months when the sky was filled with stars. Apê Qado was one of those shadowy faces of my childhood, now and then popping up. From time to time he visited our house or my grandfather's. (..) He was dressed in ordinary clothes like the local people.

> *With his clothes and behavior he was exactly someone from older times, a storyteller belonging to the old era.* (..) Most of the things he told, as far as I can remember, belonged to old times. But there was always something in the story that would be of interest today and to today's people. The stories of Apê Qado, whatever time they belonged to, were not told without reason and there was always a connection with today, a message, a reference, a reason, openly or hidden" (Uzun[245] 2005 [1998]: 17-18, translated from Turkish, my emphasis).

In this chapter I focused on the performance manner of dengbêjs registered at the Dengbêj House in Diyarbakır. They present their art as an important historical source, as a tradition that speaks from the past and conveys authentic experiences of Kurdish village life that cannot be located easily today. Many Kurds would classify the dengbêjs as traditional people, as voices from the past, and contrast them with modern Kurds living in the cities. As Mehmed Uzun says in the quote above, the quality of a performance for him depends on the connection one could feel between former times and today. He experienced uncle Qado, the dengbêj who regularly visited their house in his childhood, as someone offering a glimpse of a past life. But does the fact, as some seem to think, that the dengbêjs are often uneducated in Turkey's education system and that they are trained in an old tradition mean that they are pre-modern or not yet entirely taken up by modernity? The divide between tradition and modernity has troubled anthropology since its onset, and has been instrumental in denying coevalness to others (Fabian 1983: 31) and in the creation of an Other far from the life world of the anthropologist. As I outlined in the introduction, the same narrative has been used to reinforce and justify the power and oppression of the (colonial) state by making groups of people look as if they are in need of a civilizing mission of the state. As this global narrative is so present in Turkey and elsewhere, and engrained in our thinking, I think it is important to deconstruct its underlying assumptions and to investigate in detail what implications it has in the specific case of the dengbêjs.

In this chapter we have seen that the dengbêj art has the image of being a village tradition. Dengbêj Mahmut, for example, emphasized his village background and the qualities corresponding to such a life. The dengbêjs feel and are presented as possessing knowledge, experience and attitudes that they achieved through growing up and being trained in the Kurdish countryside where they lived in an environment dominated by Kurdish language and culture. As such they are seen as different from Kurds who grew up in cities, who lived through different experiences, and who were

245 Mehmed Uzun (1953-2007) was a Kurdish novelist and activist for Kurdish language rights in Turkey. His books were banned in Turkey and he lost his citizenship, after which he lived in exile in Sweden. He is regarded as one of the most important Kurdish authors of recent times.

much more in touch with Turkish language and culture. Village life is regarded as connected to pre-modern times, before the era of progress, where people still live as they used to in the past. In short, the village is often seen as a source of knowledge about true Kurdish culture.

However, when looking at the reality of the lives of the dengbêjs, presenting them as people unaware of, untouched by, or on the road towards, modern life, would be mistaken (see chapter 3 for individual stories). As we saw in the Introduction, over the last century the dengbêj art has developed against the backdrop of the emerging Turkish nation-state, of growing oppression, of Kurdish nationalism, and of a recent opening for Kurdish cultural expression. Some dengbêjs were persecuted, their art was prohibited, and others escaped Turkey to other countries from where they continued to develop their art in exile. Radio and television broadcast set up by Kurds living abroad assisted in raising awareness about the existence and importance of Kurdish language and culture. Although villages further removed from government control were less prone to direct oppression of culture and language, it is hardly possible to see any place within Turkey's borders as untouched by national (and global) politics or by modernity. Also remote villages were deeply influenced by the developments of the increasing power and interference of the state in local matters (see chapter 5). People living in villages who may have looked pure or pristine from an outsider's perspective were well aware of developments happening on a larger scale, if only because of their lack of access to them.

To give one example: good dengbêjs were people with an interest in music and performance. Many would have liked to have had more opportunities for this in their younger years, but performing in Kurdish was just not possible on a professional level and scale (see chapter 3). Since the dengbêjs were consciously preoccupied with the learning and rehearsing of kilams, something that took years of practice, they must have been, even more than others, convinced of the value of Kurdish language and culture. They were also painfully aware of the fact that they could not develop their art in a way congruent with other musical expressions in Turkey. In short, the fact that they lived in rural and often poor conditions did not mean that they were not aware of developments in other places, or that they were behind on some evolutionary road towards progress. Rather, they knew what was going on, they realized they had no access to things they wished to have, and, sooner or later, they often tried out a number of strategies to gain access to the professional music scene or to music education. Therefore, classifying these people as traditional, backwards, uneducated or ignorant, does not make sense when we investigate the stories of particular individuals and performances. It only makes sense when we group

them together and make a story about them that fits our perception but has little connection to the reality of life as lived on the margins of the Turkish nation-state. Indeed, the dengbêj art was pushed out of the cities and larger towns to the villages precisely as a consequence of modernity and nationalism. The modern dominance of nationalist ideology in Turkey turned the dengbêjs and their art into adversaries of the republican ideology of 'one people, one flag, one language, one nation.'

If under the Ottoman Empire the Kurds also did not belong to the Empire's center, they had their own political and social structure that had a place within the Empire, even if it was on its margins. Within this limited space Kurdish culture and language could continue to thrive without major obstructions. The dengbêjs sang in the service of Kurdish mîrs and aghas, but were marginalized when the Kurdish emirate system was destroyed by Ottoman centralization policies. These policies were the foreboding of the modern nation-state, and this first marginalization of the dengbêjs can thus be seen as a first consequence of modernity. After the foundation of the Republic, the increasing oppression of the Kurds meant that Kurdish language could only be spoken in private, beyond the reach of police and soldier's ears.[246] Unlike those dengbêjs who migrated abroad and began to use musical instruments, who were broadcast on the radio, and whose recorded music is still around today, the dengbêjs in Turkey were pushed to the margins, where they could only continue their art in the safety of the home and of smaller villages that were under less scrutiny than the larger towns and cities. Indeed, the dengbêj art was predominantly a village tradition, but as the consequence of modernity, rather than as something that preceded it.

The dengbêjs discussed in this chapter were connected to the House already some years, and were actively involved in the daily performances. The political activists who managed the House often talked with them and tried to transmit their ideological ideas to the dengbêjs (see chapter 4). The latter were thus quite aware of the new narratives about their societal function and significance. Nevertheless, only a few of the dengbêjs I interviewed spoke in terms of learning to become better Kurds, as for example dengbêj Silêman did in the extensive quote on the tribal nature of kilams in this chapter. Several other examples follow in chapters 3 and 4. Generally, however, dengbêjs did not speak in such terms and had different narratives. They emphasized their deep knowledge of Kurdish history, language, past village life, and traditions, without directly framing this knowledge as nationalist. I propose, built on the ethnographic material presented in this chapter, that this was not a matter of ignorance, but rather a conscious choice to stay connected to a different morality

246 "Villages functioned as the home for Kurdish folklore, precisely because most of the time the villages remained outside the state control" (Yüksel 2011: 52).

than that of the Kurdish movement. Although most dengbêjs did feel connected to (some of) the future ideals of the Kurdish movement, they did not share the latter's view on the past. In that sense, the dengbêjs "inhabited different kinds of time simultaneously" (Asad 2003: 223):

> When settled cultural assumptions cease to be viable, agents consciously inhabit different kinds of time simultaneously and try to straddle the gap between what Reinhart Koselleck, speaking of 'modernity,' calls experience and expectation, an aspect of the contemporaneity of the noncontemporaneous. (..) Modern history clearly links time past to time present, and orients its narratives to the future. But present experience is also, as Koselleck points out, a reencounter with what was once imagined as the future. The disappointment or delight this may occasion therefore prompts a reorientation to the past that is more complex than the notion of 'invented tradition' allows.

In this chapter we have seen this "reencounter with what was once imagined as the future" taking place. The dengbêjs did not feel there was a problem with the stories of a Kurdish past in which small-scale alliances and loyalties were much more important and present than the longing for a united Kurdistan.

This brings us to the empersonment of Kurdishness with which I started the chapter. From the self-Orientalist viewpoint of political activists, the dengbêjs are in need of personal change in order to be proper representatives of the modern Kurdish nation. They need to acquire the good Kurdish traits that are traced back to the distant past of a pristine Kurdistan, and they need to shed the bad habits of tribal loyalties, blood revenge, and religious conservativeness. They need to relinguish primordial ties and open their eyes to nationalist and democratic values. For the activists, the empersonment of Kurdishness entails a conscious remaking of the self into better moral and nationalist persons. However, most dengbêjs I spoke with did not express a similar ambivalence towards their Kurdish identity. They did not regard the Kurdish past about which they sing in their kilams as problematic.

Most of them did not go to Turkish schools and were therefore less influenced by, and less immersed in, a Turkish dominated environment. In their younger years they had embraced the kilams they learned from their masters as valuable and important sources of knowledge, culture, language, and history, and they continued to see them as such. Rather than feeling the need for a deliberate recreation of a Kurdish identity, they wished to perform in the way they had learned in the past, and to be valued for their knowledge. The Dengbêj House offered a new and visible space of recognition for their art, and it gave them the opportunity to demonstrate their qualities to new audiences. They emphasized the specific knowledge that they could offer to today's audiences: the emotions and embodied experiences of village

life and a Kurdish past that had "disappeared within a moment." With their presence and singing they felt that they could recall hidden memories for Kurds who had once lived that life, or recover a lost past for those who had not. The Sung Home that the dengbêjs imagined was therefore a different home than the political activists wished to create with the new institution of the Dengbêj House.

Part II

Life Stories

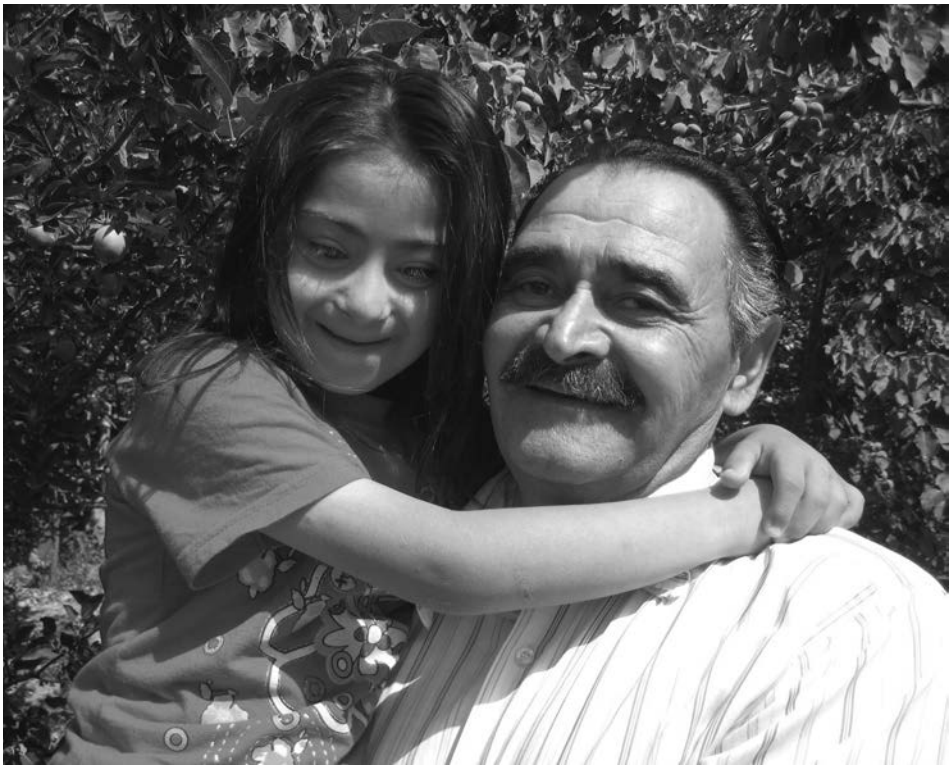

Figure 10. Dengbêj Ali with his daughter in Van. 2008.

Chapter 3

‘A language is a life,
and art is a bracelet.’
A landscape of silence.

Introduction

> Look, 1980 came.[247] On 12 September a coup took place in Turkey under Kenan Evren. All Kurdish was made forbidden. If someone had even one cassette with Kurdish in his house and was caught, he got sentenced. I had many cassettes in Kurdish from many dengbêjs, from everyone. I took them all and threw them in the river. From then on, from 1980 until.. until 2001, believe me I didn't open my mouth, I sang almost nothing. Sometimes I sang at home when I was bored. Sometimes, let me not forget this, in the evening I sat down and I said to my wife: 'make me some tea, and go to bed'. And I sat there the whole night alone and sang until the morning.[248]

With these few sentences dengbêj Mahmut summarized how his singing came to an abrupt end following the 1980 coup organized by General Kenan Evren and his supporters. The coup and its aftermath of harsh oppression and terror marked the starting point of the deep transformation of Kurdish society over thirty years. It also marked the virtual end of the dengbêj art. I start this chapter on silence with dengbêj Mahmut's story because he powerfully articulated what being silenced meant to him and what consequences it had for his art. While thinking through the other stories of this chapter, his story may help to remind us that the silencing of language and cultural production had deep and lasting consequences for Kurdish society.

The prohibitions on the Kurdish language caused dengbêj Mahmut to destroy his cassettes, testimony to the dengbêjs who had come before him. It also made him remain silent for almost two decades. His words spoke of fear, regret, submission and solitude, but also of resilience and perseverance. Dengbêj Mahmut was still young when the coup occurred. He had started learning the dengbêj art at a young age, and this took a great effort. From the stories he told about his young adulthood it appeared that he was a passionate singer, as he is today. Being a dengbêj was his pursuit and passion until the time that he did not dare to continue performing. He spoke of the prohibition on the Kurdish language one other time in my interview, after I had asked him if he really did not sing at all from 1980 until 2002, referring to an earlier comment he had made. He replied:

247 All quotes in this section are taken from an interview with dengbêj Mahmut conducted in Diyarbakır in 2007. The interview language was Turkish.

248 "Bak seksen geldi, seksen. 12 Eylül Türkiye'de inklap oldu. Bütün Kürtçe yasak etti. Kimin evinde bir Kürtçe kaseti, Kenan Evren o zaman inklap yaptı, kimin evinde bir Kürtçe kaset yakalasaydı, ondan sonra ceza verdiler. Benim bir çoğu kaseti vardı, Kürtçe kasetlerim vardı, böyle çeşit çeşitler dengbêjler vardı, herkesin. Ben hepsi götürdüm çaya attım. 1980'den 2001'e kadar inan ki ben hemen hemen yani doğru dürüst ağzımı açmadım. bazen evde sıkılınca şey dedim. Bazen, unutmayayım, akşamdan koltukta oturuyordum hanıma söylüyordum: 'çayımı yapsan getirsen git yat'. Ben tek başıma odada oturuyordum sabaha kadar söylüyordum."

> No I only sometimes sang at home, but not at weddings, or in public gatherings, very little, because the people were afraid (*başka hiç toplumda, cemaatte, düğünlerde.. ara sıra bir, millet korkuyordu, söyleyemiyorduk*). Occasionally, if a request came from the villages, I went there and sang. Sometimes we sang with two or three dengbêjs at a wedding, each in turn. But it was not like before. We could not sing every night, or once a week or once a month. That spirit was gone (*o neşe kalmadı*). Because it was forbidden, the government had forbidden it. It had disappeared, I gave up on it. But my father said to me: 'my son, a language is a life, whatever a person learns stays in his mind'. And he said: 'art is a golden bracelet, whatever happens, when someone knows an art, it is like a bracelet' (*bir lisan bir insandır. Insan ne bilse o kalır. Ondan sonra, sanat altın bileziktir. Ne olursa olsun insan bir sanati olursa bir bileziktir*).[249]

People were afraid to listen to performances. Once in a while he accepted an invitation, but these were exceptions and occurred much less frequently than before the coup. As a reaction to the disappearance of the language and public performances his father spoke to him about the importance of language and art. He said that language is rich, and when one has learned a language it never leaves one's mind and art is worth as much as a golden bracelet. In Kurdish society such bracelets are given to women as a wedding gift. Women wear them and also keep them for hard times, when they or their family need money. Whatever happens, the jewelry will always be there and have a permanent value.[250] The comparison of the dengbêj art with the bracelet for a woman's wedding shows the value the dengbêjs and other people attached to it. Dengbêj Mahmut illustrated the words of his father with a story:

> Believe me [one day] I went to Serhat, to Muş, it was snowing. I went with my father to a village, and we got lost, me and my father. I was still young at the time. There was one and a half meter snow. We ended up in another village, it was a Chechen village, a village from Chechen people. These are people who don't invite one inside. There were one hundred houses in that village. We went to all the houses but noone let us in. We would freeze to death from the cold. It was in the middle of the winter, there was 1,5 meter snow, there was ice. I sat down on a stone and began to sing:
>
> *Lo lo Faxriya's father.. Hey ey ey…*[251]
>
> That's how I began to sing, and I looked up, and across from me a door opened, over there a door opened, over there someone called me in, and over there. Four people

249 The title of this chapter is based on this quote. It is a free translation. '*Bir lisan bir insan*' is a proverb that means that with each language you learn you become, as it were, an extra person. It points to the wealth of language, and the power of knowing a different language. Since dengbêj Mahmut uses this expression to underline the importance of Kurdish, the language of his art, I felt that my English translation 'a language is a life' captures his intentions.

250 Scalbert Yücel also notes that dengbêjs compared their art with gold: 'Because of this repression, dengbêjî has tended to be represented as something 'hidden' [*tiştekî veşartî*], or as a 'buried treasure,' as one of the dengbêj said: 'The *dengbêj*, it is a treasure buried in the ground. The dengbêj is like gold.' As such dengbêjî needs to be discovered, cherished and protected' (ibid 2009: 17).

251 While telling the story he sang the first line of this kilam, without singing it in full. See chapter 1 for a full version of this kilam called *Bavê Faxriya*.

> came to invite us to be their guests! I said to my friends: 'look, my father has said to me: one day it will become necessary, preserve that art. Preserve it, the time will come, one day you will need it' (*ben arkadaşlar dedim: bak, babam bana söyledi bir gün lazım olur, o sanat sakla. Sakla, zamani gelir zamani. Bir gün lazım olur*). One of the men took us inside and gave us food, he lit the fireplace, and I started to sing. The whole village came [to his house]. If I wouldn't have been able to sing, really we would have died that night. (You didn't have any acquaintances in the village?) No really I didn't know anybody. It was the first time I came there. It was in 1976. I sang this song and it saved us. Really it is a nice art, the dengbêj art is a very nice art (*bu dengbêjlik çok güzel bir sanattır*).

Dengbêj Mahmut told me this story to illustrate the value of the dengbêj art: it meant life to him, life as opposed to death. His father had told him to preserve his knowledge, like a bracelet, because one day he would be able to use it. The story makes it also clear that one cannot underestimate the consequences of the prohibitions put in place after the coup. Most people did not have the means to buy a radio or a cassette player; possessing cassettes was like having a treasure. When people gathered in a house with a radio or a cassette player, they brought their cassettes and listened to them together. Therefore, when dengbêj Mahmut took his cassettes and threw them in the river, he lost a valuable treasure. It appears that this was a clean break with the dengbêj art, because he says 'I gave it up'. He decided to throw the cassettes away to be safe and to have some peace of mind. The policies of fear had succeeded in silencing and isolating him.

However, this silence was also occasionally broken. Dengbêj Mahmut indicated in the first quote that he sometimes asked his wife 'to bring tea and go to bed' and then he sang 'until the morning'. Although he had tried to radically and totally abandon his art, he also remembered the words of his father. At such moments he broke his silence, and enjoyed the words and sounds of the kilams. He sang to entertain himself, to find solace, and to forget his sorrow. Unfortunately, he could not share these moments with anyone, but only sing in hiding, in solitude, whereas the dengbêj art was something to be shared. Dengbêj Mahmut's effort to break his silence actually makes the silence more visible; a dengbêj without an audience is meaningless. Therefore, both acts, that of throwing away his cassettes and the lonely singing in the night suggest the emotional reaction to being silenced. At the same time, the act of singing in the night indicates that dengbêj Mahmut was not able to totally abandon his art. He kept a little hope alive that one day he would be able to sing again in front of an audience. The way he spoke about silence betrayed both his feelings of loss as well as the feeling of hope he tried to maintain.

In this chapter, that forms the central part of the dissertation, I discuss the duality of being silenced and breaking silence so clearly expressed in his and

other dengbêjs' narratives, and in that of one aşık. I focus on a number of individual narratives to examine this topic. What strategies did these individual dengbêjs develop to make a space for performance within the context of their lives, and in often confusing and painful circumstances? How did they speak of these experiences in the context of today's social and political climate? What social and moral narratives did they draw upon and how did they use such narratives to give meaning to their life experiences? The themes narrative and morality meet in the stories of individual performers. This chapter bridges the first with the third part by demonstrating what impact societal changes and new moral narratives had on individual lives.

I use the method of narrative analysis (Riessman 1993) to analyze interviews on their main themes and structure. All interviews discussed in this chapter were recorded on video, and I translated them in full. Instead of fracturing the stories by choosing quotes that fit my story, I read carefully through each interview to find out what were the main concerns of the people I spoke with. I also used Somers' narrative dimensions (see Introduction) to investigate how individuals incorporated social concerns in their personal life stories. Each life story can be read separately and the reader can pick and choose stories according to her interest. However, the range of topics that the stories convey are not chosen randomly, but according to themes that were and are important in contemporary Kurdish life in Turkey. By focusing, in detail, on the life stories of individuals we gain insight into the variety of lived experiences in the complex socio-political situation of Turkey. Many dengbêjs stopped performing or sang only occasionally between 1980 and 2000. The stories reflect important changes taking place in Turkish Kurdistan since the 1980s: the destruction of village life, rapid urbanization and migration that allowed little space for the dengbêjs to perform, and the politicization of Kurdishness and of Kurdish music. Many people of the elderly generation are not as connected to social narratives brought up by the Kurdish political movement, and dominant since the 1980s, as are the young generation that grew up during the armed conflict between the PKK and Turkey's goverment.[252] Their stories offer a diverse picture of performance opportunities and obstructions, and show more than just the politicized discourse on the dengbêj art as it developed over the last decade. I also included the story of one Kurdish aşık, since

252 This view is also often articulated in Turkey, for example in an interview with the co-mayor of Diyarbakır on the website of the newspaper 'Halkın Nabzı:' "Firat Anli claims that his generation is the last Kurdish generation that is open to peace, negotiation and living with Turks in Turkey. He believes that the new generation of the Kurds to come (those who lived their childhood in the 1990s) is too furious to negotiate peacefully, due to the state violence and oppression they have witnessed in the 1990s." (Translated from Turkish, March 28, 2014, http://www.maltepeninnabzi.com/?p=3148).

his life story gives important clues about shifting interests in music and musical instruments over the last decades among Kurds in Turkey.

While writing this chapter I realized that my own focus of attention sometimes blinded me to the focus of the people I spoke with. In earlier versions, I was preoccupied with political oppression, and I searched through the interviews for comments on this. But while reading and thinking through the interviews over and over again, I realized that the silences I was looking for (silence due to political oppression) were not necessarily the silences that the dengbêjs were talking about. I discovered other reasons that people felt silenced, which meant that I needed to broaden the topic of this chapter to include a *variety* of silences. Female dengbêjs were silenced by men and patriarchal structures of society; some dengbêjs were silenced because of religious reasons and others were prohibited from making the music they liked because of a prohibition on musical instruments. Destruction of villages and social structures, as well as migration to the cities of Western Turkey were other causes for a decline in interest and performance opportunities. A significant development after 1980 was that dengbêjs came to be seen by the Kurdish political movement as part of the feudal system it was fighting against. This made the dengbêjs unpopular, especially when they were compared to the young generation of musicians. Politicized music groups grew rapidly in popularity and replaced the music of dengbêjs. In short, throughout the lives of my respondents, individuals and groups of dengbêjs have been silenced for various reasons and by a number of actors or institutions.

When after 2000 a new space was created for the dengbêjs to perform, people who had kept silent for many years experienced a renewed interest in their art, and found new ways to express themselves. This became an important topic during the interviews. Dengbêjs looked back on their lives and recounted the heyday of their singing careers, the times that they could not sing, and how the situation is today. For some dengbêjs the silence and return was a central theme to which they returned often during the interview. For others it came up in less obvious ways, for example, when they spoke about their come-back on stage, about the perceived lack of attention to their singing, and about ideas of how and why the songs and stories of dengbêjs are important and should not be forgotten. As important reasons for their silence, the dengbêjs mentioned both the recent political transformations, as well as earlier obstructions in their singing careers. They described how the changes that took place played a role in their lives, and located themselves in this landscape of silence and the return of their voice. They *were able to speak* about this because so much had changed.

As I outlined in the introduction, in times of change, people feel the need to reposition themselves and refigure their personal narratives (Zigon 2008). Social narratives change, and stories that were previously normative and taken for granted are questioned or lose their value. As we will see in this chapter, dengbêjs often spoke of their experiences and choices in moral terms. They had clear ideas about why they made certain choices, and they explained them as being morally just and right, each in their own way. They connected to new social narratives about the meaning of their art, but they also expressed personal concerns: they made choices based on their specific life situations. The seven life stories discussed in this chapter demonstrate that people's personal experiences with a society in turmoil are multiple and complex, and are always related to their specific individual circumstances. Investigating their personal stories also makes any Orientalist categorization of dengbêjs as pre-modern impossible, as the variation of stories points to the multiple ways in which each of these dengbêjs were and are entangled in the larger picture of social change, urbanization, politicization, nationalism, and modernity.

Life story 1: politicization of Kurdish language and culture

Figure 11. The town Iğdır. Dengbêj Isa comes from a village nearby, and one of his stories is about this town. In the background the mount Ararat and Armenia. 2007.

'No one can wipe out a mother tongue'.[253]

Dengbêj Isa was born in a village close to the Armenian and Iranian borders. The nearest town is Iğdır, a small provincial town from which one can see the mountain Ararat. During Isa's childhood there were about sixty to seventy houses in his village, against four hundred today. The language of communication in the village was Kurdish, but Isa learned Turkish in primary school which he attended for five years. The villagers lived from agriculture (cotton, grain, sugar beets and vegetables), gardening (small vegetables and herbs for subsistence), and animal husbandry (goats, sheep and some cows). In summer they would go to the summer pastures with their animals, set up their black tents made of goatskin, and live for three months in the milder climate of the mountains. During the 1980s and 90s summer pastures became forbidden territory as many mountain areas became military zones occupied by the Turkish army. These measures were very disruptive for social and economic structures, as animal husbandry was an important source of income. As a result, dengbêj Isa went to work in the summer as a shepherd in pastures far away from the village, near Erzurum. In the 1990s, he and his family moved to the city Van.

In his life story dengbêj Isa focuses on his position as a dengbêj, and on the manner in which he received recognition for that position. He ascribes the authority he has as a dengbêj to two main reasons: his connection to older dengbêjs, and his fight against political oppression. As in the case of dengbêj Mahmut in chapter 2, his interview can also be seen as a performance in itself. In the second part of the interview he spoke at length about his village and tradition. In the first part he emphasized what value the dengbêj art has obtained due to its history of suffering and oppression. He began the interview as follows:

> The field of the dengbêj and the dengbêj art is very broad, how can I tell you. All the way from the time of the Ottoman Empire until today, and of course also before that time there were dengbêjs, at that time there was no reading and writing, it didn't exist. And this Kurdish people, from that time until today, grew up with the voice of the dengbêjs, with the tellings of the dengbêj, until our days.[254] And now you will say: then where did these dengbêjs come from? This dengbêj art from Serhat[255] is a culture coming from Evdalê Zeynikî. (..) Evdalê Zeynikî is very long ago, 400 or 500 years have passed.[256]

253 "Ana lisanımız kaybolmaz, kimse kaybedemez" (see below for full quote).

254 "Dengbêj ve dengbêjlik alanı çok geniştir, ben sana nasıl diyeyim. Ta Osmanlılardan, Osmanlı Imparatorluktan, bu yani, tabii dahaönce de dengbêj varmış. O zaman okur yazar yok, kalem defter yok, bunlar yokmuş. Yani bu Kürt halkı o tarihten bu tarihe kadar dengbêjlerin sesiyle büyümüş, dengbêjlerin söyleşiyle büyümüş, günümüze kadar."

255 *Serhat* literally means 'upper country' and is used in Kurdish to refer to the region around Van and Muş.

256 Evdalê Zeynikê lived from approximately 1804-1914, see chapter 1.

> Evdalê Zeynikî was the dengbej of Zor Surmeli Memet Pasha, his private dengbej. If the pasha went to war, he sang about him. If there was a hero, if there was love, he sang about it (*karamanlık olsaydı, aşk olsaydı, üzerinde söylüyordu*). Among the Kurdish people, at this moment, there is the landlord system (*ağalık sistemi*), he also sang about that. Of course after him there have been many dengbêjs. For example Reso Mahacir, Mahmudê Celolî, I haven't seen them, but our forefathers (*ata dedelerimiz*) have listened to them. My father and my grandfather have listened to them. And they said that if they started to sing the people held their ears, the windows were moving, that rich were their voices (*söylediği zaman insan kulağını tutardı, camlar patlıyordu, o kadar gür bir sesi vardı*). I have an uncle and he has heard Mahmudê Celolî, and he says: 'really I have never heard someone reach such a voice. What is Şakir compared to him?' So that means that there were even stronger voices than that of Şakîro! [exited] (*Allah allah, demek ki Şakır'in sesinden güçlü sesler de varmış! Varmış demek ki, hakikaten varmış*).[257]

By mentioning the dengbêjs who lived before him and who were listened to by his father and grandfather, he establishes a line that leads towards former famous dengbêjs. These dengbêjs of the past are regarded as even stronger than the most famous dengbêj of recent times: Şakîro, who is known for his incredible voice. In this way he underscores the idea that the contemporary is less authentic and of less quality than the allegedly much more original and distinctive Kurdish past. He also connects his qualities to the fact that he comes from the province Serhat, where Evdalê Zeynikî also came from. By situating the latter in a far and distant past, instead of the nineteenth century in which he actually lived, dengbêj Isa shows again his concern with the assumed antiquity of this tradition.

He continues to speak of the dengbêjs he has witnessed, and about the way he learned to become a dengbêj:

> When I was eleven or twelve years old, a dengbêj came to our village. He was a guest of the village agha. They even came from other villages to listen to him. There was no place for us, I was not inside. I was next to my uncle and I said to him: 'uncle this voice comes to me, if I could just see this man, if I could just see what kind of person he is!' And my uncle lifted me up to look through the window. I couldn't see his eyes, because his hat was over his eyes. And I asked my uncle: 'uncle who is this?' And he said: 'this is Mihemed Salihê.' He came before Şakîro, he was older. And I sang in his style (*makam*), I became dengbêj because of him. (..) And I told you about the dengbêjs of the past, we let the stories of these dengbêjs live. For example I can tell you this: I can today sing in the style of Şakîro.[258] This man here [the man next to him] sings in the style of Zahir, and of Huseyno. So we let the past age live today. We bring them to life again in this way.

257 All quotes in this section are taken from an interview with dengbêj Îsa conducted in Van in 2007. The interview language was Turkish.

258 Şakiro, Zahiro and Huseyno are famous dengbêjs who are widely known. Şakiro and Huseyno passed away, but Zahiro is still active as a dengbêj today.

> (Only the style, or also the words?) The words and the style, and the kilams! We revive it so that it will not get lost.[259]

He mentioned that the dengbêjs today are continuing the work of former dengbêjs; today's dengbêjs embody the past through the kilams and voices of their masters. Then, with the words 'so that this culture will not get lost', he links his story to the moral narratives of the Kurdish movement. Since its revival, political activists (see chapter 4) who went actively searching for dengbêjs and invited them to sing in the cultural centers, on television and at festivals, have developed new narratives. The current generation of dengbêjs is understood as the last representatives of a tradition on the verge of disappearing, the last ones to have witnessed the dengbêjs of the past, and the only ones who can 'bring them back to life' today. Seen from this perspective the dengbêjs are granted an important moral position. The task of the current dengbêjs is to protect this tradition from being lost. This new social narrative about the function of the dengbêjs gives their knowledge and songs increased value.

Dengbêj Isa turned then to a situation in which ' this culture' almost *did* get lost, when Kurdish was forbidden. This is the second manner in which he authorizes and foregrounds his quality as a dengbêj: through his concern with Kurdish language and with political oppression. Dengbêjs generally did not talk much about their experiences with oppression. They spoke about such events only briefly and without detail, in a fragmented way in brief remarks scattered here and there in the interview. When explaining other events, they spoke in a story-telling manner, relating the event as a short story in the interview. We will see many such examples in this chapter. In the interview with dengbêj Isa, he focused on political oppression more than others, in that same story-telling manner he used for other parts of the interview, and told two stories in which he was subjected to unfair treatment. By telling these two stories he gives meaning to the years of silence, and to his personal come-back to public life. He illustrates a time when the dengbêjs were on the verge of disappearing from public life, and when he and his friend resisted abandoning their art.

> It was in 1982 in Iğdır in the Hotel 'Palace of the East'. At the time a dengbêj from Doğubeyazıt and I [went there]. There was a man who had bought a tape recorder, and he said, 'I had bought this recorder, but there are no dengbêjs'. So together we went to that hotel, and we started to sing. Then someone knocked on the door; it was two policemen. (Had they heard you?) Yes because our voices could be heard at the market.

259 "Biz o geçmiş dengbêjlerin öyküsünü biz bugün yaşatıyoruz. Ben bugün Şakır'ın makamında söylüyorum, bu adam Zahir makamında söylüyor, Hüseyno makamında söylüyor, yani biz geçmiş çağı bugün yaşatıyoruz. (Sadece makam, ya da sözler de?) Sözlerle makamlariyle birlikte bugün yaşatıyoruz. Kilamlarla beraber. Geri canlandırıyoruz, kaybolmasın diye."

> They said, 'what are you singing?' We said, 'we are singing kilams'. They said, 'what is kilam?' We said, 'how do you mean what is kilam? We are singing Kurdish kilams.'
> 'Don't you know that that is forbidden?'
> My friend, whose Turkish was more or less good, he said: 'how can it be forbidden to sing kilams? How can Kurdish be forbidden?'
> 'Don't you know that Kurdish is forbidden?'
> We said no. 'We don't sing political things, we sing from the region. It is not political. Our mother tongue is Kurdish. Even the world cannot forbid that.' (*Biz siyasi söylemiyoruz, yöreden söylüyoruz. Bunun bir siyasalı yok. Ha, anadilimiz Kürtçedir. Bunu dünya yasak edemez, dünya*).
> They said, 'okay then come to the police station, then you can tell your problems there. You can ask if it is forbidden or not.'
> So they brought us there. (And did you really not know about this law?) From 12 September onwards a big pressure came over the Kurdish people. Everybody who had Kurdish music cassettes in his house took them out and let them disappear. They burned them, they buried them under the ground, so that if there would be a house search, one would not be able to find any Kurdish cassettes. We have lived through such days,[260] [man sitting next to him during the interview: we have lived under such difficult circumstances]. So they brought us to the police station and they let us wait until the evening. In the end the police officer called us in and said,' you have sung kilam. What is that?' We said, 'we have sung indeed, it is our mother tongue, a mother tongue cannot get lost. No one can wipe out a mother tongue (*ana lisanımız kaybolmaz, kimse kaybedemez*)' He said, 'you have sung political things.' But there was no connection to politics. They let us wait for eight or ten hours. Then they let us go. And you remember that man who was the owner of the tape recorder. He felt so sorry for us, 'because of me these people have gone to the police station'. After that we left from there and went to someone else's house, and for them we filled two cassettes (*iki kaseti doldurduk*).

As he related later in the interview, it was customary to record dengbêjs on tapes for personal use. People borrowed such tapes from each other, or they were copied and distributed in small circles. After the 1980 coup this had become much more difficult. It is not clear what the man in the story intended to do with the recordings. He may have wanted to preserve the songs, something I heard from a number of people who collected and recorded songs during those years. The man who bought the tape recorder could not find a dengbêj; they were withdrawing from public performances. In spite of this, dengbêj Isa and his friend agreed to make recordings. When the police came by inquiring about the singing, because 'Kurdish is forbidden', the two dengbêjs replied that they were singing kilams. This can be understood as a provocation, as kilam is a Kurdish word that is not understood by Turkish speakers. It was clear that they had to have been aware of the political situation even though

260 "On-iki Eylülden sonra, Kürt halkın üzerine büyük bir baskı geldi. Ki, o kaset var ya, o Kürtçe kaseti kimin evinde vardı vatandaş kasetleri götürüp kaybediyordu. Yakıyordu. Yerin altına koyuyordu. Ki arama olacak, evimizde Kürtçe kaset bulunmazsin. Biz bu günleri geçirdik."

they pretended not to know about the prohibition on Kurdish. They tried to provoke the policemen by referring to their rights as human beings: 'our mother tongue is Kurdish, even the world cannot forbid that'. They emphasized that they were not singing political songs, but rather, songs 'from the region', meaning local songs without any political meaning. However, the policemen were not satisfied with the dengbêjs' explanation and brought them to the police station. They repeated the same argument to the officer: 'we have sung indeed, it is our mother tongue, a mother tongue cannot get lost, nobody can wipe it out'.

Prohibitions on basic aspects of daily life, such as a language, caused resentment and resistance among Kurdish people. Dengbêj Isa's story shows that the primary reason for resistance at that moment was not political ideology, but rather an effort to retain a basic freedom: the right to speak one's language. It also shows that the police, who could not understand the content of the songs, were afraid of political sentiments that could be expressed in that way. The police finally let the dengbêjs go, but the fact that one could be arrested singing in Kurdish made many dengbêjs decide to abandon their profession.

Dengbêj Isa continued with a story about his military service, which also underlines the atmosphere of those days, and the importance and centrality of language. Many dengbêjs had stories to tell about their military service. As young adults this was often the place where Kurdish men came in contact with the Turkish government system for the first time, and where their Kurdishness became at once much more significant than in the Kurdish environment they came from. He told:

> I became a soldier in 1982. In the Army I sang songs all the time. But for that reason they hit me all the time (*çok ta dayak yedim*). I can say that nobody has been hit so much in the Army as I was. When I was singing, I mean all the soldiers were Kurdish, in the Army two out of three are Kurdish.[261] That is for sure. On the weekends I would sing to let time pass by. And then they came, and said, are you a separatist (*bölümcülük mü yapıyorsun*)? But there was no connection to that. So they hit me, you will not sing again. But as much as they hit me, that much more I sang. I went to the advanced training (*usta birliği*).[262] And I sang at the goodbye party evenings (*veda geceleri*) that were organized for the officers and commanders, and I sang at those parties. At that time I had a most wonderful voice. They didn't pay much attention to the content of the songs, they only wanted to listen because of my voice. There was a certain officer, and he said: 'aren't you afraid of God?' He said: 'if you have such a wonderful voice, why don't you sing in Turkish?' He said: 'I will do everything for you if you will sing in Turkish, I will turn you into an artist.' I said: 'but I don't know Turkish.' He said 'even if you don't know Turkish you have to sing in Turkish'. We have lived such days.

261 In military service Kurds were often assigned together in one regiment.

262 The military service consists of a basic training, called the *acemi birliği*, and an advanced training, the *usta birliği*.

On the one hand, officers in the Army severely punished dengbêj Isa for singing in Kurdish, asking if he was a separatist. On the other hand, they turned a blind eye to his singing, because they liked to hear music and it was a good way of passing time. The officers focused on the quality of dengbêj Isa's voice and not on his language, 'they didn't pay much attention to the content of the songs, they only wanted to listen because of my voice'. Sometimes they asked him to sing in Turkish instead of Kurdish, as the seriousness of the offence (of singing in Kurdish) is illustrated by the words of the officer: 'aren't you afraid of God?'. Singing in Kurdish was understood as being equal to 'being a separatist'. Even before the PKK began its armed resistance, and before Turkey's government regarded them as a serious threat, the fear of separatism was clearly present. One officer voiced the social narrative about the Turkish language from a nationalist perspective: 'even if you don't know Turkish, you have to sing in Turkish'. But dengbêj Isa did not feel capable of singing in Turkish. His mother tongue was Kurdish, the singing style was quite distinct, and he would have needed to learn to sing in Turkish from the beginning.

As a conclusion to the two stories about restrictions he ends with the following words:

> Really, with my voice, if I would have known Turkish, I would have been a famous musician today (*ben bu sesi sahibiyken ben Türkçe söylemiş olsaydım, ben diyebilirdim ben büyük bir sanatçiydim*). (Did you learn Turkish in the Army?) No I knew Turkish very well already before that time. But I didn't know how to sing in Turkish. I am a Kurd, and my mother tongue is Kurdish. So I need to sing this to my people. (Did you never think: 'let me sing in Turkish, and I can become a famous musician'? I mean, such a thought could be there.) No such a thought has never crossed my mind. The people, my family, my brother, they have said this to me. They said, if you sing in Turkish you can go to other places. But I didn't do it. I said: 'I sing in Kurdish, let my people listen to me (*benim halkım beni dinlesin*).'

Dengbêj Isa knew Turkish well, but presents singing in Kurdish here as a conscious moral choice for 'his people'. He explains that, against all odds, he continued singing in Kurdish, although he could have become famous if he would just have changed the language of his performance. According to dengbêj Isa, this choice was based on his love for his people and his wish to sing to them in their own language. There may have been other reasons that prevented him from having a successful musical career in Turkish, which dengbêj Isa does not mention here. As he indicated earlier, it was difficult to sing in a language and musical style that was not Kurdish, and it was not easy for a dengbêj to learn a non-Kurdish style of singing. Still, presenting his choice in this way, gives moral value to his decision and to his life story. It also fits his current position as one of the founders of the Dengbêj House.

Although dengbêj Isa relates experiences when he, as a dengbêj, resisted giving up his profession, he also stopped singing for a long period of time:

> On 12 September [1980], we abandoned the dengbêj art totally (*biz dengbêjliği tamamen terk ettik*). It was not only that you couldn't sing kilam, you could also not speak Kurdish, such a system came over us (..). We took a break for 10/15 years until Özal gave us our freedom. We had forgotten what the dengbêj art was, what kilam was (*dengbêjlik nedir, kilam nedir, söyleyiş nedir, biz bunları unuttuk*). (And you also could not sing?) Yes I also didn't sing at that time. Our culture got lost, it was on the verge of disappearance (*kültürümüz kaybediyordu, kaybolmak üzerine gitti*).

So, although dengbêj Isa told stories about resisting the politics of oppression, he also did not continue singing and forgot much of his repertoire. The long silence of the dengbêjs had such a profound effect that 'we had forgotten what the dengbêj art and kilam was'. Many accounts bear witness to the disappearance of the dengbêj art from public life, to such an extent that people hardly knew that it had once existed. Like many others, dengbêj Isa attributes the silencing of the dengbêjs entirely to political oppression, 'Such a system came over us'. As one of the few remaining dengbêjs, he talks about the oppressive power of the state, executed by policemen and army officers. But they were not the only ones acting as an assimilating force. Even dengbêj Isa's relatives tried to convince him it would be better to sing in Turkish. Oppression led to self-censorship and self-assimilation in order to avoid problems and obtain access to better opportunities.

Dengbêj Isa says that the dengbêjs only started singing again after 'Özal gave us our freedom', meaning after the bans on Kurdish language and Kurdish music were lifted. Turgut Özal was Turkey's prime minister from 1983 to 1989, and president from 1991 to 1993. He was of Kurdish descent from the eastern town Malatya, and is praised by many Kurds as the one who supported the Kurdish cause. Although he was influential in instituting freer policies for Kurdish language and cultural expression, a harsh period of oppression occurred following his death. The ban on Kurdish music was indeed officially lifted, but it did not result in much freedom at the time. This situation also appears in dengbêj Isa's story, when he relates how the dengbêjs have only recently begun to feel free:

> We have opened here in July 2005. But most of the dengbêjs have died. And most have forgotten what they knew. All of us, I am saying this [also] about myself. I have lost many things, I have forgotten many. If you cannot sing you forget. So what we are doing here, we are bringing it to life only recently. It is something recent, before they didn't give us the chance. (Wasn't there more freedom at the end of the 90s? I thought that from then

> on it became freer.) Yes that's right, slowly there was more freedom, from 1993[263] until now it became freer and freer, but still we could not sing. The fear was still there (*o korku vardı*). If you were singing the police would come and take you to the [police] station. So we can only do this again since two years.

Dengbêj Isa's words show that events marked in people's minds as having initiated important changes were not always as successful as they are remembered. Özal made his name among the Kurds as a man of the Kurds and an advocate of their rights, but effective changes were only realized after 1999. Before 1999, 'we still could not sing, the fear was still there'. As we will see in chapter 4, political activists, and with them a politicized modern Kurdish music scene, were in the foreground of organized resistance in the second half of the 1990s. With great difficulty they managed to open cultural centers, published books and music, and organized political activities. Many Kurds suffered harsh consequences for their political involvement. They faced frequent police raids; destruction and closure of cultural centers, bookstores and music companies; and also torture and imprisonment. In such an atmosphere of terror many people gave up on open resistance.

Dengbêj Isa's story draws attention to the ongoing politicization of activities related to cultural expression and language, and to the intrusive presence of the police and military. Officers could decide about intimate matters such as language use in the private sphere, and arrest people who defied the prohibitions. In regions where Kurdish was spoken as the main language of communication, the prohibition of speaking the language in public, and of performing cultural expressions, led to general outrage over such unjustified measures. Dengbêj Isa connected his experiences of the 1980s with social narratives present at the time of my research, in which the dengbêjs were regarded as guardians of a uniform Kurdish heritage. By placing his experiences in the framework of the Kurdish movement, which speaks about resistance, heritage, and the right to speak your mother tongue, he gave authority to his position as a dengbêj and a leader of the House.

When I asked him after this episode how he had met Şakîro, whom he called his master, he continued:

> There is a village in the region of Horasan with the name Idari. Şakîro had gone to that village. The people were recording his songs on tape. And the village headman said to him: 'I know somebody who sings exactly in your style' (*makam*). And [Şakîro] was really surprised and wanted to know who it was. And he told him about me, that I was from Iğdır, that I had come to their summer pasture the year before, that I had filled some cassettes for them. And there was one man there who had a cassette of

263 Dengbêj Isa says 1983, but he most probably means 1993.

> mine. So [Şakîro][264] listens to the cassette, and he was surprised. He said: 'how old is this man?' And they said: 'he is about twenty-five years old.' And he wanted to see me.
> There were aghas, there was my master, and I was young, so I felt ashamed. I felt so much under stress and pressure, I broke out into sweat, I sang of course, but I could not sing like normally.[265] (..) I sang the same song that I had sung on the cassette he had heard. He said at the end: you will become a dengbêj. And he said: 'I know this very well, if I will die, and you are continuing like this to become a dengbêj, then some people will say: 'okay, this is the style of Şakîro.' And it is really like that.[266]
> I went to many places, I cannot tell all about it, but in Erzurum, in the region of Şakîro, there is the lake of Hayrangol. I went there, and a friend was singing there, I went to this place and when I came in, there was no space left anymore to sit. It was a very rich village. And someone said to Bekir, who was the dengbêj from there: 'Bekir you have sung very well, it was very good, but I would be so happy if I could hear something from Şakîro, if it would be only one or two stanzas in his style.' I was young, I was not married yet, I sang one song, and he said to a boy: 'get the cassette recorder, you need to fill a cassette.'

Also in this part of his story, dengbêj Isa focuses on making clear where his authority as a dengbêj comes from. He was called by Şakîro himself, one of the greatest master dengbêj, and because of his ability to sing in Şakîro's style, he became famous.

When we look again at the various elements of his story, it becomes clear that both elements, that of being a dengbêj in the line of the great masters, and of being someone who resists political oppression, mark his own position as meaningful and important, and also as morally just. The stories became part of his personal narrative, in which he is a very qualified dengbêj who reminds people of Şakîro, but also someone who dared to resist the regime and to stand up for his people. He tells how he was taken to the police office for singing Kurdish songs; how he challenged the policemen when he said that he did not know about prohibitions on Kurdish singing, and how he sang Kurdish in the Army and was beaten for doing so. Even though he also says he abandoned singing for most of the years of oppression, these examples provide a reflection of his efforts to defend Kurdish heritage. Dengbêj Isa presents himself as someone who transmits Kurdish culture and language through his training by the great masters, and as someone who courageously resisted prohibitions. This makes him into a person who stands up for the culture and

264 He said here *rahmetli*, the deceased.

265 "Tabii ağalar oturmuşlar, hem benim ustam benim yanımda, hem de ağalar oturmuş, yaşım genç, yani utanıyorum biliyor musun? Öyle bir ter beni bastı, öyle bir sıkıntı bir stres beni bastı, tabii söyledim ama kendi dediğim gibi söyleyemedim."

266 "Sen dengbêj olursun, ama dedi, ben bunu iyice biliyorum, ben dedi öldüğüm zaman, eğer sen, dedi, devam edersense, bazı cemaatte bazı divanlarda oturduğun zaman söylediğin zaman, o insanlar diyecekler ki: 'tamam, bu Şakır'ın makamıdır.' Hakikaten aynen öyledir, arkadaşlar biliyorlar."

language of the Kurdish people as a whole. His story culminates in the opening of the new Dengbêj House where he and the other dengbêjs 'bring to life' the old dengbêjs of the past, 'we let the past age live today.' Because most dengbêjs did not put their encounters with political oppression on display by speaking about them, the story of dengbêj Isa stands out. He transformed these experiences into a meaningful story in which he presents himself as a true guardian of the dengbêj art.

Life story 2: a female dengbêj

Figure 12. Dengbêj Zano Reşik in her village near Hazro, 2008. She is not the person who told this life story.

'Brother, don't open the eyes of women'.[267]

Someone who had a different relationship to the political developments compared to dengbêj Isa is dengbêj Bêrîvan, who I met for the first time at the festive opening of the Dengbêj House in Diyarbakir in 2007. She was one of the four performers who sang at the opening celebration, a tall woman with a powerful voice. At other times I did not see her in the Dengbêj House, where normally only men were present. Much later, when I interviewed her for the second time, she came to the House for our appointment. When she entered through the gate, I saw her coming and walked toward her to greet her. We sat down together in the courtyard, in the midst of the other dengbêjs. They greeted her, but the atmosphere was uncomfortable, and dengbêj Bêrîvan did not seem at ease. She did not perform at that time, and apart from the 2007 opening ceremony performance, I never heard a woman performing in the Dengbêj House in Diyarbakır.

I interviewed dengbêj Bêrîvan twice, the first time with a translator, the second time alone.[268] Both times her story struck me as significant, because it was so different from the stories of the other dengbêjs. The main topic she discussed in both interviews was silence, the way she was silenced as a woman for performing the dengbêj art, and the way she liberated herself from these prohibitions. Her experiences were quite different from the life experiences of the other dengbêjs; her story is an important counter voice to the stories of male dengbêjs that dominate my ethnography. As we will come to see on the basis of her story, the silence of the female voice, among the dengbêjs as well as in my own material, is significant for what it reveals of the experiences of many female dengbêjs and women more generally in eastern Turkey.

In this section, I pay attention to dengbêj Bêrîvan's life story, most of which she told in the first interview. The emphasis is on the way she described her experiences of being silenced as a female dengbêj, mainly before the year 2000. In chapter 4 I return to her story and present her opinions on the role of women in eastern Turkey and the transformations that took place in her life after 2000. In that chapter, we will see how dengbêj Bêrîvan located her experiences, and those of other women, in a political framework. I argue there that the way in which dengbêj Bêrîvan tells her story, namely as a process of awakening, is typical of how political activists

267 "Bira çava jinê veneve" (see below for the full quote).

268 Dengbêj Bêrîvan did not speak Turkish fluently and felt more comfortable in Kurdish. In the first fieldwork period I therefore made use of a translator. During the interview she mostly communicated in Kurdish with the translator, but sometimes she spoke directly to me in Turkish. In the second fieldwork period I spoke with her and interviewed her in Kurdish.

talk about the new Kurdish personhood (see Introduction). The part I discuss in this chapter also needs to be seen in this light: she regards herself in her younger years as not yet aware of or awakened to the Kurdish cause, as well as not yet aware of the degraded position that women are considered to have had in traditional Kurdish society.

Dengbêj Bêrîvan was born in 1963 in a small village in the region of Muş. Her father passed away when she was quite young, and she has no memories of him. He had been married to four wives, and she was the last of his seven children. His first two wives had died. Dengbêj Bêrîvan lived with her mother, and her two brothers and a sister who were the children of the same mother. The three other children lived with her father's fourth wife, and they did not live in the same house. When she was ten years old, her mother passed away as well. The four children were left on their own:

> I lived together with my brothers and sisters. (Wasn't that very difficult?) Yes, but we looked after ourselves, we raised ourselves. I had two elder brothers, and one elder sister. I was the fourth, (But how could you survive?) and we as village children, we were very diligent. We did all the work that had to be done. I had one little brother, and I looked after him. We looked after our smaller brothers and sisters.[269]

As a young child, she liked to sing and repeat[270] the songs of the women of the village. Until she was 17 years old, when she married, she had relative freedom to sing songs, but the opportunities were limited. Women did not have much chance to sing, and even less to perform in public:

> I started singing kilams when I was still young, when I was about 9 or 10 years old. Dengbêjs came and sang, for example when there was a mourning (*dengbêja dihat, digo, mesela şîn çêdibû*). As a child you can learn easily, so I learned many songs from the women. I tried to repeat their style [maqam] and rhythm. But how often could we sing freely? For example when we, women, went to the spring, went to the fields, or when we went to the forest, we sang songs together (*em biçûna çolê, pincarê, em biçûna bêriyê, veya em biçûna kaniyê, me wan ji xwe re digotin*). Or when we milked the cows, we sang many songs. Young girls did not get permission to go to weddings. I went to a few weddings and sang songs, but they were angry with me and they hit me. For example I sang songs when the bride was taken from her house to the house of the groom. Sometimes they invited us, if there was nobody else to sing, to sing at the weddings, some girls together. But when we did this, we were hit by people from our village.

269 All quotes in this section are taken from an interview with dengbêj Bêrîvan conducted in Diyarbakır in 2007, with the help of a translator who spoke in Kurdish with miss Bêrîvan, and in English to me. Sometimes we also spoke in Turkish or mixed, as can be seen in some of the original quotes given.

270 At places where people sing songs together it is usual that a few (wo)men who are known as good singers sing one line, which is then repeated by the whole group.

When the women were together, without men, they often sang during work. Women worked hard and did not have much time for leisure or pleasure. Not only adult women, but also young girls were excluded from many activities boys could do, such as education, celebrations, and public gatherings. When dengbêjs came to the village and performed in one of the homes, women had to stay outside. They could wait at the door, like the children, and listen from there.

Obviously there was no general agreement in the village regarding the level of freedom girls were allowed. It might happen that Dengbêj Bêrîvan was invited to sing at a wedding with other girls, but afterwards punished for the same activity. She told me that adult women were only allowed to attend weddings while wearing a black *çarşaf*,[271] 'nobody should see your face, and no man should hear your voice'. She was obliged to wear the *çarşaf* at her brother's wedding, when she was fifteen. But she didn't like it, 'I had a *çarşaf* when I came in, but I had thrown it away, so I came out without *çarşaf*'. This was the first time she's worn the *çarşaf*, and she could not get used to it. It seems that, while speaking of these issues, she linked these memories to current moral narratives in which such rules are regarded as unjust by many, especially so following the narratives of the Kurdish movement.

Until she was seventeen years old, dengbêj Bêrîvan had some limited freedom to perform at weddings, together with other girls. She finds significance in the fact that she had no parents to take care for her:

> When I was a young girl, I didn't have my father and mother, so there was no pressure. I only had my elder brother who put some pressure, not the eldest one, but the second one. And after I married they also pressurized me (*evlendiğim zaman tekrar baskı yaptılar*). (And if your parents would have been alive, would that have meant that you would not have been able to become a dengbêj?) Well, maybe if my parents or my father had been alive, they would have been able to support me. Maybe it would have been better. I have a little sister, and my father had taught her a song, and all the time he said to her: come to me and sing that song.

Because she did not know how it would have been if her parents had lived, she speculated about such a situation. On the one hand, there was no parental control that could obstruct her activities. On the other hand, there were also no parents who could support and defend her. She argued that her father encouraged her sister to sing, and that he would possibly have been supportive of her being a dengbêj. Without parents, she was helpless against the social control of other villagers, who hit her or prohibited her from singing.

271 The Turkish name for a body and face covering veil is *kara çarşaf*, lit. black sheet. Dengbêj Bêrîvan uses the same name in Kurdish.

When Bêrîvan was about sixteen years old, she knew many songs and was old enough to sing at weddings and be taken seriously. She had a certain amount of freedom because she was still a young girl and unmarried. But after she married her situation changed drastically:

> When I was fifteen, sixteen or seventeen years old I got some more freedom, before I married. But just at the moment I got some more freedom, I got married. So again I couldn't sing. (Because your husband didn't let you?) Yes he never let me, my brother-in-law also didn't let me. My husband was not so much against it, mostly my brother-in-law. It was because I was a bride, I was young, it was a shame. A woman shouldn't pass in front of men. Men shouldn't see her, because she was still young. For example when we had guests coming to our house, they came into our house but I did not see them (*mesela mêvan dihatin malê, diçûn hundirê malê me. Me mêvanê me nedît*), it was absolutely out of the question that I could see their faces. Not only with me, it was like that with everybody, with all the young girls. The old women would go to welcome the guests (*diçûn digo bi xêr hatin*), but the young girls did not see anyone, who they were, where they came from. It was forbidden to go to the men, to go to the gatherings.

Being a married woman changed dengbêj Bêrîvan's position radically. She was now dependent on the permission of her husband and her husband's family, and judged by social rules regarding appropriate behavior for married women. This meant that she abandoned her singing entirely. For years, she did not sing at all because 'they did not give me permission anymore to go to weddings'. To my question as to whether she sang in private, she replied with a decisive 'no'. As a consequence of her marriage, she moved from her own village to her husband's village where she was a stranger. As Yücel (2006) describes in his book *Berdel*, women who left the village of their childhood to go live in their husband's village often felt lonely and alienated from everything that was dear to them. A clear expression of the pain that goes with this transition is found in the songs sung on the *hennah* night of the bride, before the wedding. The songs are called lamentations, and have the same form as lamentations for the dead. The bride is about to leave her family, and this causes pain for her and her relatives who will miss her. In the new village, she is not amongst her own kin, rules may be different than at home, and the position of the new bride as a married woman means she loses the liberties of her childhood. The sad songs express the feelings of the bride and her closest relatives, from whom she will live separately from now on.

After her marriage, dengbêj Bêrîvan lost the limited freedom she had to sing songs. She had also fewer chances to hear the voices of other dengbêjs. Before she married, she occasionally listened to a cassette of a dengbêj, or to dengbêjs who come to weddings in her or other villages. But after she was married she had less

access to such events and had to search for other opportunities to hear the voices of dengbêjs:

> I knew the broadcast time of the program of radio Yerevan, it was about 6.30pm, I don't remember it exactly anymore, and when my husband, or father-in-law, or brother-in-law were not at home, I switched it on and listened, and I loved it. In the village we used to have a guest room in the house, and the radio was in the guest room. So I could not get to the radio to listen (*odayê misafir hebû her malekî de, oda mêvana. Radyo jî di oda mêvana de bû. Me negihîştina guhdarî bikin*). But when sometimes there were no guests I went to that room and I switched on the radio and listened. Mostly I did not have any time to sit, because there was so much work to do in the house (*zamanê me em rûniştin tunebû, ji ber ku kar hebû*).

She could only listen in secret, when the men were not at home and when there were no guests. Also, she did not have much time to spend outside the hard work at home.

Dengbêj Bêrîvan often returned to the topic of women's oppression. She felt oppressed and humiliated by the way men treated her and other women. When I asked whether there were any dengbêjs who came to her village when she was young, she replied:

> Yes they came. (Was there a village house or *dîwan*?) If there was one, we could not enter. We stayed outside at the door, and we listened by putting our ear to the door (*olsaydı biz gitmiyorduk, giremiyorduk. Dış kapıda bekliyorduk, kulağımız kapıya veriyorduk*). [explanation translator: the women couldn't go inside. Inside were the men, the brides couldn't go in. The father-in-law was there, the elders of the village were there]. Women didn't count as people! They didn't count at all! The work of women was within the house (*Kesî jin insan say nedikir. Yok, hayatta saymazdı. Kadınların işi evin içinde*). For example we had sheep, women cared for the animals, and men sold them. And sometimes we asked our husbands: for how much did you sell the sheep, and to whom? Because I had cared for the animals. And then they immediately hit us and said: you are a woman, what do you know about that, go inside! That is the truth, they did not count women as human beings! (*yani doğru odur. Bê xizmeta xwe kirine. Jin insan olarak say nedikir!*).

At first Dengbêj Bêrîvan explained that women could not enter places where the dengbêjs sang, they could only listen outside by putting their ear to the door or the walls. It seems that the translator, who interrupted her story to translate into Turkish which Bêrîvan understood, provoked Bêrîvan's indignation about the way they were treated. She cut the translator off by saying in Kurdish with excitement: 'women didn't count as human beings!'. As we will see in chapter 4 when I return to her story, expressing herself in this way became possible partly because of the writings of Öcalan on the position of women in Kurdish society, but even more because of the women's organizations that were founded along, or independently

of, the Kurdish political movement.[272] Dengbêj Bêrîvan connected her story to the newly formed social narratives of these organizations. Looking back on her life she retold and revalued her experiences, which in the past had felt like the natural order of things that she could not oppose.

Dengbêj Bêrîvan said that the position of female dengbêjs improved over time, as it became more acceptable for women to attend weddings together with men, and they no longer needed to hide. She talked about this transition as follows:

> Women did not do the dengbêj art, they did not come close to it, it was forbidden. But later folk dances became free [for women] and then we could join, after that our women sang a lot. For example nine or ten women sang together. But later, we sang together with the men. For example ten women and five men sang together, were singing. We obtained freedom. Men and women danced and sang together at weddings. But if it is about the [real] dengbêj art.. Women can go to weddings but they still cannot perform the dengbêj art, as it is seen as shameful. It is as if the dengbêj art is only for men, you can still not sing, as if it's shameful.[273]

Although dengbêjs often performed together by singing songs in turn, the focus of the performance was on the individual dengbêj and on his knowledge and qualities. This individual focus did not fit the role of women; it was considered shameful for women to be the focus of attention, especially of men. For that reason, even when with time it became more accepted to see women dancing and singing together with men, women could perform only in a group with other women, but never alone. This may explain dengbêj Bêrîvan's discomfort when she came to the Dengbêj House and sat among the men in the courtyard. Had she been with other women she would have had the protection of the group, but alone men could easily regard her as shameless, as someone without honor. It is interesting that dengbêj Bêrîvan indicated in this quote that she saw an improvement in the role of women over time, although it is not clear to me what the specific timeframe was. Did she feel this before she married, or was she speaking about the time after her marriage when she did not sing at all?

Despite the limited role women had as dengbêj, and in spite of the fact that women could not perform in public, Bêrîvan argued that women had left their mark on the dengbêj art. As we will see in the next quote, she regarded women as the source

272 Women often see Öcalan as their hero, and present him as the one who liberated Kurdish women from centuries of oppression. Çağlayan (2007) shows how Kurdish political parties try to actively change the role of women in Kurdish society and use a similar discourse as Abdullah Öcalan.

273 "Dengbêjî jina nedikir, nedigihîştin, qedexe bû. Ama govendê paşê serbest bû em dihatin gihîştin, jina me pir digo. Mesela neh deh hev jina bi hevre digot. Ama sonra sonra biz erkekle beraber söyledik. Mesela on tane kadın desin, dört beş tane erkek beraber söylüyordu. Özgürcülügü girt. Erkekler ve kadınlar beraber o dîlanda oynuyordu, hem söylüyordu. Ama o dengbêjlik... Dengbêjlik hala kadınlar düğüne gidiyordu fakat dengbêjlik yapamıyor, dedi ayıp. Dengbêjlik sanki erkeklerin şeyidir, hala söyleyemezsin, sanki ayıptır."

of this art, a view that is put forward by many male dengbêjs as well (see also chapter 1). According to this social narrative, the dengbêj art originated with women, as they are the ones who have suffered the most and composed songs out of this suffering. They sang songs about their husbands, fathers, or sons who had died; about the boy they were in love with, but could not reach, and about their unhappy marriages. Women created such songs because of the pain they felt. Dengbêj Bêrîvan told a long and detailed story about the suffering of women and the many ways women were sacrificed, which made them create songs about their unhappy destinies:

> I can say that the culture of dengbêj was invented by women, but because of pressure women cannot perform it (*ez dikarim bêjim dengbêjlik jina icra dikiriye, ama jin ji ser baski nikare wi bêje*). For women... there are for example three kinds of love. The woman dengbêj falls in love with a man or a boy but she cannot marry him because of economic problems and her family wants her to marry a rich person. For example if you look at a Kurdish girl or a Kurdish woman, none of the Kurdish women in the past married the men they liked. Because all that time, men sacrificed the women for themselves, as I said before, women did not count as human beings. Just like an animal was sacrificed, women were also sacrificed (*em bêjin, tim bu daima, mêra jin ji xwe re kirine kurban, min pêşê go jin insan say nedikir. Çawa weke heywanekî neçeşit qurban, ayni jin kirina qurban*). For example in the past when you ask the people how many children they had, they only counted the boys. You know that in the past there were fights between tribes, and only men were killed in these fights and if these two tribes wanted to make a negotiation, the tribe who lost a man from their family would get a girl from the opposite tribe aged fourteen or fifteen. The girl goes to the other tribe and marries someone who was sometimes aged fifty or seventy to stop the fighting between the two tribes. So the woman becomes the sacrifice. They sacrifice their lives for their family. And also the tribe who took the girl doesn't leave her in peace, because they say, 'you remind us of the blood of our relative who has been killed'. So still she was under pressure. And there was no support or help for this woman, and she could not get her freedom. And especially these kind of women make songs about their situation. (...) And for example in Serhat they are still selling their women. If the wife of an old man dies, he gives money to the parents of a young girl, who is maybe 15 or 17 years old, they give for example 20.000 or 30.000 [lira], and the father sells her. It still happens.

Dengbêj Bêrîvan detailed the various destinies a Kurdish woman could experience in the past. A woman could not marry by choice if her family wanted to 'sell her' to a rich family. Or a woman was given to an enemy tribe as compensation for their lost kin during tribal fights. As a result, the woman could be pestered by relatives who said she reminded them of the lost relative. Young girls were married to men who were three times their age. 'Men sacrificed the women for themselves' is a topic dengbêj Bêrîvan returns to time and again. She felt that women 'did not count as human beings'.

Since many kilams are songs sung from the subject position of a woman, women are regarded as the true source of the dengbêj art. Male dengbêjs are said to have heard women sing songs, to have adopted them, and transformed them into more artistic pieces of work. Like male dengbêjs, dengbêj Bêrîvan also articulates this social narrative in the interview:

> The invention of dengbêjs comes from women. Only, because the women did not have the right to do it by herself, to do an apprenticeship, and to perform, she could not be active in this field (*Dengbêjlik.. Icata dengbêjî ji jina derketiye, yalniz mafê jinê ewê, ji xwe re li ser bisekine, mamostasiye bike, bêje, bi ser keve, ew gineviye*). For example, the male dengbêjs, they go to a region and they hear about a certain song in that region, from a woman who has made a song about her son or her husband, then he takes that song and he refigures it. I was the witness of an event. Sometimes men go to a funeral, and they come back and they say: the women there were screaming so much, they sang the songs in such a way, that we were burned inside, and we cannot forget it.

In her opinion, male dengbêjs could be so impressed by the lamentations of women that they could not forget them, and transformed these lamentations into dengbêj songs. Because women did not have the right to perform in public, they were not able to make their voices heard in public; this was something that only men could do for women. Dengbêj Bêrîvan explains how, over time, the position of women changed and it became more acceptable for women to sing in public places:

> (Did I understand it well, that during your youth it became more possible for women to sing together with men?) Yes, we went there [to weddings] and we started to sing together with the men. And the men found out that some women had beautiful voices. They gave up on putting us under pressure. Because they understood that they couldn't do it without the women.

With these words dengbêj Bêrîvan referred to something she argues later in the interview: the war transformed the position of women to that of being almost equal to men. I return to this narrative in chapter 4.

It wasn't until the year 2000 that dengbêj Bêrîvan began to sing again, and became active as one of the few female dengbêj who sing in front of an audience in eastern Turkey. This was long after she had moved with her family from their village to Diyarbakir in 1986. Living in the city changed her life. She found the first years quite difficult:

> It was difficult, I felt strange. Women who came from the village lived their lives between four walls [in the city]. They lived their lives between four walls. There was more pressure from the men to live as slaves and servants at home, women didn't know anything how to do things. (Was the pressure worse in the city?) When I came

> to the city, I was new. I didn't know anything. I did not know Turkish, I didn't know how to read and write, I didn't dare to go out, I didn't even go alone to the neighbors. I couldn't go, a woman could not go out alone. I didn't go out by myself. I couldn't do it. I thought, how can I go anywhere? What if someone will betray me? So I didn't go. But slowly there came more freedom, I got to know some places, I developed myself. And now, after that everything became free, you don't need to ask anymore.

In the village women could go out alone. They could visit neighbors or relatives, and they did some of their work together. In the cities women were more dependent on their husbands and other male relatives, especially at first. She told me that she did not know where to go, and could not express herself in Turkish when necessary. She could not read signs and did not feel safe walking around alone, nor did her husband and relatives allow her to. While in the village, she had had the freedom to go to other places, visit people, and do work by herself, in the city she felt like a slave, a servant, who had to remain within four walls. The helplessness she felt at that time is clearly expressed by her story about a hospital visit that she repeated several times during the interview:

> I told you, I cannot read and write, I did not go to school and don't know Turkish. When I went to the hospital they said to me, 'what is your problem?' But I could not speak Turkish. I didn't know Turkish, and when I said something they threw me out. They said, 'get out, get out, get away from here, you don't know anything'. I could not express myself and I came back home. (Really?) Yes it went like that. I have experienced those things myself.

In the city, dengbêj Bêrîvan had to communicate in Turkish, a language she had not learned. Turkish was a prerequisite for all bureaucratic situations and for getting anything done. Employees of hospitals and other public places did not understand Kurdish, and in this case insulted people who spoke other languages. She related how she felt ashamed by the reaction of the hospital personnel:

> I did not know what to say, I did not know Turkish, and Kurdish was forbidden. I could not express myself and because of that I felt embarrassed. (..) Because they prohibited us from expressing ourselves in Kurdish, I felt embarrassed and I said to myself, why don't I speak Turkish, why do they offend me?

The offensive reaction of the hospital personnel, who blamed dengbêj Bêrîvan for not speaking Turkish and chased her away, embarrassed her, even though she had never been given the opportunity to learn the language. It shows how she too had internalized the social narrative of the Turkish state about the backwardness of Kurdish as a language, and people who did not speak Turkish. The propaganda machine of the state reached far, even to women who did not know Turkish and thus could not be directly influenced by Turkish propaganda. Of course, dengbêj Bêrîvan

knew about the propaganda from other people, and she understood well the reaction of the hospital personnel to her 'backwardness'. Over time she got used to city life, and learned to understand Turkish, even though she does not feel comfortable speaking the language. She also became active as a dengbêj and began placing her experiences in a political framework, something I will return to in the next chapter.

Dengbêj Bêrîvan had a different story to tell than male dengbêjs. As a woman, she did not experience obstacles from the state to her singing career, but rather from her family:

> (I heard that for a long time dengbêjs did not sing songs and people did not know anything about them. Because it was forbidden they could not..) The prohibitions were not because of the state. They were because of the family and the tribe. I can say that, concerning the dengbêj art, the dengbêj who performed in Serhat, there was not a lot of oppression, no there was not. I could not perform as a dengbêj because it was forbidden for me by the family, the tribe and the environment. (Because you are a woman?) yes. Because for women it is a shame to let her voice be heard in front of men. Women were deceived in everything. They always deceived women, they said: 'brother, don't open the eyes of women, let them not see anything, let them not know anything'.[274]

She located silence in a different place than male dengbêjs do: not in state oppression, but rather in the 'family and the tribe'. It seems dengbêj Bêrîvan did not witness much state pressure on the dengbêj art in her close environment. State oppression may not have been present at the same level in her life as in that of some other dengbêjs since villages were often less targeted than towns and cities.[275] Also, it is probable that state oppression was less influential for the position of female dengbêjs, since they did not perform outside of the family circle. Still, when she spoke about another famous female dengbêj, she did emphasize a double oppression: that of the state and of the kin and village environment. When I asked her whether the famous female dengbêjs Meryem Khan and Ayşe Şan had been an example for her, she replied:

> They were very successful Kurdish women. Since Meryem Khan is from Iraq, we couldn't listen to her very well. But Ayşe Şan is from here so it was possible for us to listen to her. And we are proud of them. Ayşe Şan is a master for all of us, for all the dengbêjs. Because she was under pressure both from her family, and from the

274 "Yani ev yasaxa em bêjin ne ji ber dewletê bû. Ji ber malbatê û aşîrê bû yasaxa bûne. Ewqas em bêjin dengbêjên me welatê Serhadê dengbêjî kirine, baski li ser van pir tunebûye yani, tunebûye. Na. Ew dengbêjîya bi me nedikir ji bo ji me re yasax bû ji ber malbatê û eşîrê û ortamê yasax bû. (Ji ber ku tu jin î?) Ee. Ji ber ku jinên dengê wê tiştê mêra ayibe, bila nebêje. Jina her tim.. jina xapandine. Her tim jina xapandine wisa kirine, gotina: 'bira çava jinê veneve, jin tiştekî nebînin, nizanibin'."

275 "Repression, however, varied depending on where one was located. Outside towns, for instance, authorities showed more tolerance for the use of the Kurdish language" Scalbert Yücel 2009: 16.

> government. Despite all this pressure she continued singing songs. She was exiled and even in that situation she continued. But now everybody can be a dengbêj, because it is free".

Dengbêj Bêrîvan regarded Ayşe Şan as an example 'for all of us', because of the difficult situation she had to endure. The latter suffered double marginalization; both her family and the government did not accept her, and she went into exile. But today, said dengbêj Bêrîvan, both forms of oppression have been lifted; anyone can be a dengbêj. The current freedom is also apparent at the end of her first interview. She finished by commenting on the interview process and the positive consequences of interviews in general:

> (Thank you, I am very happy that we could do this interview) Thank you, I am also happy. Because of all the attention for us, from television, from newspapers and from the municipality, these all have had a good result for Kurdish women. So I am also happy that you have come to do this interview. It is good for us. For example in France they invited me as a Kurdish woman to sing. I cannot read and write, I don't speak other languages, but they praised me so much, it was a very big event for me. Women are inviting women. I mean, there are a hundred male dengbêjs here, but they invited me [and not them]. I believe in this, that women will support women (*kadın kadınlara destek verecek, sahip çikacak*). Female dengbêjs have a special influence on the people, they are more influential. And men are jealous, I can see that, I am in that situation. Because people want female dengbêjs more, female dengbêjs attract more attention, and male dengbêjs are jealous. For example in August there is the festival in Tunceli, and in the program most attention is paid to women. They have two days for women activities.

Dengbêj Bêrîvan is not only present in the interview as an individual singer, but even more as a Kurdish woman and representative of Kurdish women. Her female identity is more evident than her identity as a singer. She regarded the attention for her position not as an opportunity for individual gain, but rather as a benefit for Kurdish women in general. She emphasized this by talking about her performance in France. She was invited *because* she is a woman, and she was invited by other women. The encouragement she received because of that experience lay in the fact that she was accepted as a woman; she felt accepted for what she was. It is significant that she adds that she was accepted even though she did not have an education. This shows her lack of confidence due to her lack of education.

The way dengbêj Bêrîvan spoke of women who support women shows her involvement in the women's organizations that developed such narratives. She placed female dengbêjs in opposition to male dengbêjs, who were jealous of the success of female dengbêjs. Her example of being invited to France instead of a male dengbêj, indicates that women have been able to firmly establish a position

among the more successful dengbêjs, and that she has managed to escape from her previously marginalized role. She used her previously marginalized role to move to the center of attention.

In this first interview, dengbêj Bêrîvan emphasized how being a woman had had a profound impact on her life. The social conventions were such that women were not allowed to operate freely and to sing wherever they liked. But when she was younger, she did not have the words, the means, or the environment to speak of these prohibitions in the way she could at the time of our interview. In the past, she took it as the natural order of things, whereas over time she developed a new perspective. After she moved to the city, being Kurdish became an additional restrictive factor. She was a stranger, someone who could not express herself in public places, and who was humiliated for that. She felt she was looked down upon as someone who did not have the knowledge that others had. When dengbêj Bêrîvan went to France she felt rehabilitated because even though she was in a strange country where she did not know the language, she was important for who she was - a Kurdish woman and a singer. The way she spoke of that experience tells us that her lack of education made her feel *rightly* marginalized. In France, however, she realized that it was not her fault that she did not know the language (French), and that not knowing the language did not mean she was of less value. What she experienced in France may have been an ethical moment in which she realized that one could also look at things differently.

Specific aspects of her identity—being a woman, Kurdish, and uneducated—interacted in distinct ways during her life and added to her marginalized position. However, she was able to creatively refigure this process after gaining access to new opinions and organizations. She could now make use of the same factors that had previously marginalized her. As a female dengbêj she felt she was now more interesting than a male dengbêj. As a Kurdish woman (with limited Turkish skills) she was a member of the large group of Kurdish women who are seen today as guardians of the language and culture, and this increased her status over someone who speaks Turkish fluently. Dengbêj Bêrîvan transformed previous obstructions in her life into resources that helped her build a new life. She broke her silence with the same tools that had previously silenced her, and reworked her personal story to overcome limitations by viewing her life story in a new light. I will discuss her current position and views in chapter 4, when I look in detail at her second interview. In that interview her transformation became particularly clear and she strongly emphasized her political ideas.

Life story 3: landlords and support

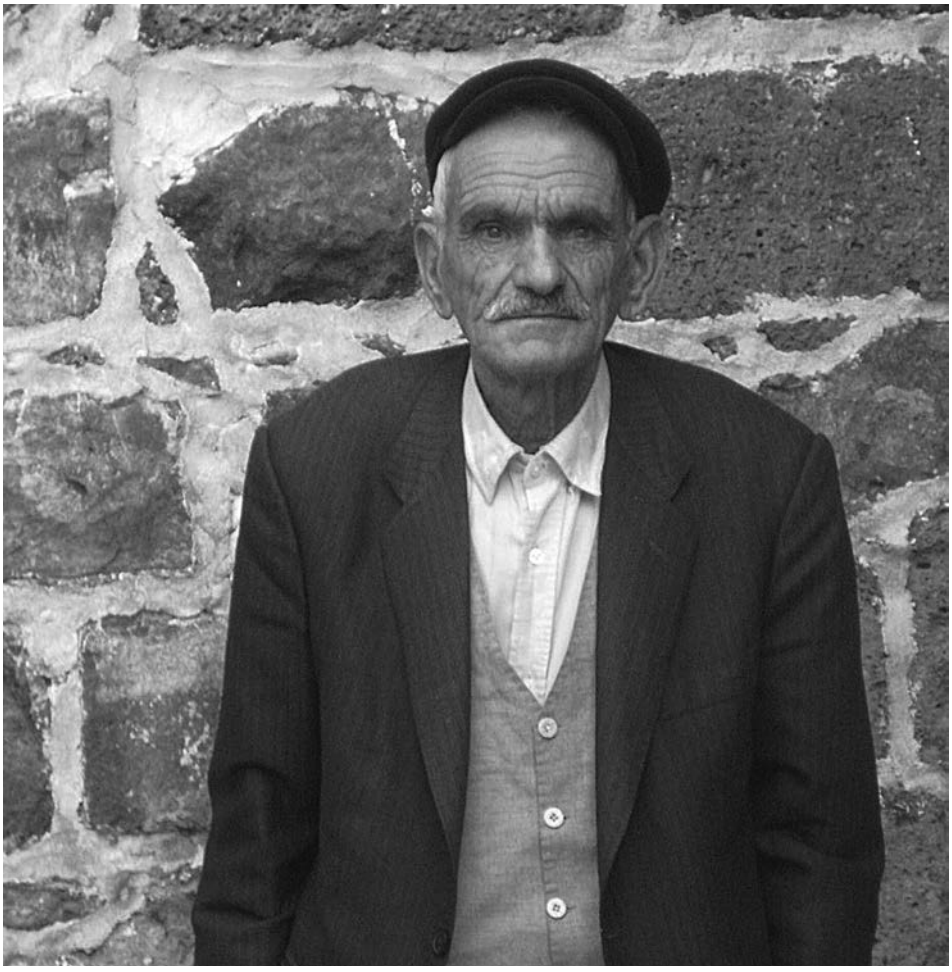

Figure 13. Dengbêj Seydxanê Boyaxci at the Dengbêj House in Diyarbakir, 2008. He is not the person who told this life story.

'Is there no one who wants to help the dengbêjs?'

Dengbêj Hamîd was born in 1949 in a small village near the Iranian border. In the first half of the 1980s, he and his family moved to Van where they have stayed ever since, gaining a livelihood from animal husbandry, gardens and fields on the outskirts of the city. Dengbêj Hamîd's house and his brother's house, plus the houses of his two sons and their families, were built on a single large plot of land. When I visited them, they seemed to be relatively well-off, since they owned houses, cars, gardens and land. The focus of dengbêj Hamîd throughout the interview, to which he returned time and again, was the lack of attention and support for the dengbêjs. He could not understand why there was no serious support for this important tradition: "why doesn't the world help the dengbêjs?"

I understand his disappointment as related to recurring experiences of being silenced. In order to counter these experiences he tried to mobilize two opposing moral narratives to generate new support for the dengbêj art. The first, namely the value of the landlord system, was valid in his younger years. The second, namely the disgrace of the landlord system as something dark, undemocratic and pre-modern, had gained in popularity under the influence of the Kurdish movement. At the outset of the interview he spoke extensively about the poverty of the dengbêjs, which he regarded as a reason why they were and are entitled to receive support:

> You have to know that.. -maybe others have told you this as well, of course we haven't seen Evdalê Zeynikî and Eyas[276] who came before him, but we have seen the others- you have to know that they all died in poverty. Not one dengbêj had a shop, a position, an office, or some wealth. Until today it is told that the dengbêjs of the past always remained poor. They always stayed in poverty. Why? Why isn't this people interested? (..) Look, dengbêj means the master of the voice. Everything comes from his heart. His brain works like a computer. He sings everything without taking it from its place. (..) They sing like a computer (*bilgisayar gibi söylüyor*). Why doesn't the world help these dengbêjs (*niye bu dünya buna el atmıyor bu dengbêjlere, her kim olursa olsun*)? Whoever it may be. Look my father learned from Mihamed, Mihamed from his father Mirêdê Cano, he learned from Evdalê Zeynî, and Evdalê Zeynî for sure also learned it from somebody else. These dengbêjs have come until today. What will happen if I don't sing, if my son will not sing? Our culture that comes from our forefathers in the form of the dengbêj art, that history is a history (*bizim kültürümüz, bizim o ata babalardan gelen kültürü dengbêjlikte, o tarih bir*

276 See for Evdalê Zeynikî chapter 1. Eyas was his master.

> *tarihtir*). And what will happen with that history? We will lose it. Is there no one in the world who will help?[277]

Dengbêj Hamîd argued that the specialized knowledge of the dengbêjs, who are poor by definition, needs to be protected by someone other than the dengbêjs. He explained that this culture that has been transmitted from bygone times until today is in danger of becoming lost if it does not receive the support it needs. Although dengbêj Hamîd did not seem to be particularly poor, but rather quite well-off, he did see poverty as a general characteristic for most dengbêjs.[278] In this way, he places himself with other dengbêjs in the social class of the poor, who cannot provide for themselves or preserve this tradition financially.

Because dengbêj Hamîd continued to talk about the lack of support for the dengbêjs, I decided to ask him about the kind of material support dengbêjs enjoyed in the past:

> (You traveled from village to village, you went to weddings, did you get support [*destek*] at that time?) In the past it wasn't like this. In the villages I can say that everything was for free. People [helped] each other, the rich.., everybody had a basic.., a tribe, a potential [safety-net], everybody had people he knew. People helped each other. I was dengbêj in my village. In my environment there were twenty villages, and that these twenty villages supported me. (Really?) Yes of course! They sent to me grain, money, they took care [of me]. For example dengbêj Eyas was the dengbêj of Uzunşibikî. (Is that the name of a village?) It is around Antep. There were twelve villages, twelve villages were in the region of Uzunşibikî. The income of twelve villages was theirs. Their dengbêj was Eyas. They gave fields, they gave him food, even a horse. (Did the agha give him this?) Yes, the agha. He looked after him, he was a dengbêj with income [*maaşlı bir dengbêjdi*]. (...)
> But today who will give something to the dengbêjs? Times have changed. We are in the city. Everyone only looks after himself. What do the rich understand of our situation? There are some people who gave support. Some bring sugar, somebody brought a television, but it isn't enough. It is necessary to let the dengbêj art live'.

277 "Bunu bilin ki, belki başkası da anlatmış, dengbêjlerin.. Tabii Evdalê Zeynikî, daha önceki o Eyas falan biz görmedik, babam anlatıyordu, diğerlerini biz gördük. Bunlar hepsi fakirlikte öldü. Hepsi yoksullukta. Hiçbir dengbêj kendi ne bir dükkanı, ne bir geliri, ne bir memurati, ne bir zenginliği yoktu. Dengbêjler ezildi, bugüne kadar anlatılıyor, hep fakir kalmış. Hep yoksullukta kalmış. Neden? Niye? Peki bu millet niye ilgi göstermiyor?" All quotes in this section are taken from an interview with dengbêj Hamîd conducted in Van in 2007. The interview language was Turkish.

278 Yüksel (2011) writes that the famous dengbêj Şakîro related the poverty of the dengbêjs also to the lack of institutional support by the Turkish state. Şakîro compared the poor situation of the Kurdish dengbêj Reso to that of the Turkish aşık Veysel who was celebrated as an important national figure. "Indeed, Veysel and Reso provide a fruitful comparative case of the Kurdish and Turkish oral poets in the same country: while the former is promoted and rewarded, the latter 'died hungry.' This comparison shows the crucial role of the state in the different courses that the Turkish and Kurdish oral poetry have taken: one is collected, studied and researched systematically through different state institutions, while the other owes its survival solely to amateur recordings" (Yüksel 2011: 88). Other dengbêjs also made this connection. They blamed both the state as well as 'the Kurdish people' for the lack of recognition and support.

This quotation clarifies dengbêj Hamîd's frame of reference and the moral institutions he felt connected to. When he was young, he was supported by the surrounding villages, and, he said, everyone had a safety net, people took care of each other. At first he spoke about his own situation, but then he switched to speak about dengbêj Eyas, to reinforce his argument. Dengbêj Eyas was supported by his agha and the surrounding villages, he received an income and even a horse. He was the master of Evdalê Zeynikî (see chapter 1), and presumably lived in the 19th century. Dengbêj Hamîd is not speaking specifically about himself or dengbêj Eyas, but about the historical dengbêj *model*. He referred to the moral institution of the landlord class, and the social narratives that must have circulated when he was young, when it was still common for good dengbêjs to receive the support of landlords. This system was already under severe pressure because of land reforms and the declining power of the aghas, but dengbêj Hamîd still had a source of income at the time. He lost this income when he moved to the city; a different social structure deprived him of previous possibilities.

He built his argument by first defining the social class of dengbêjs as poor and not rich. Subsequently he felt that belonging to that social class, and the special knowledge they possess, legitimized the dengbêjs' request for support. He presented the landlord system as the support system for the dengbêjs, at a time when people took care of each other and shared their possessions. This is a moral claim that he derived from considering the landlord class as a moral institution to which certain obligations were ascribed. Of course, this system of support should not be overestimated. Dengbêj Hamîd himself stated earlier that 'all dengbêjs died in poverty'. The fact that they were poor necessitated support from the rich; even so they remained poor and dependent on others. Dengbêj Hamîd's argued that at least the dengbêjs received some form of support and were therefore also recognized as dengbêjs, whereas 'today who will give something' and 'who will understand their situation?'. He continued:

> (You said that you were the dengbêj of twenty villages, isn't it? What did this mean? Was there one agha of these twenty villages?) These twenty villages were in the surroundings of our village. If there was a wedding, they called me. They also invited me for entertainment, there was no television, nothing. So they invited me to sing songs. The dengbêj art is very hard. Not everybody is able to sing. (But were there also other dengbêjs coming to these twenty villages?) Of course, there were also others coming. (Was there only one agha of these twenty villages, or more?) No there were more, there were many. For example five villages had one agha, or sometimes one village had an agha, or six villages. At that time it was like that. At this moment the agha-system has disappeared. (So your village doesn't have an agha now?) No, not anymore. Not only our village, in the whole of Turkey it almost doesn't exist

> anymore. Democracy came, it disappeared, the people became educated, their eyes were opened, they saw the world, they saw what happened in Europe, the television came. The people came to themselves a bit. The era of the agha system (*ağalık*) has passed. There may still be a few, but in general it is over'.

Here dengbêj Hamîd described the turning point that caused the agha's support system to collapse. This is interesting, because it shows that he referred to differing, opposing moral narratives and he adhered to all of them in some way. The social narrative of the agha system originated from his childhood and young adulthood, but it had disappeared from most parts of Turkey. Why? Dengbêj Hamîd said it was because of democracy, education, the opening of Kurdish society to a wider world. With these words he referred to three moral narratives and institutions: the social narrative of the Kurdish movement on the landlord system, which is also similar to the Turkish state's social narrative, and more generally, to the international meta-narrative of democracy and education. These narratives relate how the landlord or 'feudal' system belonged to a time before democracy, before people were educated. 'Their eyes were opened' and 'people came to themselves' are phrases fitting this moral narrative. Dengbêj Hamîd's remarks show how people have internalized such narratives, adopted them as their own, and use them as justifications for social developments they have witnessed, or for what happens in their lives. Although the landlord system seems to have been at least partly beneficial for dengbêj Hamîd, he nevertheless described its abolishment as positive.

Whereas dengbêj Hamîd seemed to endorse the ideas coming from the Kurdish political movement and 'Europe', at the same time, he was quite displeased with the current situation in which 'the times have changed' and 'everybody only looks out for himself'. His memories about the support system that benefited him when he was young, and which he believed had benefited all dengbêjs in the past ('dengbêjs with an income'), collided with the currently accepted social narrative of the same system perceived as undemocratic and enslaving of people. Therefore, I suggest that his (and other dengbêjs') complaints about the lack of support for the dengbêj is more than just a quest for money or a 'commercialization' of the dengbêj art, as it is sometimes understood by political activists (chapter 4). Instead, I believe it countered the social narrative of the Kurdish political movement which demands that every Kurd, including the dengbêjs, dedicate themselves fully and voluntarily to the Kurdish people. Most dengbêjs do not see why they should be volunteers for the Kurdish cause. They feel connected to the narrative they learned in their younger days, when the dengbêjs were supported by a landlord and the villages they served. Today the dengbêjs serve the people coming to the House, 'we serve the guests who come here', which means that

nowadays the guests of the House are the people from whom they expect financial or material support. While the Kurdish movement emphasized the political value of the dengbêj art as an authentic Kurdish tradition, and the responsibility of every Kurd to serve his/her people, dengbêj Hamîd saw this as a world turned upside down; *they* are the poor who need to be supported, they possess knowledge that should be valued and protected, and it is not their responsibility to act as protectors of the dengbêj art.

After dengbêj Hamîd spoke about the abolishment of the agha-system, he continued:

> So the agha system is behind us. There may be still a few, but in general it is finished.. I didn't sing for thirty-one years. (Why?) We migrated and some things happened. I didn't sing at all. (Why didn't you sing?) I didn't feel like it. That's why in the end I have only this much in my memory. The others I forgot. (oh.. because you didn't sing..) yes if you don't sing for thirty-one years, what happens? If you don't water a tree for thirty years it will dry out and die.

Because dengbêj Hamîd mentioned that he stopped singing immediately after he spoke of the abolishment of the landlord system, he seemed to make a connection between the two events. After he had migrated to Van, the support of the aghas naturally came to an end. He moved away from the village life he was used to, and moved to a city, beyond the circle of the agha's influence. In his new location, it was not easy to continue with the dengbêj art. But there seems to have been other reasons for his silence, because he says 'and some things happened':

> (So during thirty years you didn't sing..) I didn't sing at all. (And at weddings?) No, I didn't sing at all. (Not at all?) No. Since two years I remember some things and sing them, but everything... (does it slowly return to your mind?) Yes.

Dengbêj Hamîd answered my question why he abandoned singing evasively, and did not say much about that period of his life. Still, he returned to the topic a few sentences later:

> (Did you listen to the radio? To radio Yerevan?) At that time there was no television yet, we listened to radio Yerevan. Birê sang, Karapetê Xaco sang, Haci Xosro from Iran, the people gathered and listened so intensely. Later of course the tape came. (Did you also learn songs from the radio?) Sure, I learned some from radio Iran. I learned from there as well. But now the situation is good. Knowledge has increased a lot. Yet what a pity that there is no importance given to dengbêjs. They are not extended a hand, and they are not helped in seeing their opportunities. Of course it is also because.. As you know the dengbêjs sing in Kurdish. Because they sing in Kurdish Turkey obstructed them, they don't help, no they actually really obstruct them. They forbid it. (Have these laws also hindered you personally at that time?) I was at that time caught in the coup of Kenan Evren. He organized a coup. They

> shut me away for a while. And I was tortured for twenty-eight days. (Because of the dengbêj art, or for other reasons?) No I didn't have any other things, it was because of the dengbêj art, because of Kurdishness (kürtçülük). But nothing resulted from that, they let me go. Also look at that…

Dengbêj Hamîd's comment about the radio makes clear how limited the opportunities for hearing Kurdish in the media were at the time. 'People listened so intensely', because they had nothing else to listen to. He spoke here about the transition from a time with little options, first the radio, later the tape, until today. Today 'knowledge has increased a lot'. It is not as in the past, when people listened to a few hours of radio broadcast with an eagerness that stemmed from the limited opportunities to hear Kurdish in public. From the time that the cassette player was introduced, until today with CDs, video recordings and television, the situation has improved dramatically. However, dengbêj Hamîd said that unfortunately now that so many opportunities exist for the dengbêjs, they do not know how to use them, and no one gives them a hand to help them learn how to use these new opportunities.

It seems that, now that he was talking about the dengbêjs' limitations, he suddenly remembered other prior limitations. Because dengbêjs sing in Kurdish, the government obstructs them, he said. Instead of helping them, something he would have liked to receive from several directions, they impede them. To my question as to whether this also applied to him, he confided for the first time something about his personal experiences with oppression. He was arrested and jailed, and tortured for twenty-eight days. Before turning to that experience, here is the final part of this section of his interview:

> (Nowadays you know thirty to forty kilams. But you have forgotten many, isn't it?) I forgot most of them. (How many did you know in the past approximately, do you remember that?) Thirty-one years ago I knew many. Just as water boils, songs came to me one after another. I knew many. I cannot say how many I exactly knew, but really there were many. I was young and I listened a lot to dengbêjs. I was motivated. If I would have sung for two nights and two days, my voice wouldn't break and also [my repertoire] wouldn't finish.

The way dengbêj Hamîd spoke about his being tortured was almost impersonal, as if he had not been there, as if he was talking about another person. Yet, what he clearly expressed was the number of days he was tortured, as well as the number of years he kept silent: twenty-eight days, and thirty-one years. Thirty-one years ago he knew many songs, they rose up in him just like boiling water. He was motivated, and he would never run out of songs. But the twenty-eight days of torture, which he endured

because of being a dengbêj and a Kurd, silenced him, and erased much of what he had known and treasured. 'Also look at that…'.

Dengbêj Hamîd was a victim of the wave of arrests, oppression, terror and torture following the 1980 coup. During and after the coup, 650.000 people were detained, and most of them tortured, and more than 1,5 million people were officially registered as suspects (Imset 1996). It is important to note the enormous scale on which these practices took place, because it makes clear how many people were directly or indirectly affected by them, or afraid to suffer the same fate sooner or later. The brutalities after the coup are often mentioned as one of the most significant reasons why the PKK was able to gain mass support. Additionally, apart from the coup, torture was and is a systematic part of imprisonment in Turkey.[279] According to Zeydanlıoğlu (2009), it has been an integral part of the nation building process of the Turkish Republic. The most infamous inhuman treatment took place in Diyarbakır prison, on which the article of Zeydanlıoğlu is focused:

> What has been called 'the period of barbarity' (vahşet dönemi) or 'the hell of Diyarbakır' (Diyarbakır cehennemi), refers approximately to the early and mid-1980s (in particular the years between 1981-1984) where the prisoners in the newly built Diyarbakır Military Prison No. 5 in the Kurdish region were exposed to horrific acts of systematic torture. (Ibid: 8).

Zeydanlıoğlu enumerates the horrible torture practices perpetrated in this prison, which included severe beating; sleep, water and food deprivation; sexual humiliation and assault; and many other methods. In addition to physical torture, there was systematic psychological torture aimed at the turkification (*türkleştirmek*) of Kurdish prisoners, many of whom were illiterate and did not speak Turkish. They were forced to memorize Turkish songs and slogans as a form of a 'turkifying' education. Zeydanlıoğlu cites a prisoner who spoke about this psychological torture:

> What we were forced to do aimed at destroying our personalities. Despite us not being Turks, they used to make us shout 'I am a Turk, I am right.' I think they made us learn fifty to sixty nationalist songs by heart. It might have been more. These songs are nothing you would sing in your daily life. When you consider the limits of the human memory, learning this amount of songs by heart is very difficult. There is not a worse way of torturing, especially when you consider the fact that some of these

279 'Torture in Turkey is not a problem limited to the period of detention. Torture is systematically applied in Turkey as an administrative practice. Whoever is deprived of his/her freedom is under permanent threat of torture from the very minute of detention…The very existence of threat of torture is itself a method of torture…Torture is not just a method of obtaining information. It is at the same time an arbitrary way of punishment. One of the main purposes of torture is to punish the criticisms and political activities, and to frighten and manipulate the whole society through terrorism..' (Medical foundation, London, 1999, quoted in Zeydanlıoğlu 2009).

> people were illiterate. A person is already under the pressure of facing torture that will be impossible to endure in case these songs are not learnt by heart. You get the truncheon even when you know them by heart. At least hundred times (Mavioğlu in Ibid: 10).

It is hard to imagine how this form of torture must have felt for a dengbêj. Learning fifty to sixty new songs by heart in Turkish meant literally erasing at least parts of his repertoire. Dengbêjs undergoing torture must have felt like tapes being overwritten, the most important gift they had slipping away from them. Even the person cited above, who was neither a dengbêj or illiterate, described this in terms of: 'there is not a worse way of torturing'. This must have held even more for dengbêjs. Turkification as a form of torture was and is usual in prisons in Eastern Turkey, and such policies formed a central part of the modernization project of the Turkish state. Without a doubt, dengbêj Hamîd also became a victim of turkification measures that were carried out as psychological torture.

Returning now to dengbêj Hamîd's story let us look first at the moment in the interview when he spoke of being imprisoned and tortured. He mentioned it when speaking of the radio and the limited opportunities that the dengbêjs had at the time. Of course, he said, it was not only a lack of support, there was also oppression, the government obstructed them. When he talked about restrictions, it reminded him of the current situation: most restrictions have been lifted. Theoretically, there should be many options for him and other dengbêjs to perform. But instead he felt he was still limited and that the dengbêjs could still not count on an extended hand. For someone who had lived through torture and imprisonment, decades of war and government suppression, and who lost most of his repertoire, the current more open environment offered hope for new opportunities. He assisted in founding the Dengbêj House and became one of its most dedicated members. But the initial enthusiasm quickly turned into disappointment because of a renewed neglect of their performance. The recent revival did not bring what he had hoped for. The neglect of their current performances reinforced his earlier experiences of being silenced, first through the downfall of the landlord system and his move to the city Van, and later through his imprisonment and torture.

Life story 4: Armenian voices

Figure 14. Dengbêj Cîhan's village. In the past there were no mosques in this region, only churches. Mosques were built during the life time of dengbêj Cîhan, about 50-60 years ago. Picture made by Cîhan's son, 2011.

'I am a Kurd and a Muslim, not a Fileh'.[280]

Since the Armenian genocide in 1915,[281] the previously strong Armenian presence in Kurdistan has been virtually wiped out. The Kurds had played a large role in the assassination and deportation of the Armenians and other Christian groups from eastern Turkey. Survivors who did not escape from these horrors to other countries were forced to totally assimilate to Kurdish culture, and to hide their Armenian identity as much as they could. Seemingly, nothing remained of their previous identity and of the culture they belonged to. However, in spite of the brutality of the '1915 events', as they are often referred to within Turkey in an attempt to avoid naming them, the Armenian voice can clearly be heard today, especially among Kurds. As Bruinessen remarks, "the Armenians are very much present today in people's memories, in fact even more so than I found to be the case thirty years ago" (in Jongerden 2007: xxiii). Although Turkey's government until now has strongly opposed recognizing the size, horror, and planned and deliberate character of the mass killings, Kurds in Turkey have made steps towards an increasing recognition, and the acknowledgement of their own share in it.[282] Notwithstanding these positive steps, being Armenian is still something one would rather hide than bring out into the open due to discrimination and prejudices experienced in daily life, and the unlawful treatment by the government.[283]

280 "Ez Kurd im, ez Misilman im, ne Fileh me," see below for the full quote. *Fileh* is a Kurdish word used to refer to Christians, or to Christian ethnicities in the Kurdish region (the main ones the Armenians and Assyrians). One can often understand from the context, or the region spoken about, which type of '*Fileh*' is meant.

281 This was not the first massacre of Armenians. About the differences with earlier massacres, and about the nature of the genocide, Suny notes: "Though there was a continuity between the brutal policies of massacre and deportation that earlier regimes used to keep order, the very scale of the Armenian Genocide and its intended effects – to rid eastern Anatolia of a whole people – make it a far more radical, indeed revolutionary, transformation of the imperial setup" (Suny 2002: 98).

282 A recent example was the inauguration of the 'monument of common conscience' on September 12, 2013, in Diyarbakir. The monument is "dedicated to all peoples and religious groups who were subjected to massacres in these lands", the mayor Abdullah Demirbaş declared in his opening speech. He also said: "We Kurds, in the name of our ancestors, apologize for the massacres and deportations of the Armenians and Assyrians in 1915. We will continue our struggle to secure atonement and compensation for them." (in the *Armenian Weekly*, September 12 2013).

283 On the one hand there are positive signs such as Armenians winning court cases on land tenure. On the other hand Armenians are still often discriminated against. For instance, Armenian public figures such as journalists and writers who come out in the open in daily life are subject to acts of violence, such as intimidation, threats, and in excessive cases murder and assassination. The Hrant Dink case is one but a prominent example of such violence, in which Hrant Dink, the editor general of the Armenian newspaper *Agos* who was born and raised in Turkey, was assassinated. Six years after the assassination, the case remains dark and some of the bureaucrats that were investigated after the murder for their involvement in the assassination have been promoted to even higher ranks in bureaucracy, instead of being held accountable for their role in, or negligence of, the assassination.

In the case of the dengbêj art, Armenians frequently emerge in kilams; in chapter 1 I discussed the role of Armenians in kilams through the figure of the Armenian woman. The kilams *Evdal û Gulê*, in which a Kurdish dengbêj competes with an Armenian female dengbêj (chapter 1), and *Metran Isa* about an Armenian woman who marries to a Kurdish man, are among the most well-known. Another way in which Armenians are present in the dengbêj art is through 'Karapetê Xaco' (his kurdified name), an Armenian who became one of the most famous voices of the dengbêj art. He was born in 1902 as Karapet Khatchadourian, in the village Bilhêder near Batman, at that time still an Armenian village. When most of his family was killed during the genocide he grew up among Kurds and learned to sing in Kurdish. Later in his life he moved to Armenia and became famous because of his activities on radio Yerevan. His voice, broadcast from abroad, was listened to attentively by many Kurds in eastern Turkey, who had no other access to Kurdish media than through this radio station, and he became a symbol of Kurdish resistance.

Although there are not many Armenian dengbêjs today, coincidentally the first dengbêj I happened to speak with was Armenian. He lived in Istanbul, and I met him through a friend. He was not connected to any of the Dengbêj Houses, and did not perform anymore today apart from his singing at home within his family circle. Born in 1925, he was also the oldest among the people I spoke with. He could understand some Turkish, but did not speak it. Most of his adult life he lived in a village in the Sasun region, close to where Karapetê Xaço came from. Dengbêj Cîhan made a living from farming, with tobacco as the main subsistence crop. Since 2004 he lives in Istanbul with one of his children, although he still regularly returns to his home region to visit the village and his other children. His life story is rich in memories and stories, of which I explore some parts in this section. I got to know him and his relatives well, and visited them often over the years. On my visits I often recorded again some other stories or songs, or asked him a few more questions. In this section, instead of investigating the line of thought, connections and coherence within a single long interview, I look at four interviews simultaneously and offer citations from all of them. This has the virtue of demonstrating the way this dengbêj talked: each question or story reminded him of yet another story and led us to new places and memories.

The first sentence of the first interview we had, in which I asked him to speak about his life, was as follows:

> My mother and father.. My father became a Muslim in the time of the torment of the Christians (*terqa fileh*) and came to his aunt. His aunt Hela, she was in Hewrê. The father of my mother was from the Derxanê [tribe], they were Arabs.[284]

Dengbêj Cîhan first defined his father, and therewith also himself, as a Muslim. I return to this point later on. He refers to the genocide as 'the time of torment of the Christians', as it is usually referred to in Kurdish.[285] His father was born and raised in the Armenian village Parmis. He spoke Armenian and was a Christian. The village was in the Sasun region in eastern Turkey, about 50 km from the town Silvan. This region was a mixture of Armenian, Arabic and Kurdish villages.

Dengbêj Cîhan knows much about the history of the region, of his father, and of his village. He told how, when Parmis was attacked, the men were gathered and sent to a prison in the town Pasûr (Kulp), about 70 km from Parmis. Later on all these men were killed by the Ottoman army. Aram managed to escape from that prison. In the meantime, the soldiers who had attacked their village had also gathered all the old people, women and children, and driven them into the church. They set fire to the church, and to all the people who had taken refuge there. Later on he said about the village:

> At the time of the torment of the Christians some became Muslims. In Parmis there were 1050 people registered. Of those 1050 people 50 people were left. Some remained in Turkey and some went to Yerevan. 1000 people were killed (*hezar nifusî hatî kuştin winda bûn*). My father had three brothers. My grandfather was arrested by soldiers for army duty and never came back, that was before the time of the massacres. No one knows what happened to him. Six months later the torment of the Christians began. One of my uncles was killed in a village. Then there were two who got lost. One of them was young, unmarried; one of them was married and had a child. No one knows if he could reach to Yerevan with his children. Some fellows have been in Yerevan and they asked for my uncles, but they had no information about my uncles. The uncle of my father, his name was Romo, they asked him in Yerevan but they could not find information about him.

His father Aram thus remained behind on his own: first Aram's father left and did not return. Then during the massacres one of his brothers was killed, and the two others went missing. The Armenian genocide of 1915 had been preceded by other massacres and persecutions and thus did not stand on its own. The fact that his

284 The quotes in this section are taken from four interviews with dengbêj Cîhan conducted in Istanbul between 2007 and 2010. The interview language was Kurdish. In the first interview, mister Cîhan's son translated between us in Kurdish and English.

285 There are two expressions in Kurdish that refer to the Armenian genocide. The one is *terqa fileh*, *terq* meaning that a group of people needs to escape immediately under pressing conditions. The other one is *fermanê fileh*, *ferman* meaning a law or decree. The latter refers to the decision by the central authority at the time to deport the Armenians from Ottoman soil.

father went missing may have been related to this; persecution of Christians had already begun. Another time, dengbêj Cîhan related a story he had heard about Aram's grandfather from an Armenian friend who came from the same region:

> Before the torment of the Christians, before that happened [there was another story] about Cerco. He was the grandfather of my father. Qolaxasî (a rank equivalent to Captain in the Ottoman army)[286] and a regiment of soldiers went there, in that time they said Qolaxasî to the commander of the regiment. He went there and he said to the village chief: 'either I will burn your village, or one of you will come out and I will fight with him. If he cannot win from me I will burn the village, but if he can win from me I will not burn the village. They had a fight and he won. (He won from Qolaxasî?) Yes he killed Qolaxasî. They didn't burn Parmis and the regiment of soldiers left. This happened before the torment of the Christians.

This was an example of an intervention of Ottoman soldiers in the village long before the 1915 genocide.

After his escape from the church, Aram went to his aunt Hela who was married to a Muslim and lived in the Kurdish village Hewrê. Aram lived with them for some years. Kurds and Armenians had been living close to, but often separated from, each other before the genocide. It seems that intermarriages did take place, but often not with consent of the parents. The few Armenian survivors who were left, mixed with the local population and had to conceal their Armenian identity. In that village he met a woman from the Derxane tribe, one of the largest Arab tribes in the Sasun region. She and her brother came from another village but had settled in Hewrê after they had been involved in a dispute. Someone got killed, and they had to leave their village. The fact that they had a conflict with their relatives and were not living with them anymore may have been the reason why Aram managed to marry her; if she still would have been living in her village it might have been difficult for Aram to marry a Muslim. Even though he had converted, people did not forget his background and it seems likely that it was more difficult for former Christian men to find a marriage partner. The couple had two children, two boys of which the first passed away when he was still a baby. Cîhan would remain their only living child. However, the marriage did not last long; when Cîhan was about eight years old his mother left his father for another man and moved to another village in the same region.

Cîhan stayed with his father. His father then managed to reclaim some land in their former village Parmis, through his cousin who had lived there after the genocide but had then passed away. They went there together with his father's sister

286 Derived from Turkish *Kolağası*.

Hela. Parmis was now inhabited by Kurds, as often happened after the genocide: Armenian villages were seized by Kurds who took over their lands, and also their houses and possessions if they had not been burnt down.[287] When they went to Parmis they renovated the house of the cousin and moved there. The villagers granted them farmland as well. But in the year that they settled there his father died, when Cîhan was only ten years old. He was still too young to take up the farm work, and he and his aunt were forced to return to Hewrê.

Dengbêj Cîhan never learned any Armenian, as his father did not speak Armenian with him: "my father didn't speak Armenian. The kilams of the Armenians were all in Kurmanji, they sang kilams in Kurmanji."[288] As eastern Turkey was dominated by Kurds, Kurmanji was the lingua franca at the time, at least after the genocide. Both Arabs and Armenians spoke it well and communicated in Kurmanji when talking with the Kurds, or with other minorities.[289] Also other people told me that after the genocide their parents stopped speaking Armenian out of fear for repercussions, and tried in all possible ways to hide their Christian and Armenian identity. The children of survivors thus grew up as Kurds: they spoke their language, had converted to their religion, and often married with them, as there were only few other Armenians left. What remained were only the memories, the stories, and the people around who would continue to remind them of their being *Fileh*.

Left without his father to take care of him, Cîhan continued for some time to move from place to place before he finally settled down in a village where he would stay and which would become his home. First, for reasons unknown to me he left with his aunt and her husband for Cewzîk, a village near Kozluk, not far from Hewrê. As a shepherd Cîhan herded the animals of his uncle, a job many village children would do. They stayed there for two years and returned. In that village he met a sheikh whom he liked, and who escaped from there to Syria. At the time, sheikhs were persecuted.[290] Cîhan liked this sheikh, and when he returned from Cewzîk to his hometown, he decided to visit the sheikh in Syria:

287 I heard many such cases from dengbêjs and other people I spoke with. They talked openly about the fact that their village had been Armenian in the past. Many villages also kept their Armenian names, and were only renamed after the government renamed all villages in eastern Turkey into Turkish names.

288 "Bavê min nizanibû xaber neda. Kilamên Ermenî tev Kurmancî bûn. Ermenî jî kilamên Kurmancî digotin."

289 When I did research among Armenians from Sasun currently living in Istanbul I visited a café that functioned as their meeting place. They did not know Armenian, but spoke either Kurmanji or the local Arabic dialect among each other. They had migrated to Istanbul in the 1990s and were not used to speaking in Turkish with each other.

290 The persecution of sheikhs and religious authorities not supported by the state was a measurement implemented after the foundation of the Turkish Republic.

> I was still a child. I went to the sheikh, I was a follower of his (*em mirîdê mala wî şêxî bûn*), [I prayed and joined their ritual].[291] I went with someone else who was also a child. (On foot?) We went to Syria (*binxetê*), it was in the year of the famine (*sala xela bû*). We went on foot, we were children, we went on our own feet. (But it was very far?) It was three days. From my place to there was three days. We had leather shoes but they were torn apart and no one gave us new ones. Who could give? On foot. (..) They were in two villages, two brothers and they both stayed in a village. The villages were near to each other, it was half an hour from one to the other. Sheikh Mihemed and Sheikh Abdulqidus. (Two sheikhs?) Yes they were brothers. They had another brother who migrated as well with his father, to a place in Sasun. In Turkey.

While he stayed with the sheikh for two months, he assisted him with household tasks and sang for him. It must have been around the year 1939, when he was about fourteen years old. He told how he learned about the heroic deeds of the sheikh, who had revolted against the government, and how he sang about these events as entertainment for the sheikh. These were his first singing activities.

> I went to that sheikh. I used to sing for him, the kilams of his battle with a regiment of soldiers and militias from the Badika and Xiya tribes (*Ez çûm cem wî şêx. Me kilam digo, şerê wî hêriya ku kiribû, alayekî esker tevî milîsîyê yê Xîya û ê Badika*). There were only nine armed men with rifles, including the sheikh. Sheikh Mihemedê Zilî's daughter was also with them. She had a child with her, and she could not carry her child [anymore]. Hence, [in addition to fighting] two men carried the woman and the child. There were only seven men [in total]; for about two hours they fought with their rifles with all the regiment and militias, in a place without any chance to hide themselves. But they managed to escape to the mountains during that battle, and that is how he escaped to Syria.

This is a nice example of a kilam that was made about an event that took place not long before Cîhan sang it for him. He must have learned the kilam from people in the house of the sheikh, and because he had a nice voice and a good memory, he sang them for the sheikh. This episode also demonstrates that he was totally immersed in Kurdish culture, even though his father and aunt with whom he grew up were Armenian. Still, he also felt connected to his Armenian background as becomes clear from what he said immediately after the above quote:

> At that time there were French in Syria, no Arabs. In the time that I went it was French. Their soldiers were also Kurmanj, they were *Fileh*. Like us they also spoke Kurmanji. The soldiers of the French. They knew Kurmanji. They were all *Fileh* who came from Turkey. Like dengbêj Karapetê Xaço, he was from a village of Batman, from Bilhêder. He said that he had been a soldier for the French for fifteen years.

291 "Me jî zikir dikirin, zikirê wana dikirin." I inserted the last part of the sentence from a place later in the interview, as it exemplifies what he means with 'I was adherent of him'.

> After two years he could not leave. He also had a horse on which he mounted and rode around. He had a wife and family also. He got food for himself and his family and a horse from the French government. He was their soldier for 15 years. He died when he was hundred and three years old. (Did you meet him?) I didn't meet him but I have heard his fame. He was a dengbêj. (How do you know those things about him?) He said it himself. (In an interview?) Yes.

Dengbêj Cîhan often showed interest in his Armenian roots at moments in the interview when that topic came to mind. From the sentence about the sheikh escaping to Syria, he seemed to remember some things about Syria that were relevant to him. Syria had become a French mandate during WWI. Some of the Armenians who crossed the Turkish border and entered Syria were employed by the French as soldiers. Cîhan remembers how they spoke his language, Kurmanji Kurdish, and that they were 'all *Fileh* who came from Turkey.' This reminded him of dengbêj Karapetê Xaço who also enrolled as a soldier for the French. It seems, in spite of not seeing himself as an Armenian, he recognized something in these people that made him feel connected. Karapetê Xaço was like himself a dengbêj with Armenian roots, who became assimilated to Kurdish culture to such an extent that he became a famous dengbêj. The soldiers who he met in Syria obviously also caught his attention because they spoke Kurmanji, like himself, but were also *Fileh*, and he repeated "they were all *Fileh* who came from Turkey." Apart from recognition, another reason for his interest may have been that he suspected there could be relatives among those who had escaped from the atrocities. At another moment in the interview he said:

> The uncle of my father, his name was Romo, some men asked for him in Yerevan but they could not find any information about him. (So maybe in Yerevan there live relatives of yours?) Yes. Fifty years ago a letter came with the name of my father. (Really?) It said: 'come,' but I did not go. Yeah, I didn't go. (Why?) Really I didn't go. I [lived] with my father in law, I didn't go. (Of course it is something difficult..) I didn't have children yet. (It was very early..) Yes around fifty years ago. (Did you send them a letter?) No the letter came with the name of my father, and with someone else's name. I didn't care about it. (You didn't reply?) No I didn't. There were some people who said: 'come let's go', but I said I could not go. (You had his address?) Yes. I myself didn't see that letter. But someone said to me that the letter had come to a man in the village Beksê, he was also an Armenian-Muslim (*musilmîn*), it came to his house and it was with the name of my father. I myself didn't see the letter, nor the address.

Here again we see that dengbêj Cîhan on the one hand distanced himself from the relatives he appeared to have in Yerevan. He seems to have been too occupied with the life he lived, and obviously also satisfied with it. He already lived with his future father-in-law by then, and may already have known he that would marry his daughter. Whatever the exact reasons, it is clear from his account that he did not feel

the slightest interest to go there. On the other hand, he shows that he identified with the man who had received the letter, someone in a nearby village who was, as he said, "also a *misilmîn*", like himself. This term is used for Armenians who became Muslims. It seems that dengbêj Cîhan reconciled himself to this identity and decided to live with it, rather than to leave and go to Yerevan when he had the option.

After his visit to the sheikh in Syria, Cîhan returned home because he had heard that his aunt missed him and cried for him. In the years that followed he lived for some time with his aunt, and some more time with his mother who had come to ask him to stay with her. In both places there were conflicts: his aunt's husband had sold Cîhan's cow, and in his mother's village he fell in love with the Imam's daughter and wanted to marry her, but his mother and stepfather did not give their permission for the marriage. He therefore left their house and stayed with friends in Hewrê, and went to work in a village called Qaweçî, near Kozluk. At this time he became acquainted with an agha of a neighboring village, agha Hamo, or Haji Hamo. The agha turned out to be a distant relative, he was the son of Cîhan's cousin (father's brother's daughter) who had been kidnapped by a Kurd. The agha thus had an Armenian mother and a Kurdish father. Possibly because of this kinship, the agha invited him to stay at his house and work for him, and also promised him one of his daughters. It was around 1946 when he moved to the agha's village Holê, he was about twenty years old. He worked for him as a farm laborer and as a shepherd. His wife to be was only seven years old, so he agreed to wait until she had grown up.

These first years of his stay with Hamo was also the time when he got the chance to learn the dengbêj art. As an agha, Hamo received many guests, and also many dengbêjs. Hamo agha was a Haji, he had made the pilgrimage to Mecca. According to Cîhan he was an important man, a leader who had other people work for him. He himself did not work on the lands, but instead rode on his horse "and traveled through all of Kurdistan." He must have been a man of importance, judging from the many dengbêjs who visited his house, and who he was obviously capable of rewarding with presents. Dengbêj Cîhan told me how, in the years that he stayed with Hamo, he got to see dengbêjs from many places:

> They came from every place, from the lands of Serhat until Barava, through the villages of Diyarbekir. They came and sang. When they left, the agha gave them a sheep or a lamb or a gift like that. They performed and they left again (*Ji her derî hatin, yên welatî Serhadî heta Barava, hata gundên Diyarbekir. Tev dihatin. Çiqas dengbêj.. dihat, carina dihatî mal paz diyar kir, di vana çûn. Dengbêjî kirine diçûn*). From Silvan there was Saidê Osman. Then Sedîqê Sextî, also from Silvan. Camîlê Zerbîya from Muş. The dengbêj of Ali agha came from the highlands, from Serhat. He always walked from here to there and sang (*ji piya diçû kilama digo*). Then there was Cemîlê Zerbîya, also

> from Farqîn. Then there was Ahmedê Xazo from Batman, from the Reşqota tribe. And there was another from the Reşqota, from the Batman region, his name was Avdilrahmanê Havdê. Emîn of Xano Serî, of the village Barava. And Sadiq of the house of Şeşo. (June 2007).

All these dengbêjs visited agha Hamo, and probably also other aghas in the region. This demonstrates that in the 1940s the dengbêj art was still very much alive, and connected to the landlord system.

Although Cîhan was present at many performances and learned kilams from them, he emphasized that he learned most of his songs from someone else. The dengbêjs I spoke with often regarded one dengbêj as their main master. For dengbêj Cîhan this was the uncle of his wife, uncle Ramazan. Uncle Ramazan had learned his kilams from 'the dengbêj of Alî agha' mentioned above. During the First World War, for some time a certain Alî agha had stayed in the house of agha Hamo. He came from Muş, a town more to the north, and seems to have been a war refugee who had escaped from the advancing Russians in 1914. One of the people he came with was his dengbêj. As the agha and his following stayed under the protection of Hamo agha, the dengbêj of Alî agha often sang kilams for them. This is how uncle Ramazan had learned the repertoire of this dengbêj, and also the stories that corresponded to these kilams.

Dengbêj Cîhan was eager to learn from him. From the interview he appears to have been an energetic young man with keen good memory who absorbed any information he came across. He already had some singing experience from his time in Syria, and now that he got to know uncle Ramazan had a chance to learn more. During the interview he often mentioned that he had learned all his kilams some fifty to sixty years ago from uncle Ramazan who, in turn, had learned them from the dengbêj of Alî agha. When I asked him on what occasions he sang these kilams, he said that he often sang them during his long wanderings as a shepherd, when he was alone and did not have much else to do. Later on he also sang at weddings and was invited by people of his own and the surrounding villages. He was not a famous dengbêj, and in spite of the many kilams he knows, he was very modest about his knowledge. He did not regard himself or uncle Ramazan as a real dengbêj. He felt that the real dengbêj had been the dengbêj of Alî agha, from whom they had learned the kilams.[292]

292 Dengbêj Cîhan's son Aram told me that dengbêj Ramazan did not perform in public and was not known as a dengbêj by more people than his father and his close relatives. According to Aram, this was because he was the brother of agha Hamo, and therefore it was expected from him to behave as a part of the elite class. This also meant that he could not perform as a dengbêj, as this would mean he would lose his dignity.

When, after speaking of the many dengbêjs he named above, I asked him if he also remembered any female dengbêjs from that time, he replied:

> There was a female dengbêj from Herendê (*dengbêjê jin yek Herendî bû*). (Was she Christian or Muslim?)[293] Well she became Muslim but first she was Christian (*hat misilman bû care çû fileh bû*). There was a Muslim, the brother of Îsa, he was her lover (*dergistî*). He was the son of Mihemedê Alî Keleş. And when she came back from him she became a Christian again. (She was kidnapped isn't it?) Yes she was (*wê revand anî*). She stayed with him for a year. (Did you see her?) Yes I did, because she came to our house and stayed for a month with us, at the house of my wife's father. Her name was Xemê, Xemixiştî, she had a wonderful voice. They said Xemêxitî to her, she was an amazing dengbêj. (..) Her Christian name (*navê wê filetî*) was Xemê, and her Muslim name was Henîfe. She was from the village Herendê,[294] they were all Christians. When she escaped she came to the house of Hamo because he protected people when they were kidnapped. She stayed for one month and in this time she sang songs. (Did she sing in Kurdish?) Yes in Kurmanji. (Did she also know Armenian?) yes she knew Armenian, but usually she spoke Kurmanji. (And how did she learn the songs?) There was a dengbêj in her village, his name was Amo, and he was also Armenian. He sang songs in Armenian and Kurmanji. He also became Muslim and changed his name to Amer.

This is interesting for several reasons. It is possible that Armenian women were more often known as dengbêjs than Kurdish women. It seems that it was easier for them to sing in front of a public and to be known by many people, which in Kurdish circles would have been understood as shameful for the husband and woman's relatives. Like many other Armenian women she fell victim to being kidnapped by a Kurd. However, she managed to escape from him and to return to her home village, become a Christian again, and to marry a Christian man. She must have been an independent woman to have managed to change her fate in this way. This might be because she came from Herendê, a village still inhabited solely by Armenians, which meant she would have had more support than other Armenian women who were left without social connections to protect them. But first, before returning to Herendê, she was hosted for a month by Hamo agha who most probably arranged her return to the village. The Armenian roots of Hamo agha may have incited him to use his position to protect women like Xemê.

293 This was one of the interviews we did in 2007, and Cîhan's son was translating for me at that time. He knew that the village Herendê was Christian, so for that reason he asked if she was a Christian.

294 The village Herendê was the only Armenian village that was saved from the genocide in its entirety. I spoke with people from this village, and they told that the village was saved because the villagers were blacksmiths. As there were no other blacksmiths in the region they were needed, and thus saved.

Another interesting fact is that Xemê had learned her songs from dengbêj Amo, an Armenian himself, who sang in Kurdish and Armenian. He had also converted to Islam. This example demonstrates how Armenian knowledge ceased abruptly: Amo had still sung in Kurdish and Armenian, but Xemê, who learned kilams from him, sang only in Kurdish. Dengbêj Cîhan himself had seen only Kurdish dengbêjs, apart from one Armenian woman. Within one generation Armenian culture and language had been wiped out almost entirely. Cîhan's story also demonstrates that the recollection of Armenian identity was still there, as he knew which people in the surrounding villages had an Armenian background. The contacts he had eventually helped him to find a job, a village and a marriage partner. For better or worse, (former) Armenians supported each other and made use of each other's networks.[295]

After Cîhan lived for some years with Hamo agha, Hamo agha's daughter was considered to be marriageable, and they married when Cîhan was about twenty-five years old. Helîme was only twelve. Although her parents had married her to him, she was, said Cîhan, "not yet a woman but still a child." Soon after they married Cîhan was summoned to serve in the army. He fulfilled the two obligatory years of military service and returned home. He had been stationed in Thrace in western Turkey, far from his region of origin. When he came back, he and his wife remained living with Hamo agha for another four years before they moved to their own house in the same village. After six years of marriage, when Helîme was about eighteen years old, she became pregnant.

Although this story is told by dengbêj Cîhan, the silence of Helîme speaks through his words. She passed away in 2005, a year before I became acquainted with dengbêj Cîhan. Later Cîhan's son, Aram, told me more about her. It was no secret to her children that she had married their father against her will and that she was not happy in her marriage. She bore eleven children and lived the harsh village life many women of her generation lived. They lived in a house with only one large room. In the evening the matrasses that, during the day, were piled up against one of the walls were taken down, and everyone slept in that room. Both parents and children worked hard to make a living. They had fields and some animals, and lived mainly from tobacco trade. The children went to school, but helped with this work after school time and during their holidays. They were not well off, Aram remembers times when they did not have enough to eat, and he recalls the cold winters when they

295 This was confirmed by the interviews I held with five other people from the Sasun region. They were from other villages: one from Herendê and the others from villages where Kurds and Arabs lived mixed. In these villages individual Armenians were adopted by Kurdish tribes, and lived with them as if they were Kurds. However, they kept in touch with people who had Armenian roots.

froze due to a lack of proper clothing and shoes. Helîme had a strong personality, she followed the news of the village and had a voice in conflicts. As the daughter of the agha she was raised with a knowledge of local politics. People came to her for advice or with complaints, and also from other people from their village I heard that she was known for her wisdom.

Just like dengbêj Cîhan, as a child Helîme had also been present when dengbêjs came to sing in her father's dîwan. Like him, she learned many songs from them and from her uncle Ramazan and developed a strong interest in the dengbêj art. Cîhan told the following about his wife's knowledge:

> She learned in the same way [as I did], but she didn't sing for other men. She only sang for her family and for her friends. She learned the kilams that I know but she also learned other songs. She knew many weddings songs, and she knew also the women's songs (*kilamên din jî dizanibû. Kilamên daweta tev dizanibû. Kilamên jin jî dizanibû*) (June 2007).

But even though she knew many kilams, and liked to sing, she hardly used her talents. Cîhan's son Aram said that he had almost forgotten that she could sing, and realized it only when he was an adult. He said:

> There were songs that my mother knew better than my father. And my mother also composed songs herself. About her life, about her father, about her family, about her children. She didn't sing only laments.[296] For example she didn't want to marry my father and she made many songs about that. And she also sang about the other things that have affected her. I actually didn't know that she could sing. But once by chance I heard her singing and I asked: 'do you also sing songs?' And she said: 'yes I know many,' and then we bought a tape recorder and we recorded many songs. But she couldn't use it a lot, because the terrain where she could sing was small. She would for example sing at a mourning or a wedding. But even many of her relatives didn't know that she could sing.[297]

The silence of Helîme can be explained in two ways. It can be seen as yet another example of the limited access that women had to perform in public places. However, her son Aram explained her silence in a different way. Since she was the daughter of an agha, she was an important and influential woman in her village, and she used her position to exercise power. It would have been inappropriate for a (wo)man of her status to perform as a dengbêj. Performing was a task of the commoners not of the elite, and performing frequently as a dengbêj would have been damaging for her

296 Aram says this because laments were the common female repertoire, and it would not have been special if his mother used to sing only them. With this sentence he thus emphasizes that she was not 'only' singing laments, but also sang other types of songs at other occasions.

297 Aram told me this during the interview we had with his father. He translated for us, and we spoke English with each other. The quote thus was in English and is not a translation.

reputation and that of her family. Aram recalled that she occasionally performed at weddings or funerals. He said she only did so if her authority was needed. She would step forward if there were no other people present who knew the right song to sing at a particular moment, or the right thing to do following tradition. On such occasions, Helîme demonstrated her authority and knowledge in matters of dengbêj art and tradition. This was appropriate for her elite position, whereas at other moments it would have meant she was behaving like a commoner.

But aside from her public position, Helîme also liked to sing songs in private, and composed songs about situations she had been through. Aram believed that the songs had served her as an important form of self-expression. Among others, it had once served as a strong act of resistance against her forced marriage. When we communicated later by email about his mother's position, Aram wrote about her in a poetic way:

> My mother sang and composed songs to express her grief, to protest her destiny, but she accepted it anyway. She found solace in the words and rhythms of the songs she composed and sang in her privacy, one of the very few ways open to women of that kind of culture and environment. The songs were sometimes the sole refuge for them to hide, and at the same time to scream loudly by expressing their stories in words and lyrics. They were an escape from the pains and hardships of social life, or of their destiny as they would put it. They knew that they were trapped for a life time in that destiny, and that there was no way to be freed from it (English as in original email, October 2013).

This explanation of his mother's experiences fits the song examples which I gave in chapter 1 in which women and men record strong feelings of anger and frustration about their inability to change their situation. The songs offered a place to express these emotions and to criticize those who had caused them. It is unfortunate that I did not have the opportunity to meet Helîme in person in order to hear more of her own views about her life and what singing had meant to her.[298]

Today, the eleven children of Cîhan and Helîme are all adults. Two daughters continue to live in the village in the Sason region, where they married and had children. Two other daughters and a son moved to towns not far from their home village and have families. Three sons live in Istanbul with their families, and one lives abroad. All siblings fiercely support the Kurdish movement. They watch Kurdish satellite television, and often discuss politics at home. They are strict in speaking Kurdish instead of Turkish with their children. One of the sons in Istanbul is a singer

298 Although I asked Aram, who had made the recordings of Helîme's songs, if I could listen to them, he was reluctant to do so. Understandably, he felt too emotional about her recent death and felt he would be overwhelmed by his emotions had we listened together to these recordings.

in a wedding band. He performs in Kurdish, and much of his repertoire consists of politicized songs about the struggle for Kurdish freedom. Another son, the youngest of the family, married in 2008. I attended his wedding with some friends, who happened to be Turkish. They said they had never been to a wedding like this, which looked more like a political meeting than a wedding. The wedding band expressed their overtly political message both in songs and pronouncements all in Kurdish.

But Cîhan's children do not only see themselves as Kurdish. The youngest also began to discover their Armenian identity. Aram told me that as a child he found out he had Armenian roots through other children. When they fought, they insulted him by calling him *Bafileh*, and since he did not know that word he asked his parents about it. *Bafileh* (from *bav*, father, and *fileh*, Christian) means that one's ancestors are Christians, and it has a derogative connotation. Obviously, even though Cîhan did not consider himself a *Fileh*, other people saw him as such. And not only him, but also his children, who did not even know its meaning, and who spoke Kurdish, were Muslims, and had a Kurdish mother. During his student years, Aram, who officially has a Muslim name, chose to be adhered by an Armenian name. He follows both the Kurdish and Armenian issue closely. He told me that he also discussed these things with his father, and tried to explain to him that being Armenian does not automatically mean that one is also Christian; that there is a difference between ethnicity and religion. It was in one of our first interviews when I asked Cîhan with which identity he feels most connected. I did not yet speak Kurdish, and Aram translated for us. When I posed the question Aram first refused to translate it. He said that his father anyways did not feel Armenian. But when I insisted on asking him, Cîhan's reply was: "I am a Kurd and a Muslim, not a *Fileh*."

Cîhan's life story is telling for what it reveals of how Armenian identity disappeared almost entirely on the one hand, but on the other could not be forgotten. He had reconciled himself to his identity of being *Musilmîn*, of a Muslim with a Christian background. In chapter 1 I already introduced him when speaking of the kilam *Metran Îsa*. When I asked him if the end of the kilam, in which the bishop converts to Islam, was indeed the correct version, he assured me that this was the proper ending. To him, the bishop's conversion to Islam was not problematic, instead it was an identity he felt connected to and it supported his own life story. This does not mean that he denied the genocide, the flight of his father, or the prior Christian identity of the region he came from. Instead, he spoke openly and in detail about these issues and would refer to them whenever he recalled such memories. To illustrate this point, I end this section with the way Cîhan spoke about the Christian heritage of the Sasun region. By ending this story with his voice I also wish to

emphasize that despite the systematic erasure of Armenian identity in Turkey, the Armenian voice cannot be silenced, and continues to resonate through the words of a now Kurdish dengbêj.

> (Uncle, I heard that there is a very high mountain [in your region] with a church?) Yes the high mountain is the Mereto. There is a church on top of the mountain, on top of the Mereto there is a church. In the time of the *Fileh* they brought a number of Shamaz (monastery students) to this church. They placed twenty Shamaz in the church and they stayed there all winter. When spring came, they found out that they were all dead. Before they died, they had written on a paper that they did not die because of the shortage of bread or water, but because of the wind and the fear of God. That is the hearsay about the church on the Mereto. I haven't seen it and I didn't go there, but that's how we heard it from our elders.

Life story 5: the religious class

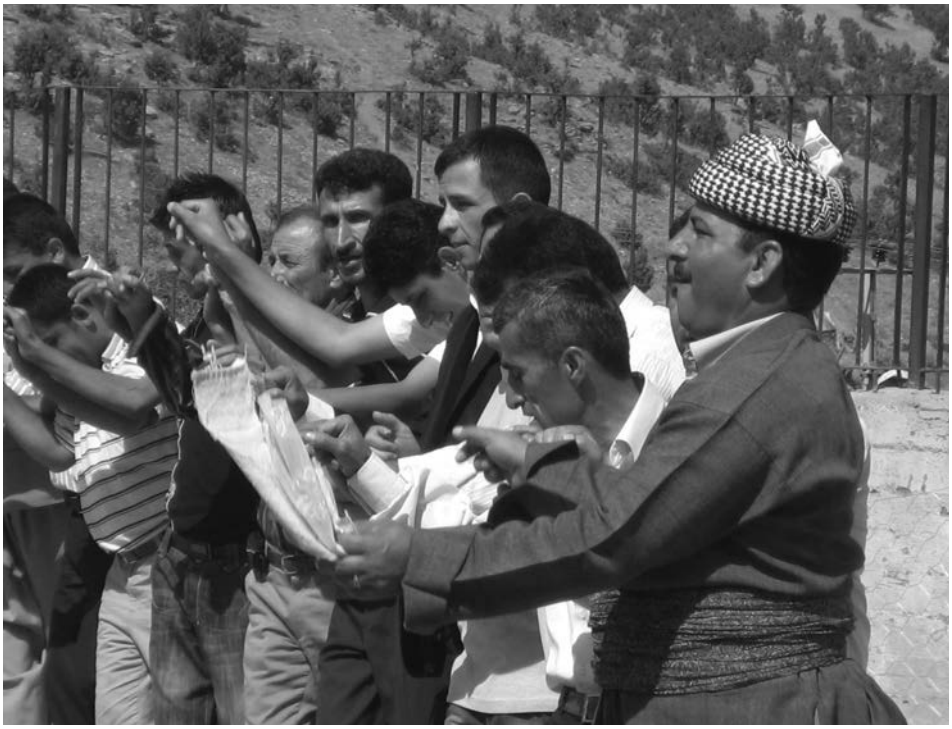

Figure 15. Men dancing at a village wedding near Hakkari. 2008.

'Everyone looked at me in surprise: why is a feqî singing?'

I will call the dengbêj who told me this story dengbêj Seyda, after his religious title. He had been a *feqî* (a madrasa[299] student) in his younger years, and he spoke about the relationship between the religious class and the cultural practices of the 'laymen'. Generally religious and social oppression did not affect male dengbêjs who wanted to sing in the traditional way, without music instruments (see life story 7 for information on the prohibitions on instruments). However, some could face prejudices and prohibitions depending on their region and family. The religious class did not always appreciate the dengbêj art even though it was a widespread tradition with considerable prestige. But the religious class regarded the dengbêj art as distracting people from religious matters, and possibly leading them astray into sinful behavior mentioned in the songs and stories. Dengbêjs sang about love, adultery, young couples eloping and running away from their families to together, and often in openly erotic descriptions. Their kilams expressed the secret desires many people had but could not act on due to societal norms. These unsettling observations of peoples' experiences as they struggled with problems they faced in daily life, were felt to threaten the religious establishment and its representatives, who were sometimes openly criticized in the kilams. It is therefore significant that dengbêj Seyda emphasized his religious identity in relation to being a dengbêj, and even regarded this as having additional value.

I interviewed dengbêj Seyda in his home not far from Van's city center, where he had kindly invited me to join him and his family for a late afternoon dinner. I had never seen him in the Dengbêj House in Van, and was introduced to him by a friend. After I started the video recording, my first question was whether I could write his name down. He availed himself of this question to offer the following introduction:

> In our dengbêj culture my name is Seyda. It means someone who is very civilized and knows a lot in his own field. They use this name for example for university teachers. Some dengbêjs only know the songs from the surroundings of Van. But mine is not like that, I know [songs] from the west, east, north and south. Whichever place you mention, I know at least five or six songs from there. That's why the Dengbêj House calls me Seyda. When I go there and someone next to me sings a song, then

299 Madrasa: religious school (see glossary)

> they ask me: is it right? They ask my advice. If I tell them that it is right then they are satisfied. That is my specialty. You can ask them if this is true.[300]

The word *seyda* literally means 'teacher' or 'tutor', but is also used for a religious leader, a mullah (*mele* in Kurdish). The latter leads the community and practices religious rituals and ceremonies, and at the same time is a teacher who educates children in the Quran. Before the founding of the Turkish Republic, most education in the Kurdish region was given in religious schools, the *madrasas*. The mullah was the main teacher. Dengbêj Seyda did not function as a mullah after he finished his education at the madrasa, but by calling himself *seyda*, he refers to his education and the status he derives from that.

Like many dengbêjs, he began the interview by trying to give authority to his position. Whereas other dengbêjs referred to the long line of dengbêjs before them from whom they had learned their art, dengbêj Seyda mentioned his title and the resulting status. Obviously he felt that the title *seyda*, which shows he was well-educated at a religious school, is more significant than his place in the genealogy of dengbêjs. He only referred to his genealogy later in the interview, when he mentioned his father and other dengbêjs from whom he learned songs. His religious education was something unusual that placed him apart from other dengbêjs and situated him favorably in relation to them.

Dengbêj Seyda's position distinguished him from the other dengbêjs of the House, most of whom only had a few years of primary school at best, or did not have any education at all. Because of his education, he felt he could have contributed to transforming the dengbêj art into a tradition with a standard that would be more respectable. Although in the above quote he said he is a respected person at the Dengbêj House, he said that he does not often go there because he feels his advice is not taken seriously:

> The only thing that separates me from them is that what I want has not happened. I wanted that young people, girls and boys, would come and that we would teach them for two hours a day so that the dengbêj art will continue and not disappear. They play and sing at weddings, but they don't sing anything right. They destroy it. So I said to them, I won't take any money, you sing, but you don't sing it right. The person after you will sing it in your way, and then it is destroyed.

He wanted to improve the position of the dengbêjs by educating young people about the dengbêj art in a structured manner. By institutionalizing the dengbêj art he hoped to generate an income. He offered his help to educate students, but he felt

300 All quotes in this section are taken from an interview with dengbêj Seyda conducted in Van in 2007. The interview language was Turkish.

that no serious effort had been undertaken by the members of the Dengbêj House to reach this goal. He concluded:

> I said to them [the dengbêjs of the House], let's do it like this: we will tell the story of the song in a detailed way, we will do it thoroughly and we will earn money. But they couldn't do this neither. And after trying these things I dried out, I thought, do whatever you want. (...) So I only sing for my wife (laughing). She listens a bit and then falls asleep.

After his disappointing experiences with the Dengbêj House, he rarely goes there. In fact, his identity as a *seyda* seems to work against him. Because of his education and his status, it is difficult for him to be assimilated into the group of dengbêjs at the House and to accept being just one of them. He has a vision for the House, and not being able to implement his plans makes him feel that his authority is in question, and, in the end, made him withdraw from the House. Dengbêj Seyda's experiences of performing as a dengbêj belonged mostly to the past and he had many stories to tell about important dengbêjs he had met, weddings he had performed at, and his position as a *feqî*.

Dengbêj Seyda learned songs from his father when he was still a child. However, his father wanted him to study and become an educated and religious person.

> When I was about seven years old I learned from my father. My father was very civilized. He knew many songs, but he didn't have a strong voice. But when he stayed with us he sang slowly to us and I listened. I learned many songs from him. He told me fairy tales like Mem û Zîn, Xecê û Siyabend, this story happened here on the mountain, and also Cembelî from Hakkari. The name of his lover was Binevş. They fell in love, the story is very long. And I learned from him others in the same way, half of it a story, half of it a song. When I was ten years old my father said to me: 'you have to study the Quran'. My father is a religious person. So I went to the Imams and learned the Quran. After that I wanted to continue to study books and I went to Iraq. There are very many madrasas there. I went there and stayed for four to five years. I learned Arabic. Of course if people travel a lot they see a lot. I returned to Turkey and went to Cizre, there are many Imams there, and I stayed with them. (Really? You have traveled a lot). Yes. There is the famous Kurdish writer Melayê Cizîrî who has written the Dîwan, a great book[301]. I read it and got a lot of inspiration from it. It's about love, about mountains, plains, water, nice people, beautiful women, and slowly I began to understand. It was literature, I became professional.

Here, dengbêj Seyda explained that his early education consisted of songs and stories, and the Quran. He seems to have been a motivated student who continued

301 Melayê Cizîrî is a famous writer and Imam from the 16th century who is one of the first known authors to write in Kurdish. Although his Dîwan is in the first place a religious book, Dengbêj Seyda emphasized the non-religiously marked dimensions. The poems about love, nature, people, and women, all inspired him.

studying voluntarily after finishing an elementary Quranic education. In addition to the religious content of his madrasa education, he was also interested in written literature in general. He was a good storyteller who constructed his life story in a professional way; the portions of his life story have a clear beginning and end: he started with his first learning experiences of the dengbêj art, continued with his madrasa education, and ended with the words: 'I became professional'.

He then discussed the combination of his two professions: being a dengbêj and a madrasa student at the same time:

> My life continued. I studied and at the same time I performed as a dengbêj. I didn't interrupt it. At the madrasa my friends asked me to sing. I sang and recite poems. I got some criticism, people who said, how can you be a *hoca* (religious teacher) and at the same time a dengbêj? These radical religious people say, you are a man of religion. For example in your country, if a priest would sing songs, then he would be criticized. So they said to me, you are educated and at the same time you sing songs. But they didn't influence me. If someone likes me he can like it, if someone doesn't like it then good luck. What is important is that I like myself in this way.

Dengbêj Seyda saw his religious education and being a dengbêj as two aspects of his identity that are both important. He continued to sing while he was engaged in his religious education. This was not without controversy, and we see that he was criticized for it. He referred here to some of the religious narratives circulating at the time in his community: one cannot be a man of religion and a dengbêj simultaneously; being educated and singing songs were seen as incompatible. A dengbêj was regarded as a secular singer who was not seen as a particularly pious person. Singing songs was something that corresponded to illiterate and uneducated people. Despite this criticism, dengbêj Seyda decided to ignore these 'radical religious people', and to follow his own judgment. At the same time, his father wanted him to study at the madrasa, and he valued the education more than the dengbêj art, as he illustrated with the following story:

> I have seen many of the old dengbêjs. When I was in Iraq I met the famous Mihemed Arif Cizîrî, I got to know him. He sang in a hotel and I listened and later I talked with him. He asked me what I was doing there. I said that I studied at the madrasa and that I liked him very much. Then he said to me, do you know some of my songs? I said, yes I know them. He said, in that case sing one of them, let me hear how you sing them. So I did and he liked it very much. He said to me, leave the madrasa and become my student, join me. I will raise you. But I was afraid because of my father, as he had said: you have to study. I didn't break his wish. I said to him, I am studying. Then he told me to continue, he said that my talent and my voice were good. That's how I met him.

Dengbêj Seyda's father was a 'very religious person' who wanted him to study and not to dedicate his life to being a dengbêj. He could be both a dengbêj and a madrasa student, but he had to give priority to one. His religious education became his priority, partly because of his father's wish. Still, he felt supported by his family in his position as a dengbêj:

> When I was still a bachelor I sang at the head of wedding dances. I was sang and the people danced. They invited me from faraway villages. If I wasn't there it was not as nice, but if I was there the young people liked it very much. Until today there are many people who like me. My family is very large and I have a special place in it. Everybody loves me. I don't want to boast about myself, that's perhaps a sin, but my character is such that everybody likes and respects me.

The acceptance and respect he experienced from his family and kin may have helped him to remain loyal to traditions that were often judged negatively by religious people, and may have helped him to continue with the dengbêj art thus fulfilling his father's wish. Since it is he who raises this topic, this indicates that it was an issue for him when he was at the madrasa. This becomes clearer later in the interview.

When later in the interview dengbêj Seyda returned to the discussion of his combining being a dengbêj with his religious education, it becomes clear that it took some time for him to accomplish this. It appears to have been less straightforward than he initially suggested. He struggled to reconcile these two parts of his identity, but was able to overcome this inner conflict. He told me that at the beginning of his madrasa education, he hid the fact that he was a dengbêj. But when attending a wedding during his student days, he felt comfortable enough to reveal this hidden part of his identity based on his madrasa teacher's encouragement. He told the following story about the day he revealed to this teacher that he actually was a dengbêj:

> (You studied at the madrasa isn't it? Has religion influenced you as a dengbêj?) 'I had a very nice *hoca*. He was a widower, his wife had passed away. Then he married again. Being his pupil I also went to his wedding. We went to get the bride, she was a widow as well. The villagers started to dance. He [the Imam] looked at me and said to me, 'do you know how to dance?' I said, 'yes I know it'. He said, 'do you want to dance at the head of the line?' And it is really so that it was a shame to go to a wedding together with your pupils. It was an ugly event. (..) He said to me, 'do you want to dance?' I said, 'if you give permission'. He said, 'I give permission, go ahead. Go dance at the wedding'. I attended the dances but after some songs they stopped singing and started to discuss who had to continue. As nobody sang I started to sing myself. Everybody looked at me in surprise. Why is a *feqî* singing? But when they started to understand my singing style they became very happy and didn't leave me alone anymore. I continued singing one song after the other. They pointed to me and said, 'watch that *feqî*, that man sings wonderful! From where does he know all the songs?' Even my *hoca* was surprised'.

This wedding was a special occasion; it was the wedding of one of dengbêj Seyda's teachers, who was a widow and marrying for the second time. The Imam encouraged the young student to join the dances, which are a major activity of every Kurdish wedding. Dengbêj Seyda was clearly surprised by this encouragement, because 'it was a shame to attend a wedding together with your pupils, it was an ugly event'. This is a strong expression of disapproval, showing how seriously the religious class condemned such allegedly frivolous behavior. The public's astonished reaction also supports the general view that *feqî's* were not supposed to behave like the general public, and that the moral institution of religion had considerable influence on this behavior. According to dengbêj Seyda, even attending a wedding together with a religious teacher was seen as embarrassing. But the teacher reacted differently from what he expected:

> When the wedding was finished he said to me: 'how could you know all of this? I apparently didn't know you. You are a different person, tell me the truth, what did you do before you came here [to the madrasa]?' I said: 'I will tell the truth, whatever you will do with me. I am a dengbêj. I do this job since I was seven years old'. He said, 'why didn't you tell me?' I said, 'I didn't tell you because as far as I knew there is no place for a dengbêj in this kind of public, in a madrasa. That's why I was afraid and didn't mention it'. He said to me, 'no, you are wrong. There is a place for you everywhere. From now on you are free. Only don't hold the hands of women'. After that I became famous, in that foreign country. Whenever there was a wedding I was ready to go. (Really? So that was in Iraq?) Yes in Iraq. In the places that are now Zakho and Duhok. In that way it became a habit. Because of me other pupils also started to do it. I have experienced many things.

Dengbêj Seyda was surprised by his teacher's attitude, he had not expected to dance and sing in his presence. His fear at having misbehaved is evident in his words: 'I will tell the truth, whatever you will do with me'. He also explained why he hid his dengbêj identity: 'because as far as I knew there was no place for a dengbêj in this kind of public, in a madrasa'. Clearly, the dengbêjs knew that the religious class did not usually appreciate their art. But his teacher, who seems to have been an open-minded person, gave him permission to perform everywhere on one condition, 'only don't hold the hands of women'. While performing at weddings he needed to observe the religious obligation of not touching a woman—a rule observed by Shafa'i Muslims. Otherwise, he was free to perform as a dengbêj, and he regarded himself as an example for other students who felt the same pressure to abandon the allegedly frivolous activities of dancing and singing. This wedding encouraged dengbêj Seyda to overcome his moral questioning and to express both aspects of his identity: his eagerness to be educated in the Quran and in literature, and his love for the dengbêj art.

Dengbêj Seyda remained in Iraq for four or five years, after which he went to Cizre in Turkey and studied at a madrasa. He spent many years on his education, which turned him into a respected and knowledgeable person within Kurdish society.[302] But his life of studies came to an end and he returned to Van.

> We came to Van, by fate. I didn't have children yet, I was newlywed. The madrasa life was finished. (Why?) Because at a certain moment I had to do other things. I had to enter military service. When I returned my father told me to marry. And after that I started working. I had to earn an income. I have done many different jobs. I have suffered a lot. But also that has finished. (..) If I talk about my life in Van.. here I was again involved in the dengbêj art. I sang in many different places. I have seen many of the old dengbêjs.

His education was finished and he returned to his family. From Beytuşşebab they migrated to Van, the nearest large city, and normal life began: military service, family life, and work. Dengbêj Seyda did not start working as a mullah for reasons I do not know. Not every madrasa student becomes a mullah. It is not clear whether he would have continued performing as a dengbêj if he had become a mullah. After he returned from the madrasa and lived in Van, he continued being a dengbêj. Most of the remainder of his interview is about the dengbêj art, about his experiences as a dengbêj, and about the songs and stories he knows. He returned to the topic of the combination of religion and music once more during the interview, when I asked him if it was *haram* (religiously forbidden) in his region to play an instrument:

> No it was not haram, but there were no possibilities for that. There was no one who played an instrument. I have never thought such things, nor accepted them. If you say that the singing of songs and the playing of instruments is haram then this is very backwards. (..) What God wants from you is that you have a good character. That humanity and nature won't be harmed by you. That you try to be useful and helpful. That's what God wants. To say, playing instruments is haram, to sing this is haram, these things were added to religion by some fraudulent persons at a later stage. If the time for worship has come, worship. If it's time to work, work. If it's time for singing, sing and play. Why would it be haram? But unfortunately they said this and have obstructed many people. They have also obstructed me. But I didn't enter too much into their thing, it didn't have much influence. I sang at weddings, I sang everywhere. My wife also knows it.

Although he at first denied that playing an instrument was *haram*, later on he said that 'they said this and obstructed many people, also myself'. He called people who regard instruments and singing as *haram* 'backwards'. His argument was the result

302 '[B]eing a mullah is a distinctive social and educational status acquired by many years of study in the centuries old madrasa education. Becoming a mullah requires a great investment of time' (Yüksel 2011: 163).

and conclusion of the ethical moment he had earlier in his life when he tried to combine his religious life with being a dengbêj. He had come to his own conclusions and is convinced by his decisions. He no longer felt the need to conceal his activities as a dengbêj and went on to successfully combine his religious status with being a dengbêj.

In the personal narrative of dengbêj Seyda, his religious education has a significant place. This education distinguishes him from the other dengbêjs, and turned him into a knowledgeable person who knows the right versions of the songs and who can correct other dengbêjs (at least from his own perspective). In this way, he tried to creatively combine his religious education with the dengbêj art. Before he was able to do so, he had to overcome a number of obstacles such as prevalent social narratives of the religious class about the position of a *feqî*, and a dengbêj. A *feqî* was supposed to study and to conduct himself in a pious manner, and not be involved in frivolous behaviors like dancing, music making, and singing. In the presence of his teachers, he had to conform to decent behavior. A dengbêj, on the other hand, was regarded as a secular performer whose activities did not fit the madrasa climate and the religious class. It was therefore difficult for him to combine these two opposed functions. Only when his teacher encouraged him to participate in the dancing at the teacher's own wedding, did dengbêj Seyda have the courage to reveal his hidden identity. The wedding functioned as a stage on which he could break his silence and sing song after song. The fact that he was a religious student made his performance all the more impressive, since people did not expect a *feqî* to sing and dance. In the discussion with his teacher after this event his teacher authorized his position as a dengbêj by saying 'from now on you are free'. From that moment on, he did not hide his dengbêj talents anymore. He managed to overcome the obstruction of the social narratives produced by the religious class about pious *feqîs* and secular, not-pious dengbêjs. His relationship with an open-minded teacher, the support of his family for the practice of the dengbêj art, and his own courage and attitude, helped him to construct a narrative in which the two normatively opposed positions were not mutually exclusive.

Dengbêj Seyda was still somewhat restricted; he could not be the student of a famous dengbêj because of his obligations as a *feqî*. But in other ways, he could use his religious education to his advantage. He had significant knowledge of both oral and literate Kurdish traditions, and his status as an educated man enhanced his performance opportunities. However, in recent years, after the foundation of the Dengbêj House, he was less successful in making this combination work. His knowledge and status made him feel capable of transforming the dengbêj art into

an institution that could be taken seriously by outsiders. He would help to educate students in 'singing the songs right', and in that way they would be able to 'generate an income'. When his efforts failed he was disillusioned and he withdrew from the Dengbêj House. At times, the combination of his two identities silenced him, at other times he was able to turn this to his advantage.

By being a madrasa student in northern Iraq and eastern Turkey, dengbêj Seyda had been immersed in a predominantly Kurdish environment for many years. Other dengbêjs however had tried to escape from the Kurdish east and traveled or migrated to western Turkey. I turn in the next section to such a story.

Life story 6: Turkish experiences

Figure 16. Kurdish migrants from Urfa in their house in Istanbul. 2007.

Turkish experiences: military service and seasonal labor

Many dengbêjs worked or lived outside of their home region for some period of their life. They entered military service and often worked as seasonal laborers in different places in western Turkey. During this time they were exposed to Turkish language, music and culture, and were influenced by that experience. They improved their Turkish, learned Turkish songs and sometimes learned to play a musical instrument. The story of dengbêj Silêman shows how he abandoned the narrow confines of Kurdish village life, escaped to a large city, learned to sing and perform in Turkish, and eventually returned to his village where he had a family and became an active dengbêj. During this period, he transformed himself from being a village boy into an experienced migrant laborer, a trader who trafficked between village and urban life, and a politically engaged Kurdish dengbêj.

Dengbêj Silêman grew up in a small village near Silvan and learned the dengbêj art from his mother. His parents survived by farming; they grew chickpeas, grain and tobacco (an important export product). Only tobacco generated an income, the other crops were meant for the family's own consumption. He attended school until grade five, after which he quit to help his family. There was not enough money, his father was getting older, and his labor was needed. He and his brother focused on tobacco as their main crop, a time consuming job. But Dengbêj Silêman was an adventurous and willful child; when he was twelve years old he left the village and started to work in lemon export in Mersin, approximately 700 km from home:

> When I had grown up, when I was about twelve or thirteen years old, I abandoned the tobacco. You know I was still a child, and I got this into my head to go to Mersin, to Anatolia to work. Over there was the lemon trade, it was exported. We harvested the lemons, and they were brought to a market. From there they went on ships and were exported to other countries. I stayed there for some years and then I decided that it was not nice, that it was not successful, and I told my father that it had not worked out and that I wanted to go to Istanbul. I bought a ticket to leave for Istanbul. (How old were you when you went there?) I was about sixteen or seventeen years old. I started to work loading and unloading ships that brought sugar, cement, cars, import and export. So I worked there also for some years.[303]

Dengbêj Silêman explained his departure from the village as a decision he made as a child, when he was not capable of making wise decisions. He seems to have been attracted to another world, to go to Mersin, and so he abandoned farm work. These

303 All quotes in this section are taken from an interview with dengbêj Silêman conducted in Diyarbakır in 2007. The interview language was Turkish.

departures happened frequently in this region as young boys escaped the hard work in the tobacco fields. They ran away in search of better places, without the permission of their families. Although they often eventually returned home, for dengbêj Silêman this took many years. Adventurous young boys who heard stories about large cities, other ways of earning money, and a different life far from home, were tempted to leave.[304] When dengbêj Silêman was seventeen years old he decided to leave Mersin for a more profitable job and he left for Istanbul. There he worked for several years, but finally returned home:

> Now my brother was here [in the village], and he had to marry. So I went into military service for eighteen months when I was twenty. I entered the military. After eighteen months of military service I went home and started again with the tobacco, I continued with my work. (Had there been somebody else who was doing the work that time that you have not been there?) The village continued planting tobacco, only our family didn't. When I returned we let my brother marry, and I made up my mind and I decided that escaping was not the right thing to do.

It is unclear what exactly made Dengbêj Silêman decide to return home. It seems that the years he worked in cities had calmed him down and prepared him for a family life in his home village. He claimed that he decided 'that escaping was not the right thing to do'. We can imagine that as a young boy, he felt the need to leave his village and build a life in a place that felt more attractive. Perhaps he was looking for adventure, as well as a better income. He did not feel satisfied with the income he gained in Mersin, and for that reason went to Istanbul. Maybe Istanbul did not bring him the success he had hoped for either. Although pressure from his family may have been one reason to return home, at the same time he presented his decision to return as his own: 'I made up my mind and decided'. Dengbêj Silêman felt the time was ripe to return home and build a life in the village. He had gone through a time of moral thinking in which he tried out various options, first trying to assimilate to Turkish culture which he found more attractive, later turning back to Kurdish culture and traditions. After many years of traveling and working far from home, he settled down in the village. The years of exile had brought him experience, a good knowledge of Turkish, and many memories.

The life story of dengbêj Silêman shows us the relationship between the Kurdish region, and Turkish culture and language. Dengbêj Silêman was 'always

304 According to Hanifi Barış who also worked on his father's tobacco farm during his childhood, and who is from a nearby region, there were many such stories: 'it happened in many families'. He remembers several cases of young boys leaving for big cities, often without their parents' permission. Thus, Dengbêj Silêman's story is not an isolated case (personal communication with Hanifi Barış).

singing', even after he left his home village. He learned many Turkish songs while in Turkish regions, and had already learned songs from the radio during his childhood. Speaking Turkish had become natural to him because he was quite young when he left home and adapted quickly to the new environment. About his years in Mersin he says:

> At the time that I worked in lemon export I sang in Turkish. Our inspector was Hasan Arabaci. His daughter always came after me and she loved me very much, but I didn't notice because I was still young. She came always to me when I was singing. I was fifteen or sixteen.

With this story he demonstrates his singing qualities, not only in Kurdish but also in Turkish. His singing attracted even the daughter of the inspector, someone higher up on the social hierarchy. When I asked Dengbêj Silêman: 'You went to many places, to Mersin, to Istanbul. Did you also sing at that time?', he replied:

> I was always singing. I sang during work, I sang at every place, I sang songs. For military service I was in Thrace. I was also singing there and when I sang they were very pleased. (And you sang in Turkish at that time?) Yes I sang in Turkish. Once when we were sitting inside because of the rain our leader came to us and asked if there were people who could sing songs. There were some people who stood up. Then he asked, 'are there also who know Arabic songs?' I raised my arm. I said I could sing Arabic, but I sang in Kurdish. They applauded for me.

So, although he often sang in Turkish, he also continued singing in Kurdish, usually among friends. Many of his friends were Kurds, both in his working environment as well as in the military. 'All the officers spoke Turkish, but when we were alone among ourselves with a group of friends, we spoke Kurdish'. Outside of this group of friends, Turkish was the language of communication. The assimilation was neither entirely natural or chosen, as it may seem in the lemon story. It was tense, because Kurdish was something that had to be hidden. His story demonstrates that Arabic did not have the same negative connotation that Kurdish had. Arabic, a language associated with a much smaller minority in Turkey, was accepted,[305] whereas Kurdish definitely was not. From his story, dengbêj Silêman appears not to have had a problem singing in Turkish in itself. The problem began when he did not have the freedom to express himself in Kurdish, and when he had to hide his Kurdish identity outside of his home environment.

After seven or eight years he returned to his home village, married and started a family:

305 Arabic was spoken by a minority and therefore did not form a threat for Turkey as a nationalist nation.

> I stayed in the village and continued planting tobacco. We continued for many years because it was a good thing to do, for one house we had two or three tons of tobacco. (Where did you sell it?) At that time one kg of tobacco was four and a half US dollars. So there was a good income. Our situation was good, we didn't need help from others. After planting tobacco I also decided to marry, I arranged one [a wife] for myself. We married, our weddings over there are very festive, very nice. We did it with the saz, you talked about Osmanê Farqînî isn't it? He was the one who played saz and sang at our wedding.

In 1987, when he was twenty-three years old, he had saved enough money from the successful tobacco industry, he was able to marry and organize a wedding celebration. For his wedding the family invited Osmanê Farqînî, a singer who came from the same region (see Introduction). The fact that they invited this wedding singer says something about their concerns at that time. First, his wedding was in a new style, 'with the saz', a wedding band that became popular in the late 1970s. Dengbêj Silêman had heard many kinds of musical styles and as a young man in Mersin and Istanbul he must have felt attracted to popular styles in which the saz played a main role. Osmanê Farqînî was a popular singer in the region and well known as a politicized singer. Although many singers sang in Turkish because of the harsh political situation, Osmanê Farqînî had always performed in Kurdish. Inviting him to his wedding was a political statement and required courage. Dengbêj Silêman lived far from his home village for many years, knew Turkish well, and was successfully assimilated to Turkish culture including singing Turkish songs. Yet after his return to the village, his life was again predominantly lived in Kurdish.

The tobacco industry collapsed some years later,[306] and dengbêj Silêman's family income decreased considerably which made it difficult to make a living. Sadly, his wife passed away in 2007. He remarried in 2009, and continued to live in the village with his second wife and six children. He emphasized that he spoke only Kurdish at home with his children and relatives. He said that he mainly sings kilams, and that he does not often sing in Turkish anymore. After he returned to the village the Turkish songs he knew were not relevant: 'Where I come from they don't sing Turkish at weddings. Nobody listens to that, it's all Kurdish'. But he also reported that after he returned the dengbêj art was not popular for many years and almost forgotten, and was only revived due to the recent renewed interest.

306 "Tobacco production has declined drastically, with the number of cultivators dropping by 49 percent from 1999 to 2004. What accelerated the downward trend, according to Kayaalp (2009) was the introduction of contract farming under a new tobacco law in 2002" (Kotsila and Turhan 2010).

Dengbêj Silêman's story demonstrates how he used both the Kurdish and Turkish languages as resources during his life. When he was young, Turkish attracted him and made him curious to see new places, to try his luck at working and earning money, and at learning new musical styles. He learned many Turkish songs, and sang them with pleasure, but upon his return to his village the songs were of little use. During his military service, he had to hide his Kurdish identity, but took a chance to release this tension by pretending to sing in Arabic. Back in the village, Kurdish was the main language of communication and entertainment. During the time that Dengbêj Silêman spent in western Turkey he learned to speak Turkish and moved freely in Turkish society, but he also developed a renewed interest in Kurdish. This interest appears upon his return to the village, his choice of a politicized wedding singer, and his current activities as a dengbêj. Other dengbêjs also speak about an initial attraction to Turkishness that later became a rejection as they came to re-embrace their Kurdishness. Often, this occurred after experiences of discrimination. Forced assimilation frequently created resilience and a reconsideration of the rejected identity that was found to have positive aspects after all. The propaganda machine of the Turkish state quite effectively depicted Turkish as the superior and only correct language. Many Kurds were forced to assimilate into Turkish culture at some time in their lives, and thus were influenced by this narrative. However, the forced character of this assimilation, and the continuing discrimination, inspired many Kurds to reflect on their position and search for other moral choices. This is when people (re)considered and revalued social narratives in the Kurdish political field (chapter 4).

Life story 7: the prohibition on musical instruments

Figure 17. A Kurdish Alevi *dede* (Alevi religious leader) in a village in the Dersim (Tunceli) region playing his saz, the long-necked lute. 2008.

'For twenty years my art was wasted'.

This chapter began with stories told by dengbêjs who lived in predominantly Kurdish environments during most of their lives. Subsequently, we heard stories told by a dengbêj who was in touch with Turkish music, language and culture due to forced assimilation and migration to large cities. The story I present in this section is, again, somewhat different. Aşık[307] Abdullah grew up with the dengbêj art, but was more attracted to other kinds of music that he heard in the town where he went to school, and on the radio. He tried to realize his dreams of becoming a good saz-player, but was only able to do so in recent years. He is someone who stands between the Kurdish dengbêjs from the villages, and Kurdish musicians and political activists to whom I turn in the following chapter. The story of aşık Abdullah forms the link between these two chapters: he tried to position himself with musicians who aimed to modernize Kurdish music, but he did not manage to do so. He grew up with the dengbêj art, but wished to move beyond the confined life world of his childhood. Kurds who resemble aşık Abdullah straddle and need to negotiate distinct moralities and temporalities. His story is so significant because it shows the transformation of the Kurdish music scene that began in the late 1970s and eventually replaced the dengbêj art.

In the Introduction I addressed briefly the prohibition on musical instruments in the southeastern part of Turkish Kurdistan, that existed at least until the 1970s. The prohibition caused problems for a number of dengbêjs I interviewed. After 1960, tribal political structures and the power of landlords and religious leaders diclined, migration to the large cities of western Turkey became structural, and the Kurdish region became more firmly integrated into the Turkish Republic. The influence of cultural forms other than the existing Kurdish traditions increased, which led to conflicts between members of different generations. The older generation aimed to maintain existing social structures, as the new generation struggled for freedom and access to novel possibilities for making a living, new forms of communication, and styles of cultural expression. Migration, starting in the 1950s, and increased access to new forms of music, generated an interest among young people for musical styles that they did not grow up with. They felt attracted to Turkish music played by the aşıks to the accompaniment of the saz (the lute), or to the popular urban music that they heard on the radio.

The saz is an immensely popular musical instrument in Turkey that spread from its traditional use in music to new urban styles. Among Kurdish and Turkish

307 An Aşık is a performer of Turkish and/or Kurdish oral tradition and accompanies himself with the *saz*, the long-necked lute. See glossary and Introduction.

Alevi[308] communities, the saz is a widely used instrument that is used for worship and is viewed as a sacred instrument. Beginning in the 1960s, it also became popular among Kurdish musicians in non-Alevi Kurdish regions. However, the prohibition on musical instruments made it difficult for young musicians to learn to play the saz. The story of aşık Abdullah, whose father did not allow him to play the saz, shows how conflicts between generations could escalate and have a profound impact on someone's life. An aşık cannot perform without his instrument, which is a fundamental part of the performance. By taking away his saz, aşık Abdullah's father blocked him from any musical activity. His story illustrates the strict nature that the prohibition on musical instruments could assume.

Aşık Abdullah was born in 1955 in a small village close to the Iranian border, in the eastern region of Turkey called Serhat in Kurdish that includes Van, Muş, Dogubeyazit and the regions close to the Armenian and Iranian borders. I got to know him in the Dengbêj House in Van, where he came regularly to listen to the dengbêjs, and also to perform in his own style. Although he is not a dengbêj, aşık Abdullah is accepted as a member of the Dengbêj House. When I asked him to speak about his childhood he replied:

> My childhood went like this. You know the Kurds and our customs and traditions… they don't say: you need education, you need food and work. They say, as long as there are many men in your house, as long as you have many children, it doesn't matter. We are with ten brothers and three sisters. We grew up in the village.[309]

Thinking about his childhood days aroused memories of poverty and of social structures that he today regards as backwards and ignorant. Aşık Abdullah went straight to the heart of his views on Kurdish society by saying that they have customs and traditions that are problematic in his eyes. He felt that, instead of thinking about survival, people first thought about having a large family with many children. He felt that this happened in his family as well; they were a poor family with thirteen children. He grew up partly in the village and partly in a neighboring town, where he learned Turkish at a young age, and was the school's best student. Still, he experienced the tough aspects of village life in a region marked by poverty, cold winters and hot summers, and little means to protect one self.

308 Alevism is a religious movement in Turkey related to Sji'a Islam, originating from resistance groups fighting against Ottoman authority. They were often victims of repression and discrimination. There are both Turkish and Kurdish Alevis, and they have developed their own culture and music. Turkish and Kurdish Alevis often feel more connected to their Alevi identity than to their ethnic identity. See also Introduction.

309 All quotes in this section are taken from an interview with aşık Abdullah conducted in Van in 2008. The interview language was Kurdish.

> As children it took us until the evening to carry a pot for 5 km to fetch water. We were children. In the snow and in the rain. At that time the school had recently been built. We went to school, but we did not have a scarf, a hat, we did not have a notebook and pen. The people were poor, the Kurdish people were at that time very poor. There was nothing. We experienced all the sufferings of the world. At the time we ate barley bread, rye bread. When it was made in the oven you could smell it from a kilometer away and we said to ourselves: we need to go home and eat the barley bread.

Kurds often mention barley bread as a sign of profound poverty. The aroma of this bread was enough to make them return home and indicates the villager's miserable situation marked by suffering, a word he used often in this interview. The people in aşık Abdullah's village were farmers and cattle breeders. The winters were spent in the village, the summers in the *zozan*, or summer pastures. Since the village was close to the border, it was a natural place for a Turkish military station, which over the years caused continuous problems:

> In the evening at eight o'clock we went to the house of our uncle, or our sister, or our neighbors, but they [the soldiers] said it was forbidden. They said, where are you going? We said, brother, it is Turkey here, it is a republic, we are also citizens. We also enter military service. (…) The soldiers hit us, they took our livestock, they levied toll, we have experienced all kinds of trouble. I also experienced those things in my childhood. I saw it when I was growing up, I saw it from the neighbors, I grew up with oppression.

Due to the proximity of a gendarmerie station (*jandarma*),[310] the village was subject to more control than other villages. There were frequent checks and soldiers mistreated the villagers by punishing them without cause.[311] In villages where the military was continuously present, the soldiers' frequent bad behavior occasioned deep resentment among the villagers.[312] When aşık Abdullah was young, the summer pastures were declared a 'no go' zone, cutting the village off from much of their land and their most important source of income. Over time, people became increasingly

310 The gendarmerie is a military division that mainly works in the countryside and has more authorization than policemen who are working in the cities. "The Jandarma, formally under the control of the Turkish Minister of Interior, is a rural police force assigned to internal security and border control in Turkey's countryside. (..) Human Rights Watch found that most experts agree that the Jandarma are heavily implicated in human rights abuses." (Human Rights Watch Report "Weapons transfers and violations of the laws of war in Turkey," November 1995. Link to the report: http://www.hrw.org/reports/1995/Turkey.htm.)

311 "In both the 1995 Human Rights Watch Arms Project mission to Turkey as well as field research in 1994 by Human Rights Watch/Helsinki, witnesses consistently pointed to the Özel Tim (Special Teams), together with the police special forces, as the worst abusers of human rights. In most of the forced dislocations investigated in this report, the Turkish troops behaved with extreme contempt for the dignity and physical well-being of civilians." Same source as previous footnote.

312 We will see a similar case in Chapter 6 where I will discuss life in such a village in more detail.

engaged in seasonal labor, living part of the year in western Turkey and working primarily in construction. However, the low income they earned from construction was seen as yet another form of discrimination and exploitation:

> All our children work in construction. They go to places in the lowlands where they work in construction. Compared to other people in the world the Kurdish people see a lot of suffering. They are not done justice. (..) There are buildings of Turks that have been totally constructed by our children. They are workers, they go to work. But they do not get a lot of money (..) Many people from the villages around us migrated. Europe is very good, I would also like to live there. There is humanity over there, human rights. (..). The world is such a nice place, and it is for all people. But in Turkey unfortunately animals have no value, and Kurds also do not have much value. I speak the truth, Kurds do not have much value. We go to work in the lowlands and they call us by saying 'kıro[313]' [derogating]. Friend, I am also your brother. I pay my taxes, I entered the military service of the government, in many places in Turkey there is blood of our martyrs in the earth. Why do I not have many rights?

Seasonal labor in Turkey is generally underpaid, manual labor done by 'the poorest of the poor'.[314] It means always being an underdog, working for others and being bossed around by others, often Turks. Aşık Abdullah's account exposes the social problems caused by this system, and how this deepens the Turkish-Kurdish divide. It also shows the connection between two processes of marginalization that reinforce each other: poverty and ethnicity. Aşık Abdullah feels that Kurds are not treated equally and that human rights are not respected in Turkey. The fact that the Kurds fought side by side with the Turks in the war of independence is a Kurdish social narrative about Turkish-Kurdish relations, which claims that Kurds are equal citizens in Turkey due to their participation in military action. Kurds often refer to the brotherhood between Turks and Kurds, and they respect this, but believe it is not respected by the Turks. The unequal treatment of Kurds makes aşık Abdullah want to leave for Europe as many other Kurds have done. He refers to an important meta-narrative about human rights and equality, 'in Europe there is justice and rights. There is love, people are free'. This meta-narrative provides him with a place he can only dream of, but where his current problems would be resolved.

313 The turkified pronunciation of the Kurdish word *kuro*, boy.

314 'Abdullah Aysu, the spokesperson of the Confederation of Farmers Unions, called the seasonal farm laborers 'the poorest of the poor of the rural region'. He added: 'in normal circumstances they can live from their own land. But this is not realized because of the conflict. There are also those who are displaced. They cannot live from farming. In case they can generate some production, they are void of mechanisms to sell their products. What they go through is directly connected to the southeastern politics'. According to official figures they number about 200,000. But specialists of the farming sector estimate that this figure in reality nears the one million if one would add the high number of people who work unregistered. They are families of laborers who come with them, and children who work as well'. Yıldırım Türker 'Istenmeyen köleler' in: the leftist newspaper Radikal 31/07/2011, my translation.

Apart from seasonal labor, villagers generate income by working as village guards.[315] Nearby villagers migrated out of the region because of the pressure to become village guards, but the Kurds in aşık Abdullah's village choose this option. According to aşık Abdullah, they were 'cheated' by the government, and opted to be village guards out of ignorance - a choice they now regret.

As a teenager, aşık Abdullah became interested in Alevi music. He bought a newly released cassette by Abdullah Papur, an Alevi aşık, and felt deeply moved by his music. He was sixteen years old and in love, and listened for hours to this music:

> (When did you see the saz for the first time? And how did it attract your attention?) 'I had a neighbor and I was in love with her. I was sixteen years old and it was not in my hands, it was destiny. I loved the daughter of my neighbor, and she loved me as well. Love at that time was not like it is today. Like they say Kerem u Asli, Ferhat u Sirin, Xece u Siyabend, Mem u Zin, my love was like theirs. The love of that time, of that era, was enduring. That of today is only something casual, it is fake. It is from day to day, you fall in love, you leave today. But the love of that time was not like that. I was crying until the morning. My mother came to bring tea in the evening, she said, in what kind of state are you? I had bought new batteries for my cassettes player, I had a cassette from Abdullah Papur, it had just been released. His first cassette. I can tell you, the love of Mahsuni, of Nuri Sesiguzel, I was still a child, there were not musicians like today, the musicians of the past. (..) I was seventeen years old. I was crying until the morning. My mother said to me, in what kind of state are you? I said, I am in love. I have fallen in love with that girl. Tell my father that he has to ask for her hand. I told my father, and he said 'no. I don't want it'. I said, but I want it. It's not for him, I am the one who will marry. But I could not do anything. I was still a child of course. I had made a stick with strings bound to it, and I played on it. (...) At that time my voice was very beautiful. Whatever I did, they did not want to ask her hand for me. I left and I went to that nice *ozan* (singer) Mahsuni Şerif.

The manner of speaking about this experience is similar to how aşıks often explain how one becomes an aşık. An aşık needs to be called by God. Many aşıks tell how one night they had a dream in which God calls upon them to search for an unknown girl they clearly see in their dream.[316] The dream makes them fall in love with the girl, and sets a quest for her in motion. In the dream, God touches their lips with wine, and the next morning the aşık is able to play the saz and sing songs without any previous knowledge. This first experience with love arouses their wish to play the saz. An

315 'The Turkish armed forces effectively put into practice the institution of the village guard from 1987 onwards. Villages were expected to assign sufficient men to form a unit of village guards, which was armed, paid for and supervised by the local gendarmerie. The village guards were not only expected to take defensive positions against the PKK, but also to participate in operations (..). About 5,000 men joined this paramilitary force in its first year, and by 1995 this number had increased to 67,000' (Jongerden 2007: 65). The position of village guards is highly contested, as it is regarded as betrayal by many Kurds.

316 Hamelink 2005, Günay 1999.

aşık is thus connected both to divine and earthly love, which provides the aşık with the inspiration for his[317] music. Here aşık Abdullah connects his interest in music to being in love and demonstrates his involvement in Alevi music and Alevi social narratives. He compares his love to experiences of profound love of the heroes of Kurdish and Turkish tales, love stories that always end dramatically. When his father refused to ask for the hand of the girl he loved, aşık Abdullah decided to leave his village. He fled and went directly to the most famous aşık of his time: aşık Mahzuni Şerif.[318] He gives authority to his position in two ways; by mentioning his connection to this famous aşık, and by offering his unhappy love story as the source of his love for singing, Alevi culture, and the saz.

It is exceptional that aşık Abdullah felt attracted to the Alevi tradition. He grew up as a Sunni, in a region far from any Alevi influence. What is more, Alevis are often viewed as heretics by Sunnis in Turkey. He could have learned to play the saz in the style of Sunni aşıks who lived in his region. Instead he felt specifically moved by Alevi music and consciously positions himself within Alevi tradition:[319]

> I went to them, I got to know them, I got to know the culture and the singers of the Alevis. And I gave myself to that. I am from Serhat, but I can say to you that I am Alevi. Because they are so hospitable, they are so warm hearted, they are such nice people. Their culture is very different. They are deep people. For example Abdullah Papur, Mahzuni Şerif, when you told your sorrows they took their saz and they sang a solution. You could know that they were folk poets (*ozans*). Their voices affected me. (…) I was influenced by Alevi culture, I had abandoned the dengbêj art, and dedicated myself to that. When I was a child I also sang in dengbêj style. But it didn't suffice for me, I didn't love it enough. My love was for the saz, I could sing in peace, I could easily express myself via Alevi culture'.

Aşık Abdullah felt he was drifting away from his culture, which did not affect him in the same way as Alevi culture. Although he is from Serhat, he identifies much more with the Alevi. He explicitly says that he 'abandoned the dengbêj art' for Alevi music. Perhaps his love for Alevi music partly stemmed from the feeling that the culture in

317 There are also female aşıks, although less than male. I have no information on whether female aşıks have similar stories about their becoming an aşık.

318 Mahzuni Şerif, whose real name was Şerif Çırık, was born in 1943 in an Alevi family in the village Berçenek near Elbistan in Eastern Turkey. He became famous in the late 1960s. His poor background, and his commitment to fight against poverty and in favor of equality which he expressed in his songs, made him immensely popular among poor people from the countryside, and among the urban poor. (http://www.mahzuniserif.net/01.%28yasami%29.htm, consulted at September 21 2011).

319 During my MA-research I encountered a similar story. A Kurdish aşık from the region Kırşehir said he had always felt connected to Alevi music. He sang songs from famous Alevi aşıks and related to their public discourse. Because he lives near Hacıbektaş, the heart of Alevi tradition, his familiarity with Alevi music is more easily traceable than that of aşık Abdullah.

which he grew up was backwards, not something that he wanted to be a part of or could be proud of. Maybe he was attracted to Turkish and wanted to belong to a more 'modern' and 'progressive' environment like many young Kurds. He fled to western Turkey, learned songs from Alevi aşık, and learned to speak and sing in Turkish fluently. Most of the repertoire he learned from his masters is in Turkish because many of them did not know Kurdish. But when I asked him whether he sings in both languages today he replied:

> Actually at the time when they did not oppress us I sang both in Turkish and Kurdish. But when we came under oppression and they forced us, I started to hate it a bit. I totally broke with Turkish. I said, why do they not see us as people? I sang Turkish day and night, so when I sing one [song] in Kurdish take the effort to listen to that one. I watch Turkish television day and night, I watch their series, their films, that's how much of a human being I am. But they do not want to listen to even one of my songs. That is humanity. Because of that I said, I won't sing Turkish anymore. I don't sing it. I find it difficult. (..) The songs of Mahzuni Şerif and Abdullah Papur[320] are for me like Kurdish. Because they experienced much of suffering and they sang in Turkish.

The experience of being forbidden to sing in his language caused a feeling of resentment and resistance. Aşık Abdullah did not have a problem singing in Turkish, and maybe even wanted to do so until he was prohibited from singing in Kurdish. The effort he made to sing in Turkish and to integrate into Turkish society made him feel that he was treated unfairly when Turkish society did not allow him to sing in Kurdish. Singing in Turkish became connected to experiences of oppression; he finds it 'difficult' to sing in Turkish which causes an embodied experience of oppression. It is interesting that he said that the songs of his masters are, although in Turkish, 'like Kurdish, because they experienced a lot of suffering'. Singing Alevi Turkish songs therefore did not occasion the same embodied experience as singing other Turkish songs, because he felt connected to the aşıks through their common suffering. He felt that the experience of suffering united Kurds and other oppressed peoples:

> I fell in love with the saz, I expressed my own sorrows and the sorrows of the people of Serhat, and of all Kurds, actually the suffering of all people of the world, of all oppressed people. I know their sufferings and I sing about all of them. Whatever their religion, their language, their color, for me what is necessary is only humanity, brotherhood. Not: I am a Muslim, you are a Christian, and the other one is a Jew, the other one is a Sunni, Zaza[321], Alevi, no! Brother, it is enough that you are a human being.

320 Mahzuni Şerif and Abdullah Papur are two famous Alevi aşıks.

321 The Zaza are a Kurdish speaking minority and many adhere to Alevism. Their language Zazaki is related to Kurmanji, but the two languages are not mutually intelligible.

In this sentence aşık Abdullah draws on the Alevi social narrative about equality and more specifically a narrative used by aşıks. Alevi aşıks often speak in this way about their art: their task is to unite people and to voice the sorrows of oppressed people.[322] They often combine this goal with a communist or Marxist rhetoric, stemming from the 1960s and 70s when many aşıks gained a political position instead of a religious one.[323] They became active in leftist political movements and advocates of all oppressed people, of the 'workers' and the poor, in so doing defending themselves and other minorities in Turkey. For the Alevi aşık, no one should be excluded, everyone should be seen as equal. The aşıks became the voices of these movements by singing popular protest songs.[324] At that time, Kurdish Alevis and Sunnis formed an important segment of Turkish leftist political movements and they shared a common cause.[325] Although many Kurds subsequently separated from Turkish leftist politics,[326] because they did not see an adequate response to their situation, the connection between Kurds and Alevis was established. Aşık Abdullah could therefore easily adopt Alevi narratives for the situation of the Kurds, and presented himself similarly, as someone who articulated the 'sorrows of the people'.

In the short time that aşık Abdullah spent with Alevi aşıks, he became deeply influenced by their music, narratives, and attitudes. However, he could not continue on that path after his father brought him back to the village:

> My father came and said: I have organized a wedding for you. He had already given the money, everything was arranged, they had arranged some middlemen, he brought me back, he broke my instruments, he took me to the village, he married me under force, I could not continue my art. For twenty years, until my children had grown up, these twenty years were lost. That's how my life passed by. That love of my heart, the saz I was playing, and the words that I sang [were wasted], my life was wasted among my children. I'm married and have children, I was obliged to look after them, I worked for them, and I could not go anywhere. Until they were grown up.

322 Aydın 2004

323 Hamelink 2005. During the 1960s and 70s Alevi communities changed significantly. Due to migration to the big cities the social and religious structure as it was practiced in the villages fell apart.

324 Hamelink 2005

325 'A staggering range of leftist publications emerged – from radical populist and social democratic… through to ostensible Marxist, 'Marxist-Leninist, and even Maoist. Despite this proliferation… there was general agreement by many leftists on the perspective of struggling for a 'broad national front" (White 2000: 130).

326 In 1967 people gathered by thousands in the so-called 'Eastern Meetings' (Doğu Mitingleri) as a collective action of protest in seven cities and towns in eastern Turkey and in Ankara, organized by socialist Kurdish members of the TIP (Turkish Labor Party) and Kurdish nationalists of the DPTK (Democratic Party of Turkish Kurdistan) (Gündoğan 2005). The meetings are an example of collaboration between Kurdish and Turkish leftist protest, but also of protest directed at specific Kurdish problems 'instead of the class-based politics of the Turkish left which remained indifferent to the ethnic dimension of the Kurdish problem' (Gündoğan 2005: 2).

Because he had been deeply affected by Alevi music, and was on his way to becoming a professional musician, he experienced the return to his village, marrying, and becoming involved in family life as a great disappointment and waste. This was reinforced by the fact that he was forced into a marriage with a woman he did not love. He felt obstructed in carrying out what he wanted to do and trapped in the small village that he felt he had outgrown. Taking care of his family became a fate and burden rather than a positive experience. When I asked him why exactly his father broke his saz he replied:

> Our people of Serhat do not value arts. They say, what is a saz? It's not their fault. They have not been educated, in their time there was no school. They don't know anything about culture or about the world. They reason as if the whole world only consists of their own villages. (..) There are six billion people in the world. They are not aware of that fact, they only know the village, they say, the saz is shameful. They don't know anything about culture, they don't give it importance, because they don't know it. They didn't go to school, it's not their fault because they are not educated. Because of that it counts as very shameful among us. People thought that culture was shameful. They were very ignorant. Is it possible to be so ignorant.. My father said, my son, leave it behind. He prohibited it. He broke my saz. (..) My youth has seen a lot of suffering. (..) Our people (...) were deprived of many things, they suffered a lot. Because of that my saz playing was obstructed. (..) I was married under force, and after I was married I could not leave until my children were grown up. I could not enjoy a little bit of freedom.

Aşık Abdullah explains the prohibition of musical instruments as a result of a lack of education and knowledge. His relatives and co-villagers did not know better, he argues, and regarded the saz as shameful. Throughout the interview, it is clear that Aşık Abdullah regarded the lack of education, suffering and poverty as the main social aspects that prevented him from living the life he would have liked to live. By linking the prohibition of his father to larger societal structures, he managed to give meaning to his negative experiences and understand his fate. In his younger years aşık Abdullah did not have the means to resist his father's power, but now that his children have grown up he has more freedom to pursue his wishes, as we will see in chapter 4.

In the story of aşık Abdullah he often spoke of suffering. Suffering was caused by various inequalities that played a role in his life, and he regards it as an essential part of Kurdish life generally. These inequalities reinforced each other and marginalized him and others in his environment. He located the inequalities in a number of institutions: the customs and traditions of society, the physical presence of Turkish soldiers and state oppression, and the bosses of seasonal laborers. He saw the lack of education and knowledge - 'is it possible to be so ignorant' - as a

central problem of Kurdish society. Customs and traditions provided his father with the power to decide about crucial issues in his life. His father came to Ankara to bring him back to the village where a wedding had already been planned and arranged without his knowledge. His father destroyed aşık Abdullah's instruments and blocked his musical career, managing to silence him for many years. But instead of blaming only his father, he clearly situated his father's power in the customs and traditions of society, and indirectly in the lack of means provided by the government.

The government was negatively present in aşık Abdullah's life when he was young: 'I grew up with oppression'. The soldiers stationed near the village were a daily threat to the inhabitants who became the subjects of frequent raids and checkups, as well as physical violence. The government took away the Kurds' most important source of income by closing off access to their summer pastures. This forced them to look for other sources of income, which they found in seasonal labor, along with a low income and ill-treatment. Another way to gain income was by becoming a village guard. The government forced the Kurds living at the countryside into an impossible choice: be a village guard or leave the village.

Aşık Abdullah wanted to escape from this difficult existence and sought a better life in western Turkey. He wanted to escape from his father, from a society he regarded as backwards, and from discrimination, oppression, and poverty. He wanted to distance himself from his own society and sought a connection to another tradition that felt promising to him, and with which he could identify – that of the Alevis. He felt connected to the Alevi musical style and to their concerns with inequality, poverty and suffering. He learned to sing in Turkish, a language that triggers in him various emotions. He began to 'hate' singing or listening Turkish music, but when listening to his masters who share the experience of suffering and are therefore 'like Kurdish', the same language does not provoke a negative emotion. In chapter 4 I return to his story and show how he situates his music in the context of the Kurdish political movement in the hope of finding a new audience.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have analyzed the life stories of six dengbêjs, and another of an aşık. Their stories show that being a dengbêj can have different personal meanings, and that opportunities to perform, or reasons to keep silent, also varied from person to person. This variation is related to the specific characteristics, experiences and interests of each individual. As a woman, dengbêj Bêrîvan had

a very different relationship with the dengbêj art than male dengbêjs. Instead of feeling obstructed by the state in her singing career, she felt oppressed by patriarchal structures of society. Dengbêj Hamîd on the other hand, who grew up in a dengbêj family that had been supported by landlords, valued the former moral framework of landlords and their support. This made him evaluate the current framework, which sees dengbêjs as volunteers for the Kurdish cause, as inadequate. Dengbêj Cîhan is proud of his Kurdish identity and his knowledge of Kurdish history and kilams. He does not regard himself as Armenian, but speaks freely of the stories and memories he has of his Armenian father and the genocide. His story relates the destructive manner in which Armenian identity was erased from Turkey, but the story is also telling for what it reveals of how his Armenian roots continue to speak through his memories. Dengbêj Silêman felt attracted to Turkish life and music, but returned to his village and a predominantly Kurdish social and political life after his experiences as a migrant laborer. Aşık Abdullah's experiences shed light on a development many dengbêjs were affected by as well: the rise of new Kurdish musical styles, and the replacement of the importance of the dengbêjs. He tried to break away from village life and from the dengbêj art, which he associated with stagnation and backwardness, and hoped to have a professional music career. However, through the intervention of his father he did not manage to follow his ambitions until quite recently.

The changes that took place over the last decades were experienced differently by individual dengbêjs, and had diverse consequences in their personal lives. Conflict, migration, resettlement programs and persecution often deeply changed the lives of the people I spoke with. In the aftermath of the coup, harsh oppression caused many dengbêjs to abandon their art and to keep silent for many years. Some of them moved to the big cities due to the conflict situation which deprived them of their homes, lands, jobs, and often also of relatives and friends who lost their lives or were in prison. Most people living in eastern Turkey had these experiences, or were affected by them (see chapter 5 for an in-depth analysis). Some, like dengbêj Ali, were in prison themselves and traumatized by torture and suffering. Most dengbêjs rarely talked about these experiences, but a few, like dengbêj Isa, found meaning in the experiences for their current situation by presenting them as hardship they had defeated; they overcame oppression and suffering and managed to protect their art through difficult times.

Such reworking of experience is central to the narrative approach. By making use of this approach we discovered how each individual in this chapter interwove personal and social narratives into a meaningful life story. Many dengbêjs,

as storytellers by profession, told long narratives during their interview in which they valued and evaluated their life experiences. In their stories, they referred to social narratives circulating that mattered to them today or in the past. For example, religious narratives about how a religious student was not expected to dance or sing kilams made it necessary for dengbêj Seyda to think about his own position in this matter, and to rework that narrative into a form acceptable to himself. Narratives about the value of the dengbêjs as guardians of Kurdish heritage play an important role in the current revitalization of the dengbêj art by the Kurdish political movement. The dengbêjs integrated such narratives in their self-presentation, but not uncritically; they adopted elements that they found useful to their story, and reconfigured or left out other elements (see also chapter 4). Narratives about Kurdish poverty, suffering, oppression and hardship were used by various dengbêjs, and strongly by aşık Abdullah. He brought the narratives of Alevi aşık suffering together with those of the Kurdish movement. Since both Alevites and Kurds have suffered hardship and oppression, aşık Abdullah felt they understood each other and spoke the same language, whether Kurdish or Turkish.

The concept of morality helped situate moments when individual dengbêjs struggled with moral questions, often due to the deep transformations of the larger society around them, and to see how they dealt with these questions. Periods of change in a society can function as indicators of how people make new choices in new circumstances. For most dengbêjs, the current situation enabled them to view events that happened earlier in their lives in a new light. They went through periods in which they reevaluated their moral views. Dengbêj Bêrîvan expressed how she felt disadvantaged and oppressed because of being a woman. Later she came to know other views that elevated instead of devalued her womanhood, and that helped her to turn this into an advantage in the context of her political activities. She thus reworked her personal narrative. Dengbêj Cîhan's story demonstrated that he worked to find a solution for accommodating his Armenian roots. He accepted his identity as a Muslim with Christian roots, and strongly defended his viewpoint that he was a Kurd and a Muslim, not a *Fileh*. Dengbêj Seyda initially concealed that he was a dengbêj, assuming this would not be accepted in the religious environment of a madrasa student. But the encouragement of his teacher enabled him to reevaluate his moral framework and to create a life in which his dengbêj and *feqî* qualities could be combined. Dengbêj Silêman was curious about Turkish life and adventure in his young days, but reevaluated this after he was outside of his home region for many years. He decided to return to his village and eventually became active as a Kurdish dengbêj, in which capacity he rarely draws on his Turkish experience.

The connecting thread of the stories I presented in this chapter was the individual experience of the dengbêjs in regard to silence, oppression, and the inability to perform. The stories revealed that for each performer their songs had functioned in different ways as their home. In dengbêj Isa's story we saw that the oppression of Kurdish language and culture meant that the songs became defined more strongly as a *Kurdish* home. For dengbêj Bêrîvan, who loved to sing and listen to music but was often obstructed from doing so, her new position as a female dengbêj provided her with a place where she could feel at home as a woman. Dengbêj Cîhan sought to find a home in Kurdish society, for which he felt much in need because of his Armenian background and personal past. For him, learning to become a dengbêj meant at the same time that he felt more Kurdish and more accepted in a society that often continued to see him as an outsider.

This chapter, that formed part II of the dissertation, gave insight in how the dengbêj art formed a home for individual dengbêjs during their lives, how it meant 'life' and 'a bracelet' for each of them in distinct ways, and how they had almost lost that home during the long period of silence and oppression. After many years of collective silence these dengbêjs put great effort in rebuilding a Sung Home that fit new expectations, but would also align with their past experiences. By investigating seven personal stories in-depth, I believe we gained an in-depth perspective on the variety of experiences of people who often had little access to technology and larger power structures, but were and are part of these systems. This will shed a different light on part III that presents new processes of Kurdish cultural activism in Turkey. Rather than understanding the different viewpoints of political activists and dengbêjs as an indicator for how 'progressive' or 'modern' they are, we can explain these differences as a result of inhabiting different temporal and moral places.

The following chapter focuses on the endeavors of political activists who have strong moral views on what a modern Kurdish society should look like, and look at the dengbêj art from that perspective. With the personal stories of dengbêjs in mind, we will better understand how the latter must at times feel disconnected from these perspectives, that narrow down the dengbêj art to folklore in the service of Kurdish nationalism. This narrow perspective leaves out much of the variety of the colorful life of the dengbêjs and their art as it emerged in this and the previous chapters. However, it did a different important work: it successfully aimed at contesting the dominant presence of Turkishness in public life, and at opening up a new and visible space for Kurdishness. This was a groundbreaking development in Turkey of the 2000s, after the rejection and ignorance of the existence of Kurdish language and culture for almost a century.

Part III

Conflict and Activism

Figure 18. Dengbêj Şah Îsmaîlê Milanî performing at the Ehmedê Xanî Festival. Doğubeyazıt 2007.

Chapter 4

‘Decorate your heart
with the voice of the dengbêjs’
Cultural activism.

Introduction

> I greet you all with respect and value, warm greetings from [my home town]. I was almost leaving for my trip when something happened; comrade Zana Güneş called me and invited me for a phone attendance of his [TV] program. I said: 'I am sorry, I am leaving for Bazîd'. He said, 'convey my greetings especially to the people of Bazîd'. So he sends you his greetings and respect. But at the beginning of the 2007 festival, in honor of the immortal teacher Ehmedê Xanî, I congratulate all the people of Kurdistan! Good luck to all of you! For all our intellectuals and politicians! Good luck! Progress for us (*pêşketî ji me re*)! Live long! (..) With the permission of my friends, shall I sing a song? (dengbêj Ahmed, tr.from Kurdish, Doğubeyazıt 2007).

This is how in the summer of 2007 dengbêj Ahmed introduced himself at the Ehmedê Xanî Festival[327] in Doğubeyazit (Bazîd in Kurdish), a town on the far eastern border of the country.[328] He was the first of seven dengbêjs to perform in the dengbêj afternoon program, which took place in the Ishak Pasha palace, a huge palace built of sand-colored stone with a very large courtyard. Together with two dengbêjs performing in the program I had arrived half an hour earlier at the palace, during the performance of a folkdance group. The palace was filled with about three hundred people, men, women and children. They were either sitting on chairs that were arranged in a concert set-up, or walking around, chatting and watching the performance. The old palace added to the folkloric atmosphere, it created the image that the dances and the dengbêjs were remnants of an age old culture. Against one of the outside walls a stage had been set up for the dengbêjs, and although it was quite large it almost vanished in the huge courtyard. Behind the stage hung a large banner in the yellow, green and red colors of the Kurdish flag, reading in Turkish: "Dengbêj Divan, in the remembrance of Karapetê Xaço."[329] It was about 4 pm when the host opened the dengbêj program, and although it was summer, a cold breeze blew through the castle that made people freeze in the late afternoon.

327 The Ehmedê Xanî festival, also called the Doğubayazıt Culture, Art and Tourism Festival, is a yearly returning event attracting many visitors, music groups, intellectuals and politicians from all over Turkey. It was organized for the first time in 2002 by the municipality of Doğubayazıt 'both to show the potential of the region for tourism, as well as to help people living in the region realize the importance of tourism' (Gültekin 2008: 44). Being new phenomena, these kinds of festivals have become very popular in eastern Turkey over the last years, and often take a political turn. The state also organized events about Ehmedê Xanî in the same town (Yüksel 2011: footnote 127), in order to provide a counter voice against Kurdish events.

328 This section is based on my field notes and video recordings.

329 Karapetê Xaço (1898-2005) is a famous dengbêj born from Armenian parents. His relatives were massacred during the genocide. He was adopted by a Kurdish lord and learned the dengbêj art. He later migrated to Syria, and subsequently to Armenia, and sang at radio Yerevan. His performances at the radio made him especially famous (Kevirbirî 2005).

I present the festival at the beginning of this chapter as an illustration of how the dengbêjs reemerged in public life after 2000; namely often as a project of cultural activism. The dengbêj program at the festival was one of the sites where Kurdishness was performed and made public, and was presented as a competing project alongside other nationalist projects within Turkey. I argue that the place and program of the festival, the use of certain symbols, and the speeches by dengbêj Ahmed and the MC of the program, are all examples of a new mobilization of Kurdishness in public life. The festival will guide us through the chapter and help us to understand the position of dengbêjs in the current contested field of culture making in Turkey.

The Ishak Pasha palace was built in 1685 as the second administrative center of the Ottoman Empire after the Topkapı palace in Istanbul. It was built in an innovative architectural style, ahead of its time, famous for its beauty, and had an important strategic function in Ottoman times.[330] In 2007, when the festival took place, the city administration was in the hands of the pro-Kurdish DTP[331] (Democratic Society Party). This enabled the DTP to mobilize the historical palace as one of the festival sites. Monuments, statues, and other (quasi-) historic spaces are important sites to contest political authority. As Çınar notes, an "essential component of nationalist projects that seek to institute a new sense of nationhood (..) is the construction of national space" (Çınar 2005: 99). She remarks how successive Turkish governments have been especially creative in this strategy. Atatürk statues mark the central squares of every town and city; big white letters saying "how happy is the one who says 'I am Turk'" adorn mountains and hills; the secular Beyoğlu business district replaced the Ottoman Islamic Sultanahmet neighborhood as Istanbul's city center.

Counter movements, the most important ones during the history of the Turkish Republic being these of Kurds and Islamists, tried to reclaim strategic spaces for their alternative nationalist projects. Using the most outstanding building of the area, that was a symbol of the Ottoman reign, as a site to assert Kurdishness, can be regarded as a strategy used by the city administration to reclaim space for their political project. Through its historical meaning, the palace as a site of culture making reinforced the significance of the use of Kurdish symbols in public life, turning them into strong political statements. Speaking Kurdish on public occasions,

330 "The best preserved Islamic palace in Eastern Turkey is that of Ishak Pasha. Located amid the hauntingly alluring and desolate landscape of Doğubeyazit, it is one of the most outlandish buildings in Turkey. Built on a dominant rocky spur and visible from afar, the fortified palace was strategically positioned on the border of Turkey and Iran" (Sagona 2006: 213).

331 The *Demokratik Toplum Partisi* was the pro-Kurdish successor of the DEHAP (Democratic Folk Party), and was followed up by the BDP (Peace and Democracy Party) after its closure in 2009.

Figure 19. The Ishak Pasha Palace in Doğubeyazıt. 2007.

Figure 20. The dengbêj performance at the festival, with the banner. 2007.

and using Kurdish as a language for publication, were unlawful acts until 2001, and although this law was amended in 2001, in practice people could still face severe repercussions for such activities.[332] Therefore, hearing Kurdish spoken in public places like the festival offered a collective experience of resisting the government and anti-Kurdish movements in Turkey, and of resisting the erasure of Kurdishness. The banner behind the dengbêj stage also conveyed a political message. "Dengbêj Divan, in the remembrance of Karapetê Xaço" was written in Turkish, but with the forbidden letter X,[333] and it bore the colors of the Kurdish flag. Still writing the banner in Turkish directed it at a Turkish audience, displaying Kurdishness for everyone in the country to see. These visual signs thus gave the dengbêj program a politicized character, even before it began.

Dengbêj Ahmed is a famous dengbêj who has produced many cassettes and CDs, sometimes gives concerts, and has published a book with part of his songs. Unlike many other dengbêjs, he was familiar with a concert situation and used to presenting himself in front of a large public. In several ways he placed the festival in a political framework through his opening remarks, making it clear that he supported the Kurdish cause. First, dengbêj Ahmed referred to Ehmedê Xanî as the immortal teacher. Ehmedê Xanî (1651-1707) was a poet, philosopher and mullah who wrote in Kurdish as only a few in his time, and he is the author of the famous Kurdish epic Mem û Zîn that is often presented as a national epic. He is regarded by many as an early Kurdish nationalist. His tomb is located just outside of the palace, and the festival was named for him. Subsequently, dengbêj Ahmed congratulated 'all the people of Kurdistan'. Referring to the highly charged word Kurdistan in a public speech immediately clarifies one's position. Another way in which he politicized his performance was by mentioning his conversation on the phone with Zana Güneş.

332 Until 1982 there was no overt prohibition of the use of Kurdish, but a politics of "invisibilisation": the practice of exclusion without overt mention is characteristic of official usage throughout the Republic's history" (Haig 2003: 10). But in the 1982 constitution overt prohibitions were implemented: "article 42, which is still in force today, provides that "no language other than Turkish shall be taught as a mother tongue to Turkish citizens at any institutions of training or education". Crucially, Article 28/2 specified at the time, "no publications or broadcasts may be made in any language prohibited by law" (amended in 2001). The legally prohibited languages in question were "languages other than those which are the primary official languages of states recognised by the Turkish State" (Law 2932) meaning in particular Kurdish (Zeydanlıoğlu 2012: 110).

333 The 1928 law "*Türk harflerinin kabul ve tatbiki hakkında kanun*" (law on the acceptation and implementation of Turkish letters) imposed the use of the Latin alphabet for Turkish writing for all publications. The law established which letters belong to the Turkish alphabet, and ruled out the use of other alphabets. This meant that the letters Q, W, and X that are used in Kurdish, but not in Turkish, are not permitted. The Turkish Penal Code, article 222 states: "Those who violate the 'Law of Turkish letters and their usage', passed in 1928, shall be tried and sentenced to an imprisonment between 6 months and 2 years." The law is under discussion and might be amended in the time to come.

The latter was a member of *Koma Berxwedan*, one of the first popular political music groups. The group performed from France and Germany in the 1980s and was openly supportive of the PKK. Currently Güneş is the producer and host of a television program on dengbêjs on Roj TV, the first Kurdish satellite channel among Kurds in and from Turkey. By referring to his conversation with Zana Güneş, dengbêj Ahmed gave both a political meaning to his performance, as well as authority, since Güneş is widely regarded as one of the experts on the dengbêj art.

Following his opening remarks dengbêj Ahmed began singing about a woman named Xêlya. His voice filled the palace, singing passionately the kilam's opening exclamation *haylo li me haylo li me were haylo were haylo*, meaning "woe to us, woe to us." Xêlya is engaged to the father of Beced, the brother of Mihemed. However, a conflict with the government causes her fiancé to go into exile, and he is unable to return. Although people around her advise her to marry someone else, she decides to wait for him, even if he will not return. When the song ended dengbêj Ahmed concluded:

> Our songs are indeed very long but I will not do injustice to my friends and give them [the microphone] as well. With your permission I would like to say something. Many times people have asked me: what actually is the dengbêj dîwan? It is my conviction that everything, my life, my language, my culture, I learned everything from the dengbêj nights (şevbêrka dengbêjan), from the dengbêj dîwan. Our writings, our tapes, our television, our radio, everything started with the dengbêj nights. We have learned everything under God (*her tiştê xwedê*) from there. (..) Yes thank you for coming and thank you for your attention, I am very pleased to be here (dengbêj Ahmed, translated from Kurdish, Doğubeyazıt 2007).

With these lines dengbêj Ahmed underscored the importance of the dengbêj art. He switched from his individual perspective, that he learned everything from the dengbêj dîwan, to a collective perspective, from 'my life' to 'our writings': we the Kurds have learned everything, our language and culture, from the dengbêjs. He regarded the dengbêjs as symbols of Kurdishness, and the dengbêj art as the cradle of Kurdish civilization. Civilization (writing, tape, radio, television) started with the dengbêjs. They are traces from a far, almost lost history, the last remnants of a culture that many Kurds have only recently rediscovered. This opening performance of the dengbêj program thus conveyed two messages: the dengbêj art stands at the beginning of Kurdish culture and language, and it supports the Kurdish struggle. The master of ceremonies added weight to this meaning in his reply to dengbêj Ahmed, which he read aloud from a paper:

> Yes we thank dengbêj Ahmed very much, on behalf of the municipality and the people of Bazîd. Indeed, as he claims, the dengbêj art is of great historical value in that it protected and transmitted (ji bo parastina û pêşxistina) Kurdish language, culture, folklore and customs. For that reason the dengbêj art must be protected in every city of the Kurds. The dengbêj art gives voice to the suffering, the oppression, the sorrows, and the dreams and visions of Kurdish society. It gives voice to their heroic deeds, and also to their defeats. The dengbêj art is in its essence just like our country, without borders, it is like a river that flows, like a brook that rushes. For that reason we hope that every Kurd will decorate his heart with the voice of the dengbêjs (*ji ber vê çend em hêvîdarin ku her Kurdek dilê xwe, bi dengê dengbêjan bixemilîne*) (program's MC, from Kurdish, Doğubeyazıt 2007).

At the time, the MC worked for the Kurdish Institute[334] in Van. He was a political activist full of ideas about ways to mobilize and unify the Kurdish people.[335] He had been arrested and imprisoned several times, and was in prison again the following year when I returned.[336] With his words the MC listed several functions of the dengbêjs: 1) to protect and transmit Kurdish language and culture, 2) to give voice to suffering, oppression, sorrows, 3) to offer dreams and visions of Kurdish society, and 4) to give voice to their heroic deeds and defeats. In this way he presented the dengbêjs as representatives of Kurdish society as a whole, and also as the guardians of Kurdish society because they safeguarded its language and culture. In the dengbêj art, so he claimed, all aspects of Kurdish society come together; all suffering, all dreams; i.e. the suffering and dreams of the Kurds as a collectivity. He compared the dengbêj art directly to 'our country', a country without borders, by which he can only have meant Kurdistan. But he used this comparison in a positive sense: the dengbêj art, like 'our country', is without borders, it is a river that flows freely in all directions. The MC also mentioned hopes for the future: protection of the dengbêj 'in all cities of the Kurds', and every Kurd needs to 'decorate his heart with the voice of the dengbêjs.' These are references to the unity the Kurds are supposed to be or become. Decorating one's heart with the voice of the dengbêjs is presented like a duty that will turn one into a better Kurd.

The introduction by dengbêj Ahmed and the MC; the palace as the site selected for the program; and the visual and auditory presence of the banner and the language, are all ways of placing the dengbêjs within a particular politicized framework that links the dengbêj art to broad and collective political claims.

334 The Kurdish institutes can be found in most big cities in Turkey and organize activities to promote and spread Kurdish language by giving classes and publishing books and magazines.

335 We had a long conversation in an outside café in Van in 2007, where the MC passionately explained his visions of a democracy built from the grassroots in which local people are actively involved. Our conversation was followed by a policeman in plain-clothes sitting at a nearby table.

336 People I spoke with who were active in the organization of similar festivals or working at Kurdish cultural centers often had a personal history of arrests, court cases, imprisonment and torture.

This chapter focuses on the reemergence of the dengbêjs in public life after two decades of collective silence. Starting in 1994 abroad, and at the beginning of the 2000s within Turkey,[337] the dengbêjs were invited and encouraged by political activists to perform in cultural centers, Dengbêj Houses, on radio and television programs, and at festivals. Such sites became important spaces where Kurdishness was performed (audio)visually, and where the dominant presence of Turkish nationalism was contested. I focus on two aspects of this display of activism through the dengbêjs. I pay attention to the sites where the dengbêjs performed, and argue that these sites became places to perform Kurdishness, even more than the dengbêj art in itself. I also investigate the position of various political activists, mainly through the narratives they told about the dengbêjs and Kurdish culture, and see the reemergence of the dengbêjs as predominantly guided by them, and not by the dengbêjs themselves. I situate these narratives in the context of their lives and recent history, and in the context of the development of Kurdish nationalist thought and cultural activism.

In part I and II of this dissertation we looked predominantly at local processes. I investigated the songs and performances of dengbêjs at specific places, and presented the life stories of a number of dengbêjs in order to examine the variety of experience of individual dengbêjs in situations of conflict and social transformation. Although this was based on multi-sited fieldwork carried out in many different places, I grounded these stories in the specific local context in which the songs were sung, in which performances took place, and in which life stories were told. However, these local stories cannot be understood well when they are separated from the larger processes in which they are embedded. Kurdish media, music production, and sites of cultural production such as festivals, cultural centers and the Dengbêj Houses, increasingly shape what it means to be a dengbêj today. People do not only identify with their immediate local environment, but also connect to such larger processes. Anthropology "found media a rich site for research on cultural practices and circulation that took seriously the multiple levels of identification – regional, national, and transnational – within which societies and cultures produce subjects" (Ginsburg e.a. 2002: 5).

We already saw glimpses of these larger processes surfacing in the previous chapters, but have not yet investigated them in-depth. Therefore, in part III I pay

337 Med TV started broadcasting in 1995 and had a program on the dengbêj art from the start. Although the program already then offered a new way of looking at the dengbêjs as a form of Kurdish heritage, the active reemergence of the dengbêjs in this format began a bit later within Turkey. Until the late 1990s the Kurdish region was in an extreme state of emergency that did not allow for such things to happen yet.

attention to the way local stories are connected to larger processes of politics, conflict, and culture making. The sites of cultural production that I investigate in chapter 4 are instances of how the dengbêj art obtained different meanings and became part of cultural activism. In this chapter I mainly focus on political activists who recreate the dengbêj art in a way they see fit in relation to the political objectives they fight for. Chapter 5 investigates how a dengbêj family was affected by continuing conflict and escape, and how and why they became involved in cultural activism.

Following Ginsburg (2002) I use the term cultural activism to highlight the manner in which minority groups began to use different media and other cultural practices as a means to react to their representation in national media. Faye Ginsburg has called this 'cultural activism' "to underscore the sense of both political agency and cultural intervention that people bring to these efforts, part of a spectrum of practices of self-conscious mediation and mobilization of culture that took particular shape beginning in the late twentieth century" (Ginsburg e.a. 2002: 8). It focuses on the specific characteristics of culture making by minority groups as distinguished from that of culture making by the nation-state. Nation-states aim to unite people under a single national identity by focusing on the nation's majority culture and language. As a consequence, collective histories of minorities are often "erased in the national narratives of the dominant culture and in danger of being forgotten within local worlds as well" (Ginsburg 2002: 40). Cultural activism counters such erasure by creating new places of cultural performance where the minority's stories can be retold. Of course, the process of retelling stories "often requires reshaping them, not only within new aesthetic structures but also in negotiation with the political economy of state-controlled as well as commercial media" (Ginsburg 2002: 40). In chapter 5 we will see how this process works for a family that attended Kurdish television after their escape to Germany. There I will use Ginsburg concept of 'resignifying cultural memory.'

The politicization of cultural expression in Turkey has various dimensions. First, folk songs and folk music have been used for political goals since the foundation of the Turkish republic. Folk songs were collected, translated, and transformed into a unified Turkish national music.[338] At Turkish music conservatories, students were educated in western music, and Ottoman music was abandoned. This turned music and oral tradition in Turkey into a political project: either into a Turkish nationalist one, or, when concerned with languages other than Turkish, into an

338 "Ismail Beşikçi points out that Kurdish folklore is often presented both within and outside Turkey as Turkish folklore. There are a large number of Kurdish songs that have been Turkified and played on state radio and television in Turkey" (Yüksel 2011: 89).

oppositional project. Second, in the case of the Kurds, strict prohibitions meant that *any* Kurdish expression became a political statement in itself, even when not political in content, especially after 1980.[339] This meant that people who wanted to stay outside of political trouble would automatically not occupy themselves with the Kurdish cultural realm, and for anyone interested in Kurdish cultural expression it would be difficult for others not to see this interest in a political light. Third, since the 2000s the politicization of cultural expression obtained a new dimension. Cultural activism became an important way for the Kurdish movement to expand its political influence.

Following the capture of Öcalan in 1999, the Kurdish movement focused increasingly on non-violent and legal opposition to the Turkish state. Earlier in that year, the pro-Kurdish political party HADEP won for the first time a majority of the southeastern municipalities. In 2002 the AKP (Justice and Development Party) came to power, and introduced "a range of political reforms (..) which allowed a more peaceful atmosphere to prevail in the Kurdish-inhabitated provinces of Turkey's southeast" (Casier e.a. 2011 :104). These developments resulted in the increasing success of the Kurdish movement in establishing a cultural activism that visibly contested the state project, this time not through violence but in public life.

Çınar (2005) shows how in Turkey everyday practices such as the use of certain public places, festivals, and clothing became sites for opening up a space for alternative viewpoints in public life, and became the field of politics. In her book *Modernity, Islam, and Secularism in Turkey*, she focuses on the contestation of the secular nationalist modernization project of the Turkish state by Islamists. Çınar's analysis shows that the state's authority never went unchallenged: "throughout the twentieth century the official secular Turkish nationalism was continually challenged by (..) rival projects, including Islamist, Kurdish, and Marxist movements that produced alternative projects of modernity and nationalism" (2005: 18). Although the state tried to ban alternative viewpoints, those alternatives did not lose their voice entirely, and both Kurdish and Islamist movements gained a new visibility after the mid-

339 Zeydanlıoğlu writes about the aftermath of the 1980 coup: "Officials ordered Kurdish folk songs to be sung only in Turkish to avoid 'separatism' and public speaking or printing in Kurdish was banned and thousands of newspapers, magazines and books on Kurds were confiscated and burnt" (2012: 109). A recent example of the continuing sensitivity of Kurdish singing in public: in 2011 the famous Kurdish singer Aynur Doğan was booed and pelted with rubbish because of singing a Kurdish song during an international concert with performances in various foreign languages. "Aynur Doğan'a çirkin protesto" published at www.cnnturk.com, July 15, 2011.

1980s (Özkırımlı 2000,[340] Yavuz 1998). The Kurdish movement offered "an alternative, Kurdified set of national symbols to those of the Turkish state" (Watts 2006: 132). And the coming to office of the AK-party in 2002 even entirely changed Turkey's political landscape.

This contestation or negotiation takes place not only through 'verbal exchanges' but also through 'performative acts'. To give one example: while the Kemalists interfered in bodily appearance by forbidding the fez and prescribing the hat, and by encouraging other forms of 'modern' clothing, in the 1990s the Islamists turned the headscarf into a powerful political symbol that made Islamism visible in public life. Çınar broadens the idea of the public sphere, understanding it "as any sort of verbal, bodily, or spatial articulation, performance, or display, any location can become a place where the public comes into being" (Çınar 2005: 37). She sees modernity as "a series of interventions in the public sphere (..) related to bodies, places, and time" (2005: 25), in which "everyday life is the field of politics and power" (2005: 27).

In a similar way, the Kurdish movement contests the Turkish state's project in public life[341] by claiming certain spaces and practices for the performance of particular forms of Kurdishness. The institutions and people promoting the dengbêjs form a loose network that produces similar narratives and symbols about the meaning of the dengbêj art (Scalbert Yücel 2009). This is related to the way the Kurdish political movement functions (see Introduction). Watts also shows how since the 1990s pro-Kurdish actors have gained increasing access to government offices and have provided "new access to domestic and international audiences, and new symbolic resources" (2006: 126). She calls these actors 'activists in office'. They operate within the framework of legal institutions, and have gained access to these posts through Turkey's state bureaucracy, but were and are at the same time "contested nearly every step of the way by various branches of the Turkish state" (Watts 2006: 126). The current visibility and institutionalizaton of the dengbêj art has in part been prepared and facilitated by such activists in office, as Scalbert Yücel (2009) argues in her insightful article on the dengbêj project in Diyarbakır. I elaborate

340 "Indeed, questions of 'nation' and 'national identity' have been particularly predominant in Turkish political discourse in the last two decades – under the impact of the Kurdish and pan-Islamist movements" (Özkırımlı 2000: 789).

341 I refrain from using the term 'public sphere' as it was introduced by Habermas to refer to the political stage of the nation, and not to that of counter movements. Others have replied to Habermas by using the term counter publics (Warner 2002). However, in order to emphasize the fluidity of the public, in which public and counter public cannot be artificially separated, I use the general term public life, which leaves room for a more open-ended and negotiable concept of the state and the public.

on her arguments by adding the television and music production as sites of analysis. Cultural activism by activists in office was supported by actors not involved in the state bureaucracy, but who nevertheless did important work in making Kurdishness more visible for a large public. Kurdish television moved the Kurdish question to an international level, and music producers managed to find an entrance into the Turkish music market for Kurdish productions. These various sites, and the political activists[342] operating there, reinforced each other in representing the dengbêj art as Kurdish 'heritage'.

The dengbêjs and their art became part of these processes in multiple ways. For example, they are presented as Kurdish cultural heritage and under that definition they counter the official state discourse of the homogeneity of Turkish heritage, and of the denial of a Kurdish culture. At the festival, the historical importance of the palace where the dengbêj program took place, turned it into a strong symbol that reinvented the palace as a Kurdish space, where Kurdish language and culture could be articulated and openly displayed. In order to understand how the dengbêjs became part of such a negotiation in public life, along with the festival I discuss three other sites where these processes took place, and which I regard as central for the current position of the dengbêjs: the television, the Dengbêj Houses, and the music market.[343] For each site I also highlight someone who was central in promoting and supporting the dengbêjs at the time of my research, and I investigate their particular role. I suggest that political activists have been decisive in facilitating the return of the voice of the dengbêjs to public life, and therefore have also in many ways been decisive for their current positions. Their stories reveal various elements of the politicization of folklore in Turkey and abroad, and the development of Kurdish nationalist thought. The dominant ideology that speaks from their stories, and from the way they approach the dengbêj and their art, is the idea of the need for a change in mentality, an awakening towards nationalism and modernity, and the need for developing the new Kurdish personality (see Introduction and chapter 2). Political activists often trace such a development either in their own lives, or in the lives of others, which they tell as a story of previous ignorance and subsequent awareness of the Kurdish cause.

342 I decided to use the term 'political activists' for all people who were active in promoting Kurdish culture on an institutional level. This can be people involved in the state bureaucracy, but also those outside of that sphere, such as television and music producers. What these people had in common was that all of them had (or were forced to have) certain political aims with their activities, and almost in all cases faced certain repercussions that directly followed from these activities. These repercussions were either persecution within Turkey, or living in exile abroad.

343 Scalbert Yücel (2009) also pointed to television, Dengbêj Houses and festivals as central places for the performance of the dengbêj art today.

4.1 Kurdish television in Europe

An important platform through which the dengbêj art was promoted for the first time on a large scale was MED-TV, the Kurdish television channel founded in 1994 by Kurds from Turkey, and first broadcast in May 1995, with its base in London and Brussels. The launch of MED-TV would become of enormous influence in informing and organizing Kurds in Turkey and Europe, and it played an important and crucial role in promoting Kurdish nationalism among Kurds worldwide. The channel is immensely popular in Eastern Turkey, and already in 1996 was watched by a large majority of Turkey's Kurds,[344] in spite of the risk of persecution. The presence of a Kurdish television channel broadcasting in Kurdish and focusing specifically on the Kurdish viewer has arguably been one of the most important means of displaying Kurdishness as a distinct identity with its own characteristics. Whereas for long, in Turkey and elsewhere, broadcast television was primarily mobilized for nation-building, satellite television and internet "have opened up other kinds of spaces that cross cultural and geopolitical borders more easily" and have "facilitated new social configurations" (Ginsburg e.a. 2002: 2).

The television offers a platform in which the Kurds are addressed as a nation with a distinct territory, language, culture, and flag. It attempts to unite Kurds into one visible and audible imagined community, through image capitalism rather than through print capitalism. It gave a new dimension to the Turkish-Kurdish conflict, as the channel addressed the Kurds as a nation and thus became a powerful tool for the creation of an imagined national community, enabling people over great distances without physical contact to feel they belong together (Anderson 1991). "The ever presence of the Kurdish national flag and anthem [visible on the screen] means that MED-TV has the power to treat the Kurds not as audiences but as citizens of a Kurdish state" (Hassanpour 1998: 59). As such it became a major site for contesting the authority of the Turkish state. Although the founder Tabak declared himself to be independent of the PKK, the station is often regarded as having ties with the PKK and of broadcasting PKK propaganda (Romano 2002). Turkey tried by all means to close down the station in Europe, labeling it as a mouthpiece of terrorism. Due to Turkish pressure on European governments the station was banned and renamed several

344 "A Med-TV director estimated the number of viewers at about fifteen million ('MED-TV emet a nouveau', Le Figaro, aout 21 1996). According to Turkish government sources, about 90% of people watch the channel in the southeast. It is watched even by 'village guards' hired by the government to fight PKK; also, the refugees of the war who relocate 'in shanties in western towns invest in satellite dishes to see it' ('Turkey Said to be Considering Allowing Kurdish Broadcasts', Turkish Daily News, 2 June 1996)" (Hassanpour 1998: Footnote 47).

times, was called Roj TV at the time of my research, and is currently called Stêrk TV.[345] However, through such interventions the Turkish government unwittingly contributed to growing European awareness of the Kurdish question.

From the start of its broadcast, MED-TV had one program on dengbêjs, *Şevbêrka Dengbêja* (the dengbêjs nights),[346] that was initiated, made and presented by a host I will call Zana Güneş. In 2006 my research began with him, after I heard he was a central figure in revitalizing the dengbêj art. I interviewed[347] him at the television office of Roj TV in Germany, where at the time he worked making weekly programs about the dengbêjs. Together we watched some of the programs he made, and he appeared to be very enthusiastic about the dengbêjs, their different regional styles, and their individual characteristics. In 2007 his office moved to the Roj TV office in Brussels, and he continued making his programs from there. Güneş worked more than fulltime for the television, and his whole life stood in the light of cultural activism. He had lived in various European countries and travelled often to give concerts. Although he had not been able to enter Turkey for two decades, he had contact with many dengbêjs in Turkey and spoke with them on the phone regularly. They often mentioned his name and indicated that his television program had been of tremendous importance in bringing them into the spotlights. He is thus well-known and highly valued among them, as we saw at the start of this chapter, when dengbêj Ahmed referred to him in his speech at the Festival. Since 1995 Güneş' program was broadcast once a week and hosted dengbêjs and other traditional singers and musicians from a variety of backgrounds. Because of the limited possibilities for dengbêjs living in Turkey to attend the program, most dengbêjs attending were living in Europe.

When I visited Roj TV in 2006 and 2007, the politicized atmosphere was obvious. Everyone I spoke with seemed to be imbued with the political importance of their work, and the zeal to convey the message of Kurdish rights to everyone they

345 MED-TV was closed down by the British and followed up by Medya-TV in 1999. Medya-TV was closed down in 2004 by the French and replaced by Roj-TV, which was again replaced by Stêrk TV in 2012, and operates from Denmark. It has ongoing problems with the authorities and satellite broadcast is currently (2013) prohibited, which means they can only broadcast online. In Denmark it was threatened with closure because of alleged PKK-ties in August 2010 and in January 2012 (source: Institut Kurde de Paris). Although the broadcast is based in the aforementioned countries, the production is done in Belgium and, until 2007, also in Germany.

346 *Şevbêrk* means literally 'to pass the evening'. It is used for long nights when people gather together, possibly with guests, and tell each other stories, sing songs, or listen to a dengbêj.

347 In 2006 I recorded a 4 hour interview with Zana Güneş, and we worked together for 2 days at his workplace at the television. I also visited Roj TV in Brussels, although he was not present at that moment. We met regularly over the years, either in person or on the phone, and I attended both a festival performance as well as a wedding performance of him in Germany.

met. This atmosphere gave every activity a strong ideological and moral tone, as we also saw at the festival. Likewise, the program *Şevbêrk* was not just a program for entertainment or documentation, but had specific goals. Zana Güneş expressed this as follows:

> Against this [government oppression] we created for ourselves, for example among the people we created a battle front against exploitation, in order to fight this. With this program I enlighten the people, as far as my knowledge goes, and I also preserve the songs. Currently the Turkish government derives its mentality from a fascist mentality, from a racist mentality, from a mentality that denies the Kurds. But in the future, if this system will change and if the Turkish people live like brothers with the Kurdish people, then they will value these songs.[348] (..) Turkish music is influenced by many other forms of music. But Kurdish music is special in that dengbêj music is not influenced by anything.[349]

He felt that his program could educate 'the people,' and aimed at preserving Kurdish tradition. He regarded Kurdish music as purer than Turkish music and believes that one day the Turks will value this as well. His television program was thus also meant as an advertisement for the outside (Turkish) world, not yet interested in Kurdish music, but maybe in the future. This interest should stem from the fact that Kurdish music 'is not influenced by anything', i.e. pure, unspoiled, and carrying traces of a distant past. Subsequently he expressed his wish to protect Kurdish identity and culture:

> This people was continuously in revolt. Why? Because they revolted against injustice. And millions of our people went abroad. That is why this became a big massacre. For example our dengbêjs were also scattered. (..) All these people migrated as a result of wrong state politics. That's why in this system, we say to ourselves: we are the servants of this people, we are their revolutionaries, we will protect and serve this people and push them forward and in that way we will see that also our identity, and our high culture, is protected, and let's make other people accept us. This is our battle.[350]

348 "Bunlara karşı biz kendimizi örneğin mesela halk içerisinde kendimizi bir.., bu sömürücülüğe karşı mücadele etmek için bir mücadele cephesi oluşturduk. Mesela bu programı yaparken hem halkı aydınlatıyorum, bildiğim kadariyla. O türküleri koruyorum. Şimdi Türk devleti zihniyeti faşistdan bir zihniyettir, ırkçı bir zihniyettir, kürtleri inkâr eden bir zihniyet. Ama ileride bu sistem değişir Türk halkı da, Kürt halkıyla beraber, kardeşe yaşarsa, o zaman o türkülere önem verir".

349 All quotes in this section are taken from the interview with Zana Güneş in 2007 in Germany. The interview language was Turkish.

350 "Bu halk sürekli isyan etmiş. Niye? Çünkü haksızlığa karşı isyan etmiş. Ve bizim milyonlarca insanımız dışarıya çıkmış. Onun için bu bir kültürel büyük katliam oluyor. Mesela dengbêjlerimiz de dağılmış. (..) Bunlar hepsi, bu devletin yanlış politikası yüzünden göç ettiler. Bundan dolayı bizim bu sistemimizde, kendimize diyoruz biz bu halkın hizmetçileriyiz, bu halkın devrimcileriyiz. Biz bu halkın kültürünü koruyacağız bu halkı hizmet edeceğiz ve bu halkı ilerleteceğiz böyle diğer halklar içerisinde bizim de bir kimliğimiz bizim bir yüksel kültürümüz korunsun, ve diğer halklar kabul ettireceğiz. Bu bizim mücadelemiz bu."

Güneş felt that a culture and identity needs to be protected and placed on the map in order to make the Kurds visible, and to make other people accept them. This also shows his moral framing of the aims of the show, in which he regarded the average Kurd as in need of enlightenment and education: they are not aware of their culture and identity now, and therefore they need to be made aware of it. In short, he saw the dengbêj TV program as a means to protect and archive Kurdish culture; to educate the Kurds and others about their culture; and to create a visible Kurdish identity.

There is a variety of programs on Roj TV, ranging from news and discussions to music, from productions about Kurdish culture and history to dubbed movies and documentaries. Although music receives a lot of attention, dengbêjs generally do not perform in music programs. The latter are attended by singers and groups with the accompaniment of instruments. As at the festival, the dengbêjs are generally not incorporated into the Kurdish music scene, but classified as 'folklore'. This results into a very different set-up of the program and the stage. In music programs the singer or group performs on a large concert stage. All the attention is on the performers and instruments, and the programs have a professional character. The singers are presented as professionals who can compete with world celebrities. Conversely, *Şevbêrk* is not focused on celebrating the individual singer, but on celebrating Kurdish culture. One can argue that the dengbêjs participating in the program are ambassadors of Kurdish culture rather than musicians in their own right. They are there to represent and propagate Kurdish culture, as I demonstrate in the following.

The opening of the program shows old or seemingly old video images that are seen as typical for Kurdistan: riders on horseback, wo/men in traditional dress, people dancing, people sitting in a traditional-looking dîwan, landscapes with mountains and plains, some pictures of old houses and cities, people at work in the fields, people sitting in a nomad tent, and an image of dengbêj Karapetê Xaco. The background music consists of old dengbêj recordings. Both visuals and music give the impression of a time long ago, a distant Kurdish past, as it is imagined by many Kurds today. The title *Şevbêrk* is displayed, accompanied by the image of a beautiful sunset in the mountains. The image then switches to the studio. It displays the message saying that the sun has set, and the evening can begin.

Figure 21. From right to left dengbêj Gulê, Şermîn, Fehîma, and Qedriya who performed in the şevbêrk program, and who live in Germany. Source: Roj TV archive.

Figure 22. Picture of the shooting of *Şevbêrka Dengbêja*, 2006. Source: Roj TV archive.

In each episode of *Şevbêrk*, attention is given to a specific dengbêj style, mostly linked to a single Kurdish region. A group of eight to twelve or sometimes more singers are present, often men and women together. The décor consists of handmade Kurdish carpets, and other traditional handicrafts, if possible from the same region. The dengbêjs sit in a horseshoe shaped form, Zana Güneş in the middle, all dressed in traditional Kurdish dress. Often, an elderly woman and one or two children are present, who do not participate actively in the program. Their attendance enhances the feeling of sitting in a Kurdish family home, in their apparently 'natural' state. Some women are knitting or occupied with some other handicraft. In the centre of the stage, women prepare food from the region concerned. During the program they are seen kneading dough, cutting vegetables, or preparing meat. Sometimes there are also animals (sheep, birds) that walk on the stage. Güneş showed me a program where birds were present. The birds were walking around the stage, sometimes making sounds and chirping. At a certain point in the program Güneş started singing a song himself, and while he was singing, one of the birds joined in. This caused excitement among the people present on stage, who were listening to the song. Güneş used this as an example of how close the Kurdish traditional singing style is to nature, as even birds recognize the sounds and join in. *Şevbêrk* is designed to emphasize the natural and authentic character of Kurdish culture.

Its similarity to Turkish folklore programs,[351] which at that time were set up in the same way (the décor, the handicrafts, cooking and animals), turned *Şevbêrk* into a deliberate attempt to contest the Turkish state project of presenting all music and culture within its borders as Turkish national heritage. The program is meant to reveal the wealth of a culture in Turkey that was for long hidden from the public. It is now visible and present, displayed on television, broadcast worldwide, and placed alongside official 'Turkish' culture, in an attempt to counter a century long politics of "invisibilisation" (Haig 2003). At the same time, it presents Kurdish culture not only as one of the cultures of Turkey, but as a culture hailing from a different nation which has all the necessary ingredients: its own language, singing styles, clothing, songs, culinary traditions, and animals and nature specific to the Kurdish region. The program, and arguably the entire television channel, attempts to display the abundance of elements that are regarded as typical and specific to Kurdistan.

351 A current example is the TRT show Aşıklar Meclisi. However, in recent years there was also a different development: rather than focusing on 'the traditional' folklore programs intended to show the ongoing popularity of folk music, and therefore invited young people to their programs, dressed in jeans and other modern dress. Personal communication with Evrem Tilki, 2013.

What is the role of the dengbêjs in the program, and how do they value it? The dengbêjs in Turkey could only participate in the program through the phone, and some of them said they had done so. Of course participation by phone does not offer a good alternative for live participation in the program, especially in the case of singing. Since I only spoke with a few people who attended the Roj TV program live (see chapter 5), I cannot say much about the experiences of the participating dengbêjs. I can only combine some information (general remarks the dengbêjs made about TV performances, and about their participation in a program on the local television channel Gün TV in Diyarbakır), and give in that way an impression of how they felt about their art being displayed on television.

Although many dengbêjs felt positive about the new opportunities, they also expressed feelings of disappointment that were linked to a general feeling of lack of recognition, as I discussed in chapters 2 and 3. They often said that TV performances turned the dengbêj art into something else, and that it could not be seen as a replacement of the real dengbêj art. As we have seen in the first chapters, dengbêjs used to sing for relatively small audiences where there was much opportunity to interact with the public. A performance was made in cooperation with the audience and was directed towards the people present. Such a setting is still available today in the Dengbêj Houses. By contrast, singing on television, or on stage as at the Festival, is a very different way of performing and has several consequences for the performances. Because the songs are quite long they are often not sung in their entirety. Instead, the dengbêjs sing several stanzas only and do not have time to comment on the story. They sing with a microphone, separated from the audience with whom they cannot interact as would be usual in a performance (see chapter 2 for an example). Although theoretically the other dengbêjs present on stage could be interacted with, there is not much space in the program for such improvised exchange.

Also, the dengbêjs need to share a relatively short performance time with five or more singers. This is quite a number considering that dengbêjs used to sing only with one or two other singers together, or alone. Not only time, also attention needs to be shared with many others. In their younger days they used to take care of a full performance of at least several hours in which it was crucial to hold the attention of the audience as long as possible. Long stories were alternated with kilams, and long kilams were introduced by stories. Performing on television, or at occasions like the festival, the audience has quite a different expectation of the dengbêjs. The attention is much less focused on the content of the performance than on the symbolic meaning of hearing and seeing dengbêjs performing. The dengbêjs, placed

in a village décor, may remind people of their grandparents and maybe of the village they came from. For people who grew up in urban settings or live abroad nowadays, the dengbêjs may evoke a rediscovered Kurdish identity.[352] In small performance settings the content of the songs is of central importance, whereas the context of the television is not very suitable for that. The archaic language and frequently used metaphors require a good knowledge of the Kurdish language, which many people do not have. The voice and the presence, the visuality, of the dengbêjs are more central than the content of the songs.

In the interviews the dengbêjs often complained that people did not genuinely value their performances, and that on television they (or others whom they saw in the program) were not able to finish their songs. This indicates a difference between the expectations of the public and the aspirations of the dengbêjs. Also, the connection with the audiences was, in the case of the television, not made by the dengbêjs but by others, who arranged the program for them. The dengbêjs were not used to performing on stage or television and therefore seemed to feel more comfortable when others arranged it for them; they were invited by others who choose the setting of the program, the number of dengbêjs present; they were asked to sing certain kilams which means that the choice of kilams was not their own; the organizers introduced them with speeches that established their own agenda; and they did not have time to give an elaborate performance because they shared the stage with many others. This makes clear the shift in position from former days to today. From being respected, knowledgeable elders who were in control of the entire performance, they lost that control to others. The educational aims of the program transformed them into folkloric subjects, and into ambassadors for Kurdish culture, a position they occupy with ambivalent feelings.

Notwithstanding the criticism of the dengbêjs, I heard from many people how moved and encouraged they felt when they saw dengbêjs perform on television for the first time. It seems they did not mind in what manner the dengbêjs were exactly presented, or in what form. For them the issue of importance was the fact that they could see their dengbêjs, as a display of Kurdishness, on television, and that they could hear Kurdish sung and spoken in a public space. A friend of mine said about Med-TV in general: "Med-TV was truly magical when it first appeared, I remember watching it as if aliens had arrived." Another friend said how the whole village gathered around the television to watch *Şevbêrk*, and that they would listen to the whole program from beginning to end. He said how amazed they were to

352 I discussed the perception of the dengbêjs by their current audiences with the host of a television program on dengbêjs made by Gün TV in Diyarbakır.

hear *their* kilams on television. Also some others specifically referred to *Şevbêrk* when talking about this. These first experiences of seeing Kurdish dengbêjs on television had been particularly impressive and emotional for them.

4.2 Zana Güneş: TV activism

Until now we have looked at the emergence of Kurdish television, its meaning for the display of Kurdishness, and the particularities of the program on dengbêjs. This might give the impression that the political presentation of the dengbêjs in *Şevbêrka Dengbêja* by its host Zana Güneş was beyond discussion. However, as I described in the Introduction and in chapter 3, for long the dengbêjs were not paid attention to and were almost forgotten. The process of the previous ambivalent attitude towards the dengbêjs and Kurdish traditions by the Kurdish movement, and its recent embrace, is well illustrated by the life story of Zana Güneş. His story is relevant for three reasons: first because he is a central figure in deciding how the dengbêjs were mobilized for cultural activism, second because it shows how he framed his life story as an evolvement from ignorance towards awakening for Kurdish nationalism, and third because it illustrates the transformation of the Kurdish music scene in which the dengbêjs occasionally took part, but at other times lost ground.

Zana Güneş was born in 1955 in a village near the town Iğdır, close to the Armenian border, and grew up in a predominantly Kurdish environment. He had an early interest in music and dance, and sometimes visited the Aşık-Café in Kars, where folk poets competed with each other in singing competitions in Turkish (Reinhard 1986). Turkish music was more appealing to Güneş than Kurdish music, and learning to play the saz was a first entry into the world of Turkish music. However, playing a musical instrument was not accepted by his father and his environment generally, and it was difficult to pursue his ambition. In part as a reaction to the resistance he met he started working in Izmir, 1500 km away, where he took saz lessons. From that time on he stayed regularly in the big cities for seasonal work, and returned to the village in summer when there was a lot of work.

In the cities, singing competitions were organized by owners of *gazinos* (music halls) who were looking for young talented singers to sing in their halls. As several of the dengbêjs of my research attended such competitions, we can assume that they were open to a broad public, that education was not necessary, and that it attracted young talent from all over Turkey. Zana Güneş tells us that:

> In 1979 there was a singing competition for three levels: folk music, pop music, and arabesk. I attended the level of folk music, of course in Turkish, because at that time Kurdish was forbidden. It was in Istanbul, I was there at the time. Owners of *gazino*'s came to listen to the singers, and they liked my voice very much. I won first place, and they invited me to sing in their *gazino*.

It was a matter of course that singing in another language than Turkish was not accepted at the competition.

Güneş told me that around the same time he came into contact with Kurdish student activists in Istanbul who were trying to raise awareness of the oppression of Kurds in Turkey, and who actively recruited members. Contact with these activists gave him new ideas and pushed him in new directions.

> At the universities Kurdishness (*Kürtlük*) developed among students, and this influenced me (*bizi de etkiliyordu*). And of course I grew up with these things, my family, our mothers and fathers, they told us about the things that the state did to us, that the state killed our people. And then you start to think: why is the state doing this? You also live in this state. And then you understand that the state has wrong, racist, chauvinist politics (*bir bakıyorsun ki devletin yanlış ırkçı şovenist bir politikası var*). And then you yourself also start to resist it.

The arguments he heard from the students connected with his own experiences and the stories of his relatives about the oppression by the government. He began to see his previous experiences, and the social narratives he had learned during his childhood, in a new light. When looking back on this period of his life Güneş described his deliberate choice in favor of his Kurdish identity and against government assimilation.

> I could have sung in Turkish music halls, and I could have been rich. My voice was also nice. But look, I did not do this. I have chosen this road to stand for the Kurdish culture, a thousand years old culture, and to claim my own values and my identity (*ben halkımın binlerce yıllık o kültürünü, o insanlık yönü, ve kendi değerlerime sahip çıkmak için, kendi kimliğime sahip çıkmak için, o yolu seçtim*). I said: I am a Kurd and I want to sing in my own language. (..) That is why I will claim my own identity, that's why I became political and headed towards kurdishness, Kurdistan, and these things. That's how I got a place in this front. And we said to ourselves: 'if we are a people, our people are exploited, everything is taken away from them, then we have to protect our people, and we have to stand up for them.'

Güneş presents the various options as that of either singing in Turkish and becoming rich and famous, or singing in Kurdish and 'becoming political'. He linked his choice to the public narrative of Kurdish activists, speaking about colonization, the people, and the need to protect them. As we will also see in other stories in this chapter, political activists present their lives as being marked by a period of moral questioning

in which their eyes were opened to the ideology of the Kurdish movement. By presenting previous life experiences as marked by ignorance and unawareness, they frame the encounter with the new ideology as a shift towards a different way of thought and behavior as a result of being trained in the new Kurdish personality. The prior ignorance and subsequent awakening transformed them into people who successfully passed through the stages of learning that the PKK expects from them. Güneş underlines this later in the interview:

> I told you about those *gazino* owners. They came to see whose voice was nice and invited them to their *gazino*. But my culture is different. I don't have a *gazino* culture. I have a different culture and I wanted to work in a different branch. If there would have been something else, if there would have been radio or television for example, I might have done it. But it's good that it didn't work out. Sometimes I think about this, if it had worked out than maybe I would have been like other Kurdish musicians who do not feel as Kurds and who take the culture of their own people and change it. For example we have such musicians who are Kurdish and Turkify their own Kurdish culture.[353] (..) Something like that could also have happened to me. That's why I am very glad that I never got into that.

In this part he adds an element of coincidence to his involvement with Kurdish activism; he could have been like other Kurdish musicians who neglected their Kurdishness and chose to sing in Turkish. The prohibitions on the use of Kurdish language, and the strong assimilationist policies of the government, meant that it would have been much easier for someone like him, who longed for a career in music, to leave Kurdish music behind. But he did not feel connected to the *gazino* culture, and since there were no other options, he dropped out and began to sing more and more in Kurdish. His dislike of the *gazino* culture and the lack of other possibilities along with his new connections with Kurdish activists made that Zana Güneş did not continue a career in Turkish music. His contacts with other activists made him feel increasingly connected to the PKK ideology that demands self-analysis and criticism from its members. By understanding his life story in this manner, he connects to other Kurds of whom he and other political activists hope and expect that they will follow their choice.

After the singing contest Zana Güneş stayed in Turkey for seven more years. He became more politicized during these years, singing songs made by controversial Kurdish singers, and he attended discussion groups of several political organizations active at that time. Students organized such groups to recruit members for their

353 "Bazen diyorum, belki olsaydı biz de şimdi hani o diğerleri, Kürt sanatçılar nasıl kendileri Kürt olarak hissetmiyorlar ve kendi halkın kültürünü götürüp değiştiriyorlar. Mesela bizim öyle Kürt kendisi Kürt olup da öyle Kürt kültürünü Türkleştiren sanatçılar var."

organization and to educate them in the principles of these movements. "The number of Kurdish university students was growing. They had gatherings for discussions and I learned many things from them. Of course I also knew something but not as much as them. They were more scientific." He felt most sympathy for the PKK, "because the others did nothing, but the PKK did most in actuality". Zana Güneş's increasing involvement in politics made his situation more difficult and led him in the end to leave the country. "I wanted to sing in Kurdish and it was forbidden, so I had to leave. It was not because of economy, it was because of politics." The first time he went abroad was in 1986 when he did construction work in Libya. From that year on he started to compose more songs himself, and he began to use his artistic name. He returned to Turkey in 1988 and left for France that same year, after which his political activities made a return to Turkey impossible.

From the late 1970s on, Kurds began to experiment with new forms of music. They had hardly any opportunity to perform in front of a public in Turkey, but did develop abroad, especially in Germany and France. Copies of cassettes of these groups in exile were circulated illegally among Kurds in Turkey and became immensely popular. A new Kurdish music scene developed abroad among political refugees in Europe. In France Güneş joined the music group '*Koma Berxwedan*' (lit. Resistance Band), that was associated with the PKK. They released their first album in 1983. The group composed songs about resistance, the political awakening of the people, guerrillas and martyrs.

The style of most of these songs is very different from the dengbêj style. They are rhythmic songs in wedding style, accompanied by instruments. The most prominent instrument is the saz, and other instruments used are keyboard, drum, small oboe, and various kinds of flutes. The refrain is often sung by a group, and the other stanzas by one singer. They are short songs to simple melodies that are easy to remember and can be sung by anyone. They are composed to make people aware of the Kurdish question and PKK ideology, and to generate enthusiasm for these. The popularized style of bands like *Koma Berxwedan* was new at the time and attracted much attention, and also set an example for other Kurdish music groups (see the section on the music market in this chapter for some notes on the *koms*). They disseminated political ideas among the people, raised awareness of Kurdish identity, and popularized Kurdish as a language of communication (Sarıtaş 2010).

Until 1990 Güneş identified not with dengbêjs but with musicians who wanted to modernize Kurdish music and who wanted to 'serve' Kurdish society with their modernizing ideas and political ideology. He did not have a particular interest in the dengbêj art; like aşık Abdullah (chapter 3) he had moved away from

traditional Kurdish culture. Although he had been influenced by the dengbêjs, "I grew up among dengbêjs", Güneş was more attracted to other music styles. To my question if he wanted to become a dengbêj when he was a child, he replied: "No. I preferred [instrumental] music and dance, I liked that very much. It was only later that this idea took shape. When I was sixteen I bought myself a saz." He was more attracted to music and dance, to wedding songs and wedding music, to the saz and Turkish music, than to the more heavy, serious dengbêj style, like many other young people of his time. The owner of music company *Aslan* (pseudonym) in Istanbul told me:

> We preferred other music. When music became more accessible, as young people we did not much listen to the dengbêjs. As boys and children, we appreciated more colorful and authentic music. I listened more to that. I also listened to dengbêjs, because there was nothing else. But when other music arrived, I liked it more and I did not listen anymore to the dengbêjs (Murat Aslan, interview in Kurdish, Istanbul 2008).

Especially in the countryside, where hardly any variety or choice was available, people continued listening to and enjoying dengbêj performances. But as soon as other musical styles were available, especially young people were receptive. Depending on the region and the family, traditional Kurdish music continued to be performed occasionally at weddings. But wedding bands performing in Turkish (and Kurdish, but this was marginal) became much more popular at this time, with the result that the role of the dengbêjs was largely pushed aside.

Interest in the dengbêj art returned in the early 1990s when the Kurdish movement began to validate Kurdish traditions as Kurdish 'heritage' that was regarded as demonstrating the 'authenticity' of the Kurds as a people. From that time on dengbêj kilams started to be collected and recorded, even though this was still a minor development. Zana Güneş was one of the first to recognize the importance of the dengbêjs as Kurdish heritage, and its potential, and he became more and more preoccupied with the dengbêj art. This route had already been prepared by *Hunerkom* (lit. Art group), of which *Koma Berxwedan* was a part, a cultural organization founded in 1983 to stimulate and disseminate Kurdish music in Europe. They organized concerts, festivals and cultural activities. Members of the organization were sent to different parts of Europe to teach folklore, especially folk dances. Güneş: "because of these activities our people could save their culture and our children did not forget their folklore, their music, and their dances." Because of the activities of *Hunerkom*, Güneş became more interested in traditional culture and music.

> In 1990 I sang *Bedirxan*, this was a song Efwê Esed sang on radio Yerevan. That was the first time I sang such a song. And after that I started to see how rich the dengbêj culture is. And I thought, if I don't sing it, if others don't sing it, then who is going to sing it? So although it was not my own style, I turned to it and started to sing [in the dengbêj style] (*kendi tarzım olmadığı halde ben bu sefer yöneldim ben de söylemeye başladım*). (..) [In my childhood] I only listened to dengbêjs, I only sang wedding songs. With the dengbêj style I only started much later.

Zana Güneş clearly indicates how he became interested in the dengbêj art only late in his musical career. The fact that someone like him, who was involved in cultural activism for many years, realized the importance of the dengbêj art only in the 1990s, shows that traditional music had not been high on the agenda of the political activists. From then on he became active in placing the dengbêj art at the center of attention, both by making television programs about them, and by singing in their style. The way he spoke of his increasing interest for the dengbêjs shows that his involvement with the dengbêjs was in the first instance driven by his activism. He had followed the path of Kurdish activism, that of modernizing the Kurdish people and leaving behind the allegedly problematic parts of Kurdish identity. But when in the 1990s he felt there was a different way of looking at tradition, placing it in a primarily political framework, he became as motivated with respect to this new objective as he had been for his previous musical activities.

Güneş' life story is that of a musician developing his position within the strongly politicized climate of Turkey in the 1970s and 80s. Initially attracted by Turkish music and the modernizing project of the Turkish state, he changed his views after coming into contact with Kurdish student activists. The moral appeal of the PKK turned him into a fervent activist aiming to reach as many Kurds as possible with the ideological message of the PKK. This also made him frame his life story as an evolvement out of ignorance into an awareness of the struggle for the Kurdish nation. The modernizing trend of the PKK had been a strong motivation for Güneş' activities, and had at first excluded the dengbêjs from his interests. His life story demonstrates that the dengbêj art only became relevant for him when he acquired a new way of looking at Kurdish tradition, and that his interest in the dengbêj art arose in the first place from cultural activism. His individual views carry a broader social meaning, as he was the person who for many years became an important face and voice that presented the dengbêjs on Kurdish television.

Şevbêrka Dengbêja became the first and most important vehicle for bringing the dengbêjs back into public life. The program created a space for dengbêjs among the many other programs Roj TV had to offer. Much earlier, almost ten years, than possible within Turkey's borders, the television contested the Turkish state project

by offering an alternative Kurdish imaginary world. Within this form of cultural activism, the dengbêjs became folkloric subjects who stood in for the 'natural,' 'authentic' history of the Kurdish nation. This paved the way for later developments within Turkey, when local pro-Kurdish political activists entered government offices and opened up increasing room for Kurdish cultural expression.

4.3 The Dengbêj House in Diyarbakır

Although television has been of fundamental importance in providing a new space of performance for dengbêjs, and a new visibility, Roj TV is in Europe, or 'in the air', and not in Kurdistan. Even though television produces and performs Kurdishness, the physical presence in the homeland is seen by political activists as a crucial dimension in terms of authenticity. This holds especially for traditions like the dengbêj art that people regard as strongly connected to the physical Kurdish geography. The geographical region Kurdistan is defined as the place where real Kurdish culture is found. Someone who is not surrounded by Kurdish people, by the sound of the language, by the mountains of the *welat* (the homeland), and by its nature, is regarded as less capable of being a good dengbêj: the geography where the dengbêj is born and lives determines the sound of his voice – it is said that a voice from the plains sounds different from a voice from the mountains - ; the place where a dengbêj comes from determines the content of his songs; and the political oppression he lived through makes him understand and articulate the suffering and sorrow of his fellow Kurds (see also chapter 2). The dengbêjs who live in Kurdistan are therefore perceived as more 'real' and 'authentic' than those living elsewhere and seen in this light it is of crucial importance that the dengbêjs occupy a visible place in the 'Kurdish landscape' in Turkey that has been built up by the Kurdish movement over the last decade. This turns the Dengbêj Houses into important symbolic sites where the dengbêj art and Kurdishness is performed. Now I turn first to the symbolic value of the Dengbêj House in Diyarbakır, and in the following section to the position and ideas of Zeki Barış, one of the central figures of the House.

Figure 23. Singing at the Dicle Firat cultural center in Diyarbakır. 2007.

Figure 24. The courtyard of the newly opened Dengbêj House in Diyarbakır. 2008.

The first Dengbêj House was founded in Van in 2003, followed by another in Diyarbakır in 2007. In other cities and towns there were also initiatives to establish a Dengbêj House, and if not in their own special House, dengbêjs were invited to perform at local cultural centers. The Houses form part of the Mesopotamia Cultural Centers (NÇM),[354] an organization that promotes Kurdish cultural and linguistic expression in many cities and towns in Turkey. The NÇM was founded in Istanbul in 1991, the year in which the ban on Kurdish music was lifted, and attracted youngsters who wanted to be part of the 'struggle'. Its aim was to make Kurdish culture visible, to create a space for Kurdish cultural production in a society dominated by Turkish cultural production, and to stimulate and spread Kurdish culture and language among young Kurds. It was founded first in Istanbul, the most feasible place for the survival of such an initiative, and followed by branches in other cities. The NÇM is influenced by PKK ideology and discourse (Sarıtaş 2010). In the 1990s local NÇMs were frequently closed and reopened, and its leaders imprisoned. Since the 2000s persecution has diminished, and in Diyarbakır where the city administration has been pro-Kurdish since 1999, the center is supported by the municipality.

The local political situation was also decisive for the opening of the Dengbêj Houses, and, more generally, for the space the Kurdish movement was able to claim. For example, during the time of my research, the city administration in Van was in the hands of the AKP party, which gave the Kurdish movement significantly less freedom to operate than in Diyarbakır, where the pro-Kurdish DTP was in power. In Van the atmosphere was tense and sometimes laden with fear, contrary to Diyarbakır where people felt freer to express their opinions and to display expressions of Kurdishness in public. In Van I spoke with some people who did not want to visit the Dengbêj House because they feared being associated with the Kurdish movement, whereas in Diyarbakır I never encountered such concerns. This is also related to the unique position of Diyarbakır as the capital city of the Kurdish region, which receives recognition from European politicians and is visited by them (Gambetti 2008: 101). Under the gaze of Europe, the Turkish government felt forced to ease restrictions. Diyarbakır functioned long as the main haven for Kurdish resistance against Turkish domination. So although there was a Dengbêj House in both cities, the one in Diyarbakır had much more room for the negotiation and performance of public Kurdishness.

The *Dengbêj ve Dengbêjlik Geleneği* (the Dengbêj and Dengbêj tradition) project that was set up in Diyarbakır in 2006 was both an expression of as well as

354 *Navenda Çanda Mesopotamya*, see glossary.

a catalyst for more freedom. In her article "The invention of tradition: Diyarbakır's Dengbêj Project", Scalbert Yücel (2009) offers a sound analysis of the project. I did not focus specifically on the project, but it was part of my research because I was often at the Dengbêj House and interviewed many dengbêjs involved in its activities. I will summarize Scalbert Yücel's argument, which is the only academic article about the dengbêjs today, and which confirmed many findings and ideas I developed in the course of my research.

The aim of the Dengbêj Project was to promote Kurdish culture and language, and the activities involved were the publication of an anthology and CD, and the organization of two concerts. The CD and anthology were published in 2007, the latter followed by a second edition in 2011, and the concerts were organized in September 2007 in Diyarbakır and Istanbul. The whole project was led by the municipality and the Dicle Fırat cultural center in Diyarbakır,[355] by the European Union,[356] and supported by several Turkish government ministries.[357] Additionally, the Diyarbakır municipality funded the renovation of a historical building in the city center for the location of a Dengbêj House, which opened in May 2007, and the publication of the second edition of the anthology. The municipality can be seen as the main actor in the project, as it was most directly involved in its practical set up and implementation. Since in Van the Dengbêj House had also applied for European Union funding, but not managed to receive it,[358] the involvement of the municipality in Diyarbakır seems to have been essential for its success.

Scalbert Yücel regards the project as noteworthy for three reasons: it was the first time a Turkish ministry had been involved in a project that openly supported Kurdish culture and language; it was an important step in recognizing, constructing, and institutionalizing a specifically Kurdish 'tradition'; and the project also demonstrates the complex relationship between 'activists in office' and the state (Watts 2006). One can regard the Dengbêj House as a successful attempt of legal political actors to create more space for a Kurdish voice, and as part of the larger process of the 'decolonization of Diyarbakır' (Gambetti 2008).

Watts argues that in situations of violent conflict between militants and the state most political, media- and academic attention goes to the conflict. Legal, political, and cultural activities are often neglected, whereas they may be

355 Dicle Fırat Kültür Merkezi is a branch of the NÇM.

356 The European Union's Grant scheme for the promotion of cultural rights in Turkey (Scalbert Yücel 2009).

357 The Office of the Prime Minister Directorate General of Press and Information, the Ministry of Culture and Tourism, and the Central Finance and Contracts Unit (Scalbert Yücel 2009).

358 Personal communication with one of the leaders of the Van Dengbêj House.

of fundamental importance in understanding the ongoing negotiation process between the state and the opposed party. She claims that this is also true for the Kurds. Since 1990 pro-Kurdish politicians have entered government offices, and began to work within the legal framework of the Turkish state towards a better position for the Kurds. Although the position of these 'activists in office' has often been highly contested and opposed by the opposition, resulting in the dissolution of Kurdish parties, the detainment and imprisonment of its leaders, and assaults on people and offices, their activities have resulted in increased rights for Kurds. According to Watts, participation in politics:

> "strengthened the pro-Kurdish movement by providing it with an institutional basis for public collective gathering (..), some legal protection (..), new access to domestic and international audiences, and new symbolic resources (2006: 126). And: "Kurdish ethnic activists brought highly charged Kurdish national demands into the sphere of everyday political and public life, making such demands increasingly difficult to ignore" (Watts 2006: 133).

As Watts demonstrates, what she calls 'symbolic politics' were a crucial means of making Kurdishness visible in the public sphere. Diyarbakır was a pioneer in this regard. After having "long been subjected to the homogenizing strategies of the Turkish nation-building project", it became the first city with a pro-Kurdish municipality, which used "its institutional power to reverse the Turkification of the city" (Gambetti 2008: 98-99). Gambetti argues that, due to the emergency law operative since 1984, and the restrictions that followed from that, the most likely site where the municipality could expand its influence was in culture, not politics. Although attempts of the municipality to Kurdify spaces and events met with resistance in the first years, their increasingly established position enabled them to carry out more and larger projects from year to year. Examples are the publication by the municipality of a history of Diyarbakır, rewriting that history to include Kurdish rebellions and activism; highly politicized festivals featuring Kurdish cultural production;[359] the celebration of *Newroz* (Kurdish New Year); and the reclaiming of geographical places and monuments as Kurdish[360] (Watts 2006).

Following upon the increasingly successful politics of the pro-Kurdish party, the state initiated counter projects in order to reclaim certain sites and

359 "The real 'event' has undoubtedly been the Culture and Arts Festivals organized by the municipality from the year 2001 onwards. In the first festival, the governor did not allow for singing in Kurdish" (Gambetti 2008: 113), but in following years this was allowed.

360 Diyarbakır's mayor removed a statue of Atatürk from the city center, and Batman's mayor renamed streets after Kurdish leaders, international leftist figures like Ghandi, and after international human rights discourse such as 'Democracy avenue' (Watts 2006).

symbols, in what can rightly be called a battle over cultural property. In the 1990s, when the Kurdish movement began to encourage Kurds to celebrate *Newroz* as an expression of Kurdish identity, the Turkish state tried to gain control over the meaning of *Nevruz* by reinventing it as a Turkish tradition[361] (Yanık 2006). Since the coming to office of the Islamist AKP Party, which gains many of its votes in the Kurdish provinces, this party organized numerous projects in order to contest the Kurdish movement. In response to the Ahmedê Xanî Festival in Doğubeyazıt, the AKP Party organized an alternative Ahmedê Xanî festival in the same town (Yüksel 2011). As a reaction to the popularization of the Mem û Zîn folktale as a Kurdish national epic, the AKP Party published a Turkish translation of the story, and turned it into a film and theatre play. In January 2009 a state television channel in Kurdish, called TRT6 (pronounced in Kurdish), was launched as an alternative to Kurdish satellite television channels. TRT6 also broadcasts a dengbêj program. Such examples demonstrate the importance attached by political actors in Turkey to the appropriation of symbolic space in the sphere of everyday political and public life. These examples also demonstrate how much influence the 'activists in office' have built up through seemingly insignificant steps, resulting in "the opening up of spaces of expression and activity that were unimaginable five years ago" (Gambetti 2008: 110). The counter measures of the government, including the launch of a Kurdish TV channel, were even more unimaginable at the time.

Clearly, the Dengbêj Project needs to be analyzed as part of this larger framework of cultural activism. Scalbert Yücel shows that the funding received by the European Union, and the official support given by the Turkish state, turned the Dengbêj Project into a symbolic resource that was interpreted by many as an official recognition of the dengbêjs and of Kurdish language and culture. This was realized mainly by the efforts over the years of the pro-Kurdish municipality, positioned between the state and the Kurdish movement, to gain legal acceptance for their political presence (Scalbert Yücel 2009). Apart from the official status that the dengbêjs obtained through the publication of a book and CD under the authorization of the Ministry of Tourism and Culture, the physical presence of the Dengbêj House in Diyarbakır was also an important symbolic step. The old building renovated by the municipality constitutes a historic space for Kurdish tradition. Although situated in a small alley behind one of the main roads, a sign on the road in Kurdish, Turkish and English makes the House visible and locatable for outsiders, and the House has also been made part of the tourist route through town. The House is part of an ongoing

361 Yanık's argument is more complicated than I present it here for reasons of space. She argues that

appropriation of historical buildings as sites where Kurdishness is represented.[362] The renovation of the house of Cemil Pasha, covered extensively by Kurdish TV channels in February 2012, is another example.

Before the Dengbêj House was built the dengbêjs in Diyarbakır performed in the Dicle Fırat cultural center. Their move to the House gave them a more visible and official status, which had a number of consequences for the activities of the dengbêjs, and for how they understood their position. Twenty-four dengbêjs were officially registered as members of the House. They were expected to show up regularly at the House, and to perform at festivals and on television and radio programs when requested. The House was run by the municipality, and a number of municipal employees had their offices in the House.

During my fieldwork the relationship between the dengbêjs and the municipality employees was not always without tension. The dengbêjs felt injured in their authority and position as elders of the community, because they were supervised by others who were often much younger than them, and moreover, as they saw it, also less knowledgable on the topic of dengbêj art. However, they were also dependent on these others for access to public performance and visibility. At the time of my research, there was a lively negotiation ongoing between the employees of the Project, the leaders of the House, and the dengbêjs. The latter felt their new position of 'municipal dengbêjs' had to result in some kind of official recognition and payment. In August 2007 when I was not in Diyarbakır, one of the more active dengbêjs of the House phoned me to tell me that all the dengbêjs of the House had gone 'on strike'. He sounded agitated. Was it not true that the dengbêjs came every day to the House and worked hard to serve their city? And would this not also give them certain privileges because of their special function? Moreover, the employees hired by the municipality to realize the Dengbêj Project were paid a good salary, would it not therefore be more than fair if the dengbêjs would get their share as well?

On the other hand, the Project employees[363] complained that the dengbêjs 'just did not understand', that they were caught up in 'old-fashioned thinking', not realizing that the 'times have changed' and that their art is not as popular as they would like it to be. They argued that the Project should be seen as a gift for the

362 "The conditions of possibility of the re-appropriation of urban space in Diyarbakır were not produced locally, of course. The PKK's unilateral ceasefire in 1998 and Turkey's aspiration to become a full member of the European Union, as well as the change of direction and strategy within the Kurdish movement itself, have all enabled the city's transformation into a haven of activism and Kurdish cultural expression" (Gambetti 2008: 125).

363 I spoke with several employees and others involved in the Dengbêj Project who expressed similar opinions.

dengbêjs, but instead of being grateful, they showed up with demands. As Scalbert Yücel (2009) notes, the strike resulted in an agreement of the twenty-four dengbêjs registered at the House and the municipality according to which the dengbêjs would receive a free meal on the days they visit the House, and free transportation in the city. When I visited the House again in 2008, the free meals appeared to give the registered dengbêjs a certain status: the meal was served in a room of the House, and the lunchtime spent in that room separated the registered dengbêjs from the non-registered ones and from visitors. Through its connections with the cultural center and the Dengbêj Project of the Municipality, the Dengbêj House was thus influenced by these institutions.

Unlike Scalbert Yücel, I argued in chapter 3 that the demands of the dengbêjs follow from previous understandings of their task and position, and should not be understood as a 'commercial turn' (Scalbert Yücel 2009). The management of the House and the Project, and others involved in promoting the dengbêjs, condemned the above attitude as a commercialization, arguing that the dengbêjs should be willing to serve 'their people' voluntarily. Such judgments stemmed from the fact that the activists felt driven by a goal that occupied a large part of their energy, time, and efforts. PKK influence was strongly present in places that were directly concerned with the representation, investigation and reconstruction of Kurdish culture. At the Dengbêj House I noticed a difference between, on the one hand, the attitude of the dengbêjs and other (elderly) people visiting the House and, on the other, the management or other political activists involved in the House's organization. The latter expressed a strong concern regarding the achievement of political goals, and viewed most of their activities as being, in one way or another, instrumental towards these goals. The dengbêjs were less concerned with such larger goals, and viewed their activities rather as goals in themselves. Most tensions between the activists and dengbêjs were caused by this difference in perspective, which, at the same time, was often a generational difference.

4.4 Zeki Barış and activism in the House

The perception of the tasks of the dengbêjs was clearly articulated by one of the people involved in the Dengbêj Project, Zeki Barış, who felt that the dengbêjs should be devoted to the Kurdish cause. Zeki Barış has been occupied with collecting stories and songs since the late 1970s. He was impressed by the stories of a relative who was a great storyteller. "After I finished high school I got the idea of collecting

them. First because I liked them so much, and second because I had the fear that they might get forgotten". He recorded and wrote down many songs and stories, which much later, beginning in 2000, he archived and published. At the time of my research he was closely connected to the dengbêjs, many of whom he saw almost daily. His collecting activities were for a long time his private occupation without making any of it public. As Scalbert Yücel notes, people like him felt "discouraged by the political milieu which, during the 1990s, gave priority to contemporary music, theatre and folkloric dances. In the 1990s, people interested in folkloric and oral literature were considered 'reactionary' [*gerici*]" (2009: 23).

The turn to folklore interest within the Kurdish movement and the increasing space for Kurdish publications in the 2000s gave him the opportunity to publish his material, and to see his work made public and valued by others. In 2006 he and a friend were asked to work at the Research Department of the municipality, and in that function he also became part of the Dengbêj Project. He worked in an office of the Dengbêj House located on the second floor. From there he looked over the courtyard where the dengbêjs would gather to sing, and he often joined them and listened. He also invited the dengbêjs into his office to sing songs, which he recorded and transcribed, and many of which were published in the Anthology of the Dengbêj Project (2007). Regularly the dengbêjs were invited to perform at festivals, on television and at other meetings, and he was one of the people to decide who to send to such events. At times this caused trouble when some dengbêjs felt passed over by the choices of the House management.

According to Zeki Barış, the dengbêjs initially did not have any political awareness. Only after they developed such awareness, did they become more active. In the following quote he compares the current Dengbêj House with the Dengbêj Café that existed in Diyarbakır between 1960 and 1980:

> The Dengbêj House is more advanced than the Café (*ji kahvêye pêşdartir e*), it has become more advanced. To the Café they came, three or four dengbêjs, now twenty dengbêjs come together. Now there are cultural centers everywhere and dengbêjs sing songs, it is more advanced now. (Do you know why it is that there are many more dengbêjs coming now?) In part it's because it's more known, it's more known among the people, and in part because there is a struggle, there is awakening, they come out with their culture, that influence is also present (*hinek zanan e, zanabûn ketiye nava gel, hinek jî têkoşinekî heye, yani hisyar bûye, çanda xwe de derdikevin, hinek ev tesîr heye*). They have woken up, and bring the

> culture out, its because of that influence. (They are now more aware (*bilinçli*)?)[364] Yes! If there are twenty dengbêjs together, then sixteen or seventeen of them are aware of their service to the culture (*bizanebûne xizmetê çandê tê dê*). They are aware of that. That we have a culture, that we will develop that culture (*çanda me heye, kultura me heye, em vê karê xwe pêşkêş bikin, dengbêjiya xwe pêşkêş bikin, bizanebûn*).[365]

Only three or four dengbêjs came to perform at the Café. Barış argued that the House is much better visited by the dengbêjs, because they are aware of their task. They now want to develop the culture because of their awareness of the 'struggle', and are thus much more active in pursuing that goal. He understood culture as being in the service of the struggle, and felt that this awareness is new among the dengbêjs:

> (And was this awareness not there before 1980?) No, their thoughts were not nationalist (*na, ramana wan netewî nebûn*). Dengbêjs came to the Café because they wanted to perform together. Şakîro for example came, he thinks: 'nice, let them know that I am a dengbêj as well', Mihemed Salihê Beynati also said I am a dengbêj, it went in that way. They did not sing with a nationalist mind (*bi ramanekî netewî nedihatin gotin*).

He mentions here two of the most famous dengbêjs of the previous generation, of whom he feels that they did not think in a nationalist way. They only thought about their position as a dengbêj and their fame, but not more than that. He describes this type of the dengbêj art here as something without a deeper meaning, which seems to make it less valuable for him. Performing alone was not enough. With a nationalist awareness, such performance becomes more valuable, and it would also have incited the dengbêjs to action:

> But if they would have been under nationalist influence they would have gathered in that time and they would have started recording by themselves! (*lê eger bi ramanekî netewî bandawî ev çax tişt berhev bikirane, wan bi xwe tomar bikirane!*).

According to Barış, the lack of awareness of Kurdish nationalism caused the dengbêjs to stop singing after the 1980 coup:

> If you ask the dengbêjs who sang before 1980, whether they also sang after 1980, they say no. But if they would have had nationalist thoughts, then they would also have

364 I usually avoided using political terms, but by mistake I introduced this much-used term here myself. It is often used by political activists to refer to the level of ideological awareness of ordinary people. The collector already used himself the terms 'struggle' and 'woken up' before I mentioned 'awareness,' so there is no doubt about his political intentions.

365 All quotes in this section, unless otherwise indicated, are from the interview with Zeki Barış conducted in 2008 in Diyarbakır. The interview language was Kurdish. In this interview I sometimes asked questions in Turkish, but the answers were all in Kurdish.

> sung after 1980. But they did not do that. The dengbêj art was finished. And before the NÇM was opened, from 1980 until 1991/2, The dengbêj art was finished down to its roots (*dengbêjî ji binî re qetiya bû, nema bûn*). It had disappeared. (..) At least for 20 years they didn't sing, they only started anew now. That much fear existed.

Barış felt that, if the dengbêjs would have had the higher goal of Kurdish nationalism, they would have been able to conquer their fear and continue to perform. He is convinced that only after the cultural center NÇM opened, could the nationalist mind be developed in the dengbêjs, with the support of political activists working at the center.

Barış situates also other developments within an ideological perspective. When I asked him about local differences in repertoire, and differences in performances among religious and ethnic groups, he felt disturbed by my questions:

> (Do you also know Yezidi dengbêjs?) There are no different kinds of dengbêjs, the dengbêjs are dengbêjs. They are not divided in Yezidi dengbêjs and Muslim dengbêjs. That is not a good way of speaking, it disturbs me. Dengbêjs are dengbêjs, whether they are Muslim or Yezidi or Alevi. The dengbêj style is the same, there is no difference. The person who sang yesterday was Yezidi, the one who came from Izmir. Did you notice it? What was the difference? Nothing. The dengbêj art is the dengbêj art. Karapetê Xaco was Armenian, Christian. In the dengbêj art there is no religion and belief. The dengbêj art is Kurdish. Because it is in Kurdish it can be Yezidi or Muslim or Christian or Jewish, or Zoroastrian, the dengbêj art is the same among the Kurds.

The different ethnic and religious groups that live or lived together in the Kurdish region (see Introduction) are recognized by Kurdish nationalists as all being part of the Kurdish heritage. In the television program on dengbêjs on Roj TV, Armenian, Syriac, Yezidi and Alevi dengbêjs and aşıks are invited to perform. They are given a great deal of attention and respect. However, according to Barış they should be understood as part of a unique Kurdish heritage that unites the Kurds into a single people. The unity of the Kurds is one of the spearheads of the movement. Division is a big fear for them, as the unsuccessful attempts to fight the Turks at the beginning of the century are explained because of the failure on the part of the Kurds to form a united front. This fear is often expressed indirectly among activists in their denial of the existence of internal divisions and their emphasis on the unity of the Kurds, as, for instance, here by mister Barış:

> (But for example, aren't there local songs that talk about their specific situation?) There are special songs. For example Derwişê Evdî and Adulê. Because Derwişê Evdî is Yezidi it is sung a lot among Yezidis. But Muslims also sing it a lot. Because of that we actually do not want someone saying about the dengbêj art: 'he is Yezidi

> and he is Muslim'. We are Kurds. That is separatism. We do not want racism because it destroys our unity. He is Yezidi and he is Sunni, there is not something like that.

When I tried to challenge his ideas by asking once more about the differences between regions, he again insisted on the unity of the tradition:

> (But if it is about local songs.. for example you go to Hakkari, then I expect over there a song from that region..) In the dengbêj art there are no local songs. For example the song Bavê Faxriya is sung by people from Amed, from Serhat, from Mosul, from Şengal, and by Kurds from Konya. In the dengbêj art there is no locality. The dengbêj art is *Kurdîtî*, *Kurdewarî* [Kurdism and Kurdishness].

Kurdîtî and *Kurdewarî* are terms that are used to emphasize the cultural instead of the political.[366] Although it is not easy to translate these terms and to know how individuals use them, one could say that he interprets my questions as political since I look for difference instead of unity. He felt that I was disturbing the unity of the Kurds by asking what differences there might be. He expects from me that I, as a researcher with sympathy for the Kurds, support Kurdish unity and would never emphasize possible differences. Although it is clear from the many kilams that take place in a specific region that these kilams were composed in a specific place and at a certain date and time, Barış argues that such kilams have lost their specificity and are now sung by dengbêjs from all places. His reaction demonstrates that he looks at the dengbêjs first and foremost from a Kurdish nationalist perspective: how can they support the Kurdish cause?

People like him who had an early interest in Kurdish culture often made great sacrifices to pursue their goal. Due to their efforts very valuable material has been collected and archived. They invested money, free time and energy in a project supported by no one other than themselves. They were forced to conceal their objectives out of fear someone would find out. Some had to flee the country to pursue their goals, others were imprisoned, and material destroyed. The efforts they made, the sabotage and persecution they experienced, and the lack of support from others, often politicized them. Their political objectives and the expectations they have from others to be equally devoted to the Kurdish case, should be seen in this light.

The Dengbêj House is thus an important site of culture making and cultural activism. The renovation of an old building in the city center, now dedicated to the

366 The words *Kudîtî* and *Kurdewarî* are difficult to translate. It seems they were used for the first time in the Kurdish magazine *Hawar* (the Call), published in Damascus in 1932 by Cedalet Ali Bedirxan. The magazine announced that it had the specific aim to focus on Kurdish language and culture, which it called *qurdanî* and *qurdîtî* ('Kurdism' or 'Kurdishness'), and it left politics to the "compatriot organizations" (*civatên welatî*) *(Çakır 2011: 22). They are thus used as terms to refer to activities in the field of Kurdish culture that are not directly related to politics.*

performance of the dengbêj art, contests Turkish nationalism through the display of a non-Turkish tradition in the public sphere, supported by the pro-Kurdish municipality and the European Union. The daily performance of dengbêjs in the House is a continuous visible and auditory reproduction of Kurdishness and therefore has significant symbolic value, even if the audience is limited. The municipality leadership has different expectations from the House than the dengbêjs. The activists working in the House are driven by strong political and ideological motives, in which not all dengbêjs are interested. This regularly causes tensions between the two parties. Most dengbêjs think in different moral terms about their art than the activists. This makes the activists feel that they need to 'educate' and 'awaken' the dengbêjs in order to make them ready to serve 'their people', and to enable them to recognize their 'duties'. Conversely, the dengbêjs feel they are not supported in the way they should be. They expect financial contributions, larger audiences with a genuine interest in their art, more invitations to sing at festivals, and in general more attention than they receive today. Before turning to the last place of cultural activism, namely Istanbul and its music market, I first discuss how some individual dengbêjs reacted to or evoked in their interviews to narratives of political activists introduced above.

4.5 Individual dengbêjs referring to political narratives

> Nationalist violence or inter-ethnic cooperation and tolerance depend on what narrative, what tales of injustice, oppression, or betrayal are told. Tellers of tales have enormous (*though far from absolute*) power to reshape, edit, share their stories, and therefore to promote a future of either violence or cooperation (Suny 2001: 864, my emphasis).

As the Kurdish movement developed strong ideas about the meaning of the dengbêj art in the current context, many dengbêjs incorporated these ideas in their self presentation. But because many felt at the same time also connected to other moral ideas, they did not entirely or uncritically adopt the new ideas about their function. Social narratives (or myths) are indeed powerful tools that enable people and institutions to construct and articulate identity and belonging (Suny 2001, Ferguson 1999). Other studies on social narratives (Askew 2002, Malkki 1995) focused on their being shared by large numbers of people, influencing the lives and views of individuals who felt they belonged to a certain group. But narratives, however much

disseminated and supported by institutions, are not unambiguous or univocal. Instead they are understood and utilized in different ways by individuals who subscribe (partly) to the prevailing views of certain institutions, but simultaneously seek and find ways for different interpretations.

As Suny claims in the quote above, tellers of tales have the power to shape people's stories, but this power is far from absolute. Even in a situation of dominance and oppression by political institutions caused by a violent and ongoing conflict, the interpretation of social narratives appeared to be slippery and negotiable. On the basis of the stories of a dengbêj and an aşık, whom I have already discussed in chapter 3, I argue that social narratives indeed offer a powerful means to construct one's values and identity, but that people also negotiate and develop them according to their particular life experiences and goals. These examples indicate that at the time of my research the dengbêjs were searching for new moral positions, and selectively used or rejected certain parts of the social narratives that came up in the process of their return to public life. One such story I already discussed in chapter 3. I described there how dengbêj Hamîd had internalized current narratives about the undemocratic and backwards character of the landlord system, and about the need to 'open one's eyes' to democracy and modernization. In this section I return to the stories of aşık Abdullah and dengbêj Bêrîvan, who both, in different ways, also connected themselves to the narratives of the Kurdish movement.

Aşık Abdullah

The section of the interview I discuss here was the interview's first part. In this part the director of Van's Dengbêj House (see Preface for information on the House) was present and influenced our conversation. Aşık Abdullah's focus on the director, in an attempt to make the latter understand why he should be seen as part of the House, provides insight into how the dengbêjs of the House understood their position and the function of the House as related to the moral narratives of the Kurdish movement about Kurdish suffering and oppression, and about the task of each Kurdish individual to put him/herself at the service of the Kurdish people and their struggle.

We were sitting in the director's office in Van's Dengbêj House, the director behind his desk, and aşık Abdullah and I sitting across from each other on the other side of the desk. The director was following our conversation, and his position was clearly one of authority. Occasionally he made a short remark about what aşık Abdullah was saying, a correction, an encouragement, or an addition. On other occasions, the director was also sometimes present during parts of interviews or performances that I recorded and paid close attention so that the person I was interviewing did

not forget to mention the name of the Dengbêj House and its director. The dengbêjs seemed to feel somewhat intimidated by his presence, and took care to give the entire introduction that the director expected from them. During the time that the director was present, aşık Abdullah spoke more to him than to me, seeking approval for what he was saying, and praising the director for his work. In this part of the interview he also strongly connected what he was saying to political narratives.

At the moment I started the recording, aşık Abdullah began by introducing himself at length in Kurdish in the following manner:

> Oh Kurdish people, I greet all of you, Kurds everywhere in the world, and I greet all people. I am aşık Abdullah from the Dengbêj House, being a cultural center and recording studio [the director adds: in Serhat], of the dengbêjs from Serhat. I am not a dengbêj, my style is a bit different. But I have a lot of respect for them, I am full of love for them [these last words he said in Turkish]. I am sorry that I speak Turkish, I have stayed for long among Turks. The name of our dear director is our friend Emîn. He is involved in our work.[367]

In this introduction aşık Abdullah exemplified his position: he was speaking to the community of Kurdish people; although he was an aşık, he was a member of the Dengbêj House; he was not a dengbêj, but said he appreciated them a great deal. He was the only person who called the Dengbêj House a 'recording studio', an important detail because aşık Abdullah wanted to release an album, which appeared to be one of the main reasons why he was connected to the Dengbêj House. He hoped that the director of the House would make this possible, and praised him as being involved 'in our work'. Immediately after his introduction he turned to one of his main concerns, namely, the oppression of the Kurdish language, and his own experience with that:

> We went in Ankara to the Kızılay Alevi Association. (..) We sat down there and sang one or two songs, and I also sang a few in Kurdish. I sang two songs in Kurdish, and across from me two people stood up and said to me, come we go outside. But I said, I don't know you, what would I do there? But then they said we are police in plain-clothes, why did you sing in Kurdish? Yes, it was in 1972, around that time, somewhere between 1971 and 1973. I said to them: 'brother, I am a Kurd, I have not done anything related to politics. In the same way as you have Ferhat and Şirin, we have Siyabend, and Mem and Zîn. We have love, we have our customs and traditions, our fate and love, we sing about that. If you have a problem with that, go to God and ask him why he made so many languages. What can we do about that?' They brought me to prison and beat me a lot, it was dark,.. , they left me there for four days. They put me there for four days, and they let me go.

367 The quotes in this part are taken from the interview with Aşık Abdullah conducted in Van in 2008. The interview language was Kurdish.

The Kızılay Alevi association was a meeting place for Alevis, and also for Alevi aşıks. When I visited this association in 2004[368] there were many aşıks present, all with their saz, and singing each in turn. Such associations arose in the larger cities from 1960 on. In the 1960s and 70s Alevi society changed profoundly due to the massive migration to the big cities, and the rise of the political left in Turkey (see Introduction). From a closed religious village society many Alevis living in cities became involved in leftist political movements, and began emphasizing a politicized identity much more than an Alevi religious identity. It is therefore not surprising that, in the years of political turmoil aşık Abdullah spoke about, civil policemen were present during this meeting. Singing in Kurdish was regarded as a political statement of resistance. Aşık Abdullah defended himself against their accusations by emphasizing that he had nothing to do with politics. By invoking to a famous Turkish folktale, *Ferhat and Şirin*, he tried to elicit the understanding of the two policemen, who, in the end, also must have had their own folklore. Aşık Abdullah argued that he sings Kurdish love songs that are as innocent and touching, and as disconnected from current political developments, as Turkish love songs like *Ferhat and Şirin*. He pleaded that the Kurds, like the Turks, have customs and traditions they want to carry on. But it did not make a difference, he was still detained.

Following the story about his detention, aşık Abdullah went on to speak of another kind of imprisonment:

> I stayed for a year [in Ankara] and after that my father came, he took me out of there, and he took away all my instruments from me. I was imprisoned in our village and I was married under force. For twenty years my art was wasted. I asked my art, by God where is a saz so that I can play a bit, to express the love of my heart, the fire that is in my soul, because it is still in my soul. (..) But my father broke my saz.

It seems that aşık Abdullah told these two stories in succession to emphasize the experience of imprisonment in both cases, especially since he used the strong word 'imprisonment' (*mahkum kirin*) in the second story as well. Although he had been able to escape to western Turkey at a young age, he seemed not to have had such a chance again after his father brought him back to the village. These two forms of imprisonment formed a leitmotiv in his story. Both imprisonments hindered him from carrying out the profession he would have liked to. But now, after twenty years, with his children grown up, aşık Abdullah had found a space to resume his musical career. He continued:

368 I visited this or a similar association in Ankara in 2004 during the fieldwork for my MA-thesis (I do not have information if the association I visited was of the same character as in the 1970s).

> A long time passed by, my children grew up, and I had some more time for myself. My children were grown up, so I thought, let me go and do what I wish for, so that my longing does not stay in my heart. I am a person of the Kurds, I am from Serhat, I have suffered a lot, I will go and express that sorrow and longing so that the people get to know me.

From the narrative about how he felt silenced to perform, aşık Abdullah turned to the moment where he took up his profession again. He highlighted two aspects that motivated him to start singing again. The first was the longing in his heart that he had suppressed for many years. The second motivation was that he was 'a person of the Kurds'. This sense of being Kurdish meant that he suffered much, that he shared this suffering with many other people, that he wanted to express this in his music and share his experiences with his fellow Kurds.

In the narrative that followed this, Âşık Abdullah explained this motivation in more detail. At the moment that he decided to start performing again, he looked for a way to come back on stage. His first attempt was in 2003 with a music company in Istanbul, but it concluded unsuccessfully. After that he came into contact with the Dengbêj House in Van, and he spoke of how he experienced his first visits to the house:

> One day I went here and I saw their customs and traditions, everything they do is only about Kurdish motives, the sorrows of our people, dengbêjs come and sing, now they say a dengbêj.., the dengbêj is something very important. The dengbêjs are the ones who express in words our customs and traditions, our culture, our sorrows, our love.

For a moment aşık Abdullah separated himself from the people coming to the House. It was as if he realized for the first time what the dengbêj art meant when he visited the Dengbêj House. He had distanced himself from the dengbêjs in his youth, when he wanted to learn a different musical style and be involved in a different culture. At that time, the dengbêj art did not satisfy him, as we saw in chapter 3. But according to aşık Abdullah, when he came to the Dengbêj House he discovered the value of the dengbêjs. An important reason for saying this explicitly and in this manner might be because the director of the House was still sitting next to us. In this quote aşık Abdullah emphasized the Kurdishness of the dengbêjs and the way they represented the Kurds in their songs. He included himself again in the last line, where he became part of the larger community of Kurds, whose 'customs and traditions, culture, sorrows and love,' the aşıks and dengbêjs put into words. From this important characteristic of the dengbêjs, and from the united experience of being Kurd, he made a connection to his own work and life, although he is not a dengbêj:

> Someone who today, one day, does not understand the grief of the dengbêjs, the love, .. I am musician, I have respect for every music. But in Turkey, at the moment Tarkan[369] is a great musician, but when he sings he does not understand our sorrow, I do not understand what he sings. Because in the middle of winter… my father, or my brother.. could not reach a doctor.. and that pain is still in my heart. I have suffered a lot. So I do not understand his songs,[instead] it is necessary that I sing about my own sorrow.

Aşık Abdullah produced a clear argument here, even though it may seem rather confusing at first glance. He began by saying that not everyone today can understand the grief of the dengbêjs, meaning not only the dengbêjs but the Kurds in general who have suffered a lot. This suffering cannot be understood by a modern singer like Tarkan, who did not experience the same kind of suffering as the Kurds: 'he does not understand our sorrow'. aşık Abdullah gave an example to illustrate his point: he experienced how his father died because there was no doctor within reach, and this pain 'is still in my heart'. This is not just suffering without reason; later in the interview he argued that it is suffering that was caused by the fact that they were not provided with the necessary resources by the government. There was no doctor nearby, and no infrastructure that could have brought his father to a doctor. The Kurdish region has remained undeveloped in many ways, and this has caused a great deal of trouble and suffering. This experience of suffering separate the Kurds from a singer like Tarkan, who grew up in western Turkey and does not know anything about the experiences of the Kurds. Because of this aşık Abdullah felt that there was a need among the Kurds for musicians who had experienced such suffering, who had shared the same fate, and were therefore capable of expressing this in their music. Because the core of what was needed was someone who understood the suffering of the Kurds, aşık Abdullah, even though not a dengbêj, could include himself. At first he differentiated himself from the dengbêjs, who have a different performance style, but with this shift in his argument aşık Abdullah brought himself back in. Although not himself a dengbêj, he is a Kurd who has suffered as well, and could therefore, like the dengbêjs, put his sorrow into words. He continued:

> It is necessary that I understand myself, that I understand who are my people, where do I come from, that I know myself. (…) My name is aşık Abdullah, I have made songs about the motives of the Kurds. I had a friend, one of their writers who is very close to me, I heard from him, and from you [he points to the director], and from my father and forefathers, what they talked about, how they lived, whom they loved, what further oppression, the pain and the sufferings of the people in Serhat, and I have expressed these things into words, I have showed these things. I am aşık Abdullah,

369 One of the most famous Turkish popular musicians at the time.

> I play and sing in my own language. I sing about love, about the suffering and pain of the people of Serhat.

So whereas in the past aşık Abdullah distanced himself from the culture he grew up in, and escaped to western Turkey to build a different life (chapter 3), he now accepted himself as being part of the Kurdish community. He now felt the need to see himself as a Kurd, 'to understand who are my people and where I come from'. Knowing himself meant at that moment to aşık Abdullah that he included himself in the collective experience of being a Kurd. In this way he tried to repair the relation with his 'own people' that he felt had been broken.

At the moment of the interview this was a fundamental issue for him, because when I met him he was trying to find a way back into the Kurdish music scene. He was seeking recognition, and to obtain such recognition he needed to make his position and aims clear. In the interview, with the director present, he placed himself within the moral narrative that was often reiterated by the director who by all means tried to place Van's Dengbêj House, not as successful as the one in Diyarbakır, on the map. While in the past aşık Abdullah did not want to listen to his father, at that moment he listened to the director, and to 'my father and forefathers'. He related here that he learned from them, about 'how they had lived, whom they had loved' and about the 'oppression, pain and suffering of the people in Serhat'. This collective experience of the Kurdish people, who were oppressed and went through a great deal of suffering, was the social narrative the dengbêjs connected to. Aşık Abdullah, having learned from their experiences and seeing himself as being one of them, could now say that he, too, like the dengbêjs, has 'expressed these things in words'. By connecting his own life to the social narrative about what the dengbêj art meant at that moment, and about the suffering of the Kurds generally, he created a new self definition, which he concluded with the significant conclusion: 'I am aşık Abdullah, I play and sing in my own language. I sing about the love, the suffering, and the pain of the people of Serhat'. These words were, more than to me, directed to the director behind his desk. They were meant for him, assuring him that, while an aşık and not a dengbêj, he was part of them. The experiences of imprisonment, both by the Turkish government and by his own community, are herewith turned into meaningful experiences, because with them, aşık Abdullah has become part of the collective Kurdish experience of suffering, which he articulated in his songs.

Dengbêj Bêrîvan

In chapter 3 I presented the story of dengbêj Bêrîvan, who placed much emphasis on the different experiences of female dengbêjs compared to that of male

dengbêjs. In her second interview, which I conducted a year after the first one, she spoke less about her life and more about her political views, and about the way her views had changed after she came into contact with PKK ideology. I present her story here because she indicated so clearly how she came to develop a different moral position which she adopted from Öcalan, the PKK, and, more importantly, from the Kurdish women's movement. Like Zana Güneş, dengbêj Bêrîvan also sees her life story as a development from ignorance into awakening, in this case an ignorance of the subordinate position of women, and an awakening towards her own liberation.

As we saw in chapter 3, dengbêj Bêrîvan located her own silencing not in state oppression, but in the 'family and the tribe'. She strongly emphasized the change in her own position as a female dengbêj after the Kurdish movement had gained influence. Dengbêj Bêrîvan began by asserting that in the past she had accepted that her position as a woman meant having fewer rights than men. She said that she did not know a world that was different from her own and so followed the traditions she had grown up with: "At that time I thought like that. When they said so, we did not dare [to resist]" and "I said to myself, [when they say that] this means it is forbidden". So at the time, before the 2000s, she accepted the situation as a given, whereas after that time she began to think differently. When I asked her how this change in her thinking had come about, she commented:

> It is because the struggle has started. The one from whom we have gotten the utmost rights is Apo. Apo has given rights to women. Apo said, 'women are human beings'. You know Apo Öcalan. He said, 'women also have rights'. Women should not be oppressed. Women should not be married under force. Women should not be slaves. Women should not be servants in the house. When you have rights, then women also should have rights. The *hoca* and *mele*, our imams, (..) they have hidden it. They hid the rights of women.[370]

According to dengbêj Bêrîvan, Öcalan's ideology made a stand for women.[371] She said that it is not in conflict with religion, because, as Öcalan argued, men and women are equal in the Quran and for the prophet. Apart from the influence of this ideology, dengbêj Bêrîvan saw other reasons why also men today have accepted the rights of women. She argued that, in the first place, women had suffered most during the war between the Turkish army and the PKK, more than men. Because of their suffering and their dedication to the Kurdish struggle, men have finally accepted rights for women:

370 All quotes in this section are taken from the second interview with her, conducted in 2008 in Diyarbakir. The interview language was Kurdish.

371 Women often see Ocalan as their hero, and present him as the one who liberated Kurdish women from centuries of oppression. Çağlayan (2007) shows how Kurdish political parties try to actively change the role of women in Kurdish society and use similar discourse as Abdullah Ocalan.

> Women have stood upright through all those things that happened. Women have done that more than men, have done more effort. (..) Because of that, I believe that seventy percent of the women have received their rights. They are not oppressed anymore. They are now independent, they are now free.

Another reason why, according to dengbêj Bêrîvan, men have given up on oppressing women is the humiliation and oppression they experienced themselves at the hand of the Turkish government:

> The government oppressed them. They saw how difficult oppression is, that it is something bad. Because of that they removed the revilement of women. If men would not have experienced this pressure and revilement themselves, they would have continued offending women.

She regarded the ideology of Öcalan, the war, and the oppression of men by the Turkish government, as the reasons for the changing position of women. The increasing gender equality was what opened a space for her to perform.

After 2000 she began to attend political meetings and festivities. She started being active as a dengbêj after a friend heard her singing and suggested she might sing at the meetings. Because of the lack of women willing to sing in public places, she became one of the much sought after woman for all kinds of occasions, and creatively used the advantages of this new position:

> I believe in this, that women will support women. Female dengbêjs have a special influence on the people, they are more influential. And the men are jealous, I can see that, I am in that situation. Because the people want female dengbêjs more, female dengbêjs attract more attention, and male dengbêjs are jealous. For example in summer the festival will take place, and in the program most attention is paid to women. They have two days for women activities.

She placed female dengbêjs in opposition to male dengbêjs, who were jealous of her success. She managed to escape from her previously marginalized role by using that role to move to the center of attention today.

Since dengbêj Bêrîvan only became involved in political activities recently, it seems likely that her politicized narrative has evolved since that time. During the interview she made it clear that she has learned many things from political meetings and television. She deployed the political narratives she heard in these places to recreate her life story into a narrative which explained and gave new meaning to her life. This narrative may not always reflect the realities of everyday life, in which she may still experience moments of discomfort because of being a woman, as I think I witnessed when she visited the Dengbêj House (chapter 3).

The PKK has been criticized for its neglect of women's issues, notwithstanding its apparently progressive discourse (Çağlayan 2007, Yüksel 2006). Women felt they were only accepted as PKK members if they disregarded their female identity (Yüksel 2006). They founded alternative organizations in which they felt better represented. Dengbêj Bêrîvan did not refer to such developments, and attributed her better position as a woman to the PKK leader Öcalan, of whom she heard speeches that encouraged the equal position of women.[372] That narrative gave meaning to her painful experiences of being humiliated and punished only for being a woman, for wanting to sing like a man at weddings; it gave meaning to the painful experiences of suffering because of the war; and it authorized her current position. It gave her authority because she felt she spoke not only as an individual, but as a representative of all Kurdish women. As she put it herself:

> I speak in the name of the women, in the name of the Kurdish women I can say. When they will see this interview they will be very happy, they will give me credits.

Dengbêj Bêrîvan was not only present in the interview as an individual singer, but even more as a Kurdish woman and a representative of Kurdish women. Her female identity was more evident than her identity as a singer. She spoke of the attention for her position not as an opportunity for individual gain, but rather as a benefit for Kurdish women in general. In this way, she gave meaning to her life story in the light of PKK ideology, and used that ideology to become a successful dengbêj today.

In the last section we saw how aşık Abdullah reworked his story in order to make it correspond to the moral narratives of the suffering of the Kurdish people and the need to serve them with his art. By defining himself in this way he hoped to be able to realize his longtime dream of releasing an album. Dengbêj Bêrîvan assumed an entirely new identity as a female dengbêj who represented all Kurdish women who had experienced oppression and inequality vis-à-vis men, rather than in the first place on part of the Turkish government. In this new position she was often invited to perform in the highly politicized public domain that aimed at redefining women's role in Kurdish society. Dengbêj Hamid (chapter 3), on the

372 Yüksel (2006) quotes a woman who felt her female identity was oppressed when she attended PKK meetings: "Let me put it that way: it was necessary for me to be sexless or it was necessary for me not to express the problems that I lived as a woman. And whenever I expressed, like someone who talks unnecessarily, I was not to be seen, not to be heard and not accorded any importance". At the same time, the idea that Ocalan's writing has encouraged women's liberation is also a commonly expressed viewpoint, like in this quote: "There are ideas and definitions about women, about which Abdullah Öcalan wrote, there are books Abdullah Öcalan wrote. We, too, get and read them. In these books, especially the ideas about women have been very mind-broadening for us." PKK narratives thus seems at times to have been more liberating than the practice of the organization.

one hand, endorsed the public narratives that rejected the landlord system but on the other, understood himself in relation to the moral narrative of that system that once defined the dengbêjs as poor and in need of support. This was an issue for him because in the past he had benefited from the material support of the agha of his village, whereas he saw the dengbêjs lacking such support today. He thus attempted to mobilize and change contemporary narratives in order to raise a similar type of support for today's dengbêjs.

In short, each of these individuals expressed distinct needs and concerns, and from that position drew on one of the social narratives of the Kurdish movement to accommodate their specific circumstances. All three referred to the general idea of a nationalist awakening, dengbêj Bêrîvan and aşık Abdullah most elaborately. Dengbêj Bêrîvan adopted the PKK ideas on womanhood and emancipation. Aşık Abdullah adopted the narrative of suffering and the need to fight for his people. This sheds new light on studies like Malkki's (1996) who emphasized how social narratives were produced and shared by large groups of people in a similar way. Although one can clearly detect the social narratives of the Kurdish movement in individual stories, it also becomes clear that individuals give their personal twist and interpretation to the narratives in ways they see as relevant in the context of their lives. Especially people like the dengbêjs, who were much less connected to PKK ideology than the political activists, articulated their own interpretations. In doing so, they resisted the level of control the PKK would have liked to have had over the Kurdish individual. The PKK vision of how every Kurd needed to remodel him/herself into a new Kurdish person was thwarted, not by a unified opposing power, but by individuals who simply reworked these narratives according their own needs. As Zigon (2009) insists, institutions tend to give the impression that their morality is unquestioned and that their supporters follow them in a united fashion, but this is rarely the case.

4.6 Istanbul, a market for dengbêjs

The Unkapanı district is located just outside of Istanbul's modern business district Beyoğlu. When from Beyoğlu one crosses the Golden Horn, and goes straight in the direction of Aksaray, one is in the heart of Unkapanı. On the left hand side of the busy street, always filled with buses, taxis and cars, one finds the center of

the music industry of Turkey. It is a multi-story mall called IMÇ record market,[373] where "the vast majority of significant music businesses aside from studios – including record labels, promoters, distributors, suppliers, instrument stores, and management companies", is located (Bates 2008: 164). Some of the labels have a specific affiliation; there are, for example, Alevi companies that mainly produce Alevi records, and Kurdish companies that produce Kurdish language records. I visited regularly the different Kurdish music companies, all located in this same place. The owners informed me about the newest released CDs; the best dengbêjs; the young generation of popular Kurdish singers; and about the criteria for choosing one singer over another, for releasing albums of some while rejecting others. Although one can find and buy all released records of these music companies at Unkapanı, the majority of their CDs and cassettes are sold at other places. In recent years, some of the most popular Kurdish music can be found in mainstream music shops in Istanbul's city center, although this remained marginal up to the present (2013). To find a broader collection one has to visit Kurdish-focused places such as the NÇM or a Kurdish bookshop.

The presence of Kurdish music companies at the IMÇ, and the availability of books and CDs in Kurdish in places accessible to the mainstream public is an important means through which Kurdishness has become visible in public life since the 1990s, and all the more so since the 2000s and has come to occupy a space next to publications in Turkish. It cannot be emphasized enough that hearing Kurdish in public and seeing Kurdish written on books and CD covers caused a fundamental experience of shock for many Turkish citizens,[374] through the confrontation with the existence of the Kurdish Other that had been denied for close to a century. This non-people and non-language at once had a visible and unavoidable presence, but now not as 'terrorists' [*terörist*] in 'the mountains' [*dağlarda*] and in 'the south east' [*güneydoğuda*], but in legal public spaces at the heart of commercial activity, and in non-violent ways. In this section I explore the place of the dengbêjs in the Kurdish music scene through the emergence of Kurdish music companies and the style and content of dengbêj music CDs.

The current Kurdish music market does have some precursors. Kurdish radio stations began broadcasting from abroad in 1955. In the first decades of the

373 Istanbul Manifaturacılar Çarşısı, literally Istanbul Draper's Market, which today has a different use.

374 Bates (2008) makes a similar remark when speaking about the famous music group Kardeş Türküler that studied, performed, and released albums of non-Turkish language music (such as Assyrian and Zazaki): "The knowledge that these allegedly dead languages and extinct cultures are actually still in existence is a radical and disturbing realization for many people, since it directly contradicts the widely-held fundamental conceptions about the modern Turkish nation" (pp. 66).

Republic, musicians and intelligentsia had left Turkey for a freer existence abroad, many moving to Syria and from there on to France and to Iraq. "For musicians Bagdad radio constituted a relatively comfortable place to stay (..) A lot of musicians (like the Cizrawî family and Hesen Zîrek) went from Iran and Turkey to these centers where they found a free working space" (Yıldırım 2007). Yıldırım writes that in the period from 1925 to 1960 it was very difficult to work on Kurdish cultural production, and that this situation only improved slightly after these years. In 1961 the new constitution marked a short period of more political freedom which resulted in a flood of publications and some album releases. In 1965 the first Kurdish records appeared on the market, produced at IMÇ. They featured the dengbêjs Mahmut Kızıl, Ayşe Şan and Hüseyin Tutal (Huseynê Fare) in editions of a few thousand copies. At the same time, the range of leftist movements that emerged in the political arena had consequences for how the music scene was organized: "with the fragmentation within the left, different movements and organizations started to have their own affiliated minstrels" (Sarıtaş 2010: 32). In this climate, in which political opposition groups got space to operate, there was also the growing mobilization of Kurdish activism. Both Yıldırım (2007) and Sarıtaş (2010) indicate that much of the newly emerging Kurdish music groups had a political character and developed in tandem with political movements. Most of the albums of that short liberal period were banned almost immediately, but through private copies still had a large distribution (Yıldırım 2007). This does not apply to LPs as they were not easily copied. Apart from illegal cassette copies after the 1960s (when the cassette player was introduced) there was hardly any visible and auditory presence of Kurdish music in Turkey's public life. This changed gradually from 1991 on when the ban on Kurdish music was lifted, but a more significant visibility of Kurdish music only came into existence in the 2000s. Before that time, most Kurdish musicians performed in Turkish.[375]

One of the early music companies at IMÇ is a company that I call here Aslan Müzik. Its owner, Murat Aslan, started the company in 1991, the year in which the ban on Kurdish music was lifted. He came to Istanbul in the early 1980s with the plan to start singing and make his own albums, but instead he became a producer of Kurdish music, and has close contacts with many musicians. When Aslan came to Istanbul he began as a street vendor at Eminönü Square, selling illegal cassettes which he bought from small illegal Kurdish firms. He said that at that time there were no official Kurdish recordings due to the prohibitions. He could therefore not sell his cassettes

375 The owner of Aslan Müzik (pseudonym) mentioned Fena Bedri, Aysel Bedri, Ayseli Ermeni, Izzet Altınmeşe, Ibrahim Tatlıses, Burhan Cacan, Hüsamettin Subasi, Selahattin Alpay, Mahsun Kırmızıgül, Nuri Sesigüzel, and Belkiş Akkale.

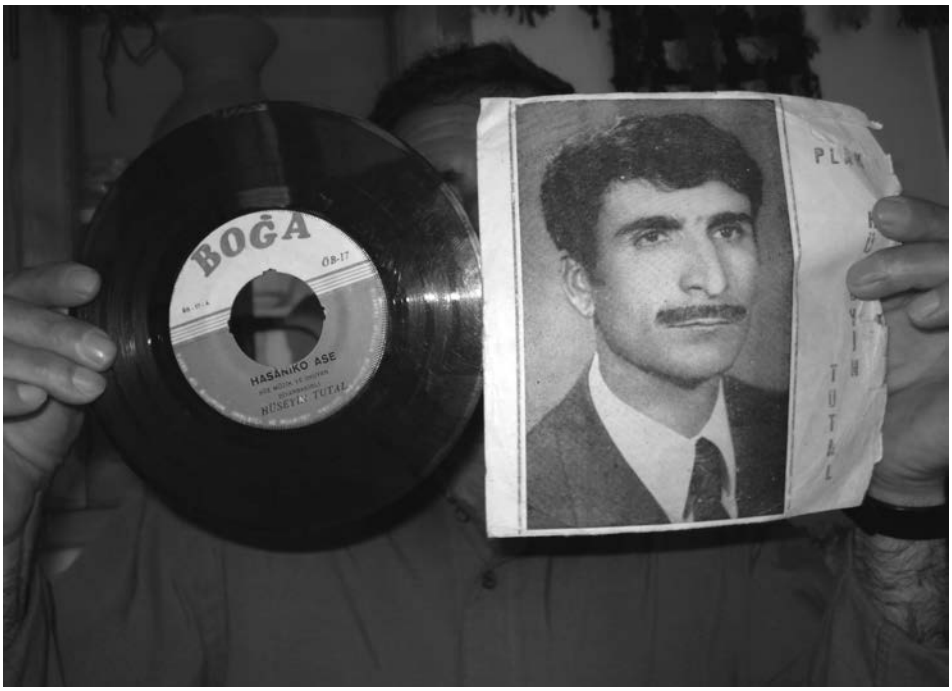

Figure 25. The early Kurdish LP of Hüseyin Tutal, shown by a music seller in Diyarbakır.

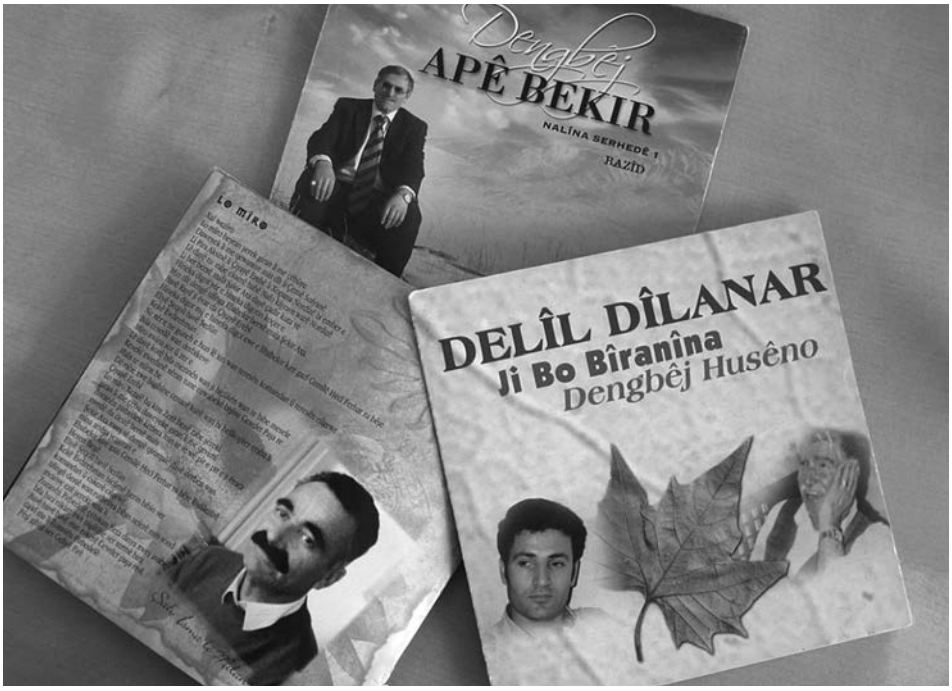

Figure 26. CD booklets, one of them the CD made by Delîl Dîlanar discussed in this section.

openly, but hid them and only showed them undercover to interested customers. In 1991 Kurdish music production became legalized, but it still happened frequently that individual albums were banned because of their alleged political content.[376] In the same year he opened his own production company.

In the Turkish music industry all recordings are registered and approved by the Ministry of Culture. The system offers protection to musicians against pirating, but serves at the same time as an instrument of censorship, which meant that until the late 1990s not many Kurdish productions were accepted. Also after 1991, despite lifting of the ban, many productions were banned because of their (alleged) political content. Aslan:

> The records were indeed published but they were not distributed. (Only in Diyarbakır and around there?) Yes in Diyarbakır, Urfa, Muş, Batman, some were distributed and after that they were removed [from the market]. Before 1990 Kurdish music was hardly sold in Unkapanı. There were some cassettes that were in Turkish and had also one or two songs that were half in Kurdish. After 1990 it was opened up a bit, but at the same time many cassettes got banned. For example I changed many names of cassettes, and also the names of songs.[377] I distributed them in Diyarbakır, the police listened to them and prohibited them (Murat Aslan, from Kurdish, Istanbul 2008).

According to Aslan, the Kurdish music scene abroad[378] had also an only limited influence in Turkey due to the same reasons. Still, new Kurdish music groups were mushrooming, and at the time Aslan worked mainly with them, as they were immensely popular among young people.[379] The place the dengbêjs occupy in the collections of the music companies is rather small, because of the only recently revived interest in them. Young and modern Kurdish musicians had an earlier and much more successful access to the wider public. Aslan released some archival albums with dengbêjs, but generally stayed away from them as people simply did not ask for their music. The focus of Kurdish music companies was on new developments in Kurdish music.

376 Aslan mentioned the first productions after the ban was lifted: "When Özal liberated it in 1991 there was a cassette of Fırat Başkale. Within two days it became banned. The name of the cassette was Cêne Cêne. It was banned, but slowly they were still published. An instrumental album came out of Şivan Perwer. An album with the name Newroz 1 and 2 by Nilüfer Akbal and Fırat Başkale. Another album of Besir Kaya half in Turkish, half in Kurdish." Interview in Istanbul in Kurdish, 2008.

377 He means that he changed these names in order to make them sound acceptable to the authorities who checked the albums before and after they were released. Still they were often banned.

378 He mentions Koma Berxwedan, Xelîl Xemgîn, Kawa, Diyar, Seyidxan, Hozan Şemdin, Maruf, Hozan Serhat, Zozan, Besê, Cewat Merwanî, Aydın, and dengbêj Seydo.

379 Also today, "the market is dominated by popular music groups known as *kom*, which incorporate traditional Kurdish materials into an arranged aesthetic, drawing often on Turkish popular music forms (most notably, *arabesk*), but also recently on rock 'n' roll, electronica, and other Western styles" (Bates 2008: 56).

In the late 1980s, and 1990s, Kurdish political music groups emerged under the name *Kom* (lit. gathering/group) which were related to political movements. *Koma Berxwedan*, of which Zana Güneş was a member (see above), was among the first. According to Sarıtaş, the groups differed from the Kurdish music produced in the previous decades. "The *koms* that emerged in the late 1980s and early 1990s created a tradition of group music making that did not exist in Kurdish music previously. While there had been some Kurdish music groups in the 1970s, they did not gain much popularity and reputation" (Sarıtaş 2010). Making music in groups was regarded as a way of building a collective and national identity, and music making was seen as instrumental in establishing a collective history.

Sarıtaş argues that the *koms* adopted ideas from Turkish leftist music groups that had emerged in the 1980s, in the same manner as Kurdish activists were connected to the Turkish left in the 1960s and 1970s. Since the Turkish left was the movement they came from, it was not surprising that Kurdish musicians took Turkish political music as their example. Kurdish political music emerged at the time that Kurdish movements started to develop independently from the Turkish left. From the left they adopted ideas about the role of the musician. "Especially the musician as a political figure who has certain responsibilities for the movement s/he belongs to has been very influential on *kom* musicians" (Sarıtaş 2010: 38). They also adopted some other elements from the Turkish left, such as the idea that polyphonic music needs to be introduced to 'modernize' Kurdish music and the use of Western popular music forms as a basis for new Kurdish music. Like the Turkish left the Kurdish *koms* produced elegies for martyrs who had died in the Kurdish struggle. This politicized music scene was immensely popular among many Kurds in years that were marked by oppression and suffering. They expressed the hardships many people went through, and they openly called for resistance, and supported the 'freedom fighters in the mountains', the PKK.

In the heated political atmosphere of that time, Kurdish music companies followed the new developments and released albums related to that, and related to the interests of the majority of the public. This is why only after 1998 a market for dengbêjs came into existence:

> In 1998, 1999 and 2000 it was increasing a bit, but now that the market is better it is even more increasing every day. Day by day the dengbêj art is growing. (..) For example, people buy an album and then they ask me, isn't there anything new of dengbêjs? Isn't there a new album of someone who is making dengbêj art? (Murat Aslan, interview in Kurdish, Istanbul 2008)

Since then Aslan has started working again on archive albums. He cleaned some of the old recordings in the studio and issued them anew, such as an album of the dengbêjs Huseynê Muşî and Reso. He noticed a rise in demand, whereas before "there were not many people who knew about it". Dengbêjs began visiting him to ask if he wanted to make an album. Aslan has certain criteria regarding whom to accept or not. They need to have a nice voice and songs that they learned from a master as well as their own songs. He also said that he travels to eastern Turkey to find singers himself, mainly in his home region of Serhat. When he hears about a youngster with a good voice, or a woman, he visits them. According to Aslan, it remains difficult to produce albums of female dengbêjs, despite the high demand for them. That is because "they are a minority. (..) There is a demand! Definitely, but they don't have much voice. There are also those who hide themselves and who don't come".

Aslan also pointed out that the Kurdish music industry received a great impulse from Kurdish television. "Our people had moved very far away from their music. Because they watch [the Kurdish music channel] MMC and Roj TV, day by day people come closer to the music (..) Often people did not know the musicians, they got to know them from Roj TV". Recently the music industry has run into hard times because of the availability of music on the internet, and the difficulty of protecting one's records from being illegally spread on the internet.

Another smaller production company is owned by Fatih Oruç. He said that he had a special interest in dengbêjs, which comes from the time he was a reporter in Diyarbakır:

> In 1992 I worked as a radio journalist in Diyarbakır. Even though it was forbidden, we still made the dengbêjs a topic in the radio programs, and I also listened to their songs at home. We came together to listen. For that reason this tradition became my essence. Because of that I have to take care of it, and I do that because I want it, not because I have to. I am very interested in it. I grew up with their voices (Fatih Oruç, interview in Turkish, Istanbul 2008).

The fact that it was forbidden to broadcast the dengbêjs and to listen to their songs, made him feel even more connected to this music. He used the term 'classical songs' (*kilamên klasîk*) for the music of the dengbêjs, and said that the dengbêjs are at the roots of all contemporary Kurdish music, which makes them of great importance.

To give an impression of what the dengbêj albums look like I discuss here one album as an example: the album *Ji bo bîranîna dengbêj Husêno*[380] (*In the remembrance of dengbêj Husêno*) made my Delîl Dîlanar, a young singer who currently lives in Cologne.

380 Album title: *Delîl Dîlanar. Ji bo bîranîna dengbêj Husêno*. Production: Ses Plak Yapım/Mîr Muzîk. Year: 2003.

The album was released in 2003. Dengbêj Husêno is one of the most famous dengbêjs of the previous generation, and he was Dîlanar's uncle. Dîlanar is a popular singer with strong ties to the dengbêj art. He is a master of several traditional instruments, and is well qualified to sing in the style of the dengbêjs, something not many young singers can accomplish. When I interviewed him at his house in Cologne, Dîlanar said, in the same vein as Zana Güneş earlier in this chapter, that he had first preferred other musical styles, but later turned back to the dengbêj art:

> There was a time when I said to myself: 'I don't want to sing at all.' I said: 'my uncle was singing with his hand to his ear [in the way of the dengbêjs], but I play an instrument and I don't want to sing in the way he sang.' But later, when I got to know more about the culture, when I got involved in Kurdish associations, I began thinking: 'If I am a Kurdish artist, if I make Kurdish music, then what is my source? I live in Turkey and if I watch television I don't see anything Kurdish. They take things from my culture, translate it, and sell it to me. Why should I listen to that? I have my own language, I have my own dengbêjs.' So first I drifted away, and then I came back to my own source. I live in different conditions, I don't live anymore in the mountains, or in a village. I live in modern conditions, but my source is there. What I need to do is to take it from there and to do something with it today (Delîl Dîlanar, interview in Turkish, Cologne 2007).

The CD is an original combination of Dîlanar's own voice and style with that of his uncle. It starts with the kilam *Bavê Fexriya* (chapter 1). One hears the sound of birds and water, to emphasize how close the dengbêjs stood to nature. From the middle of these sounds, Delîl sings the entrance, *ahiiiaaah*. This is followed immediately by an archive recording of his uncle, who sings the song. The sound is cleaned, but one can hear it is an old recording. The singing of Husêno is embellished by Dîlanar with soft drum beats, and one still hears water flowing. After 1.30 minutes, the voice of his uncle stops and Dîlanar continues the song in his younger voice. He sings a stanza, and again his uncle continues with the next. In between of the stanza's Dîlanar already joins in the last sounds of the stanza, when his uncle starts with the chorus. By mixing the voice of his uncle with his own music and voice, Dîlanar makes the voice of the dengbêj accessible to today's listeners.

The CD booklet of this CD gives transcriptions of the kilams, and a text with first some information on the life and works of dengbêj Husêno. The author, Kakşar Oremar, a well-known folklorist who wrote many texts about the dengbêjs, presents him as one of the masters in his art, who helped in protecting Kurdish culture. He is presented as resisting Turkish assimilation politics by refusing to sing in Turkish on a local radio station: "he did not sell his art cheaply" (*hunera xwe bi erzanî nefirot*) and "he did not become a seller of art (*mirovekî hunerfiroş nebû*)." He is also presented as

someone close to nature, his voice displaying "the beauty and smells of the summer pastures and mountains of the homeland (*bedewî û behna zozan û çiyayên welat, di zengilên dengê Husên de tên xuyakirin*)."

The next section of the text is about the content of the kilams. Here the author focuses on the political songs he sang: about the Sheikh Said Revolt, the resistance of Mistefe Barzanî against the Baath regime in Iraq, and some other Kurdish heroes. The text leaves aside any reference to tribal songs. In the next section the author mentions how dengbêj Husêno got known by many people when he performed at the first Newroz (Kurdish Newyear) celebration in Diyarbakır in 1991:

> After the fire of revolution and uprising lit up in the north of the homeland,[381] and after the government displayed a warm attitude against some of the requests of the Kurds (*piştî ku agirê şoreş û serhildanê li bakurê welêt geş bû û dewletê li hemberî hinek daxwazên Kurdan helwesteke nerm nîşan da*), the celebration of Newroz was permitted. At the 1991 Newroz celebration in Istanbul, that was celebrated for the first time by the HEP [Kurdish political party], dengbêj Husêno also came out into the open in front of over 30,000 people. That day the warm welcome of his people for dengbêj Husêno, demonstrated that the Kurds know the value of the dengbêjs and their art very well.

Clearly, the CD booklet expresses the ideology of the Kurdish movement and follows their narratives. In the last section the singer Delîl Dîlanar makes clear that the album is dedicated to dengbêj Husêno, and with him to all other dengbêjs of the previous generation:

> It is not an easy task to be capable of giving the taste of the songs to the people, as he did (*ne karekî hesan e ku mirov bikaribe mîna wî tehma stranê, bide gel*). I did not have the privilege to sing with him, but I hope with this work that the people will listen to my and his voice together. (..) With this album we commemorate once more, with endless respect and honor, the immortal dengbêjs Reso, Şeroyê Biro, Kawîs Axa, Meryem Xan, Evdalê Zeynikê and all other dengbêjs.

Delîl's work paved the way for the young generation of Kurds who were not used to listen to the dengbêj art, to get acquainted with their voices. By adding a musical interpretation to the old voice recordings of his uncle, alternated with his own voice, he makes the dengbêj art more accessible to people who would otherwise find it difficult to listen to the naked voices and the recital style. As one of my Kurdish friends described it: "he introduced the dengbêjs to a whole generation."

As is evident from the language used in this (and other) CD booklets, the music market often reproduced the same social narratives as in other places. At the

381 'The north of the homeland' refers to Kurdistan in Turkey.

same time, the story of Murat Aslan shows that the producers are not only driven by political motives, but also by customer demand. Although this demand also followed upon political developments, an important producer like Murat Aslan did not base his choices solely on cultural activism. He was interested in finding a market for the music he produced. His production firm originated in political engagement; the political climate was so oppressive that without a political motivation he would never have opened it. However, he also followed the wishes of the Kurdish public. Since the renewed interest in the dengbêj art, he had released many more CDs of dengbêj than before. And because he knows that there is a demand for CDs of female dengbêjs, he began searching for them himself so that he can produce their albums.

Conclusion

In this chapter we looked at the various processes, sites and narratives through which the dengbêj art has been transformed into cultural activism. Local activities such as the festival, Kurdish television, the Dengbêj Houses, and the music market in Istanbul, were prepared by international actors who presented the dengbêjs as folkloric subjects, as ambassadors of a Kurdish national culture. The specific way in which the dengbêj art became a project of cultural activism needs to be understood within the context and development of Turkish and Kurdish nationalisms. The dominant nationalist project of the Turkish state turned any Kurdish cultural expression into a subversive act. Harsh oppression made people shy away from performing Kurdishness in public. Since the 2000s the political climate became more amenable to Kurdish cultural production and step by step political activists gained more space within the cultural arena.

The open display of Kurdish language and culture in public life in Turkey became increasingly possible. Activists managed to claim places like the Ishak Pasha Palace where the festival took place and the newly renovated Dengbêj House in Diyarbakır's old city center as Kurdish sites. In Istanbul, Kurdish music producers managed to find a space for Kurdish music CDs in places otherwise dominated by Turkish cultural production. The NÇM cultural center, at the time located on Istanbul's main shopping street, and the Kurdish bookshop, were other places where Kurdishness was made visible. These sites, by their mere presence, openly contested Turkish state nationalism that for almost a century had excluded Kurdish cultural production from public life and denied its existence. However, these activities were still carried out with great difficulty; other people in the state

bureaucracy sabotaged projects, pressed charges against Kurdish politicians and activists, and arrested and imprisoned them. Consequently, for the activists, culture-making was close to being a matter of survival. Their political agenda had grown from decades of oppression and resulted in moral claims on their fellow Kurds from whom they expected total dedication to the Kurdish struggle, which they felt should be everyone's first priority.

Cultural activism was therefore not only directed at finding a space for Kurdishness in public life, but also at influencing Kurds in their way of thinking. The activists who were involved in Kurdish culture making were part of the Kurdish movement and its ideology that had developed moral narratives on what Kurdish nationalism and modernity should be. The narratives developed by the activists on the meaning of the dengbêj art were strongly tied to that ideology and the activists tried to control the "retelling" of the dengbêj art in ways they saw as appropriate for their political agendas. We saw how this retelling of the dengbêj art in terms of heritage, awakening, and being in the service of the Kurdish people, emerged in many places. It was articulated in the speeches of dengbêj Ahmed and the MC at the Festival, in the ideology behind the *Şevbêrk* TV program on dengbêjs, and in how Zana Güneş presented his own life story. Also in the Dengbêj House, the activists expected that the participating dengbêjs would be passionate volunteers devoted to serving the Kurdish people. Zeki Barış felt that some dengbêjs performing at the House had now developed a 'nationalist mindset' that made them much more dedicated and suited to the way the activists wanted to present them to the larger public. In CD booklets dengbêjs were presented as exemplifying 'thousand years old' Kurdish heritage, as mouthpieces of Kurdish suffering, and as part of the Kurdish freedom fight.

When speaking of the dengbêj art, the activists spoke at the same time of their ideas about the Kurdish past, present and future. To them, the dengbêj art holds a mirror up to Kurds in which they can see not only their beauty, but also their flaws. They feel that from this partially flawed history a better future needs to be created. The activists tried to educate the dengbêjs about the problematic side of their kilams, which speak of Kurdish rivalries, treason, and bloodshed, and of a tribal system that they see as wholly outdated in the era of nationalism. The Dengbêj Houses, cultural centers, festivals and television channels functioned as sites where ideological ideas were presented and discussed, and where social narratives were (re)produced, negotiated, and circulated. The strong ideological ideas of the activists caused tensions with the dengbêjs who often had different goals and expectations regarding their performances at these places.

Most dengbêjs were primarily interested in the transmission and performance of their art. The bodily experience of singing the old kilams they had learned when they were young, but had to hide from public life for so many years, was in itself a rewarding experience for them. When singing together, they listened to each other, and they enjoyed following the associations that the kilams brought up. Slowly they remembered more and more kilams that they had once known fluently, but had forgotten in the years of silence. The requirements established for them within the political atmosphere of cultural activism prevented them from such free association and often made them feel obstructed again. This frustrated them and made them feel that they were not valued and recognized enough for their efforts and real talents.

As we saw in chapter 2, although the dengbêjs mostly subscribed to the future ideals of the Kurdish movement, they did not always share their views on the Kurdish past, or at least felt less of a need to omit kilams seen as problematic. Only some dengbêjs who more strongly identified with the Kurdish movement incorporated the new social narratives into their own self-definition. Dengbêj Bêrîvan regarded herself as a spokesperson and example for Kurdish women who had suffered from patriarchal oppression, and saw the PKK leader Öcalan as the one who had opened the way for a different position of women in modern Kurdish society. In a way, her position as a modern female dengbêj in the service of Kurdish politics was a more important quality than her singing as an aim in itself. Aşık Abdullah connected to the ideas of suffering and the united Kurdish struggle for freedom. He hoped that this would also give him access to the music market. His endeavors show that involvement in activism had become an important way to gain access to Kurdish cultural production. Both of them framed their life stories as stories of prior ignorance, a time of awakening, and then service for the Kurdish struggle. However, they were selective in how they used this narrative, and mobilized it for what was important to them. In chapter 3, dengbêj Hamîd also used the narrative of democratization and Kurdish nationalism selectively, by mobilizing it as an appeal for more financial support for the dengbêj art.

This chapter was therefore revealing of how social narratives are created and deployed, and for what meanings they may assume in a society undergoing profound changes. Existing power relations are crucial in determining what narratives are circulated in what way. I follow other authors in their understanding of the Kurdish movement as a loose network of a number of organizations that, although they differed in their objectives and approaches, produced similar narratives, and functioned as a unified voice promoting and supporting Kurdish emancipation in

Turkey. Although there was indeed an increasing diversity of views among political activists, the PKK as the dominant ideological force for two decades was still influential in the way the activists presented their objectives. Decades of oppression, in which precisely these activists had taken a leading role and had suffered for doing so, gave their moral messages a strong claim: they had a certain authority because of their suffering. Also, the narrative of the division and hatred among Kurdish tribes and the failure of the Kurdish rebellions as a consequence thereof, makes it more difficult to come up with alternative viewpoints. In the end, no one wants to be seen as the trouble maker and as the person who destroys Kurdish unity.

If we compare this chapter about the endeavors of political activists, with the first three chapters of the dissertation that focus mainly on the perspective of the dengbêjs, a temporal perspective will help us to appreciate the differences in moral narratives and viewpoints. As I mentioned before, the majority of the political activists belong to the young generation of Kurds that grew up in the 1980s and 1990s that formed the most oppressive and disruptive decades of recent Kurdish history. Growing up with harsh oppression and violence made this generation radical in their battle for Kurdish rights. When after the 1999 arrest of Öcalan the Kurdish movement focused increasingly on peaceful and non-violent negotiation, cultural activism became an important way to place Kurdish language and culture on Turkey's political agenda. Over the last decades the cultural arena offered the best place to achieve increasing rights for Kurds, and also to enhance the influence of Kurdish policy-makers in mainly local politics. We saw in this chapter how slowly the activists' efforts began to bear fruits. Keeping in mind the many difficulties the activists had already gone through on a young age, it is understandable that their primary aim and focus was on gaining increasing Kurdish rights. They regarded strong and outspoken moral viewpoints on what Kurdish society should be and become as the only way to form a unitary front against the dominance and oppression of Turkey's politics regarding the Kurds. The historical moment is thus crucial for the type of moral narratives that emerged, and also for the force with which these moral narratives were brought across. In the following chapter we will see how this historical moment deeply affected the life of a family of dengbêjs, who lived a life on the run.

Figure 27. A family in their living room in a village near Diyarbakır, with Kurdish satellite television in the background.

Chapter 5

Songs crossing borders: musical memories of a family on the run

Introduction

> Although the institution of the nation-state and its associated political and cultural processes and practices are widely hailed as the most impressive achievement of modernity, statelessness and its consequences are seldom accorded the same privileged position in modern philosophical and political discourse. The stateless person is seen as a relic of the past fighting against modernity, or merely as an accident of modernity fighting against history. (..) The identity and the claims of the stateless are denied by the modern nation-state, which turns the stateless into the historical other of modernity (Abbas Vali 2006: 55).

It was summer 2008. We were sitting on the modest veranda of the village house in Zeban, the village where I had stayed the last four nights. It was the end of the day, just before the dusk arrived. With dengbêj Bahar and her relatives we sat on the carpet typical of all the houses in this region. They were laid out indoors, on the porches, and also outdoors in the gardens, to host the many people who were often around. Apart from dengbêj Bahar there was Murat, her brother-in-law, the owner of the house; her elderly father-in-law who spent most of the day on this porch; Murat's daughter who lived in the neighboring village and whom I could barely understand because she spoke the Kurdish dialect of this village; and Bahar's daughter who had just married her cousin, Murat's son. We gazed at the mountains that surrounded us on all sides, huge and impressive. Arriving by bus from the plain of Van, with the road climbing to Hakkari, and from Hakkari by car another steep and twisting road towards the village, this seemed to be the roof of the world. The highest peaks in this region are above 11,000 feet. The peace of the early evening was betraying us, giving the impression that this beautiful spot in the mountains was indeed a peaceful place. But the nights were filled with fighting, and the days with army vehicles and roadblocks every few kilometers. To our right we looked at the mountains of Iraq, and in the last sunlight we could still read the huge Turkish letters written in white chalk on the hill that formed the border: "the border is our honor."

That day there had been the wedding of a relative. A little later we would go to the house of Murat's sister to eat the wedding dinner. The women were all dressed in the colorful dress style of this region; long petticoats in pink, bright blue, red, green, and over these glittering see-through dresses in the same color. The ones with the most fashionable dresses had bought them in Iraqi Kurdistan which was known for the latest fashion styles and most beautiful fabrics. We dressed in the morning and had danced already the whole afternoon in the playground of the little primary school. The wedding band with *saz* (lute), drum and singer was set up in a corner of the schoolyard and played the latest Kurdish songs. The huge loudspeakers broadcast

the music over the village. To one side the women danced in a large colorful circle, in front a woman who was a good dancer waved a small kerchief to accompany the difficult dances. To the other side the men danced, at times slowly and quietly, at other times wildly and with passion.

Figure 28. Women dancing at a wedding in a village near Hakkari, 2008. They are not the people who told their life story in this chapter.

From afar we heard voices arriving. About forty to fifty men walked in a procession through the village singing the old wedding songs. In front walked the uncle of the groom and another relative, the groom in between them. His parents had died long ago. The groom and the younger men were dressed in suit and tie, the older men in traditional clothes made of Kurdish fabrics; dark green or brown wide overalls that are held up by a long Kurdish shawl in white and black, wrapped around the waist. Another shawl is tied around the head. With deep loud voices the groom's uncles were the first to sing a line which was then repeated by the others in the procession. Neither instruments, or speakers, but only the unaccompanied voices filled these last moments of the day. They passed by greeting us and continued their walk past all the houses of the village; about eighty in all, lined up neatly along three parallel streets. After dinner we returned to the schoolyard and danced, we danced late into the night accompanied by the wedding band that never seemed to grow

tired. Twice the unaccompanied voices came back on stage during a short power cut. The elderly men and women who knew the old songs well immediately took over from the band and the dancing continued. But their voices sounded reluctant and only when the wedding band struck up again, did the dancing revive with full energy.

The following morning we sat on the carpets in the house of our host, it was the day of our departure. This was the first time in many years that dengbêj Bahar had been able to visit her village. The visit was for a sad reason; her sister had suddenly passed away. She was only forty-six years old and had probably died of a heart attack. She was the sister who Bahar especially loved, a woman who was respected by many because of her wisdom. Also, she had had great knowledge of the old traditions, stories and songs. Dengbêj Bahar and her husband dengbêj Cengiz had been granted political asylum in Germany and were not able to enter Turkey legally. Since dengbêj Bahar wanted to return to the village by any means possible now that her sister passed away, she had made the journey with the passport of someone else, a risky journey. But people in this region were used to taking risks of all kinds and did not easily shy away from them. This day she had to leave again, after a stay of six weeks. Her saying goodbye recalled for me all the times she had done so before. Her life had been marked by separation: from her husband, from her village, her relatives, and many others she loved.

Although it was still early in the morning, the sun already burnt outside and the heat slowly entered the house. The women were gathered altogether in the large corridor, the front room of the house. The men sat in the adjoining living room with the door open so that we could see those sitting close to the entrance. In all there were about twenty-five people who came to say goodbye, all present a close relative of dengbêj Bahar. The atmosphere was heavy with grief. People sat silently, speaking softly with each other about things that still needed to be said or arranged or packed. Then Bahar's brother-in-law unexpectedly started to sing in the other room, he sang a lamentation for the deceased. His loud sad voice filled the room where he sat, came to us in the corridor, until it had filled the whole house. As soon as the voice began singing, most women around me began crying. The voice and the words touched on the grief they felt inside. They were mourning for the deceased; for other loved ones who had passed away; for the approaching departure; and maybe also for the difficult life in this village rent by violence. When the song ended everyone stood up to say goodbye. In tears dengbêj Bahar and her daughters got into the car and started the journey that would bring them to Hakkari that day, to Van the next day, and to Germany the day after. They went accompanied by the song that had announced their departure.

This chapter is an important follow up to chapter 4, where I discussed several sites where the dengbêj art is mobilized for cultural activism, constituting a contestation of the dominance of Turkishness in public life. In this chapter I focus on two processes related to that: first the deterritorialization of the Kurdish question and the displacement of many Kurds, and what this has meant for the dengbêj art, and second the ways in which some individual dengbêjs became involved in cultural activism. I present the life stories and songs of three members of a Kurdish family that currently lives in Germany. They originate from a village I call Zeban, located in southeast Turkey, exactly on the Turkey/Iraq border. Their (dis)embodied experience of hearing and singing songs became connected to their displacement. Dengbêj Bahar, her husband dengbêj Cengiz, and their eldest daughter dengbêj Narîn, are well educated in the oral tradition of their village. When they lived in the village their knowledge went unnoticed, but after they had left the village it acquired different meanings. The songs traveled with them on journeys which were mostly caused by ongoing conflict; from Zeban to Iraq, back to Turkey, to Iran, again to Iraq, and finally to Germany where they have lived since 1997. Since they live in Germany, they perform regularly in the *Şevbêrka Dengbêja* television program (chapter 4).

Marginalization and illegality are central to the lives of many Kurds, and also figure in the stories and songs of the family whose lives this chapter examines. Since the village the family comes from is situated on the Turkey-Iraq border, and is also close to the Turkey-Iran border, they did not feel that they belonged to any one of these nation-states in particular. Rather, much of their lives unfolded outside of legal state boundaries. Often they crossed borders illegally, for trade, to escape, or just to visit relatives on the other side. Although their village is located in Turkey, none of the family members has a Turkish passport. Instead, they obtained Iraqi passports during their stay in Iraqi Kurdistan, and German passports since they have lived in Germany. They have lived through all the major wars that have happened in the region during their lifetime, often fighting in, or on the run for, one of them, which meant that they lived in four countries, and sometimes in all simultaneously. For Bahar, Cengiz and Narîn the songs and stories they know, and the way they sang these songs for a large audience on television and on CD, seemed to make a difference in coping with the many hardships they have lived through. In this chapter I argue that the act of performing the songs, and working on archiving them, helps them to piece together the shattered experiences of lives fragmented by loss, violence and departure.

I was introduced to this family in 2007, at the start of my research, by Zana Güneş, the host of the television program *Şevbêrka Dengbêja*. He introduced us because

of their frequent participation in the program, and their profound knowledge of village songs and traditions. Although Güneş introduced them to me as dengbêjs and presents them as such in the TV program, they would not usually be regarded as such in eastern Turkey. This is because they do not sing kilams, the long recital songs that I introduced in chapter 1. Instead, they sing the more rhythmic songs called *stran* that are widely known in their village, and not the exclusive terrain of a specialized singer. This body of songs comprises work songs and wedding songs, lullabies and laments, and songs about the history of the village, the tribe and the region.[382] Until today, most people still living in the village know at least some of these songs by heart or are able to sing along with them. In the village such knowledge in itself was thus not seen as very special or remarkable.[383]

However, in recent years this knowledge has become more valued because of the increasing attention paid by the Kurdish movement to Kurdish traditions. As I mentioned in chapter 4, Zana Güneş' TV program was an important catalyst for creating a new space for dengbêjs to perform. There I showed how the dengbêjs are presented in the first place as ambassadors of Kurdish culture and as folkloric subjects. The village and its traditions became part of the performance of the essence of Kurdishness and of a Kurdish past. In this process of refiguration not only dengbêjs were invited, but also other people who could sing the songs of their village and region. By calling them dengbêjs, Güneş broadens the dengbêj art to include village traditions that are seen as less prestigious. This decision may have been inspired by several reasons. First, he could not have easily invited dengbêjs living in Kurdistan, and was therefore limited to people living abroad, and within reach of the television station. Second, it is not easy to find many good dengbêjs today. And third, especially female dengbêjs are very difficult to find, but are nonetheless an important focus of the program, the television, and the Kurdish movement generally. It was therefore crucial for Güneş to include women in his program, and to gain the attention of the public for the knowledge they possess, even if this was not usually seen as special. I suggest that this move had an important consequence: by expanding the definition of dengbêj, people who would have otherwise not been seen as sources of important knowledge began valuing and redefining the songs and stories they had once

382 Although the historical songs include topics that are also discussed in dengbêj kilams, the strans are easier to remember and have a less complex structure both in music and in words. One can thus easily separate the two genres: the kilam sung by specialized singers, and the stran by anyone.

383 This does not mean that all people know such a large amount of songs as the family I discuss in this chapter. Many people only know some of them and were used to repeat the songs when they were sung by others, and did not learn hem by heart. The people central in this chapter are therefore still special in knowing such a large body of songs. However, they would usually not be regarded as dengbêjs.

learned and felt they could contribute to the preservation and continuity of Kurdish culture and language. The material presented in this chapter suggests that this new appreciation had a special impact on the lives of women.

Another important aim of the chapter is therefore to highlight the differences between male and female experiences with respect to what the songs mean to them and their position as singers. As I explained in the Introduction, I focused during my fieldwork more on men than on women for several reasons. However, the contact with the family in Germany offered the possibility of connecting the predominance of male voices and perspectives in this dissertation to the largely absent female voice. Whereas often in Turkey I encountered resistance to interviewing and recording women, dengbêj Bahar and dengbêj Narîn already had a public visibility when I met them through their TV performances and the CD they had made. They were open and friendly and willing to contribute to my research. I could connect to their life stories and to what they told me about the meaning they found in the songs and stories they know. Both were and are active in remembering and recording the knowledge they have, and both began to value that knowledge increasingly and in a new way after they had come to Germany.

Although this chapter focuses on a family in the diaspora, and on how their stay abroad has influenced the way they value their knowledge, I do not aim to create two distinct categories of people: those who live abroad and those who remain in Turkey. At the outset of my research it had been my objective to write a more comparative work, but while visiting places in Turkey and Europe and listening to people's stories, I felt that such a division into two groups is somewhat artificial. Most Kurds in Turkey lived through similar experiences as Kurds in Europe. Apart from sharing the same upbringing and cultural environment, many Kurds in Turkey also moved out of their village of origin, to one of the big cities of Western Turkey. These are distances of 1200 to over 1500 km. Housing, jobs, and the language of communication are different from what they were used to. Often, living in these cities is as much unlike the life they lived in Eastern Turkey as living in Germany, France or the Netherlands. Kurds living in eastern Turkey often (if not always) have relatives living in western Turkey and Europe. They keep in touch by talking on the phone or via skype, and by visiting their relatives in other places. The lives of their relatives form part of their imaginative and daily life world. For Kurds living in Europe the situation is comparable. They often continue to travel back and forth between Europe and Turkey and have a predominantly Kurdish network, both personally and professionally. Dengbêjs and other singers perform on Kurdish television channels and at festivals, release CDs with Kurdish or Turkish music

companies, and are thus in the first place directed towards Kurdish audiences. It is therefore important to see the interconnections between the (personal and professional) lives of people in Turkey and in Europe. All of this does not deny that the move to Europe often made people develop in ways different from before, and where relevant I pay attention to these.

The chapter unfolds in a way that I feel most appropriate for the material I collected. The ethnographic material consists, on the one hand, of the personal life stories of the family members, and on the other of their accounts about the songs and village life. These were often two quite distinct topics: either we spoke about the one or the other. When speaking about their traumatic experiences of life in a war zone, they usually did not refer to songs or singing, and were fully focused on reliving what had happened. When I asked them during these interviews about the songs, I did not get much response, and they would continue instead to speak about their experiences. The intense experiences required their full attention, and at the end of such interviews we felt tired and emotional, and not in the mood to switch to the topic of songs. When at other times we spoke of the songs this was a very different mode of speaking. The songs were often connected to pleasant memories of celebrations and associations with neighbors, relatives and friends. Also when they were sad songs that brought up sad memories, they seemed to provoke a different type of sadness, more bearable, and more comprehensible. The way they spoke of the songs was often in a nostalgic manner, about a life world they are no longer connected to today. In the chapter I therefore separate these two modes of speaking by first focusing on the background and life stories of the family members, and subsequently on the body of songs they know. I regard these as two different storylines, each of which connects to different types of memories. In the last part of the chapter I bring these two storylines together when writing about the new personal and social meanings the songs obtained. The chapter thus consists of three main parts: 1.the family's history and life stories; 2.the life of the songs; and 3.the meaning their songs obtain today.

5.1 Life in Germany

Currently the family from Zeban lives in Germany, in a town not far from Cologne. When I met them for the first time, one daughter of their six children was already married and lived in a nearby town, the others all lived together. Since that time two other daughters have married and moved out, but they still visit often. The parents have a predominantly Kurdish network in Germany. They do not speak much

German, but speak Bahdinan Kurdish[384] as their mother tongue. They often visit relatives in nearby towns, for example a brother of Cengiz with his family. They also know many Kurdish people from other places whom they got to know since they are living in Germany. Their children, born between 1982 and 1995, all went to school here, although the eldest were already in their late teens when they arrived in Germany. But they also made friends at school and have a wider non-Kurdish network than their parents. The income of the family comes partly from a pension that dengbêj Cengiz receives from the Iraqi Kurdistan government (see below), from a kiosk where they sell cigarettes, food and beverages, and alcohol, and from the jobs of the children, who work in various professions. The dominant language spoken at home is Kurdish, and like their parents the children are interested in the Kurdish issue. Some of them expressed interest in moving back to Iraqi Kurdistan or to Turkey. They have plans to join the army there, or to start some type of trade or shop. Cengiz is most eager to move back to Iraqi Kurdistan, but Bahar wants to stay close to her children, at least for now.

The family members regularly visit Turkey and Iraqi Kurdistan, and keep a close connection to their relatives there. When they travel to Iraqi Kurdistan they go to Duhok, a city about 130 km away from the village in Turkey. This is where they lived in the 1990s, and where many people of their village live today. In 2008, Bahar, Narîn, and Guher, a younger daughter, paid a visit to their village in Turkey where they stayed for six weeks. On that visit, Guher got married to her cousin, who thereafter came to Germany. A year later the young couple returned to the village for another visit. In 2009 Narîn visited both the village in Turkey and Duhok, to take care of her grandparents, who were old and in need of care. In 2010 she married an Iraqi Kurd who lived in the same town in Germany. They organized a big wedding in Germany, complete with a hennah night and wedding salon, and some five hundred guests. About ten of the groom's relatives came over from Iraqi Kurdistan to join the wedding. The year after the young couple visited his relatives in Duhok. On this visit dengbêj Cengiz, dengbêj Bahar, and Guher were also in Duhok, where they celebrated Kurdish Newroz. In 2012 the whole family with in-laws, and also the family of dengbêj Cengiz' brother, went for another visit during summer, some by plane, others by car, and they stayed for four to six weeks. The reason for their visit was the celebration of two weddings of close relatives, and of Newroz. In short, although based in Germany, their lives also take place in the village, and even more, in Duhok. Since the visits to the village are not frequent today, the family lives primarily in an urban environment that is quite different from the village life they lived in the past.

384 Bahdinan Kurdish is a Kurmanji dialect that is more influenced by Soranî Kurdish and differs somewhat from the Kurmanji spoken by the majority of Turkey's Kurds

Another important way in which the family stays connected to their home country and to their Kurdish network is through Kurdish television. As far as I could tell from the times I visited, Kurdish television was most watched by the parents, whereas the children showed more interest in German channels. The parents do not speak much German, and also their life world is more connected to Kurdistan than that of their children. Dengbêj Cengiz said about the television:

> When there was no Roj TV I could not live for one hour. Also if I watch other programs [on Kurdish channels], I always switch back to Roj TV many times while I am watching. We cannot survive without Roj TV, it is very important. In the past there was nothing for us. There was a Kurdish radio, radio Yerevan, and they spoke Kurdish forty-five minutes a day, Kurdish dengbêjs came there, all the Kurds in the world listened to that. But thank God now we have television. We listen to the news, we see our own people, they show us the whole world, that's why Roj TV is very important to us (Dengbêj Cengiz, interview in Turkish, Germany 2007).

This was in 2007 when I had just gotten to know them. It is clear that Cengiz attached great value to Kurdish television, and indeed when I visited them I got to watch many Kurdish channels, the number of which has exploded over the years.[385]

5.2 Some historical notes on the village

The village Zeban is situated at less than one kilometer distance from the border with Iraqi Kurdistan. According to dengbêj Cengiz, long ago the forefathers of the village were from the lower Mizûrî tribe,[386] but they were incorporated in the Berwarî tribe after they moved into Berwarî territory. Cengiz traveled a great deal in this region and is regarded as a knowledgeable person on the history of the village and the region. He said that there are approximately seventy-five Berwarî villages, all of them situated in Iraq. Zeban was at the northern edge of Berwari area, and after 1923 the Turkey-Iraq border was drawn exactly through the village. Consequently, one side of the village came to be situated within Turkey's borders and was cut off from Berwarî territory.

The isolated position of the village after the 1923 border made them vulnerable for internal or external conflicts. In cases of conflict the tribe used to play an important role, either to solve internal conflicts, to negotiate with neighboring

385 At the time of writing (2013) there are around sixty Kurdish channels that can be watched through satellite and/or the internet.

386 The *Mizûrî jorî* and *Mizûrî jêrî*, the upper and lower Mizûrî, are a large tribe located in the region of Duhok and Erbil in Iraqi Kurdistan.

tribes, or to defend and fight (see for examples the below section on songs). Kurdistan generally had a certain level of self-government (see Introduction), and this applied especially to regions further removed from the state's center, and high in the mountains. Conflicts were resolved without the interference of state structures, and the tribes functioned as the local political system. After the border was drawn the village was sometimes cut off from its tribal affiliations, at times when border crossings were more difficult to realize. Zeban had an agreement with the neighboring Pinyanişî tribe in case they needed help and could not be supported by the Berwarî tribe further away.

Before 1915 this region was inhabited by a majority of Chaldean Assyrians, a Christian minority in south east Turkey and northern Iraq. Generally Kurds use the word *Fileh* (Christian) for all types of Christians, not differentiating between Armenians, Assyrians or other groups (see also chapter 3). Cengiz referred to these people as *Fileh*, but also said they were Chaldean Assyrians (*Asûrî Keldanî*). According to Cengiz, Zeban was the only Muslim village among twenty Christian villages, and thus in their region the Christians formed the majority. In spite of the conflicts with Christians, people also often talked about positive interactions with the Christians in their region. They visited each other, often shared at least one language,[387] attended each other's weddings and celebrations, and Christians often served as *kirve*, the man who holds the young boy during his circumcision and becomes his godfather.[388] However, during the 1915 genocide the Assyrians fled and did not return to Turkish territory. Many settled in Iraq where their descendants still live today. Their villages were seized by surrounding Kurds, and until today it is known which neighboring villages were previously Christian. According to Cengiz, and some other people who come from villages in this region, the relationship between Kurds and Assyrians was at times friendly and supportive and at other times hostile. The same applied to relationships among Kurdish tribes.

387 As I noted in chapter 3 in life story 4, Armenians and Kurds living in the same region often learned each other's languages. It seems that the same is true for other Christian groups who shared their territory with Kurds. Chyet (1995: 222) gives examples of people of the Syrian Orthodox church from the Tur Abdin region of Mardin who were completely trilingual in Turoyo, Kurm Kurdish, and Turkish", and from earlier sources he quotes: "All these [Christian] sects also speak fluently the language of the neighbors among whom they live, be it Turkish, Persian, Kurdish, or Arabic. (Joseph 1961:18)" (Chyet 1995: 220).

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From Cengiz' account and from the songs (see below) emerges a picture of a region with a patchwork of Islamic and Christian tribes and villages, of changing alliances among the various factions, and of people sometimes moving from one place to another and from one tribe to the next. Although in Turkey I did not often feel more isolated and far from the nearest town means of transportation than during my stay in Zeban, this suggest a different picture than one would expect from that far away village high in the mountains. In spite of the transportation difficulties that are even very challenging today, people from the Mizûrî tribe in present day Iraqi Kurdistan had moved to Zeban for unknown reasons, and had become incorporated into the Berwarî tribe. Dengbêj Cengiz knew of more examples of such migrations to other regions and other tribes,[389] and also van Bruinessen (1992) indicates that the Kurdish tribal structure was far from static. After these migrants from the Mizûrî settled in Zeban, they lived at the edge of Berwari territory and had therefore also ties with the neighboring tribes in case support was needed. But at the same time there were sometimes conflicts with these tribes and villages. After many Christians left the region during the year 1915, Kurds took over their villages and goods and the composition of the population in the region changed significantly. In the following section I will discuss the more recent history of the village, combined with the family history.

5.3 'Walls were built at the front and rear'. Life in the village Zeban.

Hinderîşê ya gişte / hay meşkê
Her ava bît ya gişte / hay jarê
Shürhe da ber û pişte / hay meşkê
Hükmete da runişte / hay jarê

All of the pasture Hinderîşê / oh butter churn
May it remain forever / oh poor one
Walls were built at the front and rear /oh butter churn
Where the soldiers settled / oh poor one

Hinderîşê pawan e / hay meşkê
Her ava bît pawan e / hay jarê
Kivetçera mana / hay meşkê
Hükmet lê bû xwedane / hay jarê

Hinderîshê is [our] property / oh butter churn
May it always remain [our] property / oh poor one
The pasture of [our] lambs / oh butter churn
Has been appropriated by the soldiers / oh poor one

Hinderîşê is the name of Zeban's summer pasture where in summer the shepherds went to herd their livestock, the milkmaids to milk, and women to gather herbs and plants that can only be found high in the mountains. Generally, people have good memories about the warm summer days when they spent time in the

389 Dengbêj Cengiz mentions other villages from which he knows the people come from elsewhere and from other tribes. After their migration to the new village they became incorporated in local tribes.

cooler pastures in the mountains. The above *meşk* song (a song sung while making yoghurt, see below) tells about the closure of the summer pasture by soldiers, and expresses the wish that their pasture will remain forever theirs. Also in other areas the military presence increasingly influenced village life. Because of its proximity to the border the village was more affected than villages that were not near the border. Apart from 'national' duties such as schooling, military service and identity registration, the village was also affected by the various military stations built in the near environment, by clashes between the military and the PKK, and by the many military checkpoints. By contrast, education and bureaucratic facilities were not easily accessible because of the village's distance from a larger town. Contacts with the state were therefore largely negative. The military presence also influenced the chance to make a good living. Jobs were and are very scarce, cattle breeding and agriculture are only possible on a very small scale due to lack of water and land; both already meager resources have to be shared with the military. In spite of the accompanying dangers, smuggle is a lucrative business in this region. The villagers do not perceive the border as legitimate. Rather, they see it as an obstacle that needs to be overcome, a barrier put up by unfortunate historical and political circumstances.

Over the years, especially after 1980, life in the village became increasingly violent, the young family had to escape because of conflict, and, both for them as well as for the villagers remaining behind, the village increasingly fell apart. Step by step the military presence hampered daily life, until in 1993 Zeban was burned down[390] and all villagers left for other places.[391] A (former Christian) settlement nearby served as host village for many people. In 2004 the village was rebuilt by a government return-project. Slowly the villagers returned and rebuilt their lives next to the ruins of the former village. In this section I investigate how village life in Zeban evolved under these circumstances, and follow the stories of the Zeban family through which we learn how they dealt with and went through all these events. In the next section I

390 "As part of its counter-insurgence operations, Turkish Armed Forces evacuated and destroyed rural settlements on a large scale. According to official figures, 833 villages and 2,382 small rural settlements (..) were evacuated and destroyed. (..) In other words, around a quarter of all rural settlements in the east-southeast region of Turkey were emptied. Numbers provided by the Human Rights Association (HRA) and the Kurdish Human Rights Project (KHRP) suggest that most evacuations occurred in the period 1991-1995, peaking in 1993-1994" (Jongerden 2010: 79).

391 "A typical village evacuation would proceed as follows. Villagers would be put under pressure to join the so-called village guards. If they refused and did not leave their village after warnings and pressure, then regular soldiers and/or special teams would one day enter the village and order the village chief (the *muhtar*) to gather the inhabitants and evacuate the settlement. Sometimes villagers were given the opportunity to collect their belongings, but often the village was plundered or soldiers would begin firing at the houses and set fire to them together with their contents. Livestock would be stolen or shot, orchards and crops burned. The villagers would take refuge in a nearby town, later moving to a main city in the region" (Jongerden 2010: 81).

pay attention to the narrative structure of their stories and to the differences in how each of them talks about similar experiences.

Cengiz was born in 1965, Bahar in 1968, both in this village. They are cousins. Their childhood "passed by like that of every other village child", as Cengiz said. Bahar's father passed away when she was still a child, and after her mother left the village for her second marriage, she remained behind and lived with her uncle. The village was quite isolated; it was 70 km away from the nearest larger town Hakkari, there were no cars, nor car roads, and there was no electricity. Under these circumstances leaving the village was a major undertaking, and "there were people who could never go to Hakkari during their lives."[392] There were about hundred and thirty houses when they were young, against about eighty today.[393] A primary school was erected in 1968. Cengiz went to school from 1971-1975, but Bahar did not attend school. Although Cengiz went to school he never received a diploma as he was not registered as a Turkish citizen. His father is from Turkey, but his mother from Iraq, and in spite of the efforts of his father who tried to negotiate with the municipality, they did not succeed in registering their children until 1976.[394] In 1981, when Bahar was fifteen years old and Cengiz seventeen, a marriage was arranged between them. Apart from being cousins, Cengiz was also the brother of the husband of Bahar's sister.[395]

The village owned many fields and a good summer pasture. The villagers lived from farming and stock breeding, but many also made a living from border trade. Cengiz:

> We have many mountains and summer pastures. Still we had only twenty, thirty or forty head of livestock. (..) If you had livestock, you had to bring it to graze, but when you brought hundred kg of tea to Iraq and you sold it, it was enough. The people at the border did not have that much livestock. Because there was the border crossing, there were things that were not available in Turkey, and there were things that were not available in Iraq, there was profit in both of them, so because of that we did not own that much livestock. It was too much effort (dengbêj Cengiz, interview in Kurdish, Cologne 2009).

392 Interview conducted in Germany with Cengiz in 2009, in Kurdish.

393 According to the information I got from my informants villages were generally (but not always) much larger when they were young than today. Most of the villages have at least halved in size. Many villages in southeastern Turkey also seized to exist because of the military operations in 1993/4.

394 Cengiz's father tried to register his children at the municipality but did not succeed. At the Turkish countryside children were often not registered, or got registered only a long time after they were born. The reasons were a.o. the distance of the municipality and lack of money. Also boys were often registered younger of age than they actually were so that they were able to postpone the military service.

395 Marriages between two sisters and two brothers are common in the Kurdish region. In Kurdish this practice is called "*berdel*' (Yücel 2006)

During his childhood years Cengiz worked as a shepherd to herd the goats and sheep of his family. In 1980 he started smuggling, when border crossings became possible after a long period of conflict and heavy military presence at the Iraqi side. Cengiz:

> When I was about fifteen years old, in 1980, our border to Iraq was opened. The war between Iraq and Iran started, and the Iraqi soldiers were withdrawn. So there were not many soldiers left and we could now go to Iraq. In that time we bought goods in Turkey: fabric, shirts, seeds, livestock and animals. We bought them and sold them in Iraq. The situation in Iraq was good; there was a lot of money (dengbêj Cengiz, interview in Kurdish, Cologne 2009).

Although border crossings were still illegal and done at night, and although smuggling trips were harsh and filled with risks, young men preferred such trips over the more boring village jobs. Together with companions Cengiz traveled to Van (a 250 km distance from the village), Diyarbakir (570 km) and even to Gaziantep (775 km) and Adana (1000 km) to buy goods and animals. Between Hakkari and the other cities the trip was done by minibus, bus or car. From Hakkari to the village, and from the village to Iraq, the transport was by foot. They transported the goods first to the village and from there crossed the border at night with their goods loaded on donkeys. In the case of livestock (mostly goats and sheep), they herded the animals to the other side. In Iraq they sold the goods or animals, bought new ones to sell in Turkey, and returned. Apart from smuggling activities, the village also has a history of people frequently migrating to and from Iraq. Cengiz:

Figure 29. A woman taking care of goats in late afternoon in a village near Hakkari, 2008.

> Everyone who left the village [had a reason]. In the first place everybody had to go in the military and stayed there for two to three years. During that time they did not have money, nor could they go on leave. Many escaped from that situation and went to Iraq. In the second place, Iraq was rich. And our village was from the Berwarî tribe. For that reason when people planned to leave the village, they did not go to the big cities of Turkey like Ankara and Istanbul, [but] they went to Iraq. In Iraq life was good. There was a lot of money, you can make a living there. That was before me, in the time of my grandparents. (dengbêj Cengiz, interview in Kurdish, Cologne 2009).

Depending on the relationship with the Turkish and Iraqi commanders, border crossings were sometimes allowed and sometimes forbidden, though always illegal via this route. When they were allowed the villagers would pay some money or goods to the commanders. This situation continues until today. For example, when I was in the village in 2008, relatives from Iraq crossed the border to attend a wedding, and the daughter of Bahar crossed the border to visit her relatives in Iraq. The border crossings were arranged with the military commander in exchange for some money, and thus could be done in daylight without any danger. When I visited the family in Germany in autumn 2009, I learned that the contacts between the villagers and the commanders had deteriorated and that it was again forbidden to cross the border. Those who wanted to visit the other side thus crossed the border at night. This is dangerous because of the general unrest in the region and also because of the many landmines. Besides for reasons of business, border crossings are also undertaken for many other reasons among which is family visits, weddings and celebrations, men who wish to find a marriage partner, and escape from conflicts with relatives or the government.

After Bahar and Cengiz married in 1981 they went to live in a house of their own. Their first two daughters were born there. Cengiz continued with border trade until 1984 and was often away on his trips. Bahar said that life in the village was most difficult for her in the years between 1980 and 1984. Although also before that time there was violence because of the presence of many soldiers in and around the village, this increased after 1980:

> At that time, I mean from what I remember, from 1980 to 1984 there was a lot of violence. People could not even leave their homes. Women could not leave. Spring came, summer came, the women could not go out alone to the fields. The oppression was very harsh at that time. After six or seven o'clock in the evening no one could go out of the house (dengbêj Bahar, interview in Kurdish, Cologne 2009).

People were afraid to go outside because they would be easy prey for soldiers who, according to Bahar, 'regarded themselves as the law'. They bullied people, they stole their goods, and they raped women who were out alone. This situation changed, she said, after the PKK came; because of the presence of the PKK the soldiers were afraid

to go out on their own, and could not treat the villagers as they did before. But from the numerous incidents all family members gave of mistreatment, conflict and war also after 1984, the overall situation seems to have gotten worse rather than better.

Yalçın-Heckmann (2010) did research in a village in the same region, which she calls Sisin, and writes about the reasons for the increasing violence. The village she writes about is at approximately 50 km distance from Zeban. According to her, there was not much violence before the 1980-coup:

> "In the area in which Sisin is situated there was hardly any political violence before the military coup in 1980. However, the Barzani-movement of the 1970s and its collapse appealed strongly to people in this area, many of whom actively participated. Many villagers and members of tribes became strongly politicized because of the Barzani movement and the war in north Iraq. The political culture that was shaped by the image of romantic desperadoes (eşkiya) found its equivalent in the image of the Peshmerga (lit. "be doomed to die", i.e. Kurdish fighter)." (pp.226, translated from German).

She explains the violence in Sisin after 1980 by the influence of the Barzani movement in this region. Zeban was affected by the same development, but had been under military control much earlier than Sisin, because of its location on the border. The presence of a military station next to their village, and its location on the border, may explain the already disruptive times in Zeban before 1980, in contrast to the overall peaceful situation in Sisin.

In 1984 there were serious disagreements between Cengiz and his brothers, and one or more other villagers. These villagers complained about Cengiz and his brothers to the military about their alleged help to a wounded PKK fighter.[396] Cengiz and Bahar strongly denied the accusation, and say the men who accused them were from a family of troublemakers and traitors who not only caused problems for them, but also for other people in the region. Two of Cengiz's brothers were arrested, jailed and tortured. Cengiz managed to escape to a village of the Berwarî tribe in Iraq, about 3 to 4 hours on foot from their village of origin. Because of this history Cengiz has not been able to return to his village until today. In the same year Cengiz joined the peshmerga army in Iraq that stood under the leadership of Mullah Mustafa Barzani.

396 Such accusations were common since the PKK had established a firm grip on the countryside. "From 1990 to 1992, the PKK established control over much of the countryside in the (primarily) Kurdish region of Turkey. In PKK-terms, these were considered 'semi-liberated zones.' In these areas - large parts of the provinces of Hakkari, Van, Şırnak, Siirt, Batman, Diyarbakır, Bingöl – the PKK established a permanent presence. The region was essentially controlled by a network of guerilla units. These had their own local bases, but were also in regular (near daily) contact with other local guerilla forces, and sometimes even lodged them in the small rural settlements in the area. These hamlets and villages provided not only shelters, but also intelligence, recruits, and food supplies" (Jongerden 2010: 83).

The Barzani peshmergas were initially the most influential movement fighting for Kurdish rights in Iraq,[397] although their authority was later contested by Talabani peshmergas. During the first half of the twentieth century, the Barzanis had made a name for themselves because of their revolts against the Iraqi government. Mullah Mustafa became the face of Kurdish resistance.[398] In 1961 the Kurdistan Democratic Party "tried to forge a regular Kurdish fighting force, and those who enrolled became known as *peshmergas* (those who face death)" (McDowall 1996: 311). In 1975 they numbered over 50,000 trained peshmergas, and another 50,000 irregular forces (McDowall 1996: 337). They were supplied with weapons by Iran, that hoped to be able to topple the Baath regime. The following decades were characterized by wars and peace negotiations, and by the increasing Kurdish division into two camps. In 1975 Talabani founded a rival party, the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), which gathered its own peshmerga army. The involvement of Cengiz in the Barzani movement is indicative of the complex situation of Kurds living in this border region. He was sought in Turkey for his assumed protection of PKK fighters and fled to villages of his tribe on the other side of the border. Since these villages were close to Barzan, and affiliated with the Barzani tribe, he became involved in Barzani's KDP, rather than in the PUK camp more to the south.[399]

On his arrival, the Kurdish conflicts were at their peak both in Iraq and in Turkey. Bahar and their two children followed him soon afterwards, and for four years the family lived in the village just on the other side of the border. However, although safe from the hands of Cengiz's enemies, it was far from a peaceful stay. The border region served as a base for Barzani's peshmergas, and as a battleground of which both Iraq and Iran attempted to get hold.[400] Because of the war between

397 Its influence in Iraqi Kurdistan stemmed from the early 20th century leadership of the naqshbandi sheikh Ahmad Barzani over a number of villages around Barzan, a village in northern Iraq on a less than 100 km distance from Zeban. Like many other chiefs at the time, his territory was in name incorporated in the Iraqi state, but in practice it formed an autonomous region.

398 He had fought in the 1932 conflict with the Iraqi army, and he had been one of the marshalls of the Mahabad Republic, a short-lived Kurdish republic in Iran in 1946. After the defeat of the republic by Iranian troops, he escaped with his troops to the Soviet Union. Their march through the border lands of Iraq, Turkey and Iran, followed by the Iranian army, gained a legendary status. After the 1958 coup in Iraq the new prime-minister invited the Barzanis to return to Iraq. However, this initially friendly relationship soon turned into a conflict, and in the early 1960s they were again on the rebel side.

399 The KDP's following consisted mainly of the Kurmanji speaking Kurds of Bahdinan in the north, whereas the PUK's following consisted of the Sorani speaking Kurds in the south. Another important force were the pro-government Kurdish *jash* troops. Although they are often seen as collaborators, it also occurred that *jash* secretly sided with one of the peshmerga camps.

400 Starting in the late 1970s, and continuing until the Anfal campaign, the Iraqi army tried to weaken Kurdish resistance by razing villages, by chemical attacks, by a scorched earth policy, and by mass executions and deportations.

Iraq and Iran the peshmerga had been able to occupy this territory. Cengiz: "That time was very bad, because also the government of Iraq was bombarding us, sending us planes, and at the same time we also could not go to Turkey. It was very bad." The system of the peshmerga was arranged in such a way that every soldier spent one month with the peshmergas and the next month at home. Meanwhile, Bahar and the three children, with the third one born in Iraq, lived under very stressful and difficult circumstances in the village. Bahar:

> There were no soldiers but planes dropped bombs. Not a day passed without planes coming three or four times. They threw bombs, the planes came, we could not do anything, all the time we had to flee, the children were running away by themselves, at that time we have seen many bad things. (Did this continue for a long time?) Yes from 1984 that we came until 1988. (So it continued for four years, this situation?) Yes at the time it was very difficult (dengbêj Bahar, interview in Kurdish, Cologne 2009).

The conflict with the Iraqi government culminated in the Anfal campaign in 1987/8,[401] and the family was forced to escape and return to Zeban. Cengiz: "In 1988 the war between Iran and Iraq finished. The whole government of Iraq returned, and came over us. With planes, with chemical [weapons] they attacked us. So we left the village in Iraq, we abandoned it. It was during the Anfal." Cengiz crossed the border in secret and hid in a cave nearby the village, while the others stayed openly in the village. This was again a fearful time because the Turkish soldiers were searching for Cengiz, and appeared regularly at the family home to see if he was there. Narîn, who is the oldest child and therefore of all the children experienced the most of the bad times, tells of the return to Zeban:

> They first try to save the children to bring them to a quieter place. And I can remember that my father brought us by horses, and in the past you know there were no cars. We were first on foot, and then he put us on horses and that's how we went to Zeban. I can never forget that day. (How old were you there?) I really don't know. My father always says that I was seven or eight when we went to Iran, so at that time I must have been five or six. But I don't know. When I look back on how my father brought me and my sister and my brother, he brought us to Zeban and went back to get my mother. (..)
> When we were still in [the Iraqi village across the border], my mother somehow was not as afraid as all the other women. My aunt always took us and brought us to a hiding place under the earth. Any time when they heard something from bombs or weapons they first took us children and I can remember that we always first went to those hiding places under the earth and my mother always stayed at home.

401 The Operation Anfal was a series of seven operations "of major assaults on peshmerga controlled areas, using chemical and high explosive air attacks" (McDowall 1996: 359). McDowall (1996) lists that approximately 150,000 to 200,000 people were killed; 4,000 villages were destroyed; and over 1,5 million people forcibly resettled. Over half of the entire Kurdish region had been cleared of Kurds.

> Everybody was afraid to go out, but my mother always just continued with her normal daily duties. (..) She just continued. And we were really afraid. I can never forget those voices, from the bombs and from how the people were screaming (you were also so young!) Yes I was so little, I was a child, but those were things.. I forgot many things from my childhood, but these I never forgot. How my aunt took us, and how my father brought us from [the village in Iraq] to Zeban. And then my father left. And as far as I remember we were just always afraid. We were hiding ourselves. And we thought my father is gone, but actually he was not gone, he was also in hiding in Zeban. For a long time we did not see him. (..) I remember from a few times that they [the soldiers] came to our house and just opened the door and entered. It was so bad, they also did not think something like 'oh my God there are children here, maybe they will be afraid', they didn't care at all. They came in with dirty shoes, checked everywhere in the house, and they were threatening us: 'when you don't tell us where he is we will also arrest you!'. (And they were soldiers?) Yes they were Turkish soldiers. And my grandmother was always bringing messages to my father how it was going and whether he could come out. And when it turned out that it was not anymore possible, because they were searching for my father everywhere, then he left for Iran. And then, I cannot remember everything, but after my father left we also had to leave (dengbêj Narîn, interview in German, Cologne 2011).

After some months Cengiz left for Iran, away from the problems in the village. Bahar and the children remained in the village. Over there twins were born of which only one survived. Cengiz's father gave them revealing names: State and Country, because, so he said, the Turkish state had made Cengiz leave for another country. The state structures would continue to affect the life of the family in the years to come.

The choice to support the one or other party, army or group was mainly related to one's nearest tribal and national ties. Although living in Turkey, Cengiz was more informed about the Iraqi than about the Turkish situation, apparently because most of the Berwarî tribe was settled there. On the other hand, not many people of the village joined the peshmerga, and the first reason why Cengiz left Zeban to fight was because he was sought after in Zeban. When I asked him what knowledge he had at the time of the political situation he replied:

> At that time, someone like me, I knew about the states that were against the Kurds, that were enemies of the Kurd. I knew there was Mustafa Barzani who fought against the government of Iraq. Our villages also went, especially the villages that were on the border, they were peshmergas and went to fight, against the Iraqi government. (In which year was that?) In 1973/4/5 and 1966/7, when the movement started. After that Mullah Mustafa went to Russia and the movement fell apart. In 1971 he returned, he returned in 1966. The movement started. The people fought against the Iraqi government. At first I thought that Iraq was our only enemy. I didn't know that the biggest enemy was Turkey, and Iran, and Syria, because at that time the movement was only in Iraqi Kurdistan. Until the PKK also started the movement in 1985 in Kurdistan in Turkey. Again there was a broad revolution (dengbêj Cengiz, interview in Kurdish, Cologne 2009).

From the sentence "I didn't know that the biggest enemy was Turkey, and Iran, and Syria" we can assume that Zeban's inhabitants were predominantly connected with the Berwarî in Iraq, and not with their neighbors within Turkey's borders. With the beginning of PKK fighting, dengbêj Cengiz became more aware of other 'enemies'. Even though he did not have direct connections with the PKK, Cengiz claims that he was supportive of them if only because of their resistance against the Turkish regime that troubled the village so much. He also says that his and other people's support grew tremendously because of the way the Turkish soldiers treated people after the PKK began their revolution. "Why did the PKK become strong and big? Until 1988 it was still very small. [But] the Turkish government oppressed the people, tortured them, threw them in the prison of Diyarbakır." He connects the support for the PKK to his own experiences with the soldiers, that caused him to escape and his brothers to be arrested and tortured. After the accusation of the brothers and the arrest, it was logical that Cengiz chose to escape across the Iraqi border, as it had always been the escape route of the village. Across the border Cengiz had relatives and friends, and he had a good network because of his many smuggling visits to the Iraqi side. He explains that each group was fighting against its own government:

> We fought against Iraq. We were at the border. We were there and we fought against Iraq. The PKK came up and fought against Turkey. And there were the Democrats from Iran, they fought against Iran. Each part was fighting against its own government. Many times the enemy forces united and fought against the Kurds. At that time the Kurds also united and fought together. (..) It also happened that Kurds fought among each other (dengbêj Cengiz, interview in Kurdish, Cologne 2009).

In 1989 Bahar and her four children left the village and followed Cengiz to Iran. They left one daughter behind because they could not cross the border with too many people. Again they had to go illegally, and by night. They paid smugglers to help them across. In Iran the family enjoyed a few peaceful years. They stayed in Naghadeh, a Kurdish town not far from the border. For the first time, the children went to school, "and somehow our life became normal" (Narîn 2011, interview in German). For three years Cengiz stayed in Iran,[402] and he and his family had a more regular life. But in 1991 Cengiz was summoned to return to Iraq and join the peshmergas. The Kurdistan Front[403] saw its chance when most Iraqi troops left the

402 Peshmerga activity continued during those years. "With the threat of chemical weapons, and an almost universal absence of habitation, the Kurdistan Front now waged war by lightning raids and ambushes, without holding any territory at all. Both parties set up food and weapons caches in the mountains for the hundreds of guerillas still willing to fight" (MacDowall 1996: 368).

403 The Kurdistan Front was a joint force founded in 1987 of Barzani peshmergas, Talabani peshmergas, and smaller Kurdish factions.

Kurdish region to fight in the Gulf War.[404] But with Saddam's defeat of the war, his army returned to the north and attacked the rebels with full force. Against the expectations of the Kurdistan Front, they did not receive US support. "Mass panic and flight gripped all Kurdistan. Over 1,5 million Kurds abandoned their homes in a mad stampede to reach safety either in Turkey or Iran. (..) The rebel forces largely disintegrated as fighters rushed to escort their families to safety" (McDowall 1996: 373). In 1991 the Safe Haven was declared, and accepted by Saddam later that year. In the meantime, Bahar and the children had followed Cengiz to Iraq which was in total turmoil. Refugees came from everywhere, and often stayed in the small house where the family now lived.

Figure 30. Women resting after a late lunch in a village near Hakkari. 2008. They are not the people who told their life story in this chapter.

When Zeban was burned down in 1993 due to the villagers' refusal to become village guards (armed villagers who were paid for their assistance of the armed forces),[405] Cengiz's two brothers and their families came to Iraq and lived with them in the house for one year, one room for each family. After a year the family moved

404 After Saddam's defeat, many soldiers deserted, and the majority of pro-government *jash*-forces joined the Kurdistan Front.

405 "The system of village guards, *Korucular*, was established in conjunction with the abandonment of the old garrison system (..) and incorporated into the organization of the Turkish Armed Forces" (Jongerden 2010: 88).

out of their house and bought another house, the uncles remaining behind in the old house. But the Safe Haven did not bring the peace people had hoped for. Internal rivalry led to another series of clashes in the years to come, this time between the PUK and PDK.[406] Sick of war, in 1996 Cengiz fled to Germany. When I asked him if he had not wanted to stay in Iraq he replied:

> No I didn't want. I wanted to stay but it was not a good situation. Life was difficult. We were up in arms again and there were fights between brothers. (Again there was war?) Yes again there was war, among ourselves, Kurds against Kurds. There was the war of the parties, and of the PKK, it was a bad situation. I did not want to fight again, because all my life passed by in wars. So I didn't like it. But I got a chance and went to Europe. Until May 1997 [I was alone], then Bahar and the children came. During the time in between I had received political asylum (dengbêj Cengiz, interview in Kurdish, Cologne 2009).

Apart from the oldest daughter Narîn, who stayed behind in Iraq and would arrive in Germany three years later, all family members managed to go to Germany legally because of Cengiz's political asylum. After Zeban was burned down, two of Cengiz' brothers went to Iraq, and another brother went to Hakkari. Bahar's sister lived in Hakkari as well. But many villagers, among whom Cengiz's parents and his youngest brother, had moved to the nearby village Kevra. Bahar and the other children visited Kevra in 1996. Narîn went more often and stayed also after that visit for many months in this village, as we will see below. In a way, the village Zeban had not stopped to exist after its destruction. Many people continued their lives in the same region, and would later return to the Zeban area where they would rebuild the village from scratch.

In the 2000s the Turkish government started so-called return projects, in which people from villages that were destroyed in the 1990s were allowed to return to their villages, on the condition that they support the Turkish government in their struggle against the PKK. In return for such support the villagers received new houses, a sum of money to build the village again, a monthly salary far above the average income in the region, and weapons. Some of the former inhabitants of the village Zeban decided to accept the offer and settled again in their village of origin. Under the government project, about eighty similar houses were built in three parallel streets.[407] At the time of my visit the vegetation was slowly returning and outside of the village there were new vegetable gardens. The village looks very

406 Apart from the PUK and KDP, also the IMK (Islamic Movement Kurdistan) joined in fighting in 1994. In 1997, the KDP attacked PKK forces coming in from Turkey. The rivalry was thus larger than only between PUK and KDP, but they were the main rivals.

407 According to the villagers the government failed to keep their promises in many ways. A lot of money that was meant for construction disappeared, and the houses are therefore much simpler than the people expected.

different from what it was in the past and from other 'natural' villages in the region. Apart from the lack of older vegetation, all houses are exact copies, built in neat rows, very untypical for 'normal' villages. Also its inhabitants are not the same as before; many of the previous inhabitants live now in Duhok in Iraq and in Hakkari in Turkey, and there are some newcomers.

As in many other villages in Turkey, people who migrate to other places are still counted as part of the village. "We have this many houses in Duhok, this many houses in Hakkari, and this many houses in Germany.. etc.". The village becomes an imagined community with at its core the geographic locality of the original village (even when it ceases to exists), and as its extension the communities in other regions and even countries (Anderson 1984). So although the village was totally destroyed and transformed into a military zone during the 1990s, the imagined village continued to exist. And although the Bahar and Cengiz and their family were not able to return to their village of origin, they could build up a life that was connected to that village by settling in Duhok in 1991.

5.4 Experiencing borders

In this section I investigate the ways dengbêj Bahar, dengbêj Cengiz and dengbêj Narîn tell their life stories. On the one hand all three share many similar experiences, and lived through many events together; on the other hand each of them has a different story to tell about his or her particular perception and understanding of how events unfolded. As I argue in the next section, the songs and performances seem to create a place of expression in which their life experiences become more comprehensible, unified and acceptable, and through which they can retrieve positive memories which in other ways are not always easily accessible. 'Experiencing borders' not only refers to the dominant presence of political borders in this family's lives, but also to their personal experiences of fragmentation and trauma due to their being continuously on the move. The songs and their singing activities traveled with them across all borders and were always there as an anchor to hold on to. Their activities on television reinforced this function of the songs. By investigating these personal experiences with borders I aim to understand better what personal and imaginative work the songs do for them, and for the audiences of the television program in which they perform.

When in 2007 I visited the family for the first time I only stayed for one evening, and we did not yet know each other. I interviewed Bahar and Cengiz together.

They told me about village life, and about the many situations in which songs were sung and composed. They spoke of different performers and their positions. They summarized how their lives passed by, and told me how they ended up performing on television, and what this meant for them. Later I interviewed Bahar, Cengiz and Narîn separately, each of them twice. In the first interview we talked in-depth about their individual life experiences, on which most of this section is based. In the second interview we talked about the songs they know. Numerous times we also shared personal experiences in other situations than in interview settings, and we wrote down and translated songs at quiet times at home. My analysis for this section is therefore specifically based on the three individual interviews that were most personal, but is naturally also informed by all other encounters we had.

Reading through the three interviews there are some things that struck me. First, as I also observed in chapter 3, each of the interviews contains themes that reappear frequently. Second, Narîn's interview is the longest with the least number of questions from my side, mostly guided by her own storyline, whereas the interviews with Bahar and Cengiz are shorter and more guided by my questions. Third, the interviews with Bahar and Narîn were emotional and intense, both for me and for them,[408] whereas the interview with Cengiz was more factual and lighter. This may be related to the fact that Bahar was present at Cengiz´s interview, whereas in the case of the interviews with Bahar and Narîn we were alone.[409] Although she was half asleep and on the other side of the room, I had the impression Cengiz did not want to go into too many painful details because he thought it might have been unsettling for her. Other reasons may have been the larger distance between him and me because of the gender difference, and the reluctance of showing too many emotions as a man.

In all interviews the experience of being continuously on the move dominates, but is differently valued. The prevalent theme in Bahar's interview is the experience of being alone, of being confused because of the many times she had to gather her children together and flee, and of the disrupting influence caused by the presence of soldiers and war. For Narîn, the most significant theme that came up in the interview is the feeling of having to leave all the time, and of how fearful she felt in the often life threatening moments. For Cengiz, the interview is dominated

408 Sharing emotional experiences was not easy because it brought alive the memories that were often not on the surface. As interviewer and friend I felt connected to the stories and also partly responsible for the emotions they brought up.

409 Although I sometimes asked to be one to one with the respondent, I did not always do this out of fear of being impolite, and I did not often pose this question in the case of men because I was afraid this was not fitting cultural expectations.

by accounts of the many border crossings and also of the advantages that living in a border region had. Let us look at how these themes variously come up in the interviews.

Dengbêj Bahar

To my question about how her childhood had passed by, Bahar began the interview[410] by speaking of the early loss of her father, the remarriage of her mother who could not take her with her, and how alone she had felt. Her mother could only take her youngest daughter with her, and left Bahar and her older sister behind. Bahar therefore grew up first with her uncle, and later lived with her newly-wed sister.

> I don't remember much of my childhood, only a little bit. I was alone. My father had passed away, I have never seen him, I was very small when he passed away. My mother remarried. I remained on my own. I stayed alone with my uncle. (You grew up at your uncle's?) Yes I grew up at my uncle's, I stayed there until I was about ten years old. Around that time I went to my sister. My sister had married the brother of Cengiz. I stayed with them until I was sixteen or fourteen years old. And then I married with Cengiz. (So you were still very young..) Yes, because I had no one.

She felt no one could give her the care she needed, which made her marry at a very young age, and also meant that she could not go to school. She told me that growing up without her parents had often made her feel lonely and unsupported.

She continued her story by telling about the many times when soldiers mistreated people in the village, and how several times they entered and took the houses upside down where she lived, during her childhood and also after marriage. At several moments in the interview she described the feeling of a loss of control in these situations and the inability to do anything to prevent the behavior of the soldiers:

> -At that time there was a lot of violence. Nobody dared to do anything.
> -People could not even leave their house.
> -Many many times, I have seen it with my own eyes, the government, the soldiers came into the house, they beat up the men, women didn't know what to do. They brought the men to the police. They beat up the women many times, and nobody could do anything against it.

She opposed the people´s inability to react to the control of the soldiers, "who could do anything they liked." When speaking of their experiences as a family she said that they got stranded in Iraq after Cengiz was betrayed by a co-villager:

410 All quotes in this section are taken from an interview with dengbêj Bahar in Cologne in 2009 in Kurdish.

> We could only be there. We could not go to Turkey. We could not go to Duhok because of the government and Saddam. In the village where we stayed were the houses of the Peshmerga, there was war, planes came, there were illnesses. That's how my life passed by for four years.

They could not go anywhere else, even though the place where they stayed was filled with war, air strikes and disease. Bahar apparently often felt the victim of circumstances over which she had very little influence. This feeling was reinforced by the absence of her husband who could not take care of his family in what were already unbearable circumstances. Of Cengiz's escape from the village she says:

> Cengiz escaped, and we stayed behind without 'owner' [head of the household]. One of his brothers was a soldier. We were left without owner, we were hungry. It was winter, there was a lot of snow, we were in very bad trouble.

Even though they stayed in the house of her parents-in-law, Bahar felt left 'without owner' because Cengiz was not around, and fearful she would be unable to manage without him. About the frequent absence of Cengiz, who stayed one month at home and one month in the peshmerga for many years, she comments:

> Half of my life, and of my children, I could not feed them, half of the time their father was present, half of the time he was not present. He was in the Peshmerga, one month he was at home and one month he was there. When he went to Iraq we returned to Zeban. When we went to Iraq he went to Iran. When we went to Iran he went to Iraq. When we went to Iraq he went to Europe. Our life was like that all the time.

Whenever the family followed Cengiz, they still did not manage to stay together. Apart from his frequent absence because of his being a peshmerga, there was also always something happening that meant he needed to leave again for other places, whereas she stayed behind with the children. She also describes the traumatic effects of war at several points in the interview, and what this meant for her:

> -All my life, since I exist, I am a human being, I have seen every war, until 1991.
> -Every day my family and my children, we were running away to the mountains, to the trees.
> -For six days we remained outside! [excited]. For six days we were outside, next to the city Naqadeh in Iran. Cengiz came from Duhok to Naqadeh and could not find us.
> -For example we were eating breakfast, and planes came. We had to flee, we could not continue eating. We could not wash ourselves. We could not prepare our food,
> -because we had to run away together with the children. It was that bad, I can really say that. Since I did not go to school I don't know the dates, but I can say that it was even more than that. Whatever I can tell you it is not everything, I can continue telling you without end.

Daily life was frequently interrupted by terrible events that made it impossible to have any feeling of basic security. Bahar told me how nowadays she still often feels confused and shattered because of the many years of war she went through. She associated her feeling of confusion with not having attended school, which made her feel insecure. In the last excerpt she implied that she could have told the story much better, in more detail and more convincingly if she would have gone to school since she would have then understood about the dates and years. Not having that knowledge made her feel that she could not remember things systematically. Several times during the interview, and also at other moments, Bahar expressed her feelings of helplessness because of her lack of education. However, at the same time she is also precise about the years at other moments. For example, in the following excerpt she summarized briefly the main phases of war:

> One of our neighbors betrayed us to the government about Cengiz and he went to South Kurdistan. He stayed there for a year and after that I joined him. I had two children. We went there and stayed there until 1988. Cengiz became a peshmerga there. (When did he start as a peshmerga?) We came in 1983, but he had already started. In 1988 we escaped and came again to Kurdistan of Turkey. You know that in 1988 there were the chemical attacks of Saddam. (Yes). The Anfal happened and we fled. Cengiz went to Iran, and I again remained in the village Zeban for a year. After a year I went to Iran to Cengiz.

She described here a period of six years in a few sentences. Later on she returned to these topics and spoke of all these events in more detail. It seems that the moves served as marking points in her memory that help her recount the events. But even though she was very precise about the dates, she did not feel she had enough knowledge to tell her story in a congruent way. She ended the interview as follows:

> These are the things I know. Everything is mixed up in my mind. Illness and beauty, war and .. for me in my mind is .. everything is mixed. And someone without education.. (but actually it's not like that, I mean I understand, your life has been so difficult, everything is mixed, like a nightmare) exactly it is like that (but at the moment that you are talking it is not like that. For example you know the exact years.) But Wendy, when someone has not studied..

For Bahar, the consequences of living for many years in situations of war and of moving from one place to another, often on the run, are feelings of confusion, loneliness, having to cope alone with her children while Cengiz was fighting, and the sense of being incapable because of her lack of education. Below we will see how these experiences make her feel about the songs she knows and about the many times she performed on television but also in other situations.

Dengbêj Narîn

Narîn's story[411] is marked by the detail in which she relates the many times she and her family moved from one place to another. She was born in 1982, and only two years old when the family left Zeban. Before she came to Germany in 1999 she lived hardly more than four years a stretch in a single place. More than any other family member (apart from Cengiz), she had always been on the run. She began speaking as follows:

> When I look back on my life, how my childhood was, there were more bad than good things. There were also good times, but when I was still in Zeban we did not have so many opportunities as children have here. The children have toys, they go to kindergarten, they have many things with which they can experience childhood, but with us it was different. When I was still little I experienced war, that my father was not with us, that he had to go to Iran because of political problems. And at the time I was of course with my mother and my grandparents. There are so many things and I do not know where to start. We were always gone. We were always gone really. First we were in Zeban, I was born there. After that we were always at the borders. For example in Iraq, in the village over there, there was somehow war of Kurds in Iraq, with Saddam. We went back to Zeban, again to Iraq, then to Iran, we were always on the move.

She described how, when she thinks back to her childhood, the main experience that comes to mind is that of always being gone, of never being in a stable place. Because she was already on the move when she was still very little, she had difficulty understanding what they were going through and why they always had to move to other places. About the escape to Iran when she was only eight years old she told me:

> On the day when they told us that we would leave, I just ran away from home. I had gone far and my uncle came after me and I was in a tree and I was crying and screaming: 'I don't want to go to Iran'. Because I did not even know what it was and I just wanted to stay there [in Zeban]. I had been born there and I really did not want to leave. And he came after me. (..)
> We had to be a bit far from the village and from there a car would take us. We were afraid that the soldiers would notice and that they would not let us go. [To other people] we had said that we were going to another town, my mother said. Anyway they came by car, it was the first time that I really did not want to leave this village. It was very bad [in the village] but I was always thinking that it was better than Iran because I didn't know and I could not even imagine. So my uncle took me down from that tree and they took me with them. And I can only remember a little bit that we drove by minibus and after that we had to walk and then again with horses. But it was dark, it was in the night, it was in the mountains, you know we went to Iran illegally. And we could hear the howls of wolves, we could even hear their howling! It was in the night and you know it was in the mountains, far from any town or village.

411 All quotes in this section are taken from an interview with dengbêj Narîn in Cologne in 2011 in German.

> It was really dark and they were also afraid to light a light in case someone would see it. (And you can remember that? So scary for children..) Yes it was like a horror movie, really. It was worse than a horror movie. In the middle of the night, dark, and you hear the sounds of wolves. And you are afraid whether one of those might come because in the past at our place many people were eaten by wolves.

This experience was so shocking for her that she felt numb when they arrived and in the days that followed:

> We stayed with them [people who lived close to the border] for the night and the next day we went to the place where my father was. It was horrible. When I remember that… It was so terrible that when we saw my daddy I did not feel any joy. I felt totally mixed up. Because you have experienced so much, and then with this fear you see someone, and you are seven or eight years old and you already have enough of life. Just imagine when one already has enough of life when one is so little.

After they moved to Iran, for a long time she kept longing for her grandparents and dreamt of seeing them. When she was sent to buy something at the shop she always passed by phone booths and tried to call them:

> So whenever I went to buy bread they were waiting for me at home, but I always came an hour late because I wanted to call. Once someone told me that you have to throw money inside, but I did not know that you needed a number. I thought you just say the name and someone comes. So I was just talking and talking in the phone. That's also something I cannot forget.

In Iran it was the first time Narîn was able to go to school. She was a good student and very eager to go. She learned to read and write in Persian. After three years the family moved on to Iraq, and now the school was in Arabic and Kurdish. Again she loved going to school, but when she was fourteen and her mother was pregnant of the youngest boy, she had to stay home to help her. She regretted much that she could not continue her education.

After that time she returned several times to Zeban because she wanted to see her relatives and was also frustrated that she could not continue at school. But whenever she was in Zeban there were problems: bombardments, battles, exploding landmines, arrests by soldiers. She spoke of many such events in detail, for example, of one visit when also her parents and brothers and sisters had come, when there was fighting during the nights and a bomb fell close to their house:

> After that bomb fell between the two houses, we waited until it calmed down again so that we could leave from there. But that night it was really bad [fighting] and the next morning soldiers came. That's also something I will never forget. We had to go there altogether to that place where the soldiers lived, to the military station, we

> had to go there, women, men, children. Why? Because they had found some people from the PKK and killed some. And they hung them on a cable behind the car and dragged them over the streets. Those streets were of course not like here, it was full of rocks. They said to us, watch, and they came with the cars and the people on the cables behind, they were already dead. And we had to watch. We were still young and yes I have seen that, even though they were dead. With their legs… I cannot forget the shoes of the soldiers, those big soldiers' shoes, like Nazis. They were walking up and down and said: 'when one of you helps them we will do the same with you'. They were shouting this. They were five people. And they said: 'when we notice that someone from the village is not here, we will find them and you will all have to watch so that no one will help them.' (They were five dead people from the PKK?). Yes. (And not from the village, you didn't know them?) No we didn't know them. (It is terrible. And the children!) They brought a lot of wood, and poured petrol on them, and burned all of them. It smelled terrible, and for days one could still smell it. So we waited until it was a bit quiet again and then we immediately returned to Iraq. We were really afraid. (So actually it was by accident that you were there just at that moment…) Yes we were just visiting. We wanted to see everyone and we were just unlucky that we were just there at that moment. On the other hand it was always like that. It was not just once, at that time when we were there. You cannot say that we were unlucky, because it was always like that. Every few weeks there was again something happening. So after those people were burned, we waited for a few days until it had calmed down and then we returned to Iraq.

Whereas Bahar and Cengiz did not go into any detail of such events, Narîn related them one by one and told what she remembered.

In 1997 Cengiz arranged his political asylum in Germany, and the family would join him there. For a combination of reasons Narîn stayed behind, whereas all the others left. She told me:

> From Iraq, when my father went, I can say that again I did not want to leave. I tell the truth, but on the other hand, I was just a child! My father did not leave me behind because I did not want to leave, but because everyone said that I was the oldest and when one goes to Europe one should not take the girls. Because there are bad things there and they become bad there, how they dress themselves. It is a non-Muslim country. They had not seen and experienced it, so they could hardly imagine how it would be. So they made my father afraid, I don't know why. After we had experienced so many things, I mean they should just have taken me as well. It was normal that I said I did not want to go because I just was fed up with always leaving. That was my problem. But I know that they did not leave me behind because of that. It was another reason. And then my father did not have enough money to go, so he brought someone else's child to Germany in my place as his own child and the father of this boy gave him money for that. People wanted to have boys in Europe so that they could work and not girls. (And at that moment you were actually happy that you could stay?) Yes, for a short time. But that day that my mother and the children left I understood that it was a mistake that I had said that I did not want to travel anymore. But I was small. When I look back at it now I think it was not like that. They

> also wanted to leave me there because everyone said: 'don't take her there, the girls become bad there'. And my mother already said that [she felt] they had abandoned me as soon as she came to Germany. She regretted it.

Narîn's wish not to leave anymore for other places caused her difficult years ahead. She stayed alone with her relatives in Iraq as a sixteen-year-old girl. Her relatives were afraid she would bring trouble and wanted her to marry soon. They exerted much pressure so that she would marry; as Narîn told me it was usual that families were afraid that their girls would fall in love with someone and in that way would bring shame on the entire family. Narîn spoke with hesitation about this period of her life, because she did not want to discredit her family. At the same time she said that she wanted this story to be told as well, since she had always kept silent about it. She decided to escape the pressure of her relatives by going back to the village, not Zeban anymore, but Kevra where her grandparents and other relatives now lived. After another illegal border crossing, an arrest, and a night in prison, she arrived there. The village gave her some peace of mind for the time being. She had more to do than in the city in Iraq where she could not go out and had to stay inside the house all the time:

> I came in winter and left in summer. (So you joined in with everything in the village, the work and everything?). Yes at the beginning of course I did not know how to do it. The women did a lot of handicrafts, and when you could not do it of course they said that you were lazy. So I learned it. And what I also did, I took a course to learn how to make carpets. We learned it from one of the women. After all the daily duties in the morning we went to the course, every day. All the girls joined. And we learned how to do that, I also learned it. (So it was a woman from the village?) Yes, she was talented. She had not learned it from anyone but she could do it so she taught us. At the beginning it is bad because your hands start bleeding. But it was the only thing that I really enjoyed. We were with all girls and we played music, it was much better than in Iraq. Because in Iraq it was in the city and there was nothing to do. (…) But in the village it's better, we had the nature, in spring we went out with the girls. And you could just sit in front of the door and talk with someone. I felt much freer. (…) The village was better. I always say you have more freedom there.

Although she felt generally better in the village, the pressure to marry continued, and when she let her father know about her difficult situation he decided she had to come to Germany as well. Her uncle brought her to Istanbul where she met shortly thereafter with Cengiz who arranged a smuggler for her.[412] Five times she attempted to go from Istanbul to Greece with a group of people and a smuggler, four times followed by arrests and imprisonment. After some nights in jail the Turkish

412 She could not go to Germany legally because of the earlier decision to take another child in her place.

authorities always let them go, after which they tried again. About one of the worst journeys she told me:

> And when we were in Greece we again got arrested and they brought us again to Turkish soldiers. And when we were with them they were busy and the smuggler said: 'let's escape, who will come'? I wanted to join and so did some more people. So we escaped. We were in the mountains and we hid ourselves and waited until dark. We had to go through water. We had to swim, whether we could or not. And we were wet and walked through the mountains. Somehow we almost reached a train station. And again they caught us. They had weapons and they shot so that we would stop. And just at that moment the smuggler tried to bring the daughter of a woman across the river, and because of the shooting he was afraid and let go of the girl. So she died. They jailed us in Greece, and the men were beaten with belts. So the Turks [came to] take us with them. It was 1999 just at the moment of the big earthquake. And we were in jail [in Izmit]. And in the night a soldier came to wake me up and said: 'you are still sleeping but the world is going down'. So there was an earthquake. Everything was destroyed. By bus we went to Istanbul. And slowly it became light and we saw what the earthquake had done. So we came to Istanbul and we had no money for a hotel, so we rented a house together. We were always [sleeping] in front of the big mosque, we stayed outside at night because we were afraid of [another] earthquake. At that moment I didn't care about being alive or not.

In the same year she finally managed to reach Germany.

Living in Germany opened new doors for her. Within two years she learned German, and after two more years of studying she got her high school diploma (*Fachoberschulreife)*. When people treated her badly because of her being a foreigner and due to her limited German she felt even more determined to continue:

> He [a bus driver] was shouting at me but I did not understand anything. And because I had already experienced so many things in my life, at that moment I could not take it that he was humiliating me so much. So I said to myself: 'I will show you in a few years. If someone like you again shouts at me I will be able to give a reply'. Those small things were big for me, they made me stubborn. I tried and I managed, I don't know how.

When a teacher tried to prevent her from continuing her studies, she waited until she had her diploma and after that looked him up to tell him what she thought of him:

> And afterwards I went to him and said to him: 'what do you have against me, what do you want from me? I don't know if you hate foreigners or what kind of problem you have. You have no idea who I am and what I have been through. You have no idea how I came to Germany and you have no idea how much effort it took me to reach this point. And now you want to destroy it for me? You cannot destroy that for me,' I said. 'If you destroy it now I will do it again next year, and if you destroy that as well I will come back again. Do you think I will give up?' I went through so many bad things in my life and I did not give up even if I did not want anymore. That's how I reached [this point]. If I would not have been this strong I would maybe not

> have managed. I said: 'I am now seventeen and all of this happened in a few years. And you want to destroy this for me?' I shouted at him. I became aggressive because of the things that I had been through.

The hardship she lived through made her a fighter who would not easily give up.

In all of its detail of places, people, and feelings, Narîn's story captures well how painful, threatening and shocking it was to live through successive stages of war and illegality. As a young woman she not only dealt with the consequences of violence and statelessness, but also with the consequences of being a woman which meant that her relatives felt they could and had to decide her destiny. Her longing to stay in one place instead of leaving all the time for other unknown places, made her remain behind in Iraq in circumstances she had wished to avoid almost immediately after her family left. Her years of being without her family seem to have made her painfully aware of how much she needed them; nowadays she often talks about the value her family has for her.

Dengbêj Cengiz

In Cengiz's life story[413] the border had a significant place. From the start it is the topic he talked about most and it kept coming up during his interview. Although the border played a largely negative role in his and his family's lives, he often gave it a positive twist while talking about it. He began by telling me that he was not able to receive his primary school diploma:

> I wanted to continue studying but at that time we did not have Turkish nationality. For that reason I could not go on studying. In Turkey when you finish primary school you can get a diploma. But I did not get that as well because I was not registered. That was because my mother was from Iraq and my father was from Turkey, because our village is on the border. (And your father did not go to the municipality?) He went! He went many times, but it didn't work out. You had to give money, and at that time the opportunities in the village were limited.

Since Cengiz could not continue his education he started looking for paid jobs on an early age. When he was sixteen years old he and his friends started with their border trade, as I already mentioned above. As he told it:

> In 1981 I started, I bought sowing seed (*dindik, toftê, cekirdek*). We bought one or two or three ton, we did not have much money. If our situation was good we bought ten or even twenty tons. (…) We bought things with a few friends and we brought it to the village. We used mules, every mule could carry hundred to hundred-and-twenty

413 All quotes in this section are taken from an interview with dengbêj Cengiz in 2009 in Cologne in Kurdish.

> kilos. We brought it to Iraq to sell, it took about fifteen days every time. You had to cross the border, it was illegal, so you could not go free and go quickly. We had to wait until the road was free, until there were no soldiers, we had to estimate that, and after that we could pass to Iraq. (At night?) yes at night, crossing the border was at night. The other places were in the daytime. (Weren't there landmines?) There were. There were mines, but we detonated them. Two of our people were killed by landmines when they stepped on them on the way. After that we continued to Antep, Diyarbakir, Van, where we bought things and brought them. After some time we started with livestock and animals.

Cengiz did not go into detail about the danger of the route, and the experience of losing two friends through a landmine. He actually only spoke of it because I asked him. Instead, he focused on the amount and types of goods they traded, on the places where they went and on the means of transport used. He was clear about the positive sides that smuggling had had for him and the other villagers:

> So we went full to Iraq and also full to Turkey. We did not go empty on the road. We went with a load and returned with a load. It was very good. That village was on the border. Our village was on the border. You could not do that work in other places. The good thing of our village was that it was on the border. If it would not have been on the border, we could not have done it. Because of that we could do such work.

Even when he was talking about the declining risks of smuggling when the border became easier to cross, he immediately translated this into a loss of profit:

> Livestock also goes slowly. We sold it. That was also good, we had profit. Later it was easier to go, the roads were free, and the profit was little. Because at first there was only little trade, you could sell whatever you wanted. You sold some things and returned. The trade was at night. But when it became easier the profit was little, although it was still good.

At an early age Cengiz was aware of the conflict and the need to defend oneself. He had saved money and bought a weapon, because he said, living at the border made it necessary to carry a weapon:

> Every house had a weapon. At that time weapons were expensive, they were 1000 dinar. That would now be $300. (…) It is a village on the border, so it was necessary to have weapons. Both the Iraqi and the Turkish government were our enemies. If we had no weapons we could not defend ourselves, we needed them to defend ourselves.

In the conflict it was also positive to live close to the border, because if necessary one had the possibility to escape (see also chapter 1):

> Whoever managed went to Iraq, they did not end up in prison. It happened to a few, but only few. Everyone left and went to Iraq. Because our village was on the border, there were mountains and the government could not get us.

After his own escape across the border in 1983, Cengiz became incorporated in the Peshmerga. I asked him about his experiences:

> (Can you remember how you felt when you went to the peshmerga? Life changes a lot, doesn't it?) Life changes a lot, it was very difficult, but I told you, I was young, my blood was warm, I could do every work, I could also work as a peshmerga (do *peshmergatî*), I could work for myself, and I could look after my children, I did all the work at the same time. I was working day and night, but my blood was warm and I didn't realize [the hard work]. Because when you are young you can work harder, you can do peshmergatî, you can do everything. I was young. I will get the picture [he shows a picture of himself with Masud Barzani in peshmerga outfit that has a prominent place in the living room].[414] This was when I was young, in 1986. I was nineteen or eighteen years old. You can see the date here. This was at the border between Turkey and Iraq. The leader had come, and I went to the leader: Masud Berzani who was the leader of Kurdistan. (Was he also your relative?) No, I was his peshmerga. In the past we were like brothers. Because we very very active peshmergas. We woke up together, we ate together. It was like the military, we were even closer than soldiers, because we went often into the mountains. We slept together, we ate together, we fought together. We were like brothers. We had become friends. Friends are closer than brothers.

Also when speaking of the hardship of life as a peshmerga fighter Cengiz focused on the positive sides. He emphasized his youth and strength at that time, the opportunity to meet the leader, and the brotherhood that peshmerga life had brought him. Moreover, he was fighting for what he felt was a good cause recognized by many:

> There are many Kurds who do not fight against the enemies, who remained subordinated (*bindest*). They work for themselves. They collect money for themselves, they became rich. But those who have fought for themselves, they were killed, they were tortured, they were imprisoned; those people who have made a revolution. But the people who stayed subordinated and accepted the situation, who said: 'whatever you say I do it', they have become rich. (But was there such a choice available for you?) No I did not accept it, I went into the mountains. (But was there such a choice for the other villagers?) Yes. You have seen how the villages at the border are. Everything has been in war. There are landmines. Life is very difficult. It is very difficult. You have seen Istanbul, and you have seen Hakkari. Is there a difference? There is a lot of difference. (…) Because it is a Kurdish city nothing has been developed, it has remained like that. You have seen how nicely developed Ankara and Istanbul are. There is a lot of difference.

414 This is a more common practice among former peshmergas: "One of the Chaldeans, whom I met when he came over to play backgammon with my Kurdish host, was a peshmerga in the mountains of Kurdistan, and proudly displays a photograph of Idrîs Barzanî (one of the sons of the late Kurdish leader Mullah Mustafa Barzanî) in his living room -- a common sight among the Kurds of San Diego" (Chyet 1995: 227).

With the last lines Cengiz meant that people who have 'enriched' themselves and accepted Turkish oppression are generally those who moved to western Turkey and benefited from the developments over there. But people who decided not to move there but to stay in the Kurdish region have suffered and lived a difficult life. So, to my question as to whether he and the other villagers could have opted for a better life, he replied that they could have left for the big cities and stayed out of the fighting, but that they did not do so. He meant that they chose to resist, but that this choice also meant hardship, poverty, war, death and destruction.

It seems that a positive attitude has served Cengiz as a weapon to combat all difficulties. More than Bahar and Narîn, he saw a certain degree of personal benefit from the difficult life he lived and he could see the immediate gains that were maybe less visible for his family. Because of border trade he could travel and experience more if than had he remained at home in the village. Being a peshmerga was associated with feelings of pride for fighting for the good of many people, and his status of peshmerga is recognized today in Iraqi Kurdistan. However, it seems that his way of speaking is also a way of protecting himself and of not bringing up the pain he feels. Narîn said that her father does not want to return to the village. She said:

> He had to leave, and he always missed the village, and now he has lost all the important people in his life, and he says: 'now it does not have a meaning anymore to me.' (..) He always says: 'when I go I want to see them all, but now I cannot see them anymore so then I also don't want to go anymore.' (..) And at a certain point, after you lose so many people, then you don't want anymore. But ten years ago or so, I really noticed how much my father missed Zeban. With every phone call, with every picture he saw, or when they sent videos from weddings, he had to cry. But I know that my father also wants the old Zeban [and not how it is now]. It is so sad, all that has happened there.. (dengbêj Narîn, interview in German, Cologne 2013).

Comparing the three stories of Bahar, Narîn and Cengiz, we can see clear differences. Bahar and Narîn expressed despair and fear, loneliness and having to leave all the time, whereas Cengiz emphasized the more positive sides he found in the proximity to the border and in his life as a peshmerga fighter. Although he clearly also suffered from all they went through, he had to some extent more options to choose from than Bahar and Narîn, although of course his choice was also limited. Being betrayed by a neighbor was surely not his wish, and after joining the peshmerga this new identity became an obligation he could not easily escape from. And yet, Bahar and Narîn were even more constrained by circumstances than Cengiz. They always had to *follow* Cengiz, when he was already gone. Several times, Bahar had to carry the heavy responsibility on her own of fleeing with her young

children through a border zone during war. This made her feel desperate, lonely, and afraid, and without defense and protection. Her lack of education reinforced the feeling that things were out of her control, and that today she is left only with painful memories and confusion. Her life was so dominated by war and escape that she felt that nowadays she is standing in the ruins of war, rather than having a life *after* those experiences. Narîn likewise often felt shattered and traumatized by her past experiences, but they have also made her determined to succeed in life. She felt she now has a life in front of her in which she can make up for all the things she missed out on in her childhood and teenage years. In the following section I investigate how dengbêj Bahar, dengbêj Cengiz and dengbêj Narîn spoke about the songs, and how they feel about the knowledge they have about village life, songs, and Kurdish traditions.

5.5 Speaking of songs and village life

As I already mentioned above, speaking of the songs seemed like a different mode of speaking in which the traumatic experiences of life in Zeban became more bearable. In this section I will present different song types with the accompanying comments by the family members that show how each of them spoke of the songs and their village memories. I did not include love songs as I already discussed them elaborately in chapter 1. For the first song types I did not feel the need to make additional comments and therefore only present the comments of Bahar, Narîn and Cengiz without further explanation. The overall analysis follows in section 5.6.

Wedding songs

Dengbêj Bahar (2007 in Kurdish): "In our region, in the past, a wedding was not one day. It was three or four days, day and night they played and sang. In the past it was different. The women all gathered in one house and sang, together with the bride. The men celebrated the wedding together with the groom in another place, and sang songs. But now they do it together."

Dengbêj Narîn (2012 in German): "My father knows already twenty-one different dance types. And every type has its own song. *Şamîrane, Barso, Sincanê, Batlakan, Beryok*, they all have their own songs. For example Şamîrane is a dance type, but the song is about a Christian woman. About her work, and what she had accomplished:

Şamîrane Şamîrane	Oh Şamîran oh Şamîran
Dadu bedat Şamîrane	Şamîran, first she had all, then she had nothing
Cukek kêşa ji behra Wanê	She grew a channel from the Wan lake
Pênc sed pala yed berdane	She let five hundred workers work
Hevde kîsa haq lêdane	She paid seventeen bags of gold
Avî kirin reskêt Wanê	She watered the gardens of Wan
Dadu bedat Şamîrane	Şamîran, first she had all, then she had nothing
Şamîrane cukek kêşa	Şamîran dug a channel
Dadu bedat Şamîrane	Şamîran, first she had all, then she had nothing
Ber şulkira heft cu aşa	She put to work seven watermills
Qutqu kumaş dan şebaşa	She gave a shirt and fabric to each worker
Avî kirin reskêt paşa	She watered the gardens of the pashas

Dengbêj Bahar (2007 in Kurdish): "When there was a wedding, there was the henna night. On the henna night the women go to the house of the bride. They sing songs, they make henna, put the henna on her hands, and sing songs to her. The groom also came to the house, and they sang also songs about the groom. They prepared the groom. Then the wedding was celebrated. For example tomorrow is the wedding, then we will prepare the bride this night. And the men prepared the groom."
Dengbêj Narîn (2012 in German): "When they went to fetch the bride they sang again other songs. And even before they would come for her, the mother and her friends also sang songs. They sang about how the girl is now leaving and has to say goodbye, and then everyone cries. For example:

Em hatin te bi kar kin narîne	We have come to get you ready, our delicate
Tu negirîn narîne	Delicate, do not cry
Em hatin te kar bikin narîne	We have come to have you, delicate
Em hatin te ji mala bavê te bar kin narîne	We have come to take you away from your father's house
Emê te bişin, emê te kar bikin,	We will wash you, we will get you ready,
Te ji mala bavê te bar bikin	We will take you away from your father's house

When the bride takes a bath, they hang a cover so that she cannot be seen, and then the women sing these lines. I sang with them and at that moment I had to cry as well. Because that moment [of leaving] is really sad."

Work songs

Dengbêj Bahar (2007 in Kurdish): "We started with the household chores, we made yoghurt, we went milking, we made bread, the tasks of the women were clear. The women looked at the house. And because there was a lot of work in the village, you don't do it alone, but with four or five girls. We worked together. We milked the sheep. We put the milk in a *meşk*-yoghurt sack and swing it, to make yoghurt and

cheese. While doing this we sang songs. For example two women sang and two others replied. Another one looked after the children."

Meşkêt kê ma li ser banî / hay meşkê	I was swinging meşk on the roof / oh butter churn
Meşkêt kê ma li ser banî / hay jarê	I was swinging meşk on the roof / oh poor one
Gazît ke me şîvanî / hay meşkê	I called the shepherd / oh butter churn
Gazît ke me şîvanî / hay jarê	I called the shepherd / oh poor one
Tu pazî bîne danî / hay meşkê	Bring the livestock for the milk hour / oh butter churn
Tu pazî bîne danî / hay jarê	Bring the livestock for the milk hour / oh poor one
Meşkêt kêma bin tuye / hay meşkê	I was swinging meşk under the mulberry tree / oh butter churn
Meşkêt kêma bin tuye / hay jarê	I was swinging meşk under the mulberry tree / oh poor one
Avêt ke mê kaniya / hay meşkê	At the spring I add water to it / oh butter churn
Avêt ke mê kaniya / hay jarê	At the spring I add water to it / oh poor one
Bo nextê çil keziye / hay meşkê	For the dowry of the forty-braids-girl / oh butter churn
Bo nextê çil keziye / hay meşkê	For the dowry of the forty-braids-girl / oh poor one

Dengbêj Cengiz (2013 in Turkish): "The *meşk* is a leather bag made from goat skin with a rope at each side. The leather bag is filled with milk, and two women would swing it from side to side until it had become yoghurt or butter. One woman would sing the first line, and the second woman repeat the same line. The last lines mean that the yoghurt and butter could be sold to pay the bride price for a girl who was named 'the forty-braids-girl', after the many braids of her hair."

Dengbêj Bahar (2007 in Kurdish): "In the past we did not have a mill. We made the flour at home. And when a woman in the evening ground the grain and made flour, because we did not have mills and we did it by hand, the women and the girls would come together in the evening and do it all together, and they made three or four bags on one evening, within one hour. And they did not do this work silently. When they were sitting there, they sang songs. They sang these songs towards each other. In that way they were singing, and the time was passing by."

Comments on music and village life

Dengbêj Cengiz (2007 in Turkish): "In our regions, in the east, if people leave the village, they sing songs to themselves. You go to the mountains alone, and to the fields, and for that reason everybody knows how to sing songs. It comes from the air, from the mountains. If you sing in such a place, it is as if there are three or four people listening to you. You are surrounded by the mountains and the voice is coming back to you."

"When it was winter, because there was a lot of snow, no one left the village. That's why we made many preparations before it became winter. When it is winter all the roads are closed, there is snow everywhere, and this continues for about three or four months. In the winter at daytime we give hay [to the animals], and at night time we

gathered with five to twenty people. We had walnuts and honey, we gathered in a house and sat together on the floor. We told fairy tales and we sang songs. Wedding songs as well as recital songs (*uzun hava*), in Kurdish we say *stranên gaziya*."
"[When we gathered on winter evenings] we continued until late, until midnight, then everybody went home, and the next day at daytime everybody again made preparations for the winter. The whole winter the people gathered. From the mountains, from other villages if they had gone there, they all came to the village and stayed there for the winter. You cannot go anywhere, if you cannot go out, how will you spend your time? In daytime you look for the animals, you chop wood, you do preparations, and in the evening you tell stories, sing songs, talk. Three or four months were spent in this way. Until spring."

Heyranok and metelok

Dengbêj Narîn (2012 in German): "*Heyranok* are rhymes, they are not songs but a rhyme. There were funny ones, and serious ones, and political, and sexy ones. About young people who were in love and showed each other their love. In the end, one needs to express everything. For example:

Çiyayeke gundê me niqebin	The mountains of our village are like hills
Rexek Kurdin yêk Ereb in	At one side are the Kurds, at the other side Arabs
Piştê bejna lawkê min ê delal	After the beautiful figure of my dear man
Mêrên vî zimanî li min heram bin	Are all other man for me a sin
Min tube bin	May I be doomed if I would love someone else

"At the time, when someone didn't have brothers and when there were no men in the house, they did not have so much value so to say. *Heyranok* were also about that. About children who had lost their mother, about women who had no brothers or father, there were funny ones about men, and about love between boys and girls:

Girêl ber gira	Hills over hills
Agirê şivan û bêriya	The fire of shepherds and milkmaids
Şemal û çira	Is like candles
Inşallah ez nemînim	If God allows me, I will not become
Bo xwişka bê bira	Like sisters who have no brothers

"Sometimes I think: did that really happen was it really true? But when I go there, then I miss it and say to myself: okay it was really true. There were good people but they passed away. There was a woman with whom i really wanted to meet up and write a lot of her things down, the *heyranok* rhymes. And she died and took everything with her in the grave. She knew things that no one else knew apart from herself. I find that really a shame."

Dengbêj Bahar: "We also have many *metelok*, they are short rhymes that form an expression or very short story, for example:

Heta tu be serî rêvaneçî	As long as you have not walked by yourself
Tu qedra pyê nizanî	You cannot know the value of feet

"Our songs are sung even more when people suffer, when people experience bad things. There are some songs that come into being during nice days, and others during bad days. For example when bad things happened in the village, and when we had to leave from the village, some songs come into being from such bad days."

Lullabies

When I asked dengbêj Bahar if there were songs she especially liked, she gave the following song. The song is sung by a father who rocks the cradle of his son and accompanies the bodily movement with a lullaby. He mourns the death of his wife, who apparently died in childbirth or soon thereafter. The father feels desperate after the death of his wife. How will he take care of his son without the mother? Will there be anyone from the village who will help out and come to nurse the boy? And how will life be meaningful for him without his wife? Dengbêj Bahar said that the song connects to her feelings of loneliness during her childhood.

Landikê kurê min	The cradle of my son
Hey layê layê hey layê layê	Oh my son, my son
Di eşa bin ve azizê ber dilê dayê	Be quiet, dearest of the heart of your mother
Ez ê landikê kurikê xwe hejînim	I will rock the cradle of my son
Ez ê landikê delalê xwe hejînim	I will rock the cradle of my sweetheart
Ez ê dest bilunga desta	I will wrap his hands
girêdema ya piya dêşidînim	and his feet in a sling
Ma keseke nine gundê me kubi xêrê xwe	Is there no one in our village who will help?
Dayikekê ji bo kuro min bînim	Who will bring a mother for my son?
Hey layê layê hey layê layê	Oh my son, my dear son
Na dayika te male cîrana ne	Your mother is not in the house of the neighbors
Ez ê ji bo te gazî	So that I could call her for you
Na dayika te li mala xalan e	Nor is she at the house of the uncles
Ku ez ji bo te qasitekî virê gemê	So that I could send a messenger to fetch her
Û ne dayika te gera govendê ye	Nor is she dancing at the lead of the *govend* dance
Ku ez bo te çavkeme	So that I could wink her for you
Dayika te li gîreke moqberê ya	Your mother is in the grave
Mar û mişk dixwun xal û nîşanê gerdanê	Where snakes and rats eat her face away
Hey layê layê hey layê layê	Oh my son, my son
Ez ê landika kurê xwe hahakem	I will rock the cradle of my son
Ez ê landika keça xwe hahakem	I will rock the cradle of my daughter
Ez ê dest bilunga desta lê giredema	I will wrap his hands in the sling

Ya piya dêlêtata kem
Ma çi xêrxas li gundê me nînin
Ji bo kurê min dayikekê peyda ki

Hey layê layê hey layê layê
Di eşa bin ve dayika xwe nemîna
Bavîkê xwe nemaye
Ma kesek xêrxas nîne bi xêra xwe
Xaletê bînin şîna dayê

I will wrap each of his legs
Is there no benevolent person in our village
Who will find a mother for my son?

Oh my son, my son
Be quiet, if your mother did not stay with us
Your father should also not stay alive
Is there no benevolent person in our village
Who will bring an aunt instead of the mother?

Songs about the village history

Cengiz told me that Zeban was attacked by Christian Assyrians at the time his great-grandfather was still a young child. The child hid himself in the oven and was saved, whereas all others were killed. The song about the attack of Zeban is called *Lîzane*, which is the name of the Christian tribe that attacked Zeban. This tribe comprised five or six villages and was led by the Christian leader Melik Xewşaba.

Lîzane

Fila cemyan Lîzane
Xweşmêr cemyan Lîzane
Sund xwar dêra Qesrane
Diçîna ser Zebane

Fila hatin şîvewa
Xweşmêr cemyan şîvewa
Sund xwar dêra Bêwa
Diçîna ser Çelêwa

Zebane gundê me ye
Avaya gundê me ye
Melik Berxû Filaye
Çîn Deştanê hîlêye

Zebane cîhê mîra
Ava bît cîhê mîra
Melik û xweşmêra
Çîn Zebanê nêçîre

Welya Bega bi lezîne
Şêrê sora bi lezîne
Aşira te bi cemîne
Here hayfa Zeban bistîne

Welya Bege dibêyo
Şêrê sore dibêyo
Bo min bîn derbînêyo
Sud mizgefte xwedêyo

The Christians gathered in Lîzane[415]
The heroes gathered in Lîzane
They swore on the church of Qesran[416]
That they would go to Zeban

The Christians came to dinner
The heroes gathered for dinner
They swore on the church of Bêwa
That they would go to Çelê (Çukurca)

Zeban is our village
May our village remain forever
The Christian ruler Berxû
Went to Zeban in secret

Zeban is the place of kings
May the place of kings remain forever
The Christian ruler and the heroes
Went to Zeban to hunt them down

Hurry up Welya Beg!
Hurry up red lion!
Gather your tribe
And revenge Zeban!

Welya Beg says:
The red lion says:
Bring me a binocular
By God the mosque is burning

415 Lîzane was the tribe of Melik Xewşaba and consisted of 5 to 6 villages.
416 Qesran was a village with a special old church

Figure 31. On one of the many family trips this family made to Duhok in Iraqi Kurdistan. 2013.

The song speaks of a conspiracy against Zeban, the place of kings. They swore to attack in addition to Zeban, also Cele (Çukurca), which was a Pinyanişî stronghold. Welya Beg was the leader of the Pinyanişî, the alliance of Zeban, and the song tells that he heard about the attack of Zeban when it was already too late. From afar he saw its mosque burning. He was too late to prevent the defeat of Zeban, but promised to take revenge. It is not clear from the song how the story continued, and Cengiz does not have further information, maybe because the main concern of the song is what happened to Zeban.

Another song Cengiz gave me was *Haci Marîfa*, about a conflict of two Pinyanişî villages with a Christian village. They disagreed about the borders of a summer pasture called Giştîke. Most villages owned a summer pasture to which they brought their livestock in the warm summer months. Ownership of a pasture was of crucial importance for the herding of the livestock of a whole village. In this song the inhabitants of Marîfa feel challenged by the Christian leaders and gather their own leaders to discuss how to react to this challenge. They prepare 'to kill the pigs'. Both songs emphasize the opposition between Christians and Muslims. Cengiz distanced himself from this content, as today such songs are regarded as problematic by many Kurds.

The following song tells of an intertribal conflict between the Berwarî and Zêbarî tribes in Iraq.[417] *Şêx û mer* (lit. Sheikh and snake) is the name of a Berwarî hero who was the subject of a conspiracy of the Zêbarî who wanted to kill him.

Şêx û Mer	Şêx û Mer
Zêbarî bû gûtine	Among the Zêbarî it was said
Çarbûtê bû gûtine	Among the four cooperating villages it was said
Cemandin çem mezine	That the big men were gathering
Got Şêx û Mer kujine	And said they would kill Şêx û Mer
Bi Zêbarî bû xebere	Among the Zêbarî the news got around
Çarbûtê bû xabere	Among the four villages the news got around
Cemandin çend mêrsere	That the chosen few heroes
Şêx û Mer destile sere	will capture Şêx û Mer
Şêx û Merê Berwarî	Şêx û Mer of the Berwarî
Bê dewleta Şêx û Mere	Şêx û Mer who was without rule
Xencer didane marî	Your sword is like a snake tooth
Yella bibît nêyarî	Get going, let there be hostility

417 A more recent history of conflict may have been the reason why this song had continuing relevance for Zeban, or for dengbêj Cengiz personally. During the Mulla Mustafa Barzani revolt (1942-1945), the Zibaris had supported the Iraqi government in their fight against Mulla Mustafa. Also in later times they remained rivals. They joined the pro-government troops *jash*, and fought against the Barzanis (McDowall 1996). Since Cengiz fought for the Barzani movement (see below), such a song may have attracted the attention of Barzani tribesmen.

Şêx û Merê Berwarî	Şêx û Mer of the Berwarî
Şêx û Mere tu bi xwe yî	Şêx û Mer you are on your own
Xencer didane sayî	Your sword is like a dog tooth
Yella bibît xwe bi xwayî	Get going [Zêbarî], go ahead and fight your own people

Four villages of the Zêbarî tribe planned to kill Şêx û mer, who was known for his courage and strength, someone whose sword was 'like a snake tooth and a dog tooth'. But the Zêbarî were divided; some of them conspired against Şêx û mer, but others sided with him. Therefore, the song incites the Zêbarî to go and fight together, instead of fighting their own people and being disgraced by their internal division.

Songs about recent events

Dengbêj Cengiz said that after the foundation of the Turkish Republic no new songs of significance were made. Dengbêj Bahar agreed. However, at the same time she said that there are many more recent songs, for example about the clashes with the soldiers who were stationed in their village, and she gave some examples. Also dengbêj Narîn gave examples of recent songs and verses. She especially liked such recent compositions and had a great memory for them. The songs and verses that Bahar and Narîn referred to were seen by Bahar and Cengiz as of less importance than the historical songs presented above. It seems therefore that the former were more 'informal' compositions that were not performed on official occasions and had less prestige than the songs dengbêj Cengiz presented. Another reason for their assumed lesser value may be that more recent songs of which the maker is known, are not regarded as real 'folk songs', which are usually seen as old and anonymous. A final reason may be that this points to a difference in male and female repertoires, with the former seen as more important. In the following, Narîn gives an example of a song that was made by women about a recent event.

Dengbêj Narîn: "Somewhere in the middle of the night it started, around three, we heard bomb-bang and these noises. We knew it was war. (..) And only the next morning could we go outside and see what happened. My parents were in the one house and I was in the other house with my uncle, and the bomb had fallen exactly in the middle. And our minibus was there, and the cow and sheep. And the bomb parts had hit the animals. So they wanted to slaughter the animals before it becomes *haram*. And not even two days later, I was there and [my aunt and her daughter] were laughing, so I asked: 'what is going on?', and then she started to sing. Immediately she had a song ready about this situation, my aunt and her daughter. They were laughing and singing, but immediately [after what happened]! (2012 in German)."

Sibêdeye sibêde zuye
Hewexana hatiye
Gut ew çiye çiqewîme
Telqek jorda hatiye
Ya dolmişê ketiye

[Daughter:] It is morning early morning
when Hewexana came
And said what is wrong, what happened?
[Grandmother:] A bomb came from above
And fell upon the minibus

Omar runişt pencerê
Gut Selwa bîne xencere
Em ê biçine dere

[Uncle:] Omar sat in the window
And said: 'Selwa bring me the big knife
We will go outside [to slaughter the wounded livestock]

Helê dibetê Guleyo
Tu bîne menceleyo
Da bi kem guştê celeyo
Û bidim xêra me û dolmişeyo

Grandmother said to Gulê:
'Bring me the large pot
So that we can put the meat in there
And receive grace for life and the minibus

5.6 The embodied experience of singing songs

Until now in this chapter we have traced two separate storylines: the personal narratives, and songs and fragments drawn from village life. In this section I bring these two storylines together. As I said at the opening of the chapter, these two storylines often remained separate during our talks. The family members had positive memories about the long winter evenings when people told each other stories, about the wedding dances, the work songs, and all the activities that they associated with life in the village, and that were often accompanied by songs. These memories seemed to remain separate from the many negative memories that also took place in the village. Life in the village had often been marked with war, oppression, and fear. Dengbêj Bahar said that "all my life I have seen every war." Dengbêj Narîn began her story with: "when I look back on my life, how my childhood was, there were more bad than good things." Dengbêj Cengiz spoke much less about the hardship he experienced, but Narîn's remark shows how much he also suffered from their painful history. However, all three of them seemed to feel different when evoking the village and their memories through the medium of the songs. The songs set in motion a specific work by being capable of connecting them to their past memories in a positive rather than negative way.

This work of the songs became visible through the positive atmosphere that emerged when we spoke of the songs and memories surrounding them. Since songs were present in everyday life in the village, and since many lyrics refer to village activities, these are also the things that come to mind when speaking of the songs. Most of the songs are not self-composed, but are songs that are not directly related to individual experiences. Although initially I was searching for songs of their own

making, as I hoped to find a more personal meaning produced through such songs than in the more general songs, I came to understand much later that it is precisely the anonymity of the songs that makes them so apt for bringing up such positive memories. In the previous section I gave many examples of how Bahar, Cengiz and Narîn talked about village memories. They did not speak about specific memories, as they did in the life story interviews we had. Instead, they spoke in general terms: how on long winter evenings they would gather and tell each other stories; how they sang songs while making yoghurt; how they sang songs when they fetched the bride from her home, etcetera. The *meşk*-songs about the yoghurt making, the *bêrî* songs about milking the sheep, the wedding songs and other work songs, they all remind one of the many activities that characterized village life. These activities were repetitive acts that occurred daily, or weekly, or during specific months of the year.

Precisely because the songs refer to repetitive, general acts that were carried out by all people in the village, they do not connect directly to individual memories. One could even suggest that by linking specifically to general and repetitive activities, the songs have the virtue of *not* reminding one of individual experiences, of overlooking and skipping over these memories while connecting to village life and activities in their most general form instead. In cases of extreme distress and trauma in the past, the songs could also serve as a place of hiding, where one could go when painful memories become too overwhelming. When singing songs, or talking about these acts, instead of the memories of pain and loss, other memories come up that are capable of displacing the pain, and of evoking activities that have no immediate connection to the trauma. In cases of trauma, people often lose the capability to express what happened into words, as words seem insufficient to capture the dramatic experience of the trauma. When speaking about the experiences of refugees, Jackson (2002) writes:

> We speak of trauma as something that 'shatters' or 'fragments' a life, 'tearing it apart' (…) This loss is centered on the loss of language. In its resistance to and its shattering of speech, trauma creates a deep sense of unsharability. And as trauma reduces us to unbearable solitude, so our stories become reduced to contingent events. The loss of emotion, of narrative design, and of moral conclusion that one sees in stories of traumatic experience are signs that the refugee has momentarily lost his or her sense of being connected to a world that can be recognized, chosen or known (Jackson 2002: 95).

In the case of this family, it seems that songs take over where words do not suffice. The songs offer an anchor in intense experiences of fragmentation, and can at times relieve feelings of pain, loss, and loneliness.

I suggest that this function of the songs is reinforced by the bodily activity, both of singing and dancing, and of the village activities to which they refer. The

embodied experience of these activities causes them to come to mind when the same actions are repeated. Many songs are directly associated with a specific village activity. For example, when singing a *meşk*-song the women who sang the song were at the same time moving back and forth in order to swing the leather bag with milk. This action had to be repeated for a long time before the milk would turn into yoghurt. One can easily imagine that dengbêj Bahar, who for years had performed this activity while singing its song, can experience in an embodied fashion the same feeling of swinging the leather bag when she hears or sings a *meşk*-song today. The same applies to many other songs: they bring to mind and body the repetitive sense of carrying out a village activity, and of being in a village environment. The bodily movement that accompanies the songs reinforces the act of singing and the memories these provoke.

As I mentioned above, the songs of this chapter did not have much prestige in the past as they are easy to learn, often seen as female repertoire, and not part of the more difficult genre of kilams that are the field of specialized dengbêjs. One could therefore easily overlook them. However, the ethnographic material of this chapter suggests that the bodily experience of singing songs in fact does a powerful work in piecing together shattered experiences of lives fragmented by violence and escape. In the following section I will turn to another role the songs play after the family members began to participate in the dengbêj TV program on Roj TV.

5.7 Resignifying cultural memory[418] and redefining the position of women

As we saw in chapter 4, Kurdish satellite television has incited the growth of an imagined Kurdish community worldwide, that crosses national borders. It has helped to reverse processes of assimilation into the dominant national identity of the countries Kurds live and of erasure of Kurdish identity. In an article about indigenous television making in Canada and Australia, Ginsburg points to similar processes among the Inuit and Aboriginals respectively, and names them "resignifying cultural memory" through media. She highlights what work media production does in the places where she carried out her research: their own film

418 When talking about Inuit film productions that show (fictive) family life as it was believed to take place before 1945, Ginsburg notes how people loved these productions and felt they rightly depicted the history of their communities. "For Inuit participants and viewers (..) [the productions] serve as a dynamic effort to resignify cultural memory on their own terms" (Ginsburg 2002: 42).

productions helped marginalized communities (1) to recuperate their own stories, (2) to increase feelings of empowerment, (3) to reverse power relations, (4) to include their stories in national narratives, and (5) to create a counter-public sphere. We have seen some of these processes taking place in chapter 4. However, for the women participating in the *Şevbêrk* program, their participation had a double meaning. For them, the program was not only about resignifying cultural memory, but also about redefining their position as women and as female dengbêjs. Although the program's style and this redefinition was to a large extent decided by others, their appearance on television had important consequences for themselves and for the position of women more generally. Also, the new recognition they received, and the new value they themselves discovered in knowledge they had previously taken for granted, seem to reinforce the positive work of the songs as described in the previous section.

How did dengbêj Bahar, dengbêj Cengiz and dengbêj Narîn become involved in the television program *Şevbêrk*? First, before singing on television, Bahar and Cengiz were already active as wedding singers in the places where they lived. It seems that this was a first step in which they became aware that the knowledge they had learned in the village was seen as valuable at other places. Second, all three were invited to join the television program. This was the biggest step, as they felt that performing on television was very different from what they had done before. Third, Bahar and Narîn got involved in the production of a CD with songs sung by women. These three activities made them feel that they possessed special knowledge that was worth recording and archiving, something they had not realized before. As mentioned above, my main focus here is on the women's stories.

From the time the family left their village and moved from place to place, Cengiz and Bahar were active as wedding singers. In Iran and Iraqi Kurdistan dengbêj Cengiz was often invited for weddings, and dengbêj Bahar sometimes accompanied him. They sang the songs they had learned in the village, which turned out to be much in demand. People often had forgotten the songs and were not able to dance the wedding dances in the same way as they had done in their villages. Dengbêj Bahar spoke about their experiences in Iran:

> For example in Iran it happened often that we had weddings of Kurds. We went to those weddings, especially my husband, especially he would sing. In Iran it was forbidden to have music groups, or to celebrate weddings outside, so people celebrated their weddings at home. Not everyone knew the songs, that's why they invited dengbêjs. Cengiz and some friends went to many weddings. I also went, I also sang. They sang and I repeated. Three men sang first, and I repeated it.

Figure 32. A family picture with Duhok in the background, Iraqi Kurdistan. 2013.

In Iraqi Kurdistan the opportunities for Kurdish music were much larger than they were in Turkey and Iran. At weddings usually there was a wedding band, but they also invited a dengbêj to complete the program. Dengbêj Bahar:

> Actually there were more bands, modern music, but there was also always a dengbêj. There would not be a wedding finished without a dengbêj. For example some hours music was playing, and after that elderly people would say: 'now the music is enough, let the dengbêj sing.' So they wanted the dengbêj to come.

But she also told me that much had changed and that many traditions had disappeared in Duhok, because life was different, and not all traditions fit that new city life. For example, in the village on the hennah night (the night before the wedding) a female dengbêj would accompany the bride and sing songs for her. The same would happen on the day of the wedding when they fetched the bride and brought her to the groom. But in Duhok that tradition did not continue:

> Day by day folklore and traditions are disappearing you know. Because they went by car and switched on the music. They did not need a dengbêj to sing songs about the bride. That time has not remained. The dengbêjs still know everything, they did not forget. But in Duhok it did not remain.

Also other types of songs that they had learned in the village were not sung anymore, because the situations in which they were sung previously no longer existed:

> There were only few [work songs] because many things that were happening in the village were not happening there, such as to make yoghurt (*meşk*), or going to the mountains, there was no milking (*bêrî*). For that reason such songs were not there, they were special for the village.

After moving to Germany, the couple was again often invited to sing at weddings. Sometimes these were weddings in which there was no musical group present, and where they only danced to the accompaniment of their voices, as in the old days. At other times there was a wedding band and they would take turns with the band.

Although dengbêj Bahar and dengbêj Cengiz thus already had public recognition before they participated in the television program, their activities had always been informal. People asked them to perform at weddings because they knew them, or because they had heard about them from others. They had not been involved in publications, productions, or interviews. However, it seems that it was especially the informal character of their activities that was helpful for dengbêj Bahar to become slowly more involved in activities that had been seen as problematic for women earlier in her life. In the village, weddings were mixed as long as the attendants were no strangers. As soon as there were people from other villages, the men and women would celebrate weddings separately and not dance or sing together. In Iran and Iraq weddings were also often celebrated separately, although there were more moments when they sang together, and dengbêj Bahar began joining dengbêj Cengiz to sing at weddings, "three men sang first, and I repeated them." In Germany mixed dancing and singing was much more common, and Bahar sang at weddings together with her sister-in-law and her husband, "Cengiz sang, and Helîn and I repeated him." In this way, Bahar had become used to singing in public.

The family's participation in Şevbêrka Dengbêja

In 1998 the family became acquainted with Zana Güneş through a Kurdish neighbor. The latter had already performed once in the program *Şevbêrk* . Dengbêj Bahar said that the idea of singing on television had never occurred to her. The evening before we did this interview we had been watching some old recordings of the program. In one of them Bahar said that initially she had felt embarrassed to sing as a woman on television, but that she was now used to it. I asked her how this had felt for her.

> (Yesterday you said on Roj TV that you felt embarrassed to sing in front of society, in front of everyone. How was it for you? You went to Roj TV and sang songs, did your thoughts about it change?) I know many traditional songs and also when I was in Iran and in Duhok I have always sung songs. But the weddings for women were

> separate from the weddings for men. Still we went together to fetch the bride and we sang together, men and women. But when we came to Germany, until that time I had not had any thoughts about television. I knew many things but I didn't realize myself that I had that knowledge. One day Güneş called my neighbor. He wanted us to make a program together. (..) So we talked with Güneş and showed some songs, we did some rehearsal [in the studio]. I just sat there next to them, I listened, and because there was no one else I repeated the songs.[419] I felt embarrassed but I still did it. Güneş said to me: 'you know so many things, why did you pretend during the whole program as if you don't know anything'? I said: 'It is very difficult for me. When I see the microphone, and the television, and the camera, it was very difficult for me to sit there. It was both hard and also an embarrassment (*şermahî*). In what way embarrassment? I had sung many times together with Cengiz. But when there is a camera you feel that people are watching.

On her first encounter with television dengbêj Bahar felt embarrassed. This was because she was not used to performing in front of a camera, and because she felt it might be inappropriate for a woman to do so. She used the word embarrassment (*şerm*) first when she talked about village weddings which women and men celebrated separately as soon as there were strangers around; they would do so because they felt embarrassed. On television she also felt initially embarrassed, but overcame these feelings with time (see below).

The encounters with Zana Güneş raised her self-esteem. He tried to encourage her to speak of her knowledge. He often visited her and asked her many things about the village and the songs she knew, and this made her feel that she had something to tell, that she possessed a type of knowledge that other people did not have and that was valuable:

> When I was young I did not understand. I knew that it was the custom among us in the village, but I did not know it was folklore. (..) Maybe I know one thousand traditional songs, but I did not know that all these songs that I know are songs of the people. I did not know that all people were singing those songs. I thought maybe only my villagers sing those songs. That's how I understood it. It was difficult.

This is an interesting quote because it shows how her local knowledge was turned into 'songs of the people,' into 'folklore' that had a broader value beyond simply the village context. 'Songs of the people' is a term that is used for anonymous songs that are seen as old and authentic because their maker is not known. Once dengbêj Bahar could define her knowledge in terms of a category that she recognized as important, she began to see its broader value. Previously she had liked the songs, but did not feel they had any more value than for herself and the people of her village. After her

419 As indicated before it is usual that the lines of a wedding song are first sung by a lead singer, and then echoed by several other singers. Every song line is thus sung twice.

encounters with Güneş she began to feel that she had something to offer. Dengbêj Narîn had a similar way of expressing this.

As we saw in her life story, Narîn was born in 1982, and lived for several periods in villages, much shorter than her parents. Often when speaking of the village she talked in terms of 'they,' whereas her parents always talked in terms of 'we.' Her position alternated between two perspectives: sometimes she felt like a participant, at other times she felt more like an outside observer. From a young age she had been interested in the songs and sayings and had learned many by heart, "I think when you are interested in something you don't forget." She said that many people listened to the songs but did not really understand their meaning and sang along, because they did not have a genuine interest in them. She herself had listened from an early age intensely to performances. When Zana Güneş began to visit her parents and asked them about their knowledge of songs, she also listened and felt inspired by Güneş' eagerness to know more:

> He came and they talked a lot, I was not always there when they were talking. And I heard how happy Güneş was, how interested he was, and I liked that and I knew all those songs by heart as well. When I saw that a singer [Güneş] since many years goes everywhere, in Europe and in Kurdistan, and looks for people, and we were somehow his last station. He said: 'I have [collected] so many things, Kurdish music is so rich, but what I hear from you is really very interesting.' Because the other villages and cities did not have so much as we had.

Comparable to the way dengbêj Bahar felt about Güneş' interest, dengbêj Narîn also felt encouraged by his recognition, and it was one of the reasons that made her more confident to speak her mind and to perform on television. She had never imagined herself doing something like that: "Actually I was extremely shy, you can't even imagine. I was so shy that I always hid myself, I sat down in a corner and I never felt confident enough to say something, I only listened." But on television she got used to singing with a microphone and telling some details about the songs or about their value. They sang in over a dozen of programs because Güneş felt they had much to tell and he kept inviting them back (see below).

After some years Güneş invited dengbêj Bahar and dengbêj Narîn to make a CD of their songs. The album was released in 2006 with the title *Stranên gel* (Folksongs), and the subtitle *Herêm: Colemêrg* (Region: Colemêrg). Colemêrg is the Kurdish name for Hakkari.[420] The term *stranên gel* is used for songs that are anonymous, and that are presented today as the common heritage of the Kurdish

420 Hakkarî is also used in Kurdish, but Colemêrg is seen as its real Kurdish name.

people. The cover picture shows a Kurdish village with clay houses, and snowy hills in the background. In the foreground a woman walks carrying a basket, and in the back one sees some other women busy at work. The CD includes various types of songs that were mostly sung by women, and of which I presented some above. The CD booklet opens with the texts of a well-known Kurdish folklorist and of Zana Güneş. The folklorist first presents the 'role of the dengbêjs and of Kurdish language.' This part is comparable to the texts of other CDs (see chapter 4) in which the dengbêj art is seen as ancient, as expressing the suffering and sorrows of the Kurds, and as the source of ancient history, as "Kurdistan is that geography where the rose of life was opened for the very first time." The next section speaks about the specific features of songs from the region Colemêrg: the song types, when they were performed, and some names of famous dengbêjs of the past. The third section is called: "the heritage of women in the preservation of Kurdish art and language." It reiterates some of the usual features ascribed to dengbêjs in general, but also pays attention to the specific place of women:

> Kurdish women more than men, are faced with the pains and illnesses of life. That's why a heavy sadness is felt in their voice. (..) In their songs one can find philosophical themes, and they awaken people to see things that are not right. With their natural voices they immerse their audience in a thousand-years-old sea of history. The fire of life is hidden in the hearts of Kurdish women.

The folklorist presents women as suffering more than men, and it seems he feels that this suffering infuses their songs with a moral value. Again, we see the theme of 'awakening' coming up in this quote. He also presents Kurdish women as almost legendary figures, close to nature and connected to old Kurdish history, and ultimately to the 'fire of life'. Zana Güneş wrote the last section of the booklet and highlights the same theme:

> Especially in those seven years when I was making the program *Şevbêrk*, [I discovered] that there are many voices of Kurdish women among our people, and I hope that these Kurdish voices (*dengên kurdewarî*), the voice of Kurdish folklore and the voice of the Kurdish women, in this way do not remain hidden, but become visible (*bilind bibe*) and spread among the people in the same way as the natural beauties of Kurdistan.

He connects women to nature, and sees them as a hidden treasure that he began to discover himself through the program, and that he now wants to spread to other people as well. Güneş thus sees women as an important target of his program.

This rediscovery of women is also discernable in other places, and thus fits within a larger process of the redefinition of women's positions by the Kurdish

movement. The Kurdish author Müslüm Yücel who lives in Istanbul, writes in his book *Berdel* (2006) about his own sad experiences with female relatives who had suffered in unhappy marriages (pp.45-89). These personal experiences inspired him to write about women. In 1999 he wrote a series of articles about female dengbêjs[421] in the Kurdish newspaper Özgür Politika in 1999, a newspaper that was printed and distributed primarily in Europe. The heading of one of these articles[422] says: 'Sadness was sometimes a soft crying. In the dengbêj institution, one of the most important pillars of Kurdish culture, there were also women'. The opening of the article reads:

> Until now Kurdish newspapers, magazines, books and even music companies kept saying that men are the roots of the dengbêj art. However, the number of female dengbêjs from the past until today is not small at all. Because in the wars that lasted for centuries every woman who gave her son to the earth, only reaped laments from the rain that watered the earth, not roses'.

Also here, Müslüm Yücel focuses on the suffering of women, which, he says, resulted in the singing of laments. From his article it appears that in 1999 female dengbêjs had only recently been discovered.

Sanat

Kadın Dengbêjler

HAZIRLAYAN: MÜSLÜM YÜCEL

Hüzün bazen ince sesli bir çığlık idi

Kürt kültürünün en önemli sacayaklarından dengbêjlik kurumunda da kadınlar vardı.

Bugüne kadar Kürt gazeteleri, dergileri, kitapları, hatta kaset firmaları, dengbêjlik ağacının kök-

Figure 33. The cutout of the discussed newspaper article

421 Many thanks to Müslüm Yücel who kindly shared his knowledge and material with me. He showed me the cutouts of the newspaper articles he had written about this topic.

422 Published September 16, 1999 in Özgür Politika.

During the times I visited the family we watched many tapes with recordings of the programs in which they had participated. They all have a similar format, which I discussed in chapter 4. I focus here on the participation of the family in two programs that were broadcast in 2006, shortly after their CD was released. The second program (below) was especially dedicated to female dengbêjs, and only women were invited. The first program was at the same time also the promotion of the CD of which the cover appeared a few times on the screen. After the introduction, which offers images and sounds of Kurdish customs and traditions from long ago, the first image shows all people present in the studio, around twenty people and four musicians. Some people are present as audience, others as singers. All people are dressed in traditional Kurdish dress; the women in wedding dresses, the men in baggy pants tied with a shawl. The two young daughters of dengbêj Cengiz' brother sit on the floor. The floor is covered with carpets, and on the wall hang large paintings that show Kurdish landscapes: a bullock plowing a field, a shepherd with his herd of sheep, a woman making bread, and people dancing at a wedding. All in all the stage represents a Kurdish village life world. The team of musicians play their instruments (saz, drum, oboe, and shepherd's flute). After a short musical introduction, all people present begin to sing a wedding song. The camera focuses on the main singers, of which each holds a microphone: dengbêj Cengiz and his brother are the lead singers who sing two lines each time, which are then repeated by dengbêj Bahar, her sister in law, dengbêj Narin, and their neighbor. After the first song ends, the camera zooms in on Zana Güneş:

> It is indeed important that together we preserve and record all our folk songs, the songs of our fathers and elders (*bav u kalan*), our folklore, for the future. Today our guests are people from the region Colemêrg, from Cizîre, from Şirnax, from our region Botan. We will talk with them today about their songs, about the dengbêj art, and about folklore. The songs of our dengbêjs have been released as a CD, according to the wish of our viewers. We welcome everybody to this *Şevbêrk*.

After this introduction, Güneş introduces all people present in the studio by their first name, and asks them to say something about Kurdish folklore. They reply by thanking him for his efforts and for inviting them, and send greetings to "all four parts of Kurdistan", and also to relatives. These recurrent elements of greeting relatives back home and of thanking the host for his efforts, enhance the informal character of the program. The greetings also connect the program, of which everyone knows it is produced in Europe, to Kurds in the 'homeland.' Dengbêj Narîn for example sent greetings to all people in Zeban, and in Duhok.

The one-hour program consists mainly of the singing of songs. In this case, most songs are wedding songs. Either dengbêj Cengiz and his brother take the lead, and are repeated by the three female singers, or one of the women takes the lead, and is repeated by the other women. There was no song in which women took the lead and were repeated by men. Even though the program is meant as a promotion for the CD, which is made solely by women, Cengiz receives most attention, and is presented as the most knowledgeable person present, and as a "dengbêj from a dengbêj family." Güneş also asked him twice for explanations of songs. In between the songs, the participants are sometimes asked for their opinion about the program. They emphasize that they see it as a program that highlights Kurdish traditions and that prevents these traditions from disappearing. A female participant:

> I want to thank you very much for this beautiful program. In the past in Kurdish folklore there were many singers who sang songs. But after they died, no one came to take their places. So those songs disappeared, they were lost. Now singers imitate others, they imitate Turkish singers. That is not right. Therefore I hope that our grandparents will remember their songs so that we can learn them and sing them.

She refers to the loss of Kurdish culture and the assimilation to Turkish culture. She also pays attention to the loss of songs because of the period of silence in which many songs were forgotten. In all programs I watched the participants express their gratitude for the renewed attention to Kurdish culture. Another person comments in this program:

> This is a day as in a dream, when people see a dream they say: 'was this real or not?' When I was young I heard many songs in the region Colermêrg. When we went to the fields, when we went to harvest hay, our voices would spread through valleys and against cliffs (*wextê cuna giya drunê, li va kevn û zinara deng ve da*), the shepherds sang songs, these are the memories that come to mind. I thank you very much. I greet all people of Kurdistan and especially those from Colemêrg.

This man makes it clear that singing the songs reminds him of the times that he lived in his home region. It reminds him of specific occasions when these songs were sung, when they all sang together while harvesting the hay for the animals, and it brings to mind images of the fields, the work, and the shepherds. Güneş aks dengbêj Narîn what she thinks of the fact that there are women present in the program. She comments:

> I think that it is necessary that we do not remain as we were in the past. Because women are the society, and everyone gives his/her own color. I do not see anything wrong in women also bringing into public view the things they know. And I want that men and women always do things together. I hope that women will go public about their lives.

As we know from her life story, Narîn had lived through many difficulties as a result of being a woman. The TV program gave her the feeling of being involved in a transformation that she herself had wished would have happened when she was a teenager.

In the program that was broadcast not long thereafter, women are the main focus of attention. This time, the visitors are twelve women from different regions. Dengbêj Bahar and her sister-in-law are also present. Güneş introduces the program as follows:

> Dear listeners, this time we have invited women from all regions. We can say that the dengbêj art began with the folklore of the mothers, that is how it spread in our society. Therefore, today we make a program especially about women.

Apart from there being only women present, the program has the same format as the other programs, and consists mainly of singing songs. A few times Güneş asked for comments on his choice to focus a program solely on women. The women commented that they were glad that he did so, and that "in the past women did not appear on stage and did not sing songs." Another woman said that she remembers that once when a dengbêj performed in the village guesthouse, she went there to watch, but she was not invited inside. She said that this has changed and that "now men and women are one." Another woman sang a song of Meryem Xan, one of the famous female dengbêjs of the previous generation. She said:

> I greet all four parts of Kurdistan. Thank you very much for the opportunities you give us. We don't want women's voices to get lost. They were very influential for me, I regard them as a mirror. When I hear the songs of Meyrem Xan and Ayşe San, it is as if I see myself in their songs.

Dengbêj Bahar and her sister in law do not receive much attention this time, probably because they had already participated in the show recently. When dengbêj Bahar wants to say something, Güneş urges her to keep it short, even though she is not a women of many words. She congratulates him with the program, and says how important it is for her.

In these two, and the other, programs I watched, Güneş acts not only as the program's host, but also as a wise father and a teacher of the participants and viewers. The educational purposes he has with the program (chapter 4) clearly appear in the often patronizing way he presents. This is also reflected in the behavior of the participants who elaborately express their gratefulness for the opportunity to sing in his program. However, as I also mentioned in chapter 4, viewers and participants seem to overlook the unequal power relations displayed in the program because

of the appreciated position of Zana Güneş, and because of the enormous value it has for viewers to see Kurdish culture produced on television. Dengbêj Bahar and dengbêj Narîn both expressed their appreciation for Güneş' work. They said that their participation in the program, and the release of their CD, gave them a new sense of value and meaning. Dengbêj Bahar said that it made people recognize her on the street, and that this gave her much satisfaction:

> (You went now many times to Roj TV, and your album was released, how is that for you?) For me that is very nice. I sing nicer, it is nice. (And the things that you know now will spread and don't stay only with you, that's also nice). For me that is no problem. My husband and my relatives did not hinder me, they do not say anything. For that reason it is nice for me. The further it comes the nicer it is. Once I went to the South (*Başur*) [to Iraqi Kurdistan]. And anyone who saw me was happy. They said how much they liked it. I came on the Radio. They had invited me, at radio *Dengê Kurdî* (Kurdish Voice). (You went there as well, to the South?) Yes in 2006. (..) That was very nice, I liked it very much. I went to the market and walked around and the people greeted me, it was something very special. And some were also protesting against it, they said: 'women should be veiled like in the past, it's not good for women.' But I didn't care. They can say what they like.

Because of the recognition for her knowledge and for her effort, dengbêj Bahar obtained a new sense of value and a new appreciation for the songs she had once learned. This was even more special to her because she was a woman. Her reply to my remark that it is nice that the songs she knows are now spread (with which I actually did not have in mind her position as a woman, but the recognition for her songs) shows that this was not self-evident; her husband or relatives could have obstructed her activities, but did not do so. Dengbêj Narîn expressed similar feelings about these experiences.[423] Their activities had a double value to them, in that they on the one hand were involved in a process of 'resignifying cultural memory,' and on the other, obtained a new visibility in public life, that redefined their position of being woman.

423 Dengbêj Narîn: "And then I was in Hakkari and almost everyone had heard the CD, and I was in Duhok and we were somehow really well-known. Because people like Güneş and his program, and they had seen us often because Güneş had taken us many times to his program. (..) And the people in Iraq liked it as well since it was from the village, from the past. Not something new but something they had missed. So they had seen it and [they found it] interesting. (..) And in Hakkari people were really proud because we had sung songs that came from there. So they were proud, and they said: 'we heard that and it is really nice, we have your CD.' And someone in a bus opened the window and said: 'are you that [person from TV]?' They were proud that we did it."

Conclusion

This last chapter investigated the personal experiences of a Kurdish family on the run. They brought their songs with them, from place to place, through times of conflict and war, the destruction of their village, and the loss of many loved ones. The two storylines of life story and songs brought us to a level where we could gain a deeper understanding of the work the songs do in the lives of individuals. Through their embodied memories of singing songs while carrying out all kinds of village activities, the songs connected them to positive memories. In that sense, the songs offer a hiding place from the many bitter and painful experiences that also took place in the village. When singing songs and speaking about them, rather than feeling pain, joyful memories came up; rather than feeling helpless and losing control, a new sense of agency emerged; and rather than feeling loss, the songs gave them a sense of worth. This function of the songs was reinforced through their activities on TV and the release of the CD.

For Bahar and Narîn, their stay in Germany probably made it easier to sing on TV and to become public figures. As dengbêj Bahar mentioned, when some people in Iraqi Kurdistan criticized her TV performances because she was a woman, she claimed that she did not care. But if they had still been living in Turkey or in Iraqi Kurdistan the social costs of such activities might have been too high. Therefore, it is likely that their stay abroad provided them with different opportunities than they would have had if they had remained in their home region. Their stay in Germany may also reinforce the feelings of loss they already had. Dengbêj Narîn told me that her interest in the things she had seen in the village was related to the fact that she had been continuously on the move. It felt to her "like a dream", because everything changed so fast and "we always saw new things and experienced new things, and somehow at a certain point your own [experiences] felt like a dream" (*Und irgendwann mal, deine war wie ein Traum*). At another point in the interview she said:

> [Living in the village] was so nice and interesting, and when i look now back on it, it appears to me like a dream (*das kommt so wie ein Traum*). As if I have dreamt it. These were so nice times. Sometimes.., I would give everything if we could just have those times back. If we could live through these moments once more so that I could have done many things differently.

Being far from a life world once lived increases the feeling of alienation and of being cut off from past experiences. When they are back in Duhok, where they travel regularly, they feel reconnected with their relatives and with a life world that is only marginally present in Germany. In this diaspora life the songs provide a home that

offers a reconnection to the place they come from, a place to escape from painful memories, and a way to piece together the many fragmented experiences that have characterized their life histories.

As Ginsburg (2002) notes, when cultural memories are resignified, new meanings emerge. In the process of bringing the dengbêj art back into public life, the position of the dengbêjs and the definition of what it means to be a dengbêj, changed. As we also saw in chapter 4, political activists have higher moral aims with their activities, and are not satisfied as long as they cannot work towards these higher goals. The TV program aimed at the redefinition of Kurdish tradition along nationalist and modernist lines. While dengbêjs often felt frustration about the lack of recognition compared to former times, as they felt that the political and moral aims of the TV often paid too little attention to their real qualities, this did not count for the family of this chapter. Since the family did not have the same type of singing career of many other dengbêjs, they also did not have the expectations of the dengbêjs. They had not expected that one day their elaborate knowledge of songs and stories would become meaningful for a much larger audience than that of their village. Also, Bahar and Narîn could not have known that one day they would perform on TV and that it would become acceptable to do this as female singers. Therefore, they experienced the redefinition of the dengbêj art by political activists much more positively than many other dengbêjs.

I suggest that these developments not only affected the personal lives of the family I discussed, but was also influential for the viewers. It became a common sight for women to perform on television, and this being a new phenomenon, made people curious about female voices and songs. The program was widely watched by many people in Turkey and abroad. Seeing Kurdish culture, language and traditions performed on TV gives people a sense of pride and a new sense of belonging. Part of the often negative sentiments that many people in Turkey had about their Kurdishness, could be replaced by positive sentiments. Also, the program provided (mainly elderly) people with examples they could easily identify with. Famous Kurdish singers such as Şivan Perwer, Aynur Doğan, Nizamettin Arîç, and Cîwan Haco, also had the function of creating a much more positive experience of being Kurdish, speaking Kurdish, and of Kurdish music. However, for many elderly people, and also for younger people who grew up in villages, the dengbêjs resonated in a different way with their cultural interests than the Kurdish music produced over the last decades. By broadening the definition of what a dengbêj is, the program *Şevbêrk* could include these people and give them a sense of recognition and value for their knowledge of songs and traditions. Moreover, because of the few female dengbêjs, the broader definition of

being a dengbêj includes women whose knowledge would otherwise remain in the shadows. The program on the one hand reconfirms what people remember of the dengbêj art, and what they imagine it to be, but also challenges their imagination by putting women in the limelight, who were generally not regarded as important dengbêjs in the past.

As a final remark for this chapter I will return once more to the personal meanings the songs have (obtained) for the family discussed. If we look at the total body of songs they know, of which I could only present a few in this chapter, the songs reflect a life world that has to a large extent disappeared today. Although some of the practices the songs speak of still take place in the village, current village life has changed profoundly. The village was burned down and rebuilt; many people who were born in the village live elsewhere; and people who still live in Zeban do not carry out all practices as they are described in the songs. For Narîn, Bahar and Cengiz, the village has become a far-away place that is, as Narîn said, almost more real in her imagination than in reality, since the village is not anymore what it used to be, and many of their relatives have moved away. To this family, and many other Kurds who witnessed the destruction of village life and who live a different life today, their songs and stories form a Sung Home that connects to positive experiences, and that depicts a life world that today only exists in their memories.

Figure 34. Dengbêj Apê Bekir and Salihê Qubînî in Apê Bekir's shop in Iğdır.

Conclusion

This dissertation investigated and presented the dengbêjs and their art on many different levels. It took us on a journey: from kilams about a Kurdish past, along current performances in Dengbêj Houses, to the different sites where the dengbêj art was turned into cultural activism, and to the personal life histories of dengbêjs and of a family on the run. The dengbêj art told us an important story of a society in conflict and change; of the redefinition of what it means to be a (good) Kurd; of ideas about the past and the future; and of one's personal place in these processes. During the time of my research, which was a unique moment of return of the dengbêjs into public life, different social narratives, moralities, and temporalities met in the dengbêj art, and were negotiated at places where the dengbêjs performed. This negotiation did not only tell us a story about Kurdish society in Turkey, but also about the larger global stories of modernity, nationalism, and Orientalism.

The approach that I followed in this dissertation was centered on narrative and morality. Both theoretical frameworks were helpful in discovering what different ideas circulated among Kurds at the time of my field research. Especially in a situation of decades of conflict and oppression in which the dominant stories produced by Turkish nationalism seemed to overshadow all other viewpoints, counter narratives are crucial in offering alternatives and in altering feelings of loss of power and control. As we saw in the chapters, dengbêjs and others mobilized such narratives in order to understand the transformation Kurdish society went through, but also to see their personal life stories in a different light. Although often these alternatives did not seem to be capable of resisting the power of Turkey's government, recent developments in the field of Kurdish culture and politics demonstrate that important changes were forged. These changes were prepared by political activists who had developed alternative models and searched for ways to enter and change the cultural and political arena.

In the first chapter I focused on the kilams and how they represent a Kurdish past. Since the dengbêjs were the most important and prestigious performers in Kurdish society, their art formed an important means through which moral ideas were conveyed about home and belonging, about what it meant to be a good person, about who belonged and who did not. The dengbêj art was one of the institutions that produced moral narratives that did not only stem from the religious or political establishment, but added the perspective of the Kurdish commoner. The dengbêjs were mostly common wo/men who stood in the service of an agha, and who observed the life world of the Kurdish nobility from the sideline. In the majority of the kilams a commoner is presented as the voice of the kilam. It seems therefore that the dengbêjs

saw themselves as close to the ordinary people and as articulating their viewpoints. Many of the events the kilams speak of can be situated in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Through recurring figures that emerge in the kilams they sketch a life world that does not anymore exist today. The kilams express feelings of powerlessness and despair of people because of the power of elders who decided about their destiny. The kilams also demonstrate that the lifestyle of the nobility was out of reach for most commoners. The Armenians emerge as the most important Other living side by side with Kurds. In the kilams Armenian women are often imagined as marriage candidates, and Armenians are staged as serving Kurdish interests.

The late nineteenth and early twentieth century was a time of turmoil and war in which the centuries old Ottoman Empire disintegrated and made place for a modern nation-state, and in which new borders were created. The emergence of the Republic of Turkey and of Turkish nationalist ideology turned the Kurds and other minorities into undesirable citizens, and resulted in the denial and oppression of Kurdishness. The kilams sketch a Kurdish geography in which local structures were imagined and experienced as the center, and the surrounding states as the periphery. Local leaders had differing alliances with surrounding tribes and with the states they were part of. However, with the increasing control of the state in local affairs, and with the development of Turkish nationalism and the foundation of the Republic, the enmity and opposition between the Kurds and Turkey's government increased and became a structural feature of local politics. In the early twentieth century the figure of the local leader was predominantly defined in opposition to that government as a rebel, a traitor, or a fugitive, and was condemned for treason or praised for revolt. But the kilams continue to show diversity and divisions among Kurds, and the enmity between Kurdish tribes and clans.

The second chapter looked at how dengbêjs in Diyarbakır's newly opened Dengbêj House presented themselves. I understood the performances I attended during my research as performing tradition. The dengbêjs felt they offer an important contribution to Kurdish society by their knowledge of historical kilams, and through their embodied experiences with village life. They had many stories to tell about their younger years in which the dengbêjs were greatly appreciated, and when whole villages gathered in the dîwan to listen to them. They also spoke of the special qualities of village life, and believe that people had certain capabilities that the current generation of Kurds living in the cities lacks. Another quality they emphasized is their knowledge of historical kilams. They enjoyed the oral character of their art in which free association is a central feature. From one song line or topic

they remembered other kilams and topics, which contributed to the dynamics of a performance.

However, this free association was hindered by the morality of political activists who provided the dengbêjs with a new space in public life. The activists, and many young Kurds who grew up in the Turkish education system, were taught to emperson Turkishness, and to see their Kurdish identity as backwards and ignorant. As a response to this, the Kurdish movement redefined Kurdishness as a positive identity, but only through a rejection of certain elements. This ideology opposes the tribal past of the Kurds, and therewith also an important part of the dengbêj kilams. Political activists saw the dengbêjs, like all Kurds, as in need of education and awakening towards Kurdish nationalism. They need to be taught which kilams to sing, and which to leave out. As a result, the dengbêjs felt often obstructed and undervalued by people who wished to control and guide them in their choice of kilams.

Rather than seeing the dengbêjs as ignorant and as unaware of recent developments and narratives, I suggested in this chapter to see their activities as deliberate choices to embrace other moral narratives. Unlike the activists, most dengbêjs did not feel ambivalent about their Kurdish identity and past. They appreciated the kilams as sources of historical knowledge that reveal important information about the Kurdish past and should not be forgotten. Also, I argued that the dengbêjs should not be seen as pre-modern or on the road towards modernity, but as caught up in and influenced by the process of modernization. The centralization of government authority, the rise of nationalism, and the denial and oppression of Kurdish language and cultural production, pushed the dengbêjs and their art to the margins. They could only continue in the villages where they could remain outside of government control. Their stories show that the lack of access to education and a musical career they had often wished for, was a result of these developments, rather than its precursor.

The third chapter presented an in-depth investigation of the life stories of six dengbêjs and an aşık. At the time of my research, the dengbêjs had only recently returned into public life, and looked back on their personal histories from that particular moment. They reflected on the happy times when they had been able to sing frequently, and on the times that they had been obstructed from doing so. In their stories I discovered a range of reasons for the times that they remained silent. The experience of silence that was shared by all dengbêjs was the period from roughly 1980 to the beginning of the 2000s, when political oppression and the overall situation of conflict and resettlement, deeply disrupted village structures

that had been the main facilitating institutes for them to sing. Dengbêj Mahmut, Isa, and Hamîd spoke about these experiences of oppression that made them afraid to continue singing. After their recent return into public life, Dengbêj Hamîd expressed the disappointment about the lack of support, that many other dengbêjs shared with him. Being tortured and prohibited to sing made him experience this new lack of attention as a returning experience of silence.

But there were also other reasons for silence. Dengbêj Bêrîvan spoke of the limited chances she had to sing because of being a woman. Dengbêj Cîhan's story was indicative for the erasure of Armenian identity from eastern Turkey. He had chosen to define himself primarily as a Kurd and a Muslim, and not as an Armenian. From his story spoke a strong sense of the ways in which being Armenian had become undesirable. Dengbêj Seyda spoke about the religious class he felt connected to through his education at several madrasas. As a religious student he had initially felt hesitant to show his qualities as a dengbêj, but he found a way to combine the two identities. Dengbêj Silêman was an adventurous child who, like many others of his age, was curious about life in western Turkey, and who went there as a laborer. He learned to speak Turkish fluently, and learned many Turkish songs. But after years he returned to his village and took up a more Kurdish centered life again. Finally, aşık Abdullah had wished for a musical career, but was obstructed by his father who destroyed his saz and married him under pressure. The prohibition on musical instruments meant that only twenty years later, aşık Abdullah had the chance to strive for the publication of an album and to live the life he wished for himself.

The variety of personal stories showed how individual singing careers were influenced by different developments taking place during the life times of the dengbêjs. They also showed that many dengbêjs spoke in moral terms about choices they had made in their lives. Following Zigon (2007), this demonstrates that in times of deep transformation of an entire society, people feel the need to reposition themselves towards the social narratives they hear around them, and at the same time to create their own story in which they rework their stories in ways that enable them to present themselves as morally good persons.

In chapter 4 I investigated the processes, sites and narratives that had turned the dengbêj art into a project of cultural activism in recent years. Cultural activism was an important means to contest Turkish nationalism in public life, and to reclaim public spaces for the expression and production of Kurdishness. This development had been initiated from abroad, by the Kurdish satellite channel MED-TV. Kurdish television was arguably the most important platform through which a Kurdish majority began seeing and imagining itself as a national community.

Through the life story of Zana Güneş, the host of the TV show *Şevbêrka Dengbêja*, we saw how these processes of politicization and deterritorilization took place in the life of an individual who played a central role in redefining the dengbêj art. We also saw how he framed and gave meaning to his life by tracing in himself an evolvement of former ignorance and later awakening for the Kurdish cause. This manner of self-presentation fits well in PKK ideology that sees the need for each individual to go through a process of learning to become a good Kurd with a new Kurdish personality.

Within Turkey, similar processes started somewhat later due to the conflict, oppression and turmoil Kurdish society went through until the beginning 2000s. Since the 2000s, the Kurdish movement was increasingly able to mobilize cultural activism within Turkey in order to expand its political influence. The reemergence of the dengbêjs in public life was thus directly related, and part of, these new forms of cultural activism. At the time of my research, new places where Kurdish culture was displayed and produced were in the process of being set up. Political activists invited the dengbêjs to perform at historical sites such as the old palace in Doğubeyazıt, and the newly renovated historical building of the Dengbêj House in Diyarbakır. These sites reinforced the historical claim they wanted to make that presents the dengbêjs as an age old Kurdish tradition and heritage. Moreover, speaking Kurdish in public at the festival and the opening of the Dengbêj House, were means to publicly acknowledge and reclaim the for almost a century denied existence of the Kurdish language. An important form of the new presence and visibility of Kurdishness can also be found in the music market in Istanbul. In recent years, Kurdish music CDs sit alongside Turkish CDs in the large music shops in Istanbul's main shopping street. Finding such CDs and other publications in the center of commercial activity is an important means to transform the Kurdish Other of Turkish modernity, often imagined as violent, primitive, and backwards, into a legal, visible, and non-violent presence in public life.

However, these activities were still highly contested, and dangerous for many people involved during the time of my research. Activists risked being arrested, imprisoned, or charged, and many activists had a (long) personal history of persecution by the government. This added a strong moral claim to their position as advocates for Kurdish rights, as people respected them for their dedication, something not everyone could or would do. Their ideological narratives were therefore quite influential. Zeki Barış, an activist who was one of the central figures working at the Diyarbakır Dengbêj House, spoke passionately about his ideas. He felt that the nationalist awakening of the Kurdish people would make their traditions, and thus also the dengbêj art, more meaningful for today. He and other activists

were primarily focused on political improvements, and could not see the dengbêj art as loose from political struggle. Notwithstanding the influence of these narratives, we saw that many dengbêjs did not adopt such narratives uncritically in their self-presentation, and that the ones who did, emphasized elements that connected to their life stories and personal interests.

Chapter 5 investigated the (musical) memories of a dengbêj family that had lived through, and escaped from, all major wars occurring in the border region during the last decades of the twentieth century. By focusing in-depth on the life stories of one family, and particularly on the two female dengbêjs singers of this family, we gained better insight in what multiple and devastating consequences conflict and escape have in the lives of individuals; in how they mobilized the songs they know to cope with their current experiences, and in how they got involved in cultural activism through their participation in the TV show Şevbêrk. I used the chapter also to focus on the position of women. In the TV show, the definition of dengbêjs included people who had a good knowledge of rhythmic songs (*stran*), but not of kilams. This meant that many more female singers could be included in the show. The focus on female dengbêjs fit in the importance attached in the ideas of the Kurdish movement to the enhancement of the position of women, as this is understood necessary for the creation of a modern Kurdish society. It also gave women and men whose knowledge was previously not seen as valuable, a new sense of importance of the songs and traditions they know.

We saw how during the interviews and talks I had with the family members, two storylines emerged: one in which they primarily spoke of their life experiences, and another one in which they focused on the songs and on memories of village life and its activities. These two storylines remained mostly separate and were characterized by two sets of emotions. When speaking of the life events they went through, the interviews brought up painful memories of loss, violence, and confusion. When speaking of the songs, they brought up joyful and peaceful memories of village life, and even when they referred to sad memories, these memories seemed to be more comprehensible and bearable than in the context of telling their life stories. I suggested that the songs they learned during the years they lived in the village, do a particular work. By bringing to mind repetitive actions that were carried out by all people, the songs connect to embodied memories of village life, and therewith have the capability of overlooking and of not connecting to painful memories.

After the family moved to Germany, they got involved in TV performances and the production of a CD. These activities were on the one hand a form of resignifying cultural memory. The songs and stories of people who in Turkey remained outside

of the story of Turkish nationalism and modernity, were now given importance and included in the new story of Kurdish nationalism. Additionally, these activities were also important in redefining the role of women who had previously often been excluded from performing in public life. Therefore, miss Bahar and miss Narîn not only gained a new sense of valuation for their knowledge, and of the importance of their songs as 'folklore', they also gained a new position as women. Their activities on remembering, performing, and archiving the songs, thus held several personal meanings to them. The new visibility of women, and the broader definition of what it means to be a dengbêj, arguably also affected the audiences of the TV show.

By focusing on the performers of a 'tradition' who are regarded as remnants of an age old Kurdish history, this dissertation contributes to gain understanding in how people connect to, redefine, and negotiate, ideas about history, modernity, and nationalism. Not only in Turkey, but also in the country where I live (the Netherlands) and elsewhere, we came to understand our history in (often evolutionary) terms of a modern present and an ancient, traditional past. Anthropology has often reinforced and contributed to this way of thinking. From an early age on we learn to regard certain people as modern and progressive, and others as traditional and backwards, and as 'back in time'. These ideas reflect and reproduce global power relations in which the 'western world' is defined as the economic and ideological center, and other places as less or more removed from that ideal. Every 'modern' place is in need of a 'traditional' elsewhere that can reconfirm and reestablish our sense of being advanced to others.[424] We imagine the other as backwards, tribal and ignorant, as unaware of modern technology, and as incapable of catching up with truly democratic, neoliberal, and nationalist values. In Turkey in a self-Orientalist way, that modern center came to be defined as western Turkey, and its traditional elsewhere as eastern Turkey, the countryside, and the Kurds.

As I suggested in the Introduction, the PKK mobilized such Orientalist ideas for their self-definition of what it means to be Kurdish. In a 'reversed process of othering,' this self-Orientalist ideology first defines all Kurds as backwards and degenerate from within. It then tries to de-Orientalize itself by explaining that backwards and degenerate character as stemming from the contamination of Kurdish culture by outside influences. Finally, it recreates itself into a new modern

424 As Yeğenoğlu (1998) says it, "both the 'Western subject' and 'Oriental other' are mutually implicated in each other and thus neither exists as a fully constituted entity" (pp.58), and: "difference, within a signifying economy such as Orientalism, is nothing but the self's/same's own excluded but necessary negative other" (pp.84).

Kurdish personality that has shed backwards, tribal and religious traits, that has understood the true core of what it is to be Kurdish, and that has embraced modern values of democracy and Kurdish nationalism. This process of 'the empersonment of Kurdishness' by awakening and learning to become a modern Kurd is seen as necessary for all Kurds.

Since the dengbêj art is regarded as transmitting ancient Kurdish history to the current generation of Kurds, it was precisely this art that became the center of discussions on the reinterpretation of that history. Political activists were haunted by the question how to deal with the tribal and divided past of the Kurds that did not in any way reflect a nationalist 'awareness', and what to do with the thousands of kilams about tribal battles and enmity that could re-incite division and enmity. To them, the most viable solution seemed to silence these kilams: if they would not be performed anymore, people would be able to rid themselves from this problematic history. They would unlearn their 'tribal' thinking, and would begin to think and act as 'nationalists'. Instead of thinking of their own gain, they would see themselves as in the service of the Kurdish people, who would then work unitedly towards their aim of increasing rights and independence for the Kurdish nation.

As we have seen in this dissertation, their approach was in many ways a successful undertaking. Step by step, political activists managed to increase the space for Kurdish cultural production in public life in Turkey, and also to gain influence in local and national politics. Their emphasis on Kurdishness as a positive characteristic, and the new role models of Kurdish musicians, politicians and others, gave people who had learned to emperson Turkishness rather than Kurdisness, a more positive sense of their Kurdish identity. However, their approach had the downside of a renewed silencing of alternative viewpoints. Next to being silenced by government oppression that regarded any form of Kurdish cultural production as an act of rebellion, the dengbêjs were also silenced by political activists who first discarded their knowledge because they regarded it as problematic, and then only accepted the kilams that most fit into their political viewpoints. Moreover, the dengbêjs were classified as ignorant people who were in need of awakening, and who were, ultimately, not capable of deciding by themselves what they felt was important to them and Kurdish society at large.

After listening to the various types of stories that the dengbêjs told, and parts of which I have presented in the chapters, defining the dengbêjs as behind on the road towards modernity appears to be inadequate and mistaken. Each of them was in different ways deeply affected by, and tied to, the consequences of modernity, most notably the establishment of the nation-state of Turkey and the

implementation of Turkish nationalist ideology. These had defined Kurdish as a non-language and a non-culture, and had pushed the dengbêjs and other Kurdish cultural production to the margins of the nation-state, to those villages that to a large extent remained outside of government control. I suggest therefore that the differences in viewpoints between dengbêjs and political activists should not be sought in their level of progress (we are all entangled in modernity), but in their differences in temporal and moral perspectives. These different perspectives mean that many dengbêjs feel comfortable and at ease with the Home they find in the songs, whereas many political activists have different imaginations about a Kurdish home, and seek to redefine its history, present and future.

Song name	Dengbêj	Date, video	Type of performance	Place
5. klamê Haso Axa	Ahmedê Aqutê	150407/1	During interview	Istanbul
6. Bavê Faxriya	Ahmedê Aqutê	290407/1	During interview	Istanbul
7. Haji Musa	Ahmedê Aqutê	290407/1	During interview	Istanbul
10. Evdalê Zeynikê	Ahmedê Aqutê	290407/1	During interview	Istanbul
11. Kurê Mîr Bedirxanê	Ahmedê Aqutê	290407/1	During interview	Istanbul
13. Zembilfiroş	Ahmedê Aqutê	170607/1	During interview	Istanbul
14. Qîza Riza Xewlitê	Ahmedê Aqutê	170607/1	During interview	Istanbul
15. Musa beg û Huseyin	Ahmedê Aqutê	170607/1	During interview	Istanbul
17. Dewrişê Evdî	Ahmedê Aqutê	170607/1	During interview	Istanbul
20. Azê û Şemê	Remezanê Tembelî	070507/1	During interview	Cultural center Diyarbakır
21. Evdalê Zeynikê û quling	Remezanê Tembelî	070507/1	During interview	Cultural center Diyarbakır
22. Heso û Asê	Remezanê Tembelî	070507/1	During interview	Cultural center Diyarbakır
23. Şêrî hayran	Remezanê Tembelî	070507/1	During interview	Cultural center Diyarbakır
25. Seyitxanê Kerr	Îbrahîmê Pîrikî	070507/2	During interview	Cultural center Diyarbakır
26. Têlî Dîlber	Îbrahîmê Pîrikî	070507/2	During interview	Cultural center Diyarbakır
27. Elî Bavê Şêxmûs	Îbrahîmê Pîrikî	070507/2	During interview	Cultural center Diyarbakır
43. Herê Diyarbekir	Ûsivê Farî	080507/1	During interview	Cultural center Diyarbakır
44. Dengbêj Selman û Siloyê Sidîqê	Ûsivê Farî	080507/1	During interview	Cultural center Diyarbakır
45. Mihemedo bavê Meys	Îbrahîmê Pîrikî	110507/1	Public performance	Cultural center Diyarbakır
46. Mala Nasir	Îbrahîmê Pîrikî	110507/1	Public performance	Cultural center Diyarbakır
47. Şerê navala kela reşê	Mihemedê Şêxanî	110507/1	Public performance	Cultural center Diyarbakır
48. Bindestiya Kurdan	Mihemedê Şêxanî	110507/1	Public performance	Cultural center Diyarbakır

Song name	Dengbêj	Date, video	Type of performance	Place
49. Îsmaîlê Êyo bavê Orhan	Seyîdxanê Boyaxçî	110507/1	Public performance	Cultural center Diyarbakır
50. Kejê	Îbrahîmê Pîrikî	110507/1	Public performance	Cultural center Diyarbakır
51. Emîne Ehmed	Salihê Qûbînî	120507/2	Public performance	Batman
52. Xalit Beg û Huseyin Beg	Salihê Qûbînî	120507/3	Public performance	Batman
53. Bavê Faxriya	Salihê Qûbînî	120507/3	Public performance	Batman
54. Têlî	Salihê Qûbînî	120507/3	Public performance	Batman
57. Loqmanê Sasun	Salihê Qûbînî	120507/3	Public performance	Batman
58. Farqîn	Salihê Qûbînî	120507/3	Public performance	Batman
59. Silêmanê Mistê	Salihê Qûbînî	120507/3	Public performance	Batman
60. Xezal û Teyar Axa	Dengbêj Memik	150507/1	During interview	Maraş
61. Pişti sirgûn	Dengbêj Memik	150507/2	During interview	Maraş
64. Evdêl Sincalê Talo	Dengbêj Gani	240507/3	Public performance	Istanbul
65. Genc Xelîl	Dengbêj Mihemed	240507/3	Public performance	Istanbul
66. Delo Yeman Hespa lawikê min	Dengbêj Mihemed	240507/3	Public performance	Istanbul
67. Şerê gela Bazîdê Seyd Ali	Dengbêj Gani	240507/3	Public performance	Istanbul
68. Didarê	Dengbêj Mihemed	240507/3	Public performance	Istanbul
69. Rizayê Xalit	Dengbêj Gani	240507/3	Public performance	Istanbul
70. Têlî	Dengbêj Gani	240507/3	Public performance	Istanbul
71. Xezala zozanê Elenderê	Dengbêj Mihemed	240507/3	Public performance	Istanbul
72. Gula di zinêr da	Dengbêj Gani	240507/3	Public performance	Istanbul
73. Ibrahîmê Axê	Dengbêj Mihemed	240507/3	Public performance	Istanbul
74. Şêx Cemal	Dengbêj Gani	240507/3	Public performance	Istanbul

Song name	Dengbêj	Date, video	Type of performance	Place
98. Habo û Osman	Sidîqê Tilmînî	020607/2	Private performance	Dengbêj House Diyarbakır
99. Çemê Diyarbekir	Sidîqê Tilmînî	020607/2	Private performance	Dengbêj House Diyarbakır
100. Genc Xelîl	Sidîqê Tilmînî	020607/2	Private performance	Dengbêj House Diyarbakır
101. Cîwano	Anonymous	020607/3	Public performance	Dengbêj House Diyarbakır
102. Qîza tuccar axa	Anonymous	020607/3	Public performance	Dengbêj House Diyarbakır
103. Bavê Salih	Anonymous	020607/3	Public performance	Dengbêj House Diyarbakır
104. Ha dayê	Anonymous	020607/3	Public performance	Dengbêj House Diyarbakır
107. Bavê Heyder beg	Anonymous	020607/3	Public performance	Dengbêj House Diyarbakır
108. Şêx Seid Efendi	Anonymous	020607/3	Public performance	Dengbêj House Diyarbakır
109. Silêmane Mistê	Anonymous	020607/3	Public performance	Dengbêj House Diyarbakır
118. Heso û Naze	Anonymous	210607/1	During interview	Van
119. Sînem	Anonymous	210607/1	During interview	Van
120. Xêlya	Anonymous	220607/1	Public performance	Doğubeyazit, festival
121. Buyera 55	Anonymous	220607/1	Public performance	Doğubeyazit, festival
122. Serhildana Zîlanê û Dewriş beg	Anonymous	220607/1	Public performance	Doğubeyazit, festival
123. Xecê û Siyabend	Anonymous	220607/1	Public performance	Doğubeyazit, festival
125. Dewrişê Evdî	Anonymous	220607/1	Public performance	Doğubeyazit, festival
126. Kilamê Bazîdê	Anonymous	220607/1	Public performance	Doğubeyazit, festival
130. Ferzende Beg	Anonymous	220607/2	Public performance	Doğubeyazit, festival
132. Farqînî	Salihê Qubînî	220607/3	Public performance	Iğdır
133. Klama Seidê Ahmed	Salihê Qubînî	220607/3	Public performance	Iğdır
134. Bişarê Çeto	Salihê Qubînî	220607/3	Public performance	Iğdır

Song name	Dengbêj	Date, video	Type of performance	Place
135. Hêlîme	Apê Bekir	220607/3	Public performance	Iğdır
136. Eminê Ahmed	Salihê Qubînî	220607/3	Public performance	Iğdır
138. Hethetke	Salihê Qubînî	220607/3	Public performance	Iğdır
141. Mala Hecî Yusuf	Salihê Qubînî	220607/3	Public performance	Iğdır
144. Evdal û Gulê	Apê Bekir	220607/4	Public performance	Iğdır
145. Mustafa Beg	Salihê Qubînî	220607/4	Public performance	Iğdır
150. Dewrişê Evdî	Dengbêj Ali	240607/2	During interview	Van, Dengbej House
151. Keremê Kur	Dengbêj Ûsiv	240607/2	Public performance	Van, Dengbej House
152. Bavê Fexriya	Feleknas	250607/2	During interview	Dengbêj House Diyarbakır
153. Feyzo bavê Ipekê	Feleknas	250607/2	During interview	Dengbêj House Diyarbakır
154. Dewrê	Remezanê Tembelî	150508/1	Public performance	Dengbêj House Diyarbakır
155. Şêrîn heyran	Remezanê Tembelî	150508/1	Public performance	Dengbêj House Diyarbakır
156. Zeri û Dîlber	Îbrahîmê Pîrîkî	150508/1	Public performance	Dengbêj House Diyarbakır
157. Salihê Nafo û Kejê	Hesenê Şilbî	150508/1	Public performance	Dengbêj House Diyarbakır
158. Gavir Mistê û Meryem Xanim	Sidîqê Tilmînî	150508/1	Public performance	Dengbêj House Diyarbakır
159. Evdal û Temo	Remezanê Tembelî	150508/1	Public performance	Dengbêj House Diyarbakır
160. Dilê	Mihemedê Tepê	150508/1	Public performance	Dengbêj House Diyarbakır
161. Gula mala	Mihemedê Nenyasî	150508/1	Public performance	Dengbêj House Diyarbakır
162. Feqî	Îbrahîmê Pîrîkî	150508/2	Public performance	Dengbêj House Diyarbakır
163. Bavê Faxriya	Hesenê Nasredî	150508/2	Public performance	Dengbêj House Diyarbakır
164. Siwarê bozê	Sidîqê Tilmînî	150508/2	Public performance	Dengbêj House Diyarbakır
165. Xatun û Nasredîn	Mihemedê Tepê	150508/2	Public performance	Dengbêj House Diyarbakır

Song name	Dengbêj	Date, video	Type of performance	Place
166. Têlo rebeno	Elîcanê Pasûrî	150508/2	Public performance	Dengbêj House Diyarbakır
167. Bajarê Amedê	Mihemedê Nenyasî	150508/2	Public performance	Dengbêj House Diyarbakır
168. Mînetdaxê	Hesenê Nasredî	150508/2	Public performance	Dengbêj House Diyarbakır
169. Kela Mêrdînê	Êlîcanê Pasûrî	150508/2	Public performance	Dengbêj House Diyarbakır
170. Genc Xelil	Sidîqê Tilmînî	150508/2	Public performance	Dengbêj House Diyarbakır
171. Delalîka dilê min	Mihemedê Tepê	150508/2	Public performance	Dengbêj House Diyarbakır
172. Nurê	Dengbêj Silhedîn	190708/1	Public performance	Village near Çaldıran
173. Birîndar	Aşık Mihemed	190708/1	Public performance	Village near Çaldıran
174. Nazê	Aşık Mihemed	190708/1	Public performance	Village near Çaldıran
175. Walî Osman	Dengbêj Ûsiv	190708/1	Public performance	Village near Çaldıran
176. Qereqaymazê Seydo	Dengbêj Silhedîn	190708/1	Public performance	Village near Çaldıran
178. Heqî û qiza Hecî	Dengbêj Silhedîn	190708/1	Public performance	Village near Çaldıran
189. Dersîmê	Aşık Mihemed	220708/3	Public performance	Village near Van
190. Kurikekî karwan	Dengbêj Silhedîn	220708/3	Public performance	Village near Van
191. Gundê Xaçar û Bizinxane	Dengbêj Ûsiv	220708/3	Public performance	Village near Van
192. Dewrişê Evdî	anonymous	220708/3	Public performance	Village near Van
193. Evdila beg	Dengbêj Silhedîn	220708/3	Public performance	Village near Van
195. Li sînora Îranê şerekê li me qewimî	Dengbêj Silhedîn	220708/3	Public performance	Village near Van
197. Mihemedê birayê Gulnazê	anonymous	220708/3	Public performance	Village near Van
199. Rizayê Xêlid	Dengbêj Ali	220708/3	Public performance	Village near Van
202. Ebubekir û bavê Nafê	Seyîdxanê Boyaxçî	260908	Public performance	Diyarbakır, Dengbêj House
203. Ebubekir u bavê Hiznî, siwarê Beşo	Xalitê Xerzî	260908	Public performance	Diyarbakır, Dengbêj House

Song name	Dengbêj	Date, video	Type of performance	Place
206. Metran Isa	Xalitê Xerzî	260908	Public performance	Diyarbakır, Dengbêj House
211. Saidê Nado	Dengbêj Gani	121108/1	During interview	Istanbul
213. Xezala zozanê Elenderê	Dengbêj Gani	121108/1	During interview	Istanbul
215. Ismailê axê	Dengbêj Gani	121108/1	During interview	Istanbul
218. Xalit begê Hesenî	Dengbêj Gani	121108/1	During interview	Istanbul
219. Geliyê Zîla	Dengbêj Gani	121108/1	During interview	Istanbul
221. Mala Bişar û Seydo	Dengbêj Gani	121108/1	During interview	Istanbul
224. Kor Huseyin Paşa	Dengbêj Gani	121108/1	During interview	Istanbul
225. Qulingê Serhadê	Dengbêj Gani	121108/1	During interview	Istanbul
227. Gula di Zinêr da	Dengbêj Gani	121108/1	During interview	Istanbul

Name performer	Date, video	Type	Place	Language
Ahmedê Aqutê	150407/1	Interview	Istanbul	Kurmanji
Ahmedê Aqutê	150407/2	Interview	Istanbul	Kurmanji
Ahmedê Aqutê	150407/3	Interview	Istanbul	Kurmanji
Ahmedê Aqutê	290407/1	Interview	Istanbul	Kurmanji
Ahmedê Aqutê	290407/2	Interview	Istanbul	Kurmanji
Remezanê Tembelî	070507/1	Interview	Diyarbakır	Turkish
Îbrahîmê Pîrikî	070507/2	Interview	Diyarbakır	Turkish
Dengbêjs from Diyarbakır	080507/1	Performance	Diyarbakır	Kurmanji
Seyîdxanê Boyaxçî	080507/2/3	Interview	Diyarbakır	Turkish
Silêmanê Bêrtî	080507/4	Interview	Diyarbakır	Turkish
Şemsedînê Gimgimî	080507/5	Performance	Diyarbakır	Kurmanji
Xalitê Xerzî	100507/1	Interview	Diyarbakır	Turkish
Ûsivê Farî	110507/1	Interview	Diyarbakır	Turkish
Dengbêjs from Diyarbakır	110507/2/3	Performance	Diyarbakır	Kurmanji
Salihê Qubînî	120507/1/2	Interview	Batman	Turkish
Salihê Qubînî	120507/3/4	Performance	Batman	Kurmanji
Memik Ganidağlı	150507/1	Interview	Pazarcık	Turkish
Memik Ganidağlı	150507/2	Performance	Pazarcık	Kurmanji
Aşık Kör Ibo	150507/3	Performance	Pazarcık	Kurmanji
Dengbêj Memik	160507/1	Performance	Pazarcık	Kurmanji
Dengbêj Maryam	180507	Performance	Karakoçan	Kurmanji
Dengbêj Mihemed /Ganî	240507/1/2	Interview	Istanbul	Turkish

Name performer	Date, video	Type	Place	Language
Dengbêj Mihemed /Ganî	240507/3	Performance	Istanbul	Kurmanji
Dengbêj Sabrî	250507/1-3	Interview	Istanbul	Turkish
Sidîqê Tilmînî	310507/1	Interview	Diyarbakır	Turkish
Dengbêjs from Diyarbakır	310507/1-2	Performance	Diyarbakır	Kurmanji
Simaîlê Sêlîmî	010607/1-3	Interview	Diyarbakır	Turkish
Sidîqê Tilmînî	020607/1-2	Performance	Diyarbakır	Kurmanji
Dengbêj House	020607/3-4	Performance	Diyarbakır	Kurmanji
Mahmut Kızıl	020607/5-6	Interview	Diyarbakır	Turkish
Dengbêj Ûsiv	040607/2-3	Interview	Van	Turkish
Seyda Derviş	050607/1	Interview	Van	Turkish
Dengbêj Silhedîn	050607/2	Interview	Van	Turkish
Ahmedê Aqutê	170607/2	Interview	Istanbul	Kurmanji
Ahmedê Aqutê	170607/3	Performance	Istanbul	Kurmanji
Dengbêj Seyda	210607/1-2	Interview	Van	Turkish
Dengbêjs from Van and other	220607/1-2	Performance	Doğubeyazit, Festival	Kurmanji
Salihê Qubînî and Apê Bekir	220607/3-4	Performance	Iğdır	Kurmanji
Apê Bekir	220607/5-6	Interview	Iğdır,	Turkish
Dengbêj Ali	240607/1-2	Interview	Van	Turkish
Dengbêj Ûsiv	240607/3	Performance	Van	Kurmanji
Dengbêj Feleknas	260607/1-2	Interview	Diyarbakır	Kurmanji
Axayê Elbistanê	210807-1/2	Interview	Elbistan	Turkish
Silva Xanim	220807/1	Interview	Elbistan	Turkish

Name performer	Date, video	Type	Place	Language
Meyrem Xanim	220807/2	Interview	Elbistan	Turkish
Karên male	230807	Image	Elbistan	Kurmanji
Xizmên Huseyno li ser gund	070508/1	Image/interview	Organos	Turkish
Hevalê dengbêj Huseyno	070508/2	Interview	Organos	Turkish
Dengbêj Hamit	070508/3	Performance	Muş	Kurmanji
Aşıks from Van	090508/1-2	Performance	Van, Aşıklar Kahvesi	Turkish/Kurmanji
Dengbêj House	140508/1-2	Performance	Diyarbakır	Kurmanji
Young dengbêjs	110608/2	Interview	Istanbul	Turkish
Dengbêj Şêxmus	120608/1-2	Interview	Istanbul	Turkish
Young dengbêjs	150608/1-2	Performance	Istanbul, concert	Kurmanji
Wedding	130708	Image	Village Hakkari	Kurmanji
Haji Xalit	140708	Interview	Hakkari	Turkish
Aşık Mihemed	160708/1	Interview	Van	Kurmanji
Apê Bekir	160708/2	Interview	Van	Kurmanji/Turkish
Dengbêjs from Van	160708/3	Performance	Van, Dengbêj House	Kurmanji
Aşık Mihemed	170708/1	Interview	Van	Kurmanji
Dengbêjs from Van	180708	Performance	Muradiye	Kurmanji
Dengbêjs from Van	190708	Performance	Çaldıran	Kurmanji
Baking bread dengbêj Werdek	200708/1	Image	Van	Kurmanji
Wedding	200708/2	Image	Van	Kurmanji
Dengbêj Werdek	200708/3	Performance	Van	Kurmanji
Mihemed Ali	210708/1	Interview	Van	Kurmanji/Turkish

Name performer	Date, video	Type	Place	Language
Dengbêj Ali	210708/2	Performance	Van	Kurmanji
Dengbêj Îsa	220708/1-2	Interview	Van	Kurmanji
Dengbêj Silhedîn	220708/3-4	Performance	Village near Van	Kurmanji
Ahmedê Aqûtê	230808	Performance	Istanbul	Kurmanji
Apê Xalîl	310808/1-2	Interview	Istanbul	Kurmanji
Dengbêj House	260908	Performance	Diyarbakır	Kurmanji
Yusuf Börgerekli	011008	Performance	Adiyaman	Kurmanji
Fatma Temel	031008-1	Interview	Adiyaman	Kurmanji
Yusuf Börgerekli	031008-2	Interview	Adiyaman	Kurmanji
Misto Yilmaz	051008/1	Performance	Village region Besni	Kurmanji
Hamo Polat	051008/2	Performance	Village region Besni	Kurmanji
Ali Durê	061008/1-2	Interview	Village region Besni	Kurmanji
Silo Qiz	081008	Interview	Village region Dersim	Zazaki
Ali Haydar	101008	Performance	Village region Dersim	Zazaki
Ali Düzgün	101008	Performance	Village region Dersim	Zazaki
Dengbêj House	151008/1	Performance	Diyarbakır	Kurmanji
Mihemedê Nenyasi	151008/2	Interview	Diyarbakır	Kurmanji
Dengbêj House	151008/4	Performance	Diyarbakır	Kurmanji
Mihemedê Derikî	161008	Interview	Diyarbakır	Kurmanji
Tehsinê Pasûrî	171008	Interview	Diyarbakır	Kurmanji
Family	191008/1	Performance	Village region Diyarbakır	Kurmanji
Zano Reşık	191008/2-3	Performance	Village region Diyarbakır	Kurmanji

Name performer	Date, video	Type	Place	Language
Dengbêj House	211008/1-2	Performance	Diyarbakır	Kurmanji
Mustafa Botî	211008/3	Interview	Diyarbakır	Kurmanji
Mahmut Kızıl	211008/4-5	Interview	Diyarbakır	Kurmanji
Dengbêj Gani	111108/1-2	Interview	Istanbul	Kurmanji
Dengbêj Gani	121108/1-2	Performance	Istanbul	Kurmanji
Hüseyin Çelik	151108/1-2	Interview/Performance	Bursa	Turkish-Zazaki

This list does not include the recordings I made in Europe. Some of the people I interviewed in Europe wanted to remain anonymous, and because I only spoke with a limited number of people it would be easy to connect their names with the stories in the dissertation.

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Nederlandse samenvatting

Koerdische *dengbêjs* zijn dichter-zangers die verhalen vertellen in gezongen poëzie. Mijn onderzoek beperkt zich tot Turkije. In de periode van mijn veldwerk in Turkije (2007-8) was er nieuwe belangstelling voor deze traditie nadat er jarenlang nauwelijks aandacht voor was geweest. Dit moment van terugkeer in het publieke leven hing samen met veranderingen binnen de Koerdisch politieke beweging, en ook met een langzame verbetering van de positie van deze beweging binnen de politieke arena van Turkije. De dissertatie presenteert een aantal verschillende aspecten van de dengbêj traditie op dat moment van terugkeer in het publiek: liederen over een Koerdische geschiedenis, huidige optredens in Dengbêj Huizen, de verschillende plaatsen waar de dengbêj traditie onderdeel ging uitmaken van cultureel activisme, en de persoonlijke levensverhalen van dengbêjs en een gezin op de vlucht. De veranderende positie van deze traditie vertelt een belangrijk verhaal over een samenleving in conflict en verandering; over de herdefiniëring van wat het betekent om een (goede) Koerd te zijn; over ideeën over het verleden en de toekomst; en over hoe individuen zich persoonlijk positioneren in deze processen. Ik laat verder zien hoe deze processen begrepen kunnen worden als onderdeel van wereldwijde discoursen over nationalisme, moderniteit, vooruitgang en oriëntalisme. De situatie in Turkije staat niet op zichzelf maar heeft te maken met die grotere processen.

Als belangrijkste theoretische benaderingen gebruik ik narrativity (Jackson 2000, Somers 1994, Riessman 1993) en morality (Zigon 2007), en studies over nationalisme, oriëntalisme en moderniteit. Het proefschrift is verdeeld in drie delen: hoofdstuk 1 en 2 gaan over liederen en optredens; hoofdstuk 3 gaat over levensverhalen, en hoofdstuk 4 en 5 gaan over conflict en activisme.

In hoofdstuk 1, ‘ Singing a Kurdish past,’ bespreek ik de liederen van de dengbêjs en onderzoek ik op welke manier zij een Koerdisch verleden presenteren. Tot het midden van de twintigste eeuw hadden de dengbêjs een belangrijke positie in het Koerdische sociale leven en de liederen kunnen daardoor gezien worden als een belangrijke bron van Koerdische ideeën. De dengbêj traditie was een instituut dat morele ideeën verspreidde die niet alleen de ideeën van de geestelijke en economische elite, maar ook die van de gewone vrouw/man. De meeste dengbêjs waren gewone mannen en soms vrouwen die in dienst waren bij een agha en die het dagelijks leven van de elite van dichtbij meemaakten maar daar geen deel van waren. Uit de kilams blijkt dat de dengbêjs zichzelf eerder als onderdeel en als stem van het volk beschouwden dan van de elite.

Door veel kilams te vertalen en te leren begrijpen, samen met Hanifi Barış die mij hierbij hielp, kreeg ik inzicht in de belangrijkste onderwerpen die in de kilams aan de orde komen. Ik ontdekte dat er steeds terugkerende personages voorkomen in de kilams die ik 'figures' noem. Ik bespreek bijvoorbeeld de personages van de rouwende vrouw, de lokale leider, de rebel, en de Armeense vrouw. Veel van de gebeurtenissen die in de kilams bezongen worden vonden plaats in de laat negentiende en begin twintigste eeuw. Aan de hand van de steeds terugkerende personages schetsen de kilams een wereld en sociale realiteit die vandaag niet meer bestaat.

De laat negentiende en begin twintigste eeuw was een periode waarin het Osmaanse rijk uit elkaar viel en de vele oorlogen voor enorm veel vernietiging en verandering zorgden. Het ontstaan van de Republiek Turkije en van de ideologie van Turks nationalisme maakte Koerden en andere niet-Turkse volken binnen de grenzen van Turkije tot ongewenste burgers. Dit leidde tot de onderdrukking en ontkenning van het Koerdisch-zijn. In de kilams wordt een politieke wereld geschetst waarin het Koerdische gebied en lokale politieke structuren worden beschouwd als het politieke centrum, en de omliggende staten als de periferie. Lokale leiders hadden veranderende banden met omliggende stammen en met de staten waar zij deel van uitmaakten. Echter, de kilams laten zien dat de vijandigheid tussen koerden en de Turkse regering toenam naar mate de Turkse staat en Turks nationalisme meer invloed gingen krijgen. Waar in oudere liederen nog sprake is van een acceptatie van banden met de Ottomanen, worden banden met de Turkse regering in nieuwere liederen steeds vaker beschouwd als verraad.

Hoofdstuk 2, 'performing tradition', onderzoekt hoe de dengbêjs in het nieuwe Dengbêj Huis in Diyarbakir, dat geopend werd tijdens mijn onderzoek, zichzelf presenteren. De dengbêjs vonden dat zij een belangrijke bijdrage leverden aan de Koerdische maatschappij door hun historische kennis, en door hun ´belichaamde´ ervaring met het dorpsleven. Tijdens de interviews vertelden zij veel verhalen over hun jeugd toen de dengbêjs nog erg gewaardeerd werden. Zij vertelden ook over de eigenheid van leven in een dorp, en zij vonden dat mensen die in dorpen wonen en zijn opgegroeid bepaalde kwaliteiten hebben die mensen in de stad missen. Voor de dengbêjs was het zingen van kilams een activiteit waarbij zowel de historische herinnering levend wordt gehouden, en ook de ervaring van vroegere optredens in de context van het platteland opnieuw wordt beleefd.

Deze beleving van de dengbêjs werd niet onkritisch bekeken door politiek activisten die hier hun eigen ideeën over hadden. Veel van de activisten waren jonge Koerden die opgegroeid waren met het Turkse educatiesysteem. Zij hadden geleerd

om zich het Turks-zijn toe te eigenen, en het Koerdisch-zijn te beschouwen als onderontwikkeld en achtergebleven. De Koerdische politieke beweging probeert dit te veranderen door het Koerdisch-zijn te herdefiniëren als een positieve identiteit. Tegelijk propageert de beweging dat bepaalde elementen van het Koerdisch-zijn moeten worden afgezworen. De Koerdisch nationalistische ideologie is tegen de tribale verleden van de Koerden, en is daarom ook fel gekant tegen een belangrijk deel van de kilams van de dengbêjs. Veel van hun kilams gaan immers over onderlinge twist tussen verschillende Koerdische stammen. Politieke activisten beschouwden de dengbêjs, tegelijk met alle andere Koerden, als mensen die educatie nodig hebben en wiens ogen geopend moeten worden voor het Koerdisch nationalisme. Ze moeten geleerd worden welke kilams ze wel en niet mogen zingen. De consequentie hiervan was dat veel dengbêjs zich gehinderd voelden in de vrije uitoefening van hun traditie, en dat zij zich vaak niet gewaardeerd voelden.

In dit hoofdstuk stel ik voor om de dengbêjs niet te beschouwen als mensen die onwetend zijn of die weinig weten van huidige discoursen en politiek. In plaats daarvan stel ik voor om de dengbêjs te zien als mensen die bewuste keuzes maken voor andere discoursen en voor een ander begrip van de Koerdische geschiedenis dan de politiek activisten.

Hoofdstuk 3, 'A landscape of silence,' geeft een diepgaande analyse van de levensverhalen van zes dengbêjs en een aşık (een dichter-zanger volgens de Turkse traditie). Tijdens mijn onderzoek waren de dengbêjs nog maar net terug in het publieke leven, en keken zij vanaf dat historische moment terug op hun persoonlijke geschiedenis. Ze spraken over de goede momenten waarin zij veel konden optreden, en over momenten waarop zij zich gehinderd voelden om vrijuit te zingen. In hun verhalen ontdekte ik een scala aan redenen waardoor zij voor langere of kortere tijd niet optraden. De periode van stilzwijgen die door alle dengbêjs werd gedeeld was de periode van grofweg 1980 tot 2000. In die periode zorgde de politieke onderdrukking en de algehele crisissituatie van conflict en gedwongen migratie ervoor dat er van de tot dan toe bestaande dorpsstructuren weinig overbleef. Die dorpsstructuren waren cruciaal voor het bieden van een plaats voor de dengbêjs om te kunnen optreden. Dengbêjs Mahmut, dengbêj Isa en dengbêj Hamid spraken bijvoorbeeld over hun ervaringen met onderdrukking die ertoe had geleid dat zij bang waren om door te gaan met hun optredens.

Maar er waren ook andere redenen voor dengbêjs om te zwijgen waarvan ik hier enkele voorbeelden zal geven. Dengbêj Bêrîvan sprak bijvoorbeeld over de beperkte mogelijkheden die zij had als vrouw om te zingen voor een groter publiek

dan alleen haar eigen familieleden. Het verhaal van dengbêj Cihan laat zien hoe de Armeense identiteit was weggevaagd van het landschap van Oost Turkije na de genocide in 1915. Hij had ervoor gekozen om zichzelf in de eerste plaats te definiëren als Koerd en als moslim, en niet als Armeniër. Dengbêj Seyda vertelde dat hij was opgeleid in verschillende Koerdische medresses (religieuze scholen) en dat hij zich verbonden voelde met het religieuze etablissement. Tijdens zijn opleiding voelde hij zich aanvankelijk niet vrij om zich als dengbêj te presenteren omdat hij wist dat de kilams van de dengbêjs werden beschouwd als seculier, en als niet passend bij een religieus georiënteerd leven. Maar na verloop van tijd lukte het hem toch om deze twee identiteiten met elkaar te verenigen.

De variëteit aan persoonlijke verhalen laat zien dat individuele zangers werden beïnvloed door verschillende sociale structuren en ontwikkelingen tijdens hun leven. De verhalen laten ook zien dat veel dengbêjs op een morele manier spraken over de keuzes die zij hadden gemaakt. In navolging van Zigon (2007) ondersteunt dit het argument dat in periodes van grote sociale veranderingen die iedereen betreffen, mensen de behoefte voelen om zich te herpositioneren ten opzichte van veranderende morele ideeën. Tegelijk voelen mensen ook de behoefte om hun eigen verhaal te creëren dat zich onderscheidt van die van anderen. Ze werken aan een nieuw persoonlijk verhaal waarin zij zich opnieuw als moreel goede mensen kunnen presenteren.

In hoofdstuk 4, 'Cultural activism,' onderzoek ik de processen, plaatsen en discoursen die de dengbêj traditie veranderden in een project van cultureel activisme (Ginsburg 2002). Cultureel activisme werd in de jaren 2000 een belangrijk middel om Turks nationalisme publiekelijk te trotseren, en om bepaalde plekken in de publieke ruimte te claimen als Koerdisch in plaats van Turks. Deze ontwikkeling was geïnitieerd vanuit het buitenland door het Koerdische satellietkanaal MED-TV. Koerdische TV kan gezien worden als het meest belangrijke platform waardoor een Koerdische meerderheid zichzelf begon te beschouwen als een nationale gemeenschap.

Vanwege de recente geschiedenis van onderdrukking, gewapend conflict, en het vernietigen van dorpen in oost Turkije in de jaren 1980 en 1990, kwamen deze ontwikkelingen binnen Turkije pas later echt goed van de grond. Sinds de jaren 2000 was de Koerdische beweging steeds meer in staat om cultureel activisme te mobiliseren om in Turkije haar invloed te vergroten. De hernieuwde belangstelling voor de dengbêjs was dan ook direct gerelateerd aan deze nieuwe vormen van cultureel activisme. In de periode van mijn veldwerk waren politiek

activisten bezig om bepaalde plaatsen als Koerdisch te definiëren. Ze nodigden de dengbêjs bijvoorbeeld uit om op te treden op een festival dat werd gehouden in het oude paleis in Doğubeyazıt. Ook werd een historisch gebouw in Diyarbakır gerenoveerd en als Dengbêj Huis in gebruik genomen. Deze gebouwen versterkten de historische claim die de activisten wilden maken waarin zij de dengbêjs neerzetten als vertegenwoordigers van eeuwenoude Koerdische tradities en erfgoed. Ook het spreken van Koerdisch in het openbaar in deze plaatsen was een manier om publiekelijk erkenning te geven aan het bestaan van de Koerdische taal dat bijna een eeuw lang geen bestaansrecht had gekregen.

Toch waren al deze activiteiten in de periode van mijn onderzoek nog gevaarlijk voor de mensen die zich ermee bezig hielden. Activisten liepen het risico gearresteerd en gevangengezet te worden, en veel van hen hadden een (lange) persoonlijke geschiedenis van vervolging door de Turkse regering. Dit feit zorgde ervoor dat de activisten een sterke morele claim konden leggen op hun positie als voorstanders van Koerdische rechten. Zij werden erg gerespecteerd voor hun toewijding, aangezien niet iedereen zulke risico's wilde lopen. Daardoor hadden hun politieke discoursen veel zeggingskracht. Tegelijkertijd laat ik zien dat de dengbêjs, ondanks de grote invloed van deze discoursen, toch hun eigen ideeën bleven houden over hoe zij zich persoonlijk tot deze publieke discoursen verhielden.

In hoofdstuk 5, 'Songs crossing borders. Musical memories of a family on the run,' bespreek ik het verhaal van een dengbêj familie die uit een dorp op de grens met Irak komen en sinds eind jaren 1990 in Duitsland wonen. Door veel aandacht te besteden aan de levensverhalen van een familie, en in het bijzonder de twee vrouwelijke dengbêjs van deze familie, krijgen we meer inzicht in de vele gevolgen die conflict en op de vlucht zijn hebben voor individuele levens. Dit hoofdstuk laat ook zien ten eerste hoe deze mensen hun kennis van liederen gebruiken om om te kunnen gaan met de trieste herinneringen die zij met zich meedragen; en ten tweede hoe zij door hun optredens op de Koerdische TV deel werden van cultureel activisme. Ik beargumenteer ook dat de definitie van wie zich dengbêj mag noemen, verschuift in het TV programma, waardoor meer vrouwen kunnen aanschuiven, iets dat een speerpunt is van de Koerdische politieke beweging.

Een ander argument van het hoofdstuk heeft te maken met de verschillen die ik ontdekte in sfeer en manier van praten tussen wat deze mensen vertelden over hun levensverhaal, en wat zij vertelden over hun muzikale herinneringen. We zien twee verhaallijnen naar voren komen: een waarin zij voornamelijk praten over hun levensverhaal, en een tweede waarin zij focussen op de liederen die zij

kennen en op de herinneringen die zij hebben aan het zingen van deze liederen in de context van het dorp van herkomst. Deze twee verhaallijnen bleven meestal gescheiden van elkaar en werden gekenmerkt door verschillende emoties. Als zij spraken over de gebeurtenissen die zij hebben meegemaakt dan kwamen er pijnlijke herinneringen naar boven van verlies, geweld, en verwarring. Als zij spraken over de liederen dan kwamen er positieve en vrolijke herinneringen naar boven. En zelfs als de liederen verwezen naar pijnlijke gebeurtenissen, dan nog leken deze herinneringen begrijpelijker en dragelijker dan in de context van het vertellen van hun levensverhaal.

Ik suggereer daarom dat de liederen die zij leerden in de jaren die zij in het dorp doorbrachten een bepaalde functie vervullen. De liederen brengen herinneringen boven aan steeds terugkerende taken die in het dorp gedaan moesten worden, zoals het maken van yoghurt en het malen van meel. Tijdens deze activiteiten werden liederen gezongen. Doordat deze taken door iedereen gedaan werden en steeds opnieuw terugkwamen, en doordat die gepaard gaan met specifieke lichamelijke bewegingen, is het mogelijk dat de liederen juist positieve herinneringen naar boven brengen. De liederen zijn namelijk meestal niet verbonden aan specifieke gebeurtenissen maar aan steeds terugkerende activiteiten. Dat zorgt ervoor dat zij de functie kunnen vervullen van het verwijzen naar de positieve herinneringen van het leven in het dorp, en daarmee de negatieve herinneringen even naar de achtergrond duwen.

About the author

Wendelmoet Hamelink was born in Ede on the 17th of April, 1975. Between 1987 and 1993 she attended the Gereformeerde Scholengemeenschap Rotterdam, after which she began her studies in Leiden at the department of Turkish Studies from 1994-1996. After a break in her studies she began to study anthropology at the department of Cultural Anthropology and Development Sociology in 2000. She obtained her master's degree in 2005 in Cultural Anthropology with additional qualifications in Turkish Studies and African and general Linguistics. Her MA thesis on Turkish singer-poets was based on an individual research projects which included five months of intensive language training, and four months of fieldwork, in Turkey. In 2006 she began working as a PhD Candidate at the CNWS, later LIAS. In 2009 she moved to the Institute of Cultural Anthropology and Development Sociology where she completed her dissertation. She conducted fieldwork in eastern Turkey and Istanbul in 2007 and 2008, and in Germany, Belgium and France between 2007 and 2013 in short visits. From April to July 2014 she worked on a research project on musical memories of Armenians from Sassoun, carried out at the Orient-Institut in Beirut and Istanbul, and at the Deutsches Forum für Kunstgeschichte in Paris. This research was funded by the Max Weber Stiftung.