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Kurdish Music-Making in Istanbul: Music, Sentiment, and Ideology in a Changing Urban Context

A dissertation presented

by

Jonathan Sanjeev Withers

to

the Department of Music

in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in the subject of

Music

Harvard University

Cambridge, Massachusetts

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Advisor: Richard K. Wolf Jonathan Sanjeev Withers

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Abstract

This thesis is an ethnographic study of Kurdish political music at three cultural centers in Istanbul, Turkey. Activists at these cultural centers engage in musical activities that perform the Kurdish nation in Istanbul, outside of the Kurdish homeland but home to a large Kurdish migrant community. By drawing on diverse musical sources, activist musicians create and perform music that promotes an ideological narrative of history and politics in which the Kurdish freedom struggle plays a central role. The efforts of these musicians are fundamental to creating and maintaining a Kurdish activist public in Istanbul. I examine the complex process of identifying what is Kurdish in Turkey to introduce how activists perform this identification musically. Activists draw from musical behaviors they view as traditional, including singing by *dengbêj* singers and *govend* dance, to reinforce links to the homeland. These links take the form of affective symbols that in turn inform the aesthetics of contemporary Kurdish music. Members of the Kurdish activist community link genres that have arisen in recent decades, from *arabesk* to *gerilla* music, to ideological stances and attitudes with the power to destroy activist enthusiasm or to sustain it. I examine three performance contexts in detail: informal situations where Kurds meet, chat, and drink; concerts that

act as models for and of the activist community; and public protests, where activism meets the broader public.

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My fieldwork research was made possible by a research fellowship from the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences at Harvard University. Without the generosity of the Kurdish activist community and their patience with me, however, all other efforts would be in vain. While there are too many names to thank individually, I would like to mention Ciwan, Ruşen, Mervan, Zelal, and Abuzer for helping to open doors and make introductions.

Most of all, I thank my wife, Molly Exten, for support of every kind and at all times.

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Note on Langauge

The primary languages used in this dissertation are Turkish and Kurmanjî. Turkish words are spelled using the Turkish alphabet in accordance with the Turkish Langauge Association. Kurmanjî words are generally spelled using the Kurdish alphabet in accordance with the *Ferheng/Sözlük* Kurmanjî-Turkish dictionary published by the Kurdish Institute of Istanbul. In some places, however, song lyrics contain words not listed in the dictionary. In such cases I have transcribed these lyrics with advice from my consultants, but blame for any errors rests ultimately on me.

I use the Turkish plural suffixes *–ler* and *–lar* or the Kurdish plural suffixes *–an* and *–ên* when they appear as part of a larger name (e.g. *Mala Dengbêjan* or House of *Dengbêj*s). For standalone nouns, I have rendered plurals by adding an upright s to an italicized term, as in the above *dengbêj*s. Compound nouns in Turkish formed from multiple individual nouns use the inflectional suffixes *–i, –ı, –u,* or *–ü*, with an *s* added before vowels; thus *oyun* ("game" or "dance") and *hava* ("air" or "melody") become *oyun havası* ("dance melody").

Introduction

As I wrote about Turkey's Kurds in 2016, events in the region, particularly the violent conflicts and massacres that surrounded the Syrian civil war, pushed the Kurds into international headlines and rendered an ethnographic study of Kurds in Turkey particularly timely. Kurdish music studies in the past, as I will explain later, have focused their attention on music in Kurdistan, the Kurdish homeland that is divided among Turkey, Syria, Iraq, and Iran, in ways that tend either to ignore the current political realities that Kurds face today or to divide attention between the four parts of Kurdistan, making extensive analysis of any one part of Kurdistan difficult. Studies of music in Istanbul, conversely, tend to ignore the large and vocal Kurdish population that calls that city home. The result of these two trends is a study of Kurdish music in Turkey as a peripheral and marginalized aspect of regional music culture, ignoring the important presence and contributions of Kurdish musicians at the center of the Turkish musical world.

Over two periods of fieldwork in 2013 and 2014, I conducted ethnographic research primarily at the Mesopotamia Cultural Center (Tur: *Mezopotamya Kültür Merkezi* or MKM), an important Kurdish cultural center in Beyoğlu, Istanbul. This organization is the oldest in a network of centers dedicated to supporting Kurdish activist musicians. The leaders of the organization arrange classes in music, theater, and film, and the center organizes events ranging from large concerts with many performers to small protests. To a lesser extent, I also spent time at two other Istanbul cultural centers in the same network as the MKM: Arzela Cultural Center (most commonly

referred to as Arzela), located in Şirinevler, and Med Culture-Art Association (usually called Med), located in Bağcılar.

Putting Kurds (Back) in the Center

A prevailing view among Istanbul Kurds is that the Kurdish political struggle was primarily a struggle to proclaim the existence of the Kurdish people. I too intend to proclaim that existence in an academic field in which it has been largely overlooked or marginalized. Writers who address Kurdish issues in Turkey, from imprisoned PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan to sociologist İsmail Beşikçi, as well as Kurds in Istanbul, offer an understanding of the history of Turkey, the Middle East, and the entire world that moves the Kurds from the margins to the center. By engaging with this counter narrative, I intend to examine music in Turkey through a different and vitally important lens.

In Turkey, conflicting narratives of history, nationhood, and society abound. One prominent narrative is that of Kemalism, centered around the figure of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, considered by many to be the father of the modern Turkish Republic. Positions that have been influenced by this view of the history of Turkey range from extreme Turkish ethnonationalism to secular neoliberalism. The Kemalist narrative puts the Turkish War of Independence, fought by Turkish nationalists under the leadership of Mustafa Kemal after the First World War, at the center of understanding modern Turkey and incorporates the intellectual heritage of early Turkish nationalists whom Mustafa Kemal supported. Like the now disgraced Sun Language Theory, a linguistic endeavor to show that all languages descend from a Turkic root that was popular briefly in the early days of the Republic, scholarship influenced by these narratives often traces cultural practices to pre-Islamic Turkic roots and treats regional specialties within the

modern nation-state of Turkey as variants on a core Turkish culture. It is the main narrative reinforced in Turkish schools and by many of the major media in Turkey. As such, the effects of this narrative abound, and at first glance might even appear contradictory; both sides of many political debates, such as those between the center-left Republican People's Party (CHP) and the far-right Nationalist Movement Party (MHP) claim legitimacy by looking to the example of Atatürk.

Even attempting to resist the pull of this narrative acknowledges its importance. I learned this early in my studies in Turkey, when I was told by a member of my undergraduate thesis committee, Eliot Bates, that my thesis on mediated performances of the well-known folk song "Kalenin Bedenleri" strongly reflected the amount of time I had spent in Ankara. Conversations with consultants there had led me to believe that people saw the song as undoubtedly and inarguably Turkish. Bates reminded me that this view likely represented attitudes of residents of Ankara, seat of the Turkish government and the city that Atatürk built, and that I had to be careful extending this assumption to other areas of Turkey.

One might expect the second of these dominant narratives to contradict the Kemalist point of view, and in many ways it does. Rather than focus on Republic era Turkish history with major threads of Turkish ethnonationalism, the Ottomanist narrative instead focuses on the links between the modern Turkish state and the society and power structures of the Ottoman Empire. It acknowledges the importance of religious and ethnic communities, such as the Greeks and Armenians, who comprised a significant portion of Ottoman society but were decimated and deported in the aftermath of World War One. Just as one might sense a stronger influence of the

Kemalist narrative in Ankara or Izmir,[1] the narrative of Ottoman legacy is stronger in cities that bear physical witness to the monumental power structures of the Ottoman Empire, particularly Istanbul.

Both narratives enable contradictory political or societal stances. The Kemalist narrative is used as a support for both right-wing Turkish nationalist (MHP) and center-left social-democratic (CHP) politics, and was invoked by the National Security Council during the 1980 coup d'etat as well as by young protesters against the Justice and Development Party's (AKP) neoliberal and Islamist policies. Similarly, the Justice and Development Party's leader and current President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, often described as an Islamist by his opponents, employs symbols of Ottoman power as a particularly Turkish blend of religion and politics. At the same time, nightclubs and tourist draws in Istanbul use Ottoman symbols to entice European and North American visitors with a blend of exoticism and liberal cosmopolitanism.

These narratives are opposed in several key respects. While the Turkish nationalist perspective enabled by the Kemalist narrative tends to deny the contributions of non-Turkish-speaking, non-Muslim populations in present-day Turkey, the "Ottoman legacy" narrative often enables those looking back on Turkish history to extoll a cosmopolitan past. However, both narratives pivot around the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire and formation of the Republic of Turkey, and generally focus on events at Turkey's "center," whether that be the centuries-long cultural center of Istanbul, or the political and approximate geographic center of Ankara.

[1] Izmir (Smyrna) was a major center of Greeks since antiquity, but its destruction and resettlement following the War of Independence has made it a center of Turkish nationalism today. Saraçoğlu's study of middle-class Turkish attitudes towards Kurds in Izmir (2011) is especially significant when seen through this lens.

Scholars navigate between these two narratives often in their descriptions and analyses of Turkish history and society. Yildiray Erdener's *The Song Contests of Turkish Minstrels*, for example, reflects some aspects of a Kemal-centric narrative framework by connecting the *aşık* minstrel tradition primarily in terms of Central Asian shamanic practice at the expense of other, more local sources, either non-Turkish or Sufi (Erdener 1995). Martin Stokes' *The Arabesk Debate* navigates these narratives gracefully. His study of a marginalized musical genre in Turkey complicates the narrative of Kemalist nationalism while also avoiding the trap of viewing the Ottoman past with rose-colored glasses (Stokes 1992). His *The Republic of Love* addresses the transition from Ottoman to 20th and later 21st century popular music in a manner commensurate with aspects of the "Ottoman legacy" narrative (Stokes 2010). In both works, Stokes identifies the large number of migrants to Istanbul from eastern Turkey as a more or less homogenous block.

Scholarly work that highlights the Ottoman legacy abounds as well, particularly in work that spans the modern boundaries between Turkey, the Balkans, and Greece. *Balkan Popular Culture and the Ottoman Ecumene* edited by Donna Buchanan is replete with such examples, as the title indicates. Buchanan's examination of the song "Üsküdar'a Gider İken" in that volume traces versions in different languages around the former Ottoman world, reinforcing cross-border ties and weakening possible Turkish nationalist claims to musical traditions (Buchanan 2007). Maureen Jackson's studies of Istanbul synagogue repertoire in *Mixing Musics* similarly emphasizes the diversity of Ottoman-era Istanbul and the effects of that diversity on the music of Turkish Jews (Jackson 2013). The "Ottoman legacy" narrative is particularly attractive to scholars because it rejects the premises of Turkish nationalism and allows marginalized and

subaltern musical traditions to be examined on their own terms. It is also a convenient framework for understanding long-standing musical traditions in Istanbul, where one is constantly confronted with the Ottoman past.

While my research articulates key aspects of both of these narrative traditions, I wish to give voice to a narrative that challenges key aspects of both of them: the narrative of regional history promoted by Kurdish activists in Istanbul. These activists reject the fundamental tenets of Turkish nationalism and tend to have a very different view of Mustafa Kemal than the majority Turkish population. At the same time, however, the Kurdish community in Istanbul is largely composed of first and second generation migrants to the city from Turkish Kurdistan. These migrants often feel alienated from the city and have no strong connection to its imperial past. Thus they have no reason to engage strongly with a narrative of Ottoman legacy.

The history of the Kurds in Turkey over the past century shows that proponents of both narratives have used, failed, and betrayed the Kurdish people. The idea of Ottoman legacy and particularly the closely related strategy of pan-Islamism was used during World War One to recruit Kurds in the genocide of their Armenian neighbors, only to find themselves second-class citizens in a state founded on Turkish nationalism. Though extended the "promise" of assimilation, Kurds have been consistently denied full participation in Republic-era politics, leading to disillusion toward the Kemal-centric narrative as well.

The success of the Kurdish national awakening in Turkey owes much to the formulation of a coherent counter narrative. Kurds often claim an ancient connection to the land of Kurdistan, positioning themselves as the indigenous peoples of the region and Turks as colonial invaders. Kurdish activists and musicians make claims on aspects

of musical culture in Turkey that have been claimed as Turkish since before the foundation of the Republic, such as the extremely common long-necked lute Turks call the *bağlama* and styles of folk dance (*halay* or *govend*). Activist musicians see their music as an attempt to reclaim their musical culture which, much like the Kurds themselves, has been claimed as Turkish for decades.

My goal with this dissertation is to enable a parallel understanding of Turkish music history that privileges the experiences of Turkey's largest minority, building on the work of Stokes, Buchanan, Bates, and others. Just as Kurdish rights activists in Turkey want to proclaim the existence of the Kurdish people in the political sphere, I hope to proclaim their existence throughout the study of music in Turkey.

On Terminology

A key issue that these narratives both address is the question of the meaning of the word "Turk." Political scientist Soner Cagaptay has identified two primary overlapping definitions of *Türk*,[2] both of which are used in Turkish with a fair amount of ambiguity. One definition, which largely developed during the last decades of the Ottoman era, refers to a distinct ethnic or ethnolinguistic identity. By this definition, a Turk is a Muslim Turkish-speaking person; therefore, there are citizens of the Republic of Turkey who are not Turks. The other definition is best described by the words of Article 66 of the 1982 Turkish Constitution: "Everyone who is bound to the Turkish State by bonds of citizenship is a Turk"[3] (Cagaptay 2007). In *The Kurds of Modern*

[2] *Türk* is used as both a noun to describe a person (a Turk) or as a pronoun translated as "Turkish" in English (*Türk Dil Kurumu*, or "Turkish Language Association," for example, is the regulatory body of the Turkish language).

[3] *Türk Devletine vatandaşlık bağı ile bağlı olan herkes Türktür*; above translation is the author's.

Turkey, sociologist Cenk Saraçoğlu traces the implications of these two contradictory definitions, paying particular attention to the Kurds who, as Turkish citizens but not Turkish speakers, are Turks in only the legal sense. His analysis is that the two definitions offer promise to Muslims who do not meet the requirements of the ethnolinguistic definition of Turkish identity; by participation in the nation-state endeavor, there is (at least sometimes) a possibility of first-class Turkish identity (Saraçoğlu 2007).

These different definitions of Turk emerge from different Turkish nationalist narratives. Sociologist Mesut Yeğen lists five distinct nationalisms that have been historically significant in the history of the Republic: an extreme right-wing nationalism, a left-wing nationalism, a "nationalism in Islamism," recent popular nationalism, and the mainstream nationalism that supported the foundation of the secular Republic (Yeğen 2009). These different nationalisms imply different definitions of Turkishness. The right-wing nationalism of the Nationalist Movement Party (MHP) could be linked to a definition of Turk-as-ethnicity, with an emphasis on ancient and distinct cultural differences between Turks and other ethnic groups. From left-wing nationalism in Turkey, one can discern a definition of Turk as the working class, speaking the common language. Nationalist Islamism assumes a definition of Turks as Muslims, an identification that has been important in Turkey since the Ottoman era. The last two nationalisms might be thought of as connected to the idea of Turk-as-citizen.

Structure of Dissertation

This dissertation is divided into six chapters. The first three chapters address the ethnographic background. The first chapter summarizes the complexities inherent in defining Kurdish music. The linguistic, religious, and political categories that Kurds use

to describe themselves are of central importance to my thesis; one of my main arguments is that Kurdish activists make and listen to music that models the Kurdish nation as a diverse contrast to the unitary nationalism of the Turkish state. The second chapter describes those categories of musical activity which Kurds, as well as scholars of Kurdish music, consider to be traditional. I describe three such categories: the songs of *dengbêj* bards; various genres of lament; and group line and circle dancing, called *halay* or *govend*. In the third chapter, I describe three categories of music that Kurds consider modern and which many Kurdish musicians have performed: *arabesk*, associated with rural-to-urban migrants since the 1980s; *özgün* music, or "authentic" *arabesk*, epitomized by the late singer Ahmet Kaya; and *gerilla* music, songs made by or in celebration of guerrillas fighting against the Turkish military.

The final three chapters of the dissertation are a series of case studies of some of the social contexts most significant for Kurdish activists in Istanbul. The fourth chapter examines a number of key social settings where Kurds relax, where Kurdish political ideology and the concerns of daily life meet in occasionally contradictory ways. In chapter five, I examine a concert organized by the Mesopotamia Cultural Center in support of those fighting and displaced by the so-called Islamic State. This concert and others like it are a major setting for organizers to further connect political ideology to Kurdish migrant identity through music. The final chapter follows Kurdish activists as they protest past and ongoing actions of the Turkish government. In all of these settings, Kurdish musicians play songs that draw on musical categories of the "traditional" and the "modern" to perform and model the Kurdish socialist nation.

1 Kurds and Kurdish activism in Istanbul

The Kurds are often described as one of the world's largest "nations without a state" (e.g. Dehzani 2008). While this description reflects the attitudes of many Kurds, it obscures some of the complexity surrounding identifying something as Kurdish. Academic descriptions of the Kurdish people often choose to focus on either the diversity of subnational identities within the group (White 2000, Kirisçi & Winrow 1997) or on the creation of a unified national Kurdish identity (Gunes 2012, Saraçoğlu 2011). In this chapter, I explore both sides of this distinction by detailing how Kurdish political activists describe the Kurdish people. After a brief introduction to the Kurdish people in terms of language, religion, and geography, I explain how recent politics have affected Kurds in Turkey and led to a discourse of national awakening and liberation. I end the chapter with a number of descriptions of Istanbul neighborhoods that are significant in Kurdish music.

1.1 Who are the Kurds?

Due to longstanding denial of the existence of the Kurdish nation by the Turkish government for large periods of the 20th century, few academic studies of the Kurds in Turkey exist prior to the 1980s. The first major academic treatments of the Kurds after this period (Izady 1992, Entessar 1992, Kreyenbroeck & Allison 1996) have focused on Kurds as rural people, centering their attention on the Kurdish homeland and on traditional tribal divisions. Such focus neglects the Kurds' contemporary reality. For modern Kurds in Turkey, recent political history is as important a marker of identity as language and ancient history, and urban areas outside Kurdistan are important centers of Kurdish social life. More recent scholarship on the Kurds (Gunes 2012, Saraçoğlu

2011) acknowledges these important shifts in Kurdish society, focusing on the lived realities of Kurds in Turkish urban centers.

My Kurdish research consultants emphasized both history and contemporary reality, pointing me towards other aspects of Kurdish life they felt were crucial for me to understand. For example, Idris, a man in his late 20s, summed up the Kurdish people as, "…one of the most ancient peoples in the Middle East…. We are an oppressed people, but we can be an example to the Middle East and the whole world. Only Kurds have made true democracy in the Middle East." Yurttaş, a man in his mid to late 40s, mentioned language, religion, and political affiliation: "Some of us speak Kurmanci, some of us speak Zazaki, some of us are Sunni, some of us are Alevi… I want to be here [in the Mesopotamia Cultural Center in Istanbul] so that I can give a service to all my people."

Şiyar, a musician in his early 30s, described the two musical traditions with which he and a fellow musician affiliate themselves and in the process provided a revealing lesson in the political geography of Kurdistan and Turkey:

> Many things are similar [in Kurdish and Turkish music], and besides, we live in the same country. Our cultures more or less resemble one another, and many things are close. But of course one [musical tradition] is in Kurdish, while the other is in Turkish… Imagine you leave Istanbul and head towards Antep. As you go, the dialect, the way people talk, will change suddenly, all at once. That side is Kurdistan, this side, Turkey. It's necessary to make this distinction. Culture changes, color changes. But the government has never made this distinction. (November 23, 2014; translated from Turkish)

To sum up the important points of these descriptions: these people, typical of politically active Kurdish musicians and cultural activists in Istanbul, see the Kurdish people as an ancient people, a group that has lived in a region of the Middle East called Kurdistan for millennia. The Kurdish homeland is divided between four states: Turkey,

Iraq, Iran, and Syria. In each of these four states, the Kurdish people have been subjected to various oppressions and gross injustices. They speak the Kurdish language. They are a people who have recently discovered their voice and are taking stands for freedom, justice, and equality.

This description provides an excellent point of departure for painting a broad picture of the Kurdish people. However, Kurds generally subsume a multitude of identities (linguistic, religious, regional) under the heading "Kurdish." In fact, my field consultants often pushed me to define my interests in terms more precise than that of "Kurdish" music. Did I mean music only in Kurmancî, the most common Kurdish language spoken in Turkey, or was I interested in Zazakî music as well? Was I only interested in music from specific regions of Northern Kurdistan (that is, the parts of the Kurdish homeland in the boundaries of modern Turkey), or was I also looking at Kurdish music in other regions? Did I wish to limit myself to Alevi music, or was I also interested in the music made by Sunni Kurds? These and other social and musical descriptors provide ideal launching points for a more precise and multifaceted representation of the Kurdish people. In this chapter, I will shed some light on these facets of Istanbul Kurdish identity in steps, looking at the linguistic, religious, and regional characteristics around which Kurdish identity is formed.

1.2 Linguistic Differences

When I asked Turkish and Kurdish residents of Istanbul and Diyarbakır, “What is Kurdish music,” they most commonly responded that Kurdish music was music with lyrics in the Kurdish language. Subsequent conversation always showed this short

answer to be overly simplistic, but its very commonality shows the importance of linguistic identification in Kurdish identity.

Kurds with whom I interacted in Istanbul typically talked about "Kurdish" and "Turkish" as the most important linguistic categories in their daily lives. However, this was a coarse distinction that masked something more complex. For example, many Turkish speakers refer to the prestige dialect of Turkish spoken in Istanbul as “proper” Turkish. However, in Istanbul itself, where this dialect is spoken mainly by educated Turks, dialect variations tend to stand out. Such regional variations are present throughout the nation-state of Turkey, even among such populations as that of the Kurds who speak other languages.[4] As Turkey’s largest city, Istanbul hosts large populations from across Turkey and the region. This complicates not only what it means to be Kurdish but also what is meant by the term “Turkish”.

The Kurds with whom I met and spoke in Istanbul almost all spoke “Turkish” in a way that I, as a non-native speaker of Turkish, could understand, although their manners of speaking conformed to varying degrees with prestige-dialect Istanbul Turkish. These differences were at times represented as matters of regional variation ("In Diyarbakır, we say...") or as products of poor Turkish education. People would sometimes joke about the ways they themselves spoke, emphasizing the features of their

[4] As an example, on a brief trip to Diyarbakır (the largest city in Kurdistan), a friend of mine, Ciwan, entertained himself by correcting my pronunciation of certain words. "Datli", he told me, "not Tatli". This "Diyarbakır dialect" of Turkish was a source of amusement, understood to be rude and unrefined. In another circumstance, back in Istanbul, I noted to my roommate Erdal that I noticed that many people pronounced the word for music ("Muzik") as "Muzuk", especially in a construction such as "our music" ("Muzugumuz"). This difference between the Turkish that I was taught—the Turkish that is reflected in standard spelling and is generally considered the "correct" Turkish—and this pronunciation seemed to me to be an overapplication of Turkish vowel harmony rules to a foreign word. Erdal believed, by contrast, that this difference stemmed from the fact that most of my interviews were done with people for whom Turkish is a second language, and that their "mistakes" were attributable to education.

dialect that are stereotypically Kurdish. Certain sounds are not pronounced in Istanbul Turkish, particularly the so-called "soft G." This letter is often pronounced by Kurds, and as I sensed, particularly when Kurds in Istanbul want to highlight their outsider statuses for humor or identity positioning.

As a linguistic category, "Kurdish" requires careful examination and differentiation in order to be meaningful. Unlike Turkish, which was the subject of massive and largely effective linguistic reforms in the 20th century, the Kurdish language has not undergone reform through the agency of language academies. Although Kurds in Turkey may use words translatable as "Kurdish"[5] to talk about any or all Kurdish languages, such usage generally refers to Kurmancî,[6] which is the most common language spoken by Kurds in Turkey. More specific linguistic terms are used to specify other Kurdish languages and dialects.

Kurmancî, an Indo-European language related to Persian, belongs to the Northwestern branch of the Iranian language family, Kurdish, as an Indo-European language, and Turkish, as a Turkic language with close resemblances to Azeri and other Central Asian languages, differ significantly in terms of grammar and vocabulary. Turks and Kurds were fond of telling me that Kurdish is closer to English than it is to Turkish and that I would find it easier to learn for that reason. Additionally, Kurds make use of the relative proximity of Kurdish to Persian in representing themselves as distinct from Turks. At least one consultant of mine went so far as to reference a similarity between Kurds and Iranians in racial terms—he said that Kurds and Persians belong to the same

[5] *Kürtçe* in Turkish, and *Kurdî* in Kurmancî.

[6] I try to use Kurdish (Kurmancî) spellings when possible. The name of this language is often spelled Kurmanji in English literature.

ırk (race), namely, Aryan. The symbolism employed by Kurdish activist cultural centers such as the Mede Culture-Art Center also shows an alignment with a broad Persianate identity, using names of ancient Iranian kingdoms. Many Kurds point to the observance of Newroz, the vernal equinox celebration common from the Balkans to China, as a tangible link between the Kurdish people and the cultures of Greater Iran. Kurmancî is thus a central part of modern Kurdish nationalism, key to many Kurds' understanding of their identity in the region.

Kurdish is not the only language spoken by the Kurds, however. Other forms of language spoken by Kurdish peoples are sometimes called dialects. To avoid engaging deeply in the often political distinction between dialect and language, and in the interest of representing my fieldwork experience, I will call these other forms of Kurdish separate languages. The other primary language spoken by Kurds in Turkey, Kirmanckî, is spoken globally by far fewer people (most estimates are between 1.5 and 4 million speakers, compared to Kurmancî's estimated 20 million) and is in many ways quite different from Kurmancî. This language is generally referred to as "Zazakî" in Kurmancî, and as "Zazaca" in Turkish. The origins of the term "Zaza" are somewhat unclear and possibly pejorative; according to the *Encyclopedia Iranica*, the term literally means "stutterer" (Asatrian, "Dimlī"). However, in the interest of accurately representing what my consultants said, I will henceforth use "Kurdish" to refer to Kurmancî and "Zazakî" to refer to Kirmanckî. The classification of Zazakî as a dialect or language of Kurdish is thus at least partially a political choice, uniting two somewhat overlapping linguistic groups in Turkey under the common heading of "Kurdish." According to speakers of the two languages with whom I spoke, Kumancî and Zazakî are not mutually intelligible, but enough common ground exists to enable communication to be established—albeit with

some inventiveness. While spoken in other regions, Zazakî is generally associated with one particular region of Kurdistan—Dersim—and with Alevism, the second-largest religious tradition in Turkey. However, as I will discuss later, these regional, religious, and linguistic markers can be found in all different combinations and are not always linked in the same ways.

In addition to the main Kurdish languages spoken in Turkey, there are others such as Goranî and Soranî, that are mainly spoken in Iran and Iraq. In Istanbul, I primarily encountered Soranî through broadcasts on Rojhelat TV, an Iran-based Kurdish music television station. Music in Goranî and Soranî was also occasionally on other Kurdish media outlets, a small but significant indicator of unity among Kurdish peoples. Though Istanbul Kurds knew about Soranî and Goranî and would discuss them alongside Kurmancî and Zazakî, I never encountered native speakers of these languages in Turkey. While Kurmancî speakers told me that they could communicate with Soranî speakers with some effort, no one claimed to have learned either language. While these languages are very significant for Kurdish studies in general, particularly in Iran and Iraq, their absence in Istanbul speaks volumes about the ways that nation-state boundaries affect the flow of people across Kurdistan. In general, however, Kurds in Istanbul make reference to unity among Kurds; maps and other symbols of a broad Kurdish identity include all regions as part of Kurdistan, just as all Kurdish languages are called Kurdish.

1.3 Religious Differences

Many official figures estimate that the population of Turkey as a whole is more than 96% Muslim (Shankland 2003). Though these estimates might seem to indicate a

high degree of religious unity in Turkey, they fail to differentiate between Sunni Islam, which is itself not monolithic, and Alevism, sometimes considered a separate religion altogether. This religious difference is the most significant religious/cultural distinction in the Kurdish community in Istanbul, and one that must be unpacked carefully. It is important to note, however, that the politically active Kurds with whom I spoke often either did not identify religiously, or explicitly described themselves as atheists. Religion is a way that politically active Kurds often talk about general distinctions and cultural backgrounds, not necessarily a criterion with which they would personally identify.[7]

The Sunni Islam followed by Kurds in Turkey is in line with religious forms adhered to by most of the Turkish majority. Since at least the late Ottoman period, Sunni Islam has been that marker of identity most effective in linking the majority of Kurds and the majority of Turks. Ottoman and Turkish history are replete with examples of appeals made to the common religious heritage of the Sunni peoples of the empire and republic. While ethnic nationalism has been a powerful force throughout the history of the Republic of Turkey, it cannot be separated from religious nationalism. In 2013 and 2014, I observed an attitude that the largest ideological threat to the Kurdish freedom movement was either political Islamism or what I will call *tekçilik* (very roughly, “single-ism”). Political Islam as a political philosophy was clearly capable of competing with "Kurdishness" as the key identifying marker in people's political decisions, as election results consistently proved. By the estimate of one young non-practicing Kurdish Alevi, Abuzer, the Kurdish community was split roughly in half

[7] Of course, religion is an important part of the identity of many people I spoke to and certainly highly significant for many people in Turkey, as the constant debates on the role of Islam in political and public life in Turkey testify.

between those who saw themselves as Muslims first, and those who saw themselves as Kurds. The other political philosophy, *tekçilik*, might be thought of as the sum of all the various efforts on the part of the Turkish political establishment to foster a single national identity. In Turkish-language Kurdish oriented publications such as the newspaper *Özgür Gündem*, *tekçilik* was a common theme (see, for example, Celalettin Can's July 7, 2014 article, "Ya demokrasi ve özgürlük! Ya tekçi, otoriter rejim!"). This is the political philosophy that Kurds see the government forcing on them, with unitary symbols of the Turkish state at every turn: one flag, one language, one religion, one people, and so forth. These two political philosophies overlap but are not identical. One can argue, for example, that the peoples of Turkey are linked by their Sunni heritage while distinguishing between the Sunni populations of Turkey and the Arab world. From the perspective of many Kurdish political activists, however, under Erdogan and the AKP, political Islam and assimilationism go hand in hand.

Alevism, by contrast, is followed by only roughly 30% of the population in Turkey and has never been used as a tool of political unity to the same degree as Sunni Islam. Like Sunni Islam, both Kurdish-speaking and Turkish-speaking populations in Turkey practice Alevism. Alevism is, in general, a non-universalist belief system, unlike Sunni Islam: non-proselytizing, with a strong focus on the community and practices that have been interpreted as secretive throughout history. However, it is difficult to generalize about Alevism. Some say that Alevism is a Kurdish religion, a descendant or cousin of Zoroastrianism with a veneer of Islamic ritual. This view is reflected by Izady, who groups a number of Kurdish religious traditions under the banner of "Yazdânism". Turkish-speaking Alevis, according to this view, are a marginal sub-group of Alevis, possibly representing long-assimilated Kurdish communities. Others view the Islamic

components of Alevism as deeper than a mere veneer. One prominent example is the *Encyclopedia Iranica* entry on Zazakî-speaking Alevis, or Dimlî, which describes Alevism as an extreme form of Shi'sm with "an admixture of indigenous primitive and some Christian beliefs" (Asatrian 1995). The relationship between Alevi and Sunni belief and practice was illustrated by Yurttaş, who recounted a period of his childhood where he, a child from an Alevi family, was sent to study the Qur'an in a Sunni mosque:

> It didn't seem strange to me back then. I looked around and saw that, of our Alevis, 3-5 people studied the Qur'an. Children. 'OK, let me go too,' I said to myself. And I went to the mosque, I studied the Qur'an and got an education from the mosque teacher… I recited the *ezan* and prayed [*namaz kıldım*], me an Alevi child… [Alevis] go to the mosque from holiday to holiday. It's a joke, but that's what they did. My father went to the mosque on every holiday… This was the reasoning [for sending me to the mosque]: 'The Sunnis wouldn't recite from the Qur'an at our funerals, so let there be one of us who can recite.'
>
> (personal communication, translated from Turkish by the author)

Yurttaş's experiences have broader resonances in the Alevi community and reflect the respect that some Alevi communities hold for Sunni traditions and theology. As his joke about attending prayers only on holidays indicates, some Sunnis feel almost as if Alevis are just a group of "bad" Muslims, rather than a distinct religious tradition.

The aspects of Alevi belief and practice of concern in the present work are those that are specifically connected to music. This is no small part: music and the *bağlama* in particular are central Alevi religious rituals. Details on the *bağlama* appear in Chapter 2. The central Alevi worship ritual, called *cem*, features a special type of song, called *deyiş,* whose theme is mystical love. Sunni, Kurmanci-speaking musicians made special reference to *deyiş*s in the Zazaki language in representing "traditional" Kurdish music.

1.4 Contested Geographies

The Turkish state and official organizations have long been fond of generalizing the different regions of Turkey as follows: in the west, the Marmara and Aegean regions; along the northern coast, the Black Sea region; along the southern coast, the Mediterranean region; around Ankara, the Central Anatolian region; and in the east, the East Anatolia and Southeast Anatolia regions. These regions are usually each associated with some defining characteristics, whether in food, dress, music, or regional accent. The primary appeal of this way of characterizing Turkey is that it depicts the various geographic regions as parts of the Turkish whole; the coastline is defined by the sea it borders, and the interior of the country is simply a geographically defined chunk of Anatolia. The cultural diversity of the nation-state is represented as enriching varieties of general Turkish culture, with the people at the edge of the Turkish map, and their cultural practices, simply one part of the kaleidoscope of Turkishness.

Many Kurds, whose homeland is simply a marginal region of Anatolia on Turkish maps, dispute this geographical generalization. The primary point of contention is the existence and extent of Kurdistan. When Şiyar told me that "this side is Turkey, that side is Kurdistan," he was asserting a division the Turkish government has long worked to erase. In the Turkish, Anatolia-centric view of the region, the easternmost parts of the nation-state of Turkey are simply Eastern and Southeastern Anatolia. Similarly, a Kurdistan-centric description of regional geography describes that area as Bakurê Kurdistanê, or Northern Kurdistan. The corresponding names for the other parts of Kurdistan are Rojavayê Kurdistanê, or simply Rojava, for Western Kurdistan within the borders of Syria; Rojhilatê Kurdistanê, or Rojhilat, for Eastern Kurdistan within the borders of Iran; and Başurê Kurdistanê for Southern Kurdistan within the boundaries of Iraq. This description reflects an understanding of regional geography that both

acknowledges the historically significant impact of nation-state boundaries on Kurdish peoples and recenters the map, moving the Kurdish people from four different peripheries to one unified center.

In the Turkish political system, the nation-state comprises 81 provinces (*il*), each named after its respective capital city and subdivided into smaller administrations and city governments (*belediyeler*). When Turkish citizens, Turks and Kurds alike, respond to the question, "Where are you from?" or otherwise feel the need to identify their place of origin, they use this system of provinces and administrations as a point of reference. One young man, Serhat, gave a typical answer to my question, "*Nerelisiniz?*": *Bitlis. Tatvan, Bitlis*. In this way, he referenced the province (Bitlis), based on Turkey's internal political boundaries, and the city (Tatvan).

1.5 Political Consequences of Kurdish Identification

What are the effects of government policies and official stances towards the so-called "Kurdish Question" with regard to the likelihood of an individual to self-identify publicly and politically as Kurdish? Throughout the history of the Republic, but especially after the 1970s for reasons I will explore further below, the Kurds have been subjected to a series of educational and cultural policy decisions that Kurdish activists sum up as "assimilation" (*asimilasyon*). These diverse policies have targeted many aspects of Kurdish cultural identity and have further complicated the issue of what it means to call someone or something "Kurdish."

One aspect of assimilation efforts is the government's overt suppression of Kurdish attempts to maintain their ethnic distinctiveness and poetic traditions through such means as education and expression in the Kurdish language. For periods of the

20th century that peaked in the 1990s, the government forbade Kurds from speaking Kurdish in public (Kreyenbroek 1992). An official ban on publishing and broadcasting that was implemented from 1983 and 1991 reveals how specifically the Kurdish language and cultural identity were targeted during that period. The law forbade the use of any language for publishing or broadcasting that was not the first official language of any country with diplomatic relations with Turkey. Since Kurdish was the *second* official language of Iraq at that time, Kurdish was in essence specifically banned without being named. Additionally, a strong social stigma against speakers of Kurdish existed in western Turkish cities such as Istanbul or Izmir, to the extent that speaking Kurdish in public often meant risking verbal or physical attack.

Pressure to assimilate is thus a defining part of the Kurdish experience in western Turkish cities. Throughout the interviews that I conducted, in the concerts with political messages and goals that I attended, and in casual conversation, a wealth of language emerged to describe this pressure and resistance to it. Musicians at the MKM provided a particularly pointed description of this pressure as *beyaz soykırım*, or "white genocide." In the words of Mervan, a middle-aged musician at the MKM: "That's 'white genocide': cultural genocide. It's not to strike [or kill] you, but to wipe out, to make you passive… To wipe out a culture, its language, its culture, its way of thinking."

However, it was most common for people to talk about the government's *asimile politikası* (assimilation politics) as a catch-all for diverse language and economic policies. They also often speak about "assimilated Kurds" (*asimile etmiş Kürtler*), usually when describing political and language choices or conditions. For example, Ruşen, a skilled *bağlama* player in his early 20s who had lived in Istanbul for almost all his life, once introduced himself to a newcomer at the MKM. The newcomer asked him

some questions in Kurdish, and Ruşen apologetically said that he didn't understand: *Asimile etmiş Kürtler'den biriyim* (I'm one of the assimilated Kurds). At other times, the "assimilated" descriptor applies to large demographic generalities. For example Kurds who identify more strongly with their religious Sunni identity (and who tend to vote for the AKP[8]), Alevis from Dersim who, everyone says, hang pictures of Atatürk in their homes and identify themselves as Turks on the grounds of citizenship (and who tend to vote for the CHP[9]), and people from Adıyaman Province who generally do not speak Kurdish have all been called "assimilated," though their actual religious, political, and linguistic affiliations may all differ significantly. Identifying someone as "assimilated" is, in essence, to say that they are not fully Kurdish but says little about what they are instead. The criteria for calling someone "assimilated" are mostly based on whether or not one supports the network of political causes I will refer to as the "Kurdish freedom movement." Understanding this aspect of Kurdish identity more fully, then, requires a detailed look at Kurdish history and politics.

1.6 The PKK and War in Kurdistan

> For the past 40 years [the war] has continued in the hottest manner. In everyone's neighborhood there's at least one, uh, soldier who's died [meaning guerrilla]. Either among their neighbors, or in the neighborhood or in the village. There's definitely at least one. But despite that, they [Turkish government and mainstream society] don't ask what's going on, why these people are 'going to the mountains', why is this war continuing…
>
> (Mervan Tan, personal communication, 11/28/14)

[8] *Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi* (Justice and Development Party), the current (January 2015) ruling party of Turkey. The AKP is generally considered to be socially conservative and/or Islamist.

[9] *Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi* (Republican People's Party), the main opposition party. For decades Turkey's only political party, The CHP is today generally considered to be center-left and secularist.

My consultants tended to present thumbnail sketches of Kurdish history in Turkey that began in the 1980s or 1990s. These decades, beginning with the 1980 military coup in Turkey, witnessed an intensification of urbanization, economic disruptions throughout Turkey, and the beginning of a broad expansion of Kurdish nationalist discourse (Gunes 2012). This was the beginning of what my consultants called the "Kurdish movement" (*Kürt hareketi*) or the "freedom movement" (*özgürlük hareketi*). In the 1970s, the principal issues that divided the population of Turkey were political (Yıldız 2004). Many left-wing groups were formed throughout Turkey, some of whom advocated and practiced armed resistance to "imperialism" and "capitalism." Such concepts are moving targets. The meanings of the words *emperyalizm* and *kapitalizm,* which surface continually in political publications and protest rallies are highly context-dependent. The *Partiya Karkerên Kurdistan* (Kurdistan Worker's Party, or PKK) began as one of these groups, but under the leadership of Abdullah Öcalan, called *Apo* (“Uncle”) by many Kurds, Kurdish nationalism became an increasingly large part of the group's agenda. Founded 1978 in the Diyarbakır province village of Fis, the PKK began to use violence in its resistance of “assimilation,” “capitalism,” “fascism,” and “imperialism” with attacks on military and police in 1984.

It is impossible to overstate the importance of the PKK in modern Kurdish politics and, by extension, the history of the Republic of Turkey in the late 20th century. Kurds in Turkey use common euphemisms that reflect the need for some level of secrecy when talking about the PKK, though the simplicity of these euphemisms indicates the organization’s importance. For example, my consultants and other musicians often use the term *gerilla* (guerrilla) for members of the PKK and allied groups, and the phrase "going to the mountains" (*dağlara gitmek*) for joining the PKK. For these Kurds as well

as for Mervan, those *gerillas* who have died in the conflict between the PKK and the Turkish military are martyrs (*şehit*). While many in the Kurdish left view the PKK and its guerrillas as heroes, the Turkish, US, and EU governments continue officially to view the PKK as a terrorist organization. Many self-identified Turks view Öcalan as a terrorist leader, while many Kurds view Öcalan as a figure more along the lines of Nelson Mandela or Mahatma Gandhi.

The PKK-military conflict has at its roots a history of discrimination in Kurdistan. While many of the region's problems were economic—Kurdistan, a rural area, had been ignored for development—the Turkish government's steady policies to erase the existence of a distinct Kurdish people, culture, and language was a significant factor leading to the conflict. Erol, a Kurd from Kars in his early 30s, told me that he didn't speak a word of Turkish until he was 12, despite beatings at school which led him to stay away from schools for years. Abuzer, a 26-year-old Kurd from Adıyaman (a city he described as being the center of Kurdish assimilation) learned Turkish by watching dubbed-over American television, which all the beatings he received at school never accomplished.

Öcalan's initial goal was the establishment of an independent Kurdish state. The PKK's targets were primarily the military, the police, the *jandarma*[10], and politicians and businessmen. Many of my Kurdish consultants connected to the cultural centers described the conflict as the result of Kurds defending themselves against the aggression of the government. When Kurdish activists spoke to me about the conflict, they emphasized that they did not start the war and have always been a peace-loving people.

[10] The *jandarma*, or Turkish Gendarmerie, is a branch of the armed forces that acts as a military police force, particularly in rural areas.

This emphasis is a response to the dominant narrative, advanced by the Turkish government and major news organizations and believed by many people in Turkey, that depicts the PKK as a terrorist group that murders civilians and is uninterested in long-term peace.

The *Mezopotamya Kültür Merkezi*, like many other Kurdish cultural centers, was formed in the early 90s, at the height of the conflict and accompanying harsh government response. Many of the musicians and artists associated with the center, such as Mervan, experienced various levels of police harassment, arrest, and torture during the '90s. Mervan was arrested several times for playing and publicizing concerts.[11] The '90s, as reported to me by Mervan, Gönül, and many others, are generally considered the darkest point for the Kurdish people in recent memory.

In 1999, after an international hunt, Öcalan was taken by the Turkish police at the Greek embassy in Kenya. Though originally sentenced to death, Öcalan has since been imprisoned on İmralı Island in the Sea of Marmara, and has spent several years in solitary isolation. During this time, Öcalan wrote books and letters that outlined a new strategy for the PKK, collected and published as *Prison Writings* in 2011. Rather than seeking an independent Kurdish state, Öcalan now advocates a democratic solution that would establish a confederation linking the four parts of Kurdistan in Turkey, Iran, Iraq, and Syria.

Since 2009, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, leader of the Justice and Development Party

[11] During one jail stay, Mervan told me, the police presented him with a form that they wanted him to sign without reading. He refused to sign it, telling me that a common practice of the police was to extract false confessions about terrorist activities. As he said, they showed him a paper, saying that if he signed it, they would release him. The policeman covered the text of the form with his hand. Mervan believed that the form was a confession to planting a bomb, and refused to sign it. This is just one example of how Kurds believe that the Turkish and international public is misinformed to believe that Kurds are terrorists.

(AKP), has been also making gestures that indicate a movement towards inclusion of Kurdish issues in Turkish politics. Called the "democratic initiative" (*demokratik açılım*) by government figures, these gestures have largely been interpreted by my consultants and major Kurdish-oriented newspapers such as Özgür Gündem as political calculations intended to maintain the large voter majority the AKP currently enjoys. The establishment of the Kurdish-language television channel TRT 6[12] is one such gesture. More recently, in a September 2013 announcement dubbed by the media as a "democratization packet," Erdoğan announced that private schools would be permitted to use Kurdish as the language of instruction. My consultants in Kurdish cultural centers, who tend to be harshly critical of the AKP, interpreted this move as appeasing Erdoğan's wealthy Kurdish supporters and international observers while having no real effect on middle and lower-class Kurds. Nevertheless, the effectiveness of Erdoğan's moves can be seen in the political map; especially among more religious, conservative Kurds, Erdoğan's mix of neoliberal economic policies and political Islam is more appealing than Öcalan's far-left confederationist socialism. The AKP controls local governments throughout Kurdistan, and clearly many Kurds agree with Mucahit, a shop owner in his late 40s, who told me that "everything's better since Erdoğan took over."[13]

Of all the major obstacles to democratic participation by Kurds, Turkey's high election threshold (*seçim barajı*) has probably been the most effective. For a political

[12] Though the acronym is of a Turkish phrase (*Türkiye Radyo ve Televizyon*), the "6" in TRT 6 is always said as the Kurdish "şeş" rather than as the Turkish "altı".

[13] Some anecdotes speak to the perceived political divide in the Kurdish community. Ruşen, as we drove through Batman, said "we're going to win Batman this next election" (*gelecek secimde biz kazanacagiz;* by "we" or "*biz*", he meant the BDP). Abuzer, talking about Kurdish politics, told me that Kurds have a saying: Either our language, or our religion (*Ya dilimiz, ya dinimiz*). Due to the political affiliations of most of my consultants, I heard many more anti-AKP opinions than support for the current government. Mucahit's statement was somewhat of an anomaly.

party to enter parliament, that party must receive at least 10 percent of the votes in every district. While many Kurdish political parties have been formed and generally receive large percentages of the vote in predominantly Kurdish areas, the *baraj* has kept them from participating in government. The most recent such party, the *Barış ve Demokrasi Partisi* (Peace and Democracy Party, or BDP) has been circumventing this barrier by running its candidates as independents and reforming the party after elections. Previous Kurdish political parties, such as the DTP (Democratic Society Party) and the HADEP (People's Democracy Party) were closed by Turkish constitutional court. Only recently, especially since Öcalan's Newroz ceasefire announcement in 2013, has a viable political solution become a genuine possibility. During the period of my fieldwork, Kurdish community papers and other news outlets portrayed the situation as extremely fragile and became increasingly pessimistic as events unfolded in Syria and Iraq.

When I present my research interests as Kurdish music and myself as an American, people often take it upon themselves to explain the Kurdish conflict to me in their own terms. On December 3, 2013, for instance, I talked with a man who had come into the MKM to talk with the directors. After hearing a bit about my interests, he started to explain the Kurdish struggle to me. His explanation was fairly typical. As he put it, the Turkish government and press have long controlled what people outside the region know about the Kurdish conflict. As a result, he said, Western governments view the Kurds as terrorists. So a child in Kurdistan who throws a rock at the police, he explained, might be given ten to twenty years in prison. But as he put it, what else can the child do? His father and his older brothers might have been arrested and tortured. The whole region is a center of conflict. “They [meaning politicians and foreign

governments] say to find a peaceful solution," the man said, "but close our [political] parties."

Kurdish musicians who present their music as Kurdish, by and large, represent a viewpoint that is largely in line with the goals of the PKK and its political branches. The legacy of the PKK's radical Marxist roots and connections to more contemporary movements in Turkey, such as the Gezi Park protests, continue to have a large influence on the movement. Mervan, for example, has explicitly stated that in the 1990s, performing in Kurdish was a political act for which one could be arrested—and he was. Zelal, a Kurmancî-speaking singer prominent in the MKM community, also emphasized the political aspects of her music-making. She emphasized that her goals were to continue the traditions of Kurdish music to prevent them from being lost in the face of Turkish hegemony. Today, as the AKP has made moves toward lifting restrictions on the Kurdish language, musical performance continues to be an arena where different versions of what it means to be Kurdish are played out. A majority of Kurdish artists identify with the BDP/HDP and with movements that resist capitalist hegemony.[14] Key words that link these Kurdish musicians to broader movements in Kurdish society are *direniş* (resistance) and *mücadele* (struggle). However, the state-sponsored alternative of the TRT6 offers a mainstream platform and economic opportunities that some musicians have found difficult to resist. Along with this, there is also a large number of musicians that BDP/HDP-allied Kurdish musicians dismiss as performers of *arabesk*. Dismissive attitudes towards this genre abound across many segments of the political left in Turkey, as detailed by Martin Stokes in *The Arabesk Debate* (1992), but Kurdish

[14] The word *hejemon* is a regular feature of such discussions, especially after the Gezi Park protests in the summer of 2013.

leftists have distinct reasons to be critical of *arabesk*. Because these musicians sing in Kurdish about personal pains, generally related to women, and make their livelihoods by performing at Kurdish weddings, professional Kurdish musicians view them as tasteless, untalented, and motivated purely by money. Additionally, as Ruşen explained to me, such lyrical themes are described as "hopeless" (*çaresiz*) by leftist Kurdish musicians, taking the focus of the Kurdish people in Turkish cities away from the communal struggle and encouraging a psychology of self pity.

This political context has led to a huge repertoire of "*gerilla*" songs, which I will explore further along with the politics of *arabesk* in chapter 3. Generally written by or about armed PKK guerrillas, these songs include marches, traditional dance tunes, and "slow" (usually pronounced *slov*) music. The themes of *gerilla* music are varied. Many, such as "Mezin Apo" (Great Apo) by Koma Berxwedan (Resistance Group) and "Rêber Apo" (Apo the Guide) by Koma Çiya (Mountain Group), are about Öcalan, using the affectionate nickname ApoGülsü. Others are about nature, particularly about the beauty of the mountains in Kurdistan. Still others are adaptations of socialist and communist marches, such as "Herne Peş" and "Kine Em?" written by the Kurdish poet Cigerxwîn. Many *gerilla* songs are calls for revolution or praise revolutionary groups, such as the YPG (*Yekîneyên Parastina Gel*, or the People's Protection Units of Syrian Kurdistan). *Gerilla* songs were one of the most popular genres among many young people at the three MKM cultural centers. The texts of that genre illustrate the panegyric language and tone such songs often take towards the PKK and Abdullah Öcalan:

Mezin Apo, bilind Apo,	Great Apo, High Apo,
serok Apo, apê me	Leader Apo, our uncle,
Şêrin Apo, qahreman tu,	Sweet Apo, you hero,
rêberê gelê me	guide of our people
Şêrin Apo, qahreman tu,	Sweet Apo, you hero,
rêberê gelê me	guide of our people
Nav û dengê gelê me	The people's name and voice
saz û ziman karê me	Instruments and language are our work
saz û ziman karê me	Instruments and language are our work
serok û rêbere me	Leader and guide of our people
bijî bijî apê me	Long live our uncle
Mezin Apo…	Great Apo…
Partî enî û arteş	The Party, blameless and an army
Apo serok û serkeş	Apo, the rebel leader
Apo serok û serkeş	Apo, the rebel leader
derman kirin kûl û eş	heal the slave and the land
serdar û rezanê me	our commander and guide
serdar û rezanê me	our commander and guide

Kawa serok Apo hat	"Kawa"[15] Leader Apo went
rohanî û rojhilat	East and West
rohanî û rojhilat	East and West
û çekdarî ya felat	took up arms for deliverance
herdem bijî apê me	Long live our uncle

While the lyrics emphasize the central role played by Öcalan in the Kurdish political awakening, they also reveal the importance of music in the PKK struggle. The singer specifically names "instruments" (*saz*) and "language" (*ziman*) as tools of revolution. *Gerilla* songs like this one, then, are an indication of the importance of

[15] Kawa the Blacksmith is a figure of resistance to oppression in Iranian mythology. In the revival of Persianate traditions that accompanied the growth of Kurdish national consciousness, Kawa is the mythical leader of a rebellion against the oppressive regime of Dehak. This story is at the center of the Kurdish understanding of Newroz.

music on recent Kurdish political history and vice versa.

1.7 Kurds in Istanbul: Cultural Centers and Neighborhoods

In order to understand contemporary Kurdish music, it will be useful to consider the place of Kurds in Istanbul, my primary fieldwork site. With more than 14 million inhabitants, Istanbul is by far the most populous city in Turkey, a dynamic center of social changes often considered Turkey's "cultural capital." Before the formation of the Republic of Turkey and the demographic shifts of the 20th century, Istanbul, the capital of the Ottoman Empire, was home to a large number of Greeks and other Christian peoples. The legacy of that pre-Republic Istanbul is varied and noticeable in many ways, although my field consultants only occasionally drew on this history in their conversations with me. Today, however, a large proportion of Istanbul residents are migrants or children of migrants from other parts of Turkey due to the explosion in urbanization since the 1970s (Gül 2009).

Istanbul straddles the Bosphorus Strait, a narrow, river-like body of water that connects the Black Sea with the Sea of Marmara and ultimately with the Mediterranean. The historical core of the city is located on the European side of the strait, and it is on that side where the monumental structures of Ottoman power largely remain. Topkapı Palace, Ayasofya (the Hagia Sophia), and Sultanahmet Camii (the Blue Mosque), along with other old neighborhoods and buildings, are all on a peninsula south of the narrow Golden Horn. North of the Golden Horn is the district of Beyoğlu, historically the location of European embassies to the Ottoman Empire and today the location of Taksim Square and İstiklal Caddesi, important centers of both tourism and anti-government protests. Surrounding this old core are neighborhoods that were historically

separate cities and towns but have today become part of Istanbul. Besides the waterways that divide the city, Istanbul is also a city of hills, which separate the neighborhoods from one another and have been a hurdle to transportation.

Four Istanbul neighborhoods are particularly significant for the landscape of Kurdish music in the city. Three of those neighborhoods are locations of Kurdish cultural centers with a specific focus on music, and the fourth neighborhood is a focal point for many protest activities in Istanbul. The three *Mezopotamya Kültür Merkezi*-affiliated cultural centers in Istanbul are the original MKM itself, located in Beyoğlu; the Arzela Kültür Merkezi, located in Şirinevler; and Med Kültür Sanat Derneği, located in Bağcılar. All three of these centers are strongly connected to Kurdish politics, and I never met anyone at any of the cultural centers who wasn't at least sympathetic to the PKK. One consultant told me that the MKM and other centers coordinate their activities with PKK leadership. The link between music and arts-oriented cultural centers and the PKK is an open secret locally. This link helps us understand the functions of the kinds of Kurdish music supported by these centers, while also explaining why the MKM might not support other forms of Kurdish music.

One way to envision the neighborhoods that are the focus of this study is by imagining paths through them—a series of virtual promenades. I start in Tünel, an area in Beyoğlu on the European side of the Bosphorus. At the top of a large hill, Tünel is the terminus of an underground funicular that gives the neighborhood its name. The narrow cobblestone surface streets that lead up the hill are filled with music stores. Many of these stores display musical instruments in their large windows. Stringed instruments, such as bağlamas, guitars, uds, violins, and, in one store, a sitar, hang from ceilings and line racks back in many of the stores, and wind instruments such as neys, kavals, and

clarinets sit in cans and on special display racks. Many of the stores also specialize in audio equipment. On several occasions, I went with Kurdish musicians to buy an instrument or other musical equipment. They would either go from store to store, searching for the highest quality instrument at the best price, or they would use connections and simply go to where they had someone they trusted working there.

Leaving Tünel, one stands at an open square with somewhat expensive restaurants on all sides. This square is the beginning of the neighborhood commonly called Taksim. In many ways the heart of Istanbul, Taksim is centered around İstiklal Caddesi, a wide and often crowded pedestrian thoroughfare lined with shops and restaurants that runs from Tünel to Taksim Square itself. A "nostalgic tramway" runs through the middle of the street, a relic of Istanbul's old public transportation system and a tourist draw. The occasional police vehicle also runs through the street, parting the crowds of people walking along with short honks. All kinds of people walk along İstiklal Caddesi at all times of day, from English and Arabic-speaking tourists to locals shopping and strolling. Street musicians, particularly those playing regional dance music, often draw large crowds, though often musicians who appear economically disadvantaged tend to be passed by.

Halfway along İstiklal Caddesi are the large metal gates of Galatasaray Lisesi, an elite French-language high school and common meeting place. If no other public event is going on during the day or evening, one can always expect to see people waiting there, checking cell phones and watching. To one side of the school is a small side street. There are small side streets all over the neighborhood, but this particular one seems to be a favorite staging area for the police. Oftentimes large armored police vehicles are parked along that small street, and during demonstrations or protests, the police would line up

in front of that street holding riot shields and weapons.

Quite often, the area in front of Galatasaray Lisesi is the location for protests of some kind. If one walks past the high school every day, as I did, one will see all manner of protests for various causes. Some of these are regular, such as the Cumartesi Anneleri protests every Saturday. Others, like the August 15, 2013 protest by Circassian groups against the Sochi Winter Olympics, are responses to current events and issues. The square is an excellent staging place for public protests. It is roughly halfway along İstiklal Caddesi in a central location that makes it easy to convene protesters. The square is more open than other areas along İstiklal, with room along the side to avoid the tram and any other passing vehicles. Finally, of course, it is ideal place to attract attention. Thousands of people pass by the high school on foot every day, and protests to spread awareness on a certain issue take full advantage of this audience. While one might not see a protest every day, there is a good chance that something will happen if you wait near Galatasaray High School.

Another side street leading from İstiklal near this point is the Hazzopulo Passage, a covered alleyway that connects İstiklal to a parallel back street. This passage, like similar one all along İstiklal, is lined with small shops selling toys, clothing, and jewelry. What made this passage particularly significant in my personal geography were the outdoor tea cafes to which the passage leads. After squeezing through the crowded passage, one comes to a courtyard-like space filled with low tables and stools hidden from the main streets. This area, with multiple cafes competing for customers, is often very crowded. Here, people meet and talk, drinking tea and smoking cigarettes outdoors, even in winter. I often met people there myself, and it was also a regular part of my Saturdays: after the weekly protest, many people would sit in the courtyard and

catch up.

Continuing on İstiklal Caddesi past Galatasaray High School, one passes clothing stores and office buildings. Many of these buildings have ornate facades, relics of the past when this neighborhood was home to the large numbers of European Christians who were connected with foreign embassies in the Ottoman period. The embassies themselves, consulates now that Istanbul is no longer the capital, are large gated compounds. Only European (non-Muslim) countries run consulates here, and a large Catholic church is another reminder of what the neighborhood was like in the Ottoman era. Taksim Square, at the end of İstiklal, is another square that has, like the front of Galatasaray High School, seen many protests, most notably the Gezi Park protests of the summer of 2013.

The Mesopotamia Cultural Center (Tur: *Mezopotamya Kültür Merkezi*) is in nearby Tepebaşı, a neighborhood between İstiklal Caddesi and Tarlabaşı. The contrast between Tarlabaşı and Taksim is most noticeable right along Tarlabaşı Boulevard, a multilane, heavily trafficked road that runs almost parallel to İstiklal Caddesi. Compared to İstiklal's upscale, pedestrian cosmopolitanism, Tarlabaşı Boulevard seems like a different city altogether. Wig shops, cheap places to eat, and shady hotels line both sides of the street. Residents of Istanbul's respectable middle-class neighborhoods warn foreigners against crossing through the underpasses that lead into the heart of Tarlabaşı. Such warnings do not dissuade many young Europeans and Americans from Tarlabaşı's charms, particularly the low rent and proximity to Taksim's nightlife. In addition to these expats, Tarlabaşı has populations of migrants from the east. Tarlabaşı has long been home to a large Kurdish community, and in the fall of 2014, when the civil war in Syria had displaced many people, I noticed several cars with Syrian license plates

along the narrow, winding streets. On one such street, lined with trees, a small nondescript sign announces the *Navenda Çanda Mezopotamya/Mezopotamya Kültür Merkezi*.

The Mede Culture-Art Association, or *Med Kültür-Sanat Derneği* in Turkish, another cultural center in the MKM network, is in Bağcılar, about an hour by public transportation to the west of Taksim. Bağcılar is another community with a large Kurdish community, which is partially why there is a branch of the MKM there. Another reason is that Bağcılar Square, the center of the neighborhood, is a transportation hub, with multiple bus lines and a subway connecting it to other Istanbul neighborhoods. The square is bordered on one side by a wide road and is large and open compared with İstiklal Caddesi. A large mosque dominates the square, and elevators connect the street to the subway entrance several stories below. The surrounding neighborhood of Bağcılar is working class, similar in many respects to Tarlabaşı. A major difference is that Bağcılar is much newer than Tarlabaşı and the rest of Beyoğlu. The name Bağcılar, meaning "vineyards," reflects its agricultural past. The original homes, mostly shanties called *gecekondu*, have now been replaced with apartment buildings, but the neighborhood still shows many signs of economic marginalization.

From the bustle of Bağcılar Square, several streets lead into the heart of the neighborhood. Bağcılar, more so even than Tarlabaşı, is home to a large Kurdish population. One street, flanked by occasional trees and sporting a wide sidewalk, leads behind the large Bağcılar Mosque and towards the tram line. Unlike many of the streets in neighborhoods closer to the center of Istanbul, the streets in Bağcılar are oriented towards cars, and as a result there are fewer people selling food and other items on the street. Walking past several grocery stores, one eventually reaches a large and

complicated intersection. Across the street, a multi-story building sits darkly squat, flanked by similar offices. A sign, large and prominent compared to the signs announcing other Kurdish cultural centers, shows that this building is the site of *Navenda Çanda Med/Med Kültür-Sanat Derneği*.

The final neighborhood, Şirinevler, is also on the European side, about 45 minutes by bus from Taksim. Like many neighborhoods in Istanbul, Şirinevler's center is a large, open square, surrounded by restaurants and stores. Şirinevler Square is connected to other parts of Istanbul by street buses as well as by Istanbul's rapid bus system, Metrobus. The Metrobus station is connected to the square by a large overpass, which is a defining feature of the square. People sit and wait on the stairs, and often young children try to sell tissues or other small items to passersby.

Heading away from the overpass through the square, a series of parallel numbered streets host restaurants and small stores. Like Tarlabaşı and Bağcılar, Şirinevler is home to a sizeable working class Kurdish population. In most weather, small carts sell various street foods such as *pilav* and stuffed mussels. This part of the neighborhood is dominated by pedestrian traffic, and on nice days can be quite crowded. On one of the numbered side streets, a brightly lit *döner* restaurant on the corner sits above a somewhat hidden basement staircase. A small white sign, which I know from experience is very easy to miss, informs attentive passersby that the staircase leads to *Navenda Çanda Arzela/Arzela Kültür Merkezi*.

In this chapter, I have provided a general background on the ethnographic context of my fieldwork. In Istanbul, Kurds speak a multitude of languages, follow several religions, and come from different regions. These differences are important to Kurds, but a general Kurdish identity emerges from the negotiation of these different

markers. An important context for this negotiation is the ongoing series of conflicts in the region, which I have explained. Finally, by going on a virtual tour of some key neighborhoods in Istanbul, I have set the stage for more detailed description of music in Kurdish life in Istanbul. In the following chapters, I will build on the background provided above in order to show some of the ways that these concepts affect contemporary musical contexts and practices.

2 *Dengbêj, Qirik, Govend*

2.1 Introduction: Amed Newroz

Kurds in Istanbul are separated from Kurdistan physically and socially, creating powerful feelings of alienation. The physical element of this alienation is significant: although within the same nation-state boundaries as the region from which most Istanbul Kurds hail, Istanbul is more than 500 miles from the edge of Kurdistan and is populated mostly by Turks. The social aspects of this alienation are felt throughout Kurdistan as well as urban centers in western Turkey. Kurds in Istanbul and in Kurdistan often feel that they are separated from what most Kurds recognize as their traditional life ways, including their occupations and linguistic/musical milieu. This chapter explores three musical categories—*dengbêjî* songs sung by *dengbêj* bards, various genres of lament, and the music that accompanies traditional dance—that represent the perceived traditional culture from which Istanbul Kurds feel separated. By detailing the causes of this separation with respect to local discourses of modernity, I provide a background for understanding how this music continues to shape and influence Kurdish music today.

Celebrations of *Newroz,* the new year celebrations on March 21st, are prominent contexts in which Kurds display "the traditional" for themselves. *Newroz* is celebrated across a vast region, from Central Asia to the Balkans. Modern observance of *Newroz* by Kurds in Turkey is a relatively recent phenomenon and differs in many ways from the holiday's observance in neighboring Iran. In Diyarbakır, the largest city and unofficial capital of Turkish Kurdistan, Kurds have been celebrating *Newroz* each year since the

mid 20th century. Beginning in the 1960s, small numbers of Kurds protesting Turkish state oppression began to burn tires, a small act of resistance intended to be a visual sign of the spirit of revolution. By the mid 2010s Newroz celebrations have grown to involve upwards of a million participants, combining celebration with political protest. Kurds come to Diyarbakır from across Turkey and from diasporic communities in Europe, gathering on the morning of March 21 in Diyarbakır's *Newroz* park.

The *Newroz* celebrations of 2015 were regarded by many as an important political event. In the previous year, the region had been rocked by ISIL[16] offensives in Syria and Iran. Most Kurds regarded the retreat of ISIL from Kobanê in Syrian Kurdistan to be a major victory for the Peoples' Protection Units (YPG) and Women's Protection Units (YPJ), Kurdish paramilitary organizations closely affiliated with the Kurdistan Workers' Party (Lund 2015). Kurds with whom I spoke in Istanbul regarded Kobanê as the Kurdish Stalingrad, comparing the Kurdish defense of an embattled city under siege to the Soviet defense of Stalingrad during World War Two. Such a comparison casts the war in the mold of World War Two, viewed as a conflict between the far right and the far left, rather than as a religious or ethnic conflict. Comparisons to Stalingrad were so common that they appeared in international media coverage as well.[17] On top of the events of the past year, Kurds in Turkey also looked forward to the

[16] Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant, a radical Islamist group that emerged and seized a large amount of territory in Syria and Iraq during the Syrian Civil War. Other names for the organization include: ISIS (the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria), ISIL (the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant), İŞİD (Tr: *İrak ve Şam İslam Devleti*, literal translation of ISIL), DAİŞ (the Arabic-derived acronym most commonly used in Kurdish), and the name used by the organization itself, IS (the Islamic State). I will use ISIL because it is the closest common English equivalent of the way that my consultants referred to the group, İŞİD.

[17] According to media sources, this comparison seems to have originated with a YPG leader, Polat Can (Gold 2015). "The Kurdish Stalingrad; the War against Islamic State." Economist (US) 1 Nov. 2014 (Web.) Accessed 6 June 2015.

general elections scheduled for June of 2015. There was strong hope that the left-wing, Kurdish-affiliated Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP) would break the 10% election threshold and become a significant force in Turkey's political system.

What did a million Kurds do when gathered in one place? Many directed their attentions toward the large stage set up at one end of the field. There, speakers addressed the crowd, including Sırrı Sürreya Önder, an Istanbul MP for the HDP, who read a letter written by Abdullah Öcalan. Musical groups also performed. Many of my personal acquaintances from the Istanbul MKM formed a chorus and sang an arrangement of "world revolution songs" (*dünya devrim şarkıları*). These songs, often marches associated with socialist movements in European and Latin American contexts, had either been translated into Kurdish from languages such as Russian and Italian or set to Kurdish lyrics when the original march had none.[18]

For many of the attendants, however, the events on stage were a backdrop for celebrations of their own, a chance for many to perform their Kurdish identity publicly and openly. March 21st began with intense rain, and although the skies cleared by midday, the field had turned to mud. Despite this, many men wore *şalvar*, loose trousers, often dark green, that bunch around the waist, and green shirts and vests. Women wore colorful dresses, usually with embroidered white headscarves and jewelry. Such clothing, both for men and women, is typically viewed as traditional and representing rural Kurdish culture; despite their origins as working clothes, these "traditional" garments are not typically worn today except on special occasions, and

[18] Performances of socialist songs and related themes are covered in more detail in chapter 3. Here, it is significant that symbols of "traditional" Kurdish culture were integrated with symbols of international socialism, such as these songs.

many delicate dresses were splashed with mud. Pairs of musicians were scattered throughout the crowd, forming two person *davul* (large double-headed drum) and *zurna* (double-reed wind instrument) ensembles. As these musicians played, men and women gathered around them, forming circles that expanded and created large open spaces in the midst of the crowd. Participants commonly perform impromptu and unaccompanied dances, called *govend* in Kurdish (or, more commonly, *halay* in Turkish), during outdoor gatherings such as weddings and festivals.

Diyarbakır, *Newroz*, *govend*, *davul*, and *zurna*, are all regarded as links to a pre-modern or traditional Kurdish past. Far from being a straightforward expression of "traditional" Kurdish culture, this episode is a multivalent illustration of the relationship between signs of Kurdish tradition and modern ways of being culturally, politically, and linguistically Kurdish. In this chapter, I will explore three categories of music that Kurds consider traditional. The first of these categories, songs sung by bards called *dengbêj*s, is one of the most studied and visible genres of Kurdish music. The second category is a cluster of closely related genres linked by expressions of lament. The last is the *davul-zurna* music and *govend* (*halay*) dancing that Kurds dance at weddings and other events. Kurds in Turkey identify each of these genres as a respected part of traditional Kurdish culture; however, particularly in the migrant community in Istanbul, Kurds reference or adapt them in contrasting ways.

2.2 "Before" and "After": Kurdish Music and Discourses of Modernity

Kurds in Istanbul often refer to recent Kurdish music history in terms of a "before" and "after" with one or more pivot points occurring sometime in the twentieth century. Regardless of the number and timing of these pivot points, they are conceptual

breaks in Kurdish history that separate "traditional" Kurdish culture from "modern" practice. The formation of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (*Partiya Karkerên Kurdistan*, or PKK) in 1978 is one such pivot, an event that led to war in Kurdistan and a fundamental change in the relationship between Kurds and the Turkish state. Kurds often tie the formation of the PKK to earlier pivot points during the government suppression of Kurdish culture in mid-twentieth century. Together, the suppression of Kurdish culture and subsequent formation of the PKK are part of the "Kurdish awakening," a loosely defined period or event in Kurdish history referenced by my consultants and scholars alike.[19] Certain genres of music are complexly linked to this pre-awakening past.

The PKK, the organization at the center of many of these changes, was formed in 1978. Abdullah Öcalan, a radical student organizer with a history of participation in left-wing demonstrations and organizations, met with a number of other Kurdish revolutionaries in Fis, near Diyarbakır. From this meeting, the PKK formed, an organization that in the coming decades would powerfully change the relationship between the Kurdish people and the Turkish state. Beginning with bombings of military installations and other state institutions in Kurdistan in 1984, the PKK began guerrilla operations against the Turkish military as well as, some have claimed, against Kurdish civilians who collaborated with the government. Kurds who view Öcalan as their leader and are sympathetic to the PKK often emphasize that this struggle is one of self-defense

[19] See, for example, *Kurdish Awakening: Nation Building in a Fragmented Homeland*, particularly Hay Eytan Cohen Yanarocak's "A Tale of Political Consciousness: The Rise of a Nonviolent Kurdish Political Movement in Turkey"

against Turkish state oppression. The impact this group's war on the Turkish government has had on all aspects of Kurdish society, including music, is difficult to overstate.

The lives of individual Kurds bear witness to the importance of the PKK for Kurds in Turkey. Ciwan is a musician in his 30s who has long been an active performer in the various Kurdish musical contexts of Istanbul. Born in Diyarbakır, his family history is deeply tied to the changes in Kurdish society since the formation of the PKK. The Diyarbakır of Ciwan's youth in the early 1980s, before the influence of the PKK was widely felt, was controlled by a semi-feudal "peasant-landlord" system in which public life was greatly influenced by Islam (Gunes 2012). Only a few musical genres were publicly performed, with one kind of music, called *oyun havaları* (dance music), being particularly prominent. Also referred to as *davul-zurna* (after the instruments used), this music was played outdoors and at weddings by ensembles consisting of the large bass drum (*davul*) and double-reed wind instrument (*zurna*). Other musical forms were viewed by many Kurds as *günah*, temptations or moral failings, and were rarely seen in public life.

By the time Ciwan was born, however, Kurdish society was feeling the impact of the PKK's struggle. As Ciwan put it:

> "(Kurdish society) started to become more political, the power of feudalism (*feodalite*) was broken. …It was completely broken in the 90s by the PKK. The local chiefs (*toprak ağaları*) were powerful, which was what the government wanted—to keep a society back, they had to maintain the power of the chiefs—that is to say, the power of feudalism. On the other side, in the musical domain and in the cultural domain, a society that hadn't been able to own itself was about to emerge (*özüne sahip çıkamamış bir toplum çıkacaktı*)…There was a society living under pressure from religion, feudalism, the aghas, and the government. In the cultural field as well, it was a society that wasn't going to develop. As it

> became more political, it started to become aware of its own worth. 'Yes, I exist, I am living.'
>
> (personal communication, 10/7/15, translated from Turkish by author)

Ciwan and many other Kurds attribute hugely transformative culture shifts in the 1980s and 1990s to the PKK. Kurds in pre-PKK past, in this view, were both oppressed by outside forces and by repressive elements of their own culture and society. The PKK combined Kurdish nationalism with socialism to mobilize the Kurdish public against both sides of this oppression. Unlike previous Kurdish nationalist movements, such as the Sheik Said rebellion in the mid-1920s, the PKK was as much against the "feudal" power structures that seemed entrenched in Kurdish society as they were for Kurdish autonomy. For this reason, the PKK political awakening meant the end for some "traditional" Kurdish institutions, such as the local chiefs who had long been patrons of musicians. Even when these changes were a radical departure from centuries of past tradition, Ciwan and like-minded Kurds view them as a return to what being Kurdish really means. Such changes in Kurdish society, particularly the move from Islam to nationalism, are figuratively inscribed on Ciwan's family: his oldest siblings, born in the 1970s, were given Arabic-derived names such as Murat, while the younger siblings were given Kurdish names with secular meanings such as Ciwan (meaning youth) or Welat (meaning nation).

These political changes influenced local musical culture; as old ideologies and institutions were eroded and new ones adopted, the music associated with them changed as well. The changing popularity of *bağlama*, the long-necked lute that is found in many houses across Turkey, provides an illustration of one such shift. Many members of Ciwan's family, Ciwan included, play the *bağlama*, called the *tembur* in Kurdish.

With the political awakening that took place after the PKK began operations, many Kurds have increasingly moved away from viewing Islam as a central part of their identity and embraced practices, such as playing the *bağlama*, that they see as part of a primarily Kurdish, not Muslim, identity. Ciwan remembers fewer *bağlama* players in his youth, and told me that his father remembered even fewer when he was young. The *bağlama* was considered a "color instrument" (*renk saz*), intended primarily for pleasure and therefore dangerously close to *günah*. By the mid-1990s, this had changed, as Ciwan explains:

> This, of course, reflected a cultural development, a door opening… Cultural development at that time, and the playing of instruments, the interest in instruments, went together. The baglama is very common in Diyarbakır now. Not just the baglama, even the guitar. Western instruments are common too, conservatories have opened: Cigerxwin, Aram Tigran (*these are music schools in Diyarbakır*)… Why not Western instruments? There can be Western instruments. Is there no need for harmony? Without them our music wouldn't be very colorful. It might be single-voiced, but, in terms of melody it's broad. It might not be very colorful but at a certain point we can support it with instruments on which we express ourselves harmonically. It's not as though it's something that breaks away from "Kurdish music." I don't describe it like that. This could also be a return to originals."
>
> (personal communication, 10/7/15, translated from Turkish by author)

2.3 Embarrassment, Ambivalence, and Cultural Intimacy

Ciwan's account of music in Diyarbakır reveals a level of ambivalence with so-called Kurdish "traditions." On one hand, he and other Kurds express fierce pride in their Kurdish heritage and believe that musical forms such as *dengbêjî*, lament, and *oyun havaları* represent that heritage. On the other, the quotes above also reveal Ciwan's negative attitude towards parts of Kurdish "tradition," in particular the religious conservatism and patriarchal society that he and other activist-musicians saw in Kurdistan and often criticized. Such ambivalence goes beyond political or ideological

concerns, extending into a self-conscious embarrassment about being Kurdish. This embarrassment heightens the importance of displaying so-called "traditional" musical traditions correctly, to make being Kurdish something worthy of pride.

The ambivalence between embarrassment and pride that Kurds feel towards their past is particularly apparent when Istanbul Kurds return to Kurdistan. My consultants warned me every time I visited Diyarbakır in particular to beware of thieves. Returning to the airport after Newroz celebrations in Diyarbakır, my driver, who I will call Mehmet, a Diyarbakır native who had been living in Istanbul for years, grew increasingly frustrated as his car became mired in the Newroz traffic. Throughout the day, we had been surrounded by Kurds singing celebratory songs and chanting slogans that expressed pride in being Kurdish. Sitting in bumper-to-bumper traffic, however, irritation seemed to overcome Mehmet's Kurdish pride. Watching a heavy laden van attempt to drive over the median to make a questionable U-turn, Mehmet uttered two words that he and others occasionally used to describe the kinds of behavior they didn't like: "*geri kalmış*" ("underdeveloped"). For Mehmet and other Istanbul Kurds, the realities of life in Kurdistan are often frustratingly incongruent with the progress they hope and imagine for Kurdistan.

The often troubled relationship between migrants from rural areas of Turkey and their homelands is a broad theme in scholarship in Turkey; Kurds constitute a large percentage of such migrants. Extensive historical literature analyzes the massive migrations of people from rural villages across Turkey, (*köy*s) to urban centers, often to squatter communities (*gecekondu mahalleleri*, literally meaning "built overnight") that took place in the 20th century in Turkey. While Turks and Kurds from all parts of Turkey moved from villages to cities, the most disruptive migrations were from the

"east," including Kurdistan, to the "west," including Istanbul. Political scientist Tahire Erman, tracing the shifting perceptions of *gecekondu* residents in political and academic discourse, describes four ways representations of these east-west migrants (many of whom were Kurds) in Turkish media and political discourse: as "rural Others" in the 1950s and 1960s, as "disadvantaged Others" in the 1970s and early 1980s, "disadvantaged" or "culturally inferior Others" in the 1980s and 1990s, and as "threatening Others" in the 2000s (Erman 2011). For Kurds in Istanbul, these shifts in representation have led to three broad and intersecting categories: the urbanite (*şehirli*), the villager (*köylü* or *gundî*), and those who are caught between these two poles (*geri kalmış*).

The villager or *gecekondu* dweller is kind of person that Kurds identify as conservative and perhaps an embarrassing relic of both pre-modern rural Kurdish life and of how they feel that Turks see them. Musical styles are similarly linked to these worries, in that there are "proper" ways that activist Kurds see "traditional" music being recontextualized and "improper" ways, such as *arabesk* and keyboard/elektrosaz-based wedding music.

For this reason, Ciwan's perspective on a break from tradition is at least partially positive; he welcomes chord-based harmonies, electric instruments, and other modern or Western influences and technologies as capable of extending Kurdish music while maintaining some important core identity. Others disagree. In the view of Weysî, a dedicated, knowledgeable, and opinionated amateur scholar of Kurdish history and music who lives in Diyarbakır:

> There is a massacre of melodies taking place. Tied to agitation, music is being made now that puts an emphasis on words without seeking out the spirit of the music. It's a musical massacre (*katliam*). This music, with no connection to

> Kurdish music, but with words explaining the heroism, the martyrs, the struggle… It psychologically changes the musical foundation in people's brains.
> (personal communication, 11/4/14, translated from Turkish by the author)

These two perspectives on change in Kurdish music assume a past, "traditional" state, but interpret the current state of Kurdish music in very different ways in relation to this past. While Ciwan sees trends in Kurdish music today as possibly positive additions to a fundamentally Kurdish core, Weysî believes that these changes do a sort of violence to Kurdish music. Rather than providing an exhaustive history of so-called "traditional" genres, in the remainder of this chapter I hope to provide the necessary background to understand the debate over how Kurdish music has changed and continues to change today.

Another way to understand the ambivalence Kurds feel towards their "traditional" music is through Michael Herzfeld's concept of "cultural intimacy", by which aspects of cultural identity that are viewed as "embarrassing" in the presence of non-insiders but nonetheless confirm insider status (Herzfeld 2005). Herzfeld discusses numerous responses, strategic or otherwise, whereby members of a group respond to unflattering stereotypes. Kurds respond to the unflattering image of the *gundi* by emphasizing or recasting cultural practices and musical genres that provide alternatives. By emphasizing *dengbêjî* music, lament, and dance, elevating these musical practices to folkloric status, Kurds counter the stereotypes that they are uneducated, violent, and religious.[20]

2.4 Kurds, Kurdish nationalism, and "Turkish Folk Music"

[20] These stereotypes are also central to Kurdish activist opposition to *arabesk*, discussed at length in the following chapter.

Kurds often describe *dengbêjî* and *qirik* as elements of their musical culture not shared by non-Kurdish groups.[21] However, though they are considered unique to the Kurds, they are not what most of my consultants brought up when asked about "traditional Kurdish music" (*geleneksel Kürt müziği*). *Stranên Kurdî* (Kurdish Songs), a collection of transcribed songs gathered and published in the 200os by MKM musicians, illustrates what often comes to mind for many Kurds. The book contains melodies and lyrics to strophic songs, with Kurdish lyrics and information pertaining to the song's origin. Comparing these songs to the Turkish Radio and Television online archive[22] reveals that several melodies are found in both sources under different names and with lyrics in different languages. This is an example of the many ways that song repertory is contested between Turks and Kurds.

Stranên Kurdî was compiled by musicians at the MKM, many of whom continue this work today. Hivda is a conservatory graduate and professional singer who often performs at and coordinates MKM-sponsored events. Like other conservatory-trained musicians in Turkey, she is very familiar with how music is categorized and compartmentalized in the national hegemonic discourse. In Turkish schools as well as in the state conservatory she attended, the different musical traditions that come from peoples within Turkey are all claimed as "Turkish". Such claims are part of a century-long nationalist discourse that has influenced education, media, and the music industry. According to the hegemonic discourse of music in Turkey, there are two primary forms of Turkish "traditional" music, art music (*Türk sanat müziği*) and folk music (*Türk halk*

[21] While there are prominent examples of non-Kurdish *dengbêj*s, such as Karapete Xaço, no one seems to dispute that the art form is Kurdish.

[22] Formerly accessible for free from the TRT's website, the archive no longer seems to be online. A similar archive can be found at the following address: http://notaarsivleri.com/THM.html

müziği).[23] These categories emerged during the late Ottoman era and became the basis of both pedagogy and broadcasting during the early Republican era.

This categorization, it has been argued, is the direct result of early Turkish nationalists' concern with building a unified nation-state to succeed the multi-ethnic Ottoman Empire. In his discussion of the construction of Turkish folk music, sociologist Koray Degirmenci describes folklore collection in the early Republic as a nationalist enterprise with clear goals: "If one way of constructing a cultural heritage is overlooking the differences, the other is reprocessing the collected folklore forms to categorize them under the same rubric" (Degirmenci 2006). Genocides of Armenian and Assyrian Christians, as well as population exchanges with Greece, left the early Turkish Republic overwhelmingly Muslim; thus, one of the primary "differences" that cultural policies sought to overlook and reprocess was linguistic.

Collection of songs from different regions of Turkey began early, with the establishment of archives in Istanbul Conservatory and the Bureau of Culture in the 1920s (Tansug 1999). Gathered from the seven different regions of Turkey,[24] these songs were transcribed into Western notation and edited to better fit with an emerging systematized construction of folk music (Degirmenci 2006). In turn, this system became the pedagogical standard. Ruşen, another conservatory-trained Kurdish musician in Istanbul, described this system in detail at the MKM in October 2014. The standardized *bağlama* system had been an integral part of his conservatory focus on folk music, just as the *bağlama* itself was seen as a symbol of Turkish folk music. Holding his *bağlama*,

[23] Henceforth, "Turkish folk music," without quotation marks, will be used to refer to this systematized category, *Türk halk müziği*.

[24] For more information on this regionalization, its role in Turkish nation-building, and counterclaims made by Kurds, see the introductory chapter.

he demonstrated strumming patterns and rhythmic modes that are taught as typical of the Aegean Region, the Marmara Region, and Central Anatolia. Even though he views other results of standardization negatively, even as cultural violence, he has found such regionalization useful.

When it comes to Kurdish songs, however, Kurdish activist musicians feel differently. Hivda and Ruşen, along with other MKM musicians, claim that song collection and the systematization of music under the heading Turkish folk music is part of efforts to silence and eventually eliminate Kurdish cultural presence in Turkey. Others agree. Music, like other differences in local practice and folklore, has been a focus for emphasizing Turkish hegemony. Differences in language, particularly, have been erased from the archived songs in order to show that what difference remains is part of the mosaic of Turkishness. By retranslating songs back into Kurdish, Hivda and other MKM musicians hope to reclaim part of their culture that was taken from them.

Such reclaiming happens in a number of ways. In the mid 2000s, Hivda and other musicians undertook a "song collecting" project of their own. Traveling to different regions of Kurdistan, they recorded Kurdish-language versions of songs that had been gathered and archived under Turkish names in the past century. Occasionally, when a singer of a Kurdish version could not be found, they translated the Turkish lyrics back into Kurdish. Knowing which songs must have had original Kurdish lyrics was a matter of geography; prior government-sponsored song collectors often recorded where the song was originally gathered. In the interest of presenting all of modern Turkey as a unitary state, many locations in what Kurds consider Kurdistan appear among these locations. For many Kurds, it is inconceivable that a Turkish-language song could have

been gathered in Diyarbakır or Hakkari; thus, there must have been an original Kurdish-language version which is now lost.

This logic parallels that of Turkish nationalists. Such parallels are not limited to music, but extend to claims on other cultural practices as well. Konrad Hirschler has traced Kurdish historiography in *Özgür Gündem* editorials in the 1990s, finding an emphasis on Kurdish autochthony and a tendency to attribute "civilization" to the Kurds or to their imagined Aryan ancestors (Hirschler 2001). Building on this work, anthropologist Christopher Houston's discussion of the crafting of Kurdish national consciousness in Turkey stresses historical narratives that tie the Kurds to the land and casts them as the originators of cultural practices in the region. This, he argues, is a response to Kemalist secular constructions of Turkish nationalism (Houston 2008). Like Kemalist "Sun Language Theory," which gave Turkish nationalists the possibility to claim nearly any foreign word as derived from Turkish, this form of Kurdish historiography allows so-called "monopolists" (Hirschler's term, an equivalent translation of *tekçi*) to claim cultural practices as originally Kurdish. Thus, just as the song collectors who gathered and translated Kurdish songs into Turkish felt justified in claiming them as Turkish, many Kurds have little difficulty playing so-called "Turkish folk music" (*Türk Halk Müziği*) and claiming it as Kurdish.

2.5 *Dengbêjî*

2.5.1 *Dengbêjî* in Kurdish memory

Foremost among these "traditional" musical traditions is *dengbêjî*, the music sung by bards called *dengbêj*s. The genres sung by *dengbêj*s[25] include *destan*s (epics) and *payizok* ("autumn songs"), but are generally referred to by Istanbul Kurds as though they constituted a unified genre called *dengbêjî*. *Dengbêjî* is the adjectival form of *dengbêj*, the literal meaning of which is something akin to "vocal singer" (from *deng*, "sound or voice" and *bêj*, the present root of the verb *gotin* "to say or sing"). This name emphasizes that the *dengbêjî* repertoire is unaccompanied. The differences between the closely related genres that *dengbêj*s sing are often flattened out in discourse, particularly in Istanbul where *dengbêj*s are rare in daily life but figure prominently in Kurds' conception of their musical selves. Instead of referring to precise song type, Kurds often call all *dengbêjî* songs *kilam*s. *Kilam* is a comparable term to Turkish *uzun hava* (long air); like songs that are called *uzun hava*, *kilam*s are loosely metered, with the temporal organization of the text playing a central role in musical rhythm.

Since 2007, in an old basalt-walled house in Diyarbakır, a group of *dengbêj*s have gathered daily to sing. The house is known in Kurdish as the *Mala Dengbêjan*, the House of *Dengbêj*s. A government-sponsored institution, the House of *Dengbêj*s was established by the Diyarbakır municipal government in 2007 after a lessening of official and societal pressures made such a public endeavor possible. On most days, *dengbêj*s sit along the walls of the large courtyard, sipping tea and listening as each takes his turn singing. Apart from the *dengbêj*s themselves, there are other regulars and visitors who come to hear a form of Kurdish music that many believe to be a dying art. These

[25] Reigle, Robert. "Eyhok: Hakkari Geleneksel Müziği—Muzîka Gelêrî ya Hekariyê—Traditional Music of Hakkari (review)." *Journal of American Folklore* 124.494 (2011), 319-322.

*dengbêj*s sing a mixture of *kilam*s they learned from others as well as original compositions, a practice of performance and composition typical of *dengbêjî* music.

The House of *Dengbêj*s is one of the few places in Turkey where one can regularly hear *dengbêj*s perform. In Istanbul, Kurds encounter the *dengbêj* tradition mainly through recordings rather than through face-to-face oral transmission. It is through recordings of canonically respected *dengbêj*s that the *dengbêj* tradition continues to be a part of Kurdish identity; despite this social distancing, *dengbêjî* remains a key cultural emblem of Kurdishness. *Dengbêjî* recordings are the basis for Kurdish understandings of *dengbêj* history; while famous *dengbêj*s from before the era of recording technology exist as names and reputations, the voices of recorded *dengbêj*s of the past 100 years are the standard for understanding *dengbêj* "authenticity." The life stories of 20th century *dengbêj*s such as Meryem Xan (1904-1949), Şakiro (1936-1996), and Aram Tigran (1934-2009), known to today's Istanbul Kurds mainly through recordings, are both intimately connected with events of the past and removed from the lives of modern Istanbul Kurds. These *dengbêj*s are well-known to the extent that, on several independent occasions, my consultants told me to start my research with these same individuals.

One such *dengbêj* was Karapete Xaço (c. 1903-2005), a long-lived and well-recorded singer whose voice would have been familiar to many Kurds born before the 1970s. Ramazan, a non-Kurdish musician and MKM activist, wrote a brief article on Xaço's life, which connected Xaço's music to the story of his tragic life. Born to an Armenian family in Batman province, he and his siblings witnessed the annihilation of their family and community during the Armenian Genocide. As a young boy following the genocide, he began frequenting meetings of *dengbêj*s in Diyarbakır and the

surrounding areas. After moving to French-mandated Syria and joining the Foreign Legion, he settled near Yerevan, capital of then-Soviet Armenia. There, he recorded *kilam*s that he had learned and composed for Yerevan Radio (*Yerevan Radyosu*). These broadcasts and recordings entered Turkey at a time when the Kurdish language and *dengbêj* tradition were severely repressed by the government.

The *kilam* "Lawike Metîne" ("The Metîn Boy") is one of Karapete Xaço's most well-known songs. While the composer of the *kilam* is unknown, the song predates Xaço's recordings. The lyrics present the perspective of a young woman (Parıltı 2006):

> [after an introduction on the *mey*, slowly]
> *Lê lê dayikê heyranê de tu rabe*
> *Bi xwe ke bi Xwedê ke roja şemiyê*
> *Serê mi bişo û xemla min limin kê*
> *Bisk û tembêlikâ min li sere nîka min çêke*
> *Hey lê lê lê lê*
> *Hey lê lê lê lê delalê*
> [much faster]
> *Heval û hogirê me çûne mixribî şêxa*
> *Temamîka di geliyê kûr de*
> *Keçik dibê lê lê dayikê heyranê*
> *Bişîne pey lawikê metînî delalî malê*
> *Bila bêje nava sing û berê min li keçikê wî*
> *Ger tê min dixwaze bila bê min bixwaze*
> *Ger tê min direvîne bila bê min birevîne*
> *Ger min narevîne wê sibê min birêkin*
> [slowly]
> *Hey lê lê lê lê*
> *Hey lê lê lê lê…delalê*
> *Ay feleka me xayîn e gidî me dixapîne*
> *Narevîne hey delalê*
>
> Hey hey mother, hey you whom I admire, I implore you, rise up
> with your consent, with God's consent
> this Saturday, wash my head and dress me,
> braid my hair and locks around my brow
> (hey hey ley ley

hey hey ley beauty hey)
All of our friends have gone to the far-off "sheik's maghrib"
and all have fallen to the bottom of a deep valley
to the back of deep hearts and words
and the girl says, "mother, let me be your admirer
send someone to the house of the little Metîn boy
let him come and be embraced in my heart and breast
If he comes and wants me, let him come, let him want me
If he wants to abduct me, let him abduct me
If he doesn't, tomorrow they will send me away"
(hey ley ley ley hey ley ley ley)
Ah, fate has been treacherous once more and deceived us!

A young woman, who is in love with a boy from the Metîn mountains, begs her mother not to let her family send her away in marriage to another man, instead asking that her lover come and save her. The themes of the pain of separation and longing for the beloved are common in *dengbêjî kilam*s, which are often sung from the perspectives of women regardless of the performer's gender. As Weysî explained, *dengbêj* music is women's music, rooted in lamentation:

> Let's speak in examples: Look, in Kurdish palace music, divan music, the melodies to which *dengbêj*s gave voice were 95% from the mouths of women. That is, the singer is [originally] a woman. Even now, when we look at Mesopotamia, at Kurdistan, in folk music, we see that they [women] are the most expert [musicians]. In Kurdistan, in Mesopotamia, we know that the original singers and players of music were women.
>
> (personal communication, 11/4/14, translated from Turkish by the author)

In essence, Weysi asserted that many of the *kilam*s of famous *dengbêj*s such as Karapete Xaço are not their original creations; Xaço performed *kilam*s he heard other *dengbêj*s singing, who in turn were repeating what they had heard in a chain leading (possibly) to women singing in the home. This seems to be at odds with Bager's statement that a true *dengbêj* is original. However, a closer look reveals a more complex

idea of "originality" than simply composing new melodies and lyrics (something that Xaço and others certainly did). Singing like a *dengbêj* is something that is learned by imitation, but to be sung like one of the old greats, one's voice must reflect life experiences. Perhaps in place of "original" one might substitute "inextricably tied to the person of the *dengbêj*," regardless of whether that person wrote the music or not. Karapete Xaço lived a tragic life, but also a life of conflict and, one might even say, of adventure. His experience was connected to his subject matter in a way that modern urban Kurds cannot claim.

2.5.2 *Dengbêjî* in modern Kurdish life

Kurdish singers in modern Istanbul, such as Bager or Zelal, rarely call themselves *dengbêj*s. Such musicians have a close but complex relationship with *dengbêjî* music, in which they view the music as an important marker of their identity but rarely listen to it or feel unworthy of performing it. Bager is a young electrician who frequently socialized at the MKM. Though his job demanded most of his time, he was dedicated to music and loved singing and talking about music with others. For several months, I could count on seeing him nearly every day after 6 pm, either to take a weekly lesson or simply to sit, chat, drink tea, and possibly sing. Unlike some of the other singers at the MKM, Bager eschewed the singing of *şan*[26] and embraced *dengbêjî*, a genre he had grown up hearing from his father's informal performances in their home and from recordings.

Though he said that he sang *dengbêjî*, Bager refused to call himself a *dengbêj*. As he put it,

[26] *Şan* is a French borrowing (*chant*) referring to European-style art singing. At the MKM *şan* classes, students learn vocal technique including vibrato and singing in choruses.

> A *dengbêj* is someone who creates [new lyrics and melodies]. I learned by listening and imitating, but a true *dengbêj* would be able to create new *kilam*s. . . You won't be able to find a *dengbêj* today, and if you do it would be very hard.
>
> (personal communication, 11/4/14, translated from Turkish by the author)

This belief that true *dengbêj*s are rare today is not uncommon. Zelal, a conservatory-trained singer at the MKM, had recently released a solo album of Kurmanji, Zazaki, and Turkish songs when I interviewed her in September 2013. Though her repertoire consisted of a large number of genres, she quickly identified *dengbêjî* as a pillar of Kurdish music. As she described variations in *dengbêj* styles from different regions of Kurdistan, she sang in the style of *dengbêj*s who epitomized those local styles.

> In the Botan region, the land is mountainous and the air is thinner. The *dengbêj*s there sing like this: [*a melody with long, drawn out syllables, alternating between holding on to specific pitches and melismas rich with vocal breaks*]. In Muş, where the land is flat, *dengbêj*s sing like this: [*a melody that largely stays on one pitch, occasionally dropping down to mark the ends of phrases; compared to the previous melody, the syllables are sung much faster, with only the final few syllables of each phrase drawn out*].

Like Bager, Zelal did not identify herself as a *dengbêj*. Her knowledge of *dengbêjî* and her ability to sing were the result of research she had conducted as an adult, not from her early childhood. Singers in Istanbul often cited disconnects and disjunctions from the flow of *dengbêj* tradition as reasons why modern *dengbêj*s were rare or nonexistent. Zelal instead called herself a *stranbêj* (from *stran*, meaning song).

These statements could be interpreted to mean that *dengbêjî* is no longer an important genre in Kurdish music in Istanbul. Bager, Zelal, and many others in Istanbul believe that true *dengbêjî* singing, if it still exists at all, can only be found in Kurdistan. The House of *Dengbêj* is one of the few places in Turkey where *dengbêj* culture still

continues in a live, open form, although even there *dengbêj* performance has adapted to modern realities. The format of the space somewhat emulates the *diwan* setting that was an important space for *dengbêj* performance and transmission. Additionally, the *dengbêj*s there have been practicing their art for decades and generally represent a form of unbroken transmission that predates the aforementioned ruptures in Kurdish musical culture.

At the House of Dengbêjs, singers continue to praise local chiefs (Turkish: *ağa*s) one of the primary functions of *dengbêj* performance in the past that they have updated for their modern political and ideological context. As in other bardic traditions, *dengbêj*s were patronized by political leaders and in return were expected to praise the leaders' positive qualities, particularly their heroic exploits. In Diyarbakır, I saw one *dengbêj* perform *kilam* for Öcalan at the end of a session in which four *dengbêj*s alternated singing *kilams* about tragic love and past heroic feats. This final *dengbêj* concluded his performance by standing up and holding his hand in the air, making the victory sign with his index and middle finger in the shape of a V, a gesture which was met with applause. Like the "traditional" *dengbêj*s of the past century, he sang a story of recent events; however, his *kilam* praised Abdullah Öcalan and the PKK rather than a feudal or tribal ruler. The story behind this *kilam* illustrates how singers in the *dengbêj* tradition continue to engage with the politics and issues of today.

2.6 Genres of Lament

2.6.1 Lament in Kurdish memory

Lamentation by women for deaths and other tragic, unexpected events, is widely seen as a cornerstone of Kurdish culture. These laments, called *zemar*, are performed in the home in front of the close family of the lamenter. *Zemar* are generally improvised, alternating statements of grief with sighs, cries, and song-like groans. Kurds view these laments as foundational elements of what being Kurdish means, though they, like *dengbêjî* music, are rarely seen in Istanbul today.

The links between *zemar* and *dengbêjî* run deep. For Weysi, *dengbêj* music originated as *zemar*, an assertion that the texts of *kilam*s sung from women's perspectives seem to support. Though difficult to prove conclusively, this viewpoint is shared by other Kurds in Istanbul and elsewhere; indeed, locating the source of a distinctly Kurdish sound in the personal laments of women is relatively common in Kurdish discourse. The links between women, lamentation, and Kurdishness constitute a series of signs. Before delving into this chain of signification, however, the "object" of Kurdish women's lament must be carefully analyzed.

Kurds in Istanbul consider real lament (i.e., in an imagined "pure" form), like *dengbêjî*, to be rare or non-existent in modern Istanbul. My sources for *zemar* are therefore not my own ethnographic research and recordings but recordings made by others. Bese Aslan, a musicologist, recorded a number of traditional women's laments in Alevi communities in Dersim. Twelve of these laments were released as an album under the name "Kurdish Alevi Laments" by Kalan Muzik, a label with a strong history and commitment to showing diversity in Turkey.[27] These *zemar* laments respond to particular situations that are deeply personal for those who were recorded. Topics

[27] Bese Aslan. *Ocax u Xweli: Zemaren Kurdi Elewi / Kurt-Alevi Agitlari / Kurdish Alevi Laments*. Kalan Muzik, 2010. CD.

include suicide, family members who have lost their fathers, loved ones who have died in exile, and those who have been lost.

Laments are seen as more than a source of *dengbêj kilam*s; a discourse of Kurdishness-as-sadness pervades Turkish society. Films dealing with Kurdish issues, whether produced by Kurds within or outside Turkey (such as Yilmaz Guney's *Yol* [The Road] or Bahman Ghobadi's *Demek ji bo Hespen Serxweş* [A Time for Drunken Horses), or emerging from the mainstream Turkish film industry (Mahsum Kırmızıgül's *Güneşi Gördüm* [I Saw the Sun]) deal in tragedy and mourning. As is the case for Armenians, both in Armenia and in the Diaspora, Kurds understand genocide and tragedy to be a foundational part of their national identity.

2.6.2 Lament in modern Kurdish life

Like *dengbêjî*, Kurds in Istanbul feel the absence of *zemar* lament more than its presence. The reasons for this are complex, and are not limited to urban centers; such lament is rare among Kurdish activist in Kurdistan as well. Though lament is seen as an important part of Kurdish heritage, activists also often deem it inappropriate for the modern political climate. Expressions of grief are important in Kurdish music composed and performed in Istanbul today, but the specific nature of the grief can be viewed as constructive or as injurious.

Güzelanne (literally "beautiful mother" in Turkish) is one of several dozen women who meet every Saturday in front of the Galatasaray High School to raise awareness for missing family members, disappeared by the Turkish military and police. These Saturday Mothers (*Cumartesi Anneleri*) have all experienced direct, personal grief of a nature that directly connects them to the Kurdish freedom struggle; many (though not

all) of the murdered people were Kurds who were abducted and killed for participation in protests or other Kurdish or socialist activities. Despite the fact that she mourned her son every Saturday, Güzelanne did not feel that it was appropriate to lament. "We've lost our sons and daughters, we've been tortured, they set dogs on us. . . When these things happen, you don't cry and lament. You should resist (*direnmelisin*)." The Saturday Mothers are discussed at length in chapter 6.

Lament survives in Istanbul and in the Kurdish freedom struggle by being transformed, depersonalized so as to better function as a vehicle for political action. Alongside "traditional" laments such as *zemar*, Kurds describe other genres as *ağıt* (lament) as well. Every Kurd has a different understanding of what an *ağıt* is, but certain well-known songs, such as Sivan Perwer's "Halepce" often fit the bill. Written by Perwer, the song commemorates the Halabja massacre (March 16, 1988) in which Saddam Hussein's regime conducted a chemical attack on a northern Iraqi Kurdish city, which resulted in thousands of casualties. This excerpt of the lyrics shows the intensity of personal feeling of Perwer's song, as though he feels the weight of the tragedy as he sings.

> *Wey lo lo wey lo lo wey lo*
> *Wezê daketim kel û kasxanan*
> *Wezê daketim serê birc û van dîwaran*
> *Wezê bi ser kela dilê xwe mijûl ji xeman û kulan û derdan birîn in*
> *Ax de wey lo lo lo wey lo*
> *Dîsa bombe û baran e*
> *Her derê girtî mij û dûman e*
> *Dîsa nale-nala birîndaran e*
> *Dengê dayika tê li ser lorikê wan e*
> *Bavik bi keder xwe davêjine ser zarokan e*
> *Lê zarok mane bê nefes bê ruh û bê can e*
> *Ax birîndar im, wey lo lo lo wey lo*

(Wey lo lo wey lo lo wey lo)
I went down from castles and pavilions
I went down from the tops of towers and walls
to those who are on my boiling heart, from their sorrows, their boils, their pains
(Ah de wey lo lo lo wey lo)
Again, bombs and rain
Every place is filled with mist and smoke
and, again, the bitter groans of the casualties
Mothers' voices come through their lullabies
Fathers lay their children to rest in sorrow
But the children, with no breath, no spirit, no soul
Ah, I am injured, (wey lo lo lo wey lo)

Though the context has changed in important ways since its composition—Saddam Hussein's regime has long been toppled, and Northern Iraq is the most autonomous of the Kurdish regions—it remains one of Perwer's most popular songs, indicating that the style and emotion of lament resonate with Kurdish listeners. The extension of this individual instance to a broader context is a model of a larger process in Kurdish lament: individual and personal grief and tragedy, such as that which elicits *zemar* lament in the home, become synecdochal of a broader context while the specific tragedy fades into memory. A major part of Kurdish vocal aesthetics, which I will trace in the remainder of this dissertation, is a singer's ability to communicate these emotions as personal. This communication links the quality of the singer's voice to their persona. Sivan Perwer's performances of "Halepce" are understood to be filled with genuine emotion. This emotion is what links personal and generally unrecorded *zemar* and composed, recorded, and performed laments under what Kurds refer to in Turkish as *ağıt*.

2.7 *Govend*

2.7.1 *Govend* in Kurdish memory

Dance music, the final "traditional" category of Kurdish music, is on vibrant display in modern Kurdish life, as we have seen earlier in the vignette from Diyarbakır *Newroz*. A particularly prominent type of music accompanies dances called *govend* (*halay* in Turkish). Historically, *govend*s were accompanied by *davul-zurna* ensembles. The *davul* is a large, two-headed drum attached to the player's body by a strap over their shoulder and held at a slight angle. One of the two heads is tight and played by the non-dominant hand with a thin stick, about half an inch in diameter. The other head is loose and is played by the dominant hand with a large beater, shaped in such a way that much of the weight is in the end. Alone, the *davul* is capable of leading dances and creating a spectacle. At weddings, when a *davul* is present, it is still common for guests to tip the *davulcu* (davul player), often by sticking bills into the ropes around the drum. The *zurna* is a double-reeded instrument related to the *surnay* and other instruments in West, South, and Central Asia. Like the *davul*, it is a loud instrument generally played outdoors or in large wedding salons. With a range of a ninth, *zurna* players often play songs that have lyrics, which are often sung by the dancers.

Govend, the Kurdish word for these circle dances, is not commonly used by Kurds in Istanbul. Instead, they often employ the term *halay*, the Turkish word for an overlapping category of folk dances. Istanbul Kurds view Turkish *halay* and Kurdish *govend* as regional variants of the same category of dance. Throughout Turkey, particularly in regions that are today called "Anatolia"[28] *halay*/*govend* dances are associated with specific places. Much in the same way that Turkish musicologists and

[28] A term that, as mentioned in the introduction, can imply Turkish nationalist marginalization of Kurdistan.

educators have assigned places to *bağlama* styles, songs, and other musical elements as part of a formalized "folk music" structure, Turks and Kurds alike understand that *halay* dances (such as *Ankara Halayı*, associated with Ankara) come from specific places. Dance that might be called "folk dance", particularly *govend/halay*, is categorically different from other forms of dancing in Turkey, such as Western formal dances such as the tango or informal dancing that takes place in clubs. Those dances are referred to by a borrowed French word, *dans*, and the verb "to dance", *dans etmek*, follows a construction often used to adapt foreign words to Turkish. By contrast, the act of dancing a *halay* is referred to in Turkish by a different word, *oynamak*, which also can be translated as "to play." Individual dances are called *oyun*s, which also means "game." For this reason, the music that is associated with *halay* dancing is usually called *oyun havası* (*hava* meaning air). In Kurdish, *govend* also overlaps with *dîlan*, meaning "dance," "wedding," or "fun."

One simple *govend*, involving a few steps and very little complicated upper body motion, illustrates the basic form of these dances. More complicated dances are common at concerts and demonstrations, but despite their greater number of steps and movements of other parts of the body, dancers generally form circles and link hands, often holding pinkies, as in the simple dance illustrated in figure 1 below.

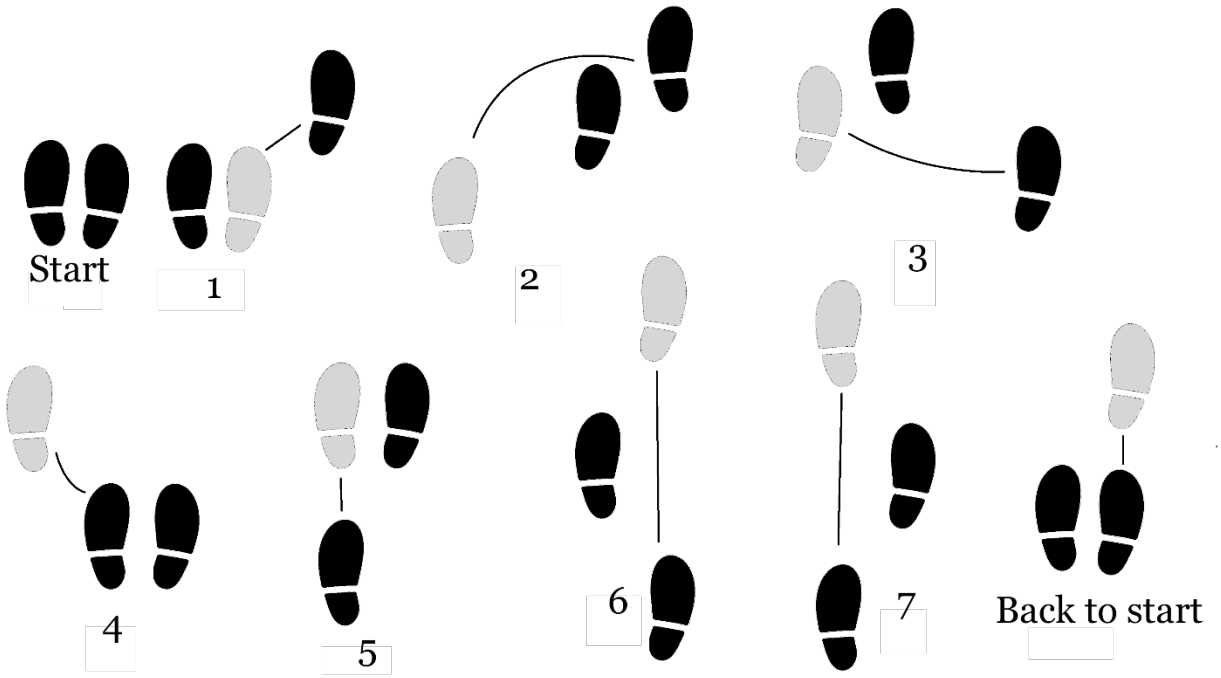


Figure 1: Steps to a basic *govend* dance. Illustration by the author.

Dancers performing this *govend* essentially take two steps forward and two steps back: starting with the feet together, they step towards the right with their right foot. Then, crossing their legs, they step towards the right with the left foot. A step to the right with the right foot uncrosses the legs, and a final step to the right with the left foot brings the legs together again. After this, the dancers take two steps back, starting with the left foot. When both feet come together at the end of these steps, the cycle begins again.

Kurds have varied ideas about what an "authentic" *govend* looks like. For many Kurds today, the *davul-zurna* ensemble represents the oldest meaningful way to dance *govend*. At *Newroz* celebrations in Diyarbakır, *davul* and *zurna* players were as much a part of the folkloric atmosphere as the *şalvar* and colorful dresses that dancers wore.

Other Kurds, particularly activists and participants in *gerilla* music culture,[29] assert that *govend* in its most traditional form is not accompanied by any instrument other than the voices and bodies of the dancers. Indeed, even when instrumental accompaniment exists, dancers often sing as they dance, with the leader of the dance calling and the other dancers responding. Claims about whether instruments are traditional are difficult to substantiate, but the belief in unaccompanied *govend* is strong and shapes modern practice, fitting well with other conceptions of Kurdish independence and anti-consumerism.

Anyone familiar with music in the region must recognize that the *davul-zurna* ensemble is common across Anatolia and beyond, played by more than just Kurds. Different Kurds deal with this shared cultural legacy in different ways; while many point to the commonality of *davul-zurna* as a sign that Kurds, Turks, and other circle-dancing people in the region are closely connected (often referred to as brotherhood, or *kardeşlik*, as in the name of Kardeş Türküler, a famous musical group that has been performing music from various regional traditions for the past 20 years), others trace a path of either appropriation or assimilation. Those who view the ensemble as originating with Kurds may see its spread among Turks as a kind of theft, an opinion expressed by Şiyar, a young man who told me on numerous occasions that "Turks have no culture of their own" (*kendi kültürü yok*). Conversely, those who view the ensemble as originating with non-Kurdish groups see its spread among Kurds as another unfortunate sign of the erosion of Kurdish distinctiveness under pressure from Turkish oppressors, though this opinion is rarely expressed.

[29] *Gerilla* music, songs written for or about guerrilla fighters, is discussed in chapter 3.

2.7.2 *Govend* in modern Kurdish life

Govend, whether danced to the *davul-zurna*, to the dancers' own singing, or to other music, has a much more prominent place in urban Kurdish culture than *dengbêj* or lament. Whereas those to musical categories are largely seen as either fading away or inappropriate today, Kurds of all different political positions continue to embrace *govend* dances. Part of the reason for this is undoubtedly the fact that many *govend*s are flexible dances; at most Kurdish weddings, one will see dancers dancing *govend* to marches or pop songs as easily as to *davul-zurna* accompaniment.

Like other highly participatory circle dances, *govend* is a relatively accessible art form, which has contributed to its prevalence in two contexts. The first of these contexts includes concerts and outdoor rallies, such as Diyarbakır *Newroz* celebrations discussed above. At that and similar events, *govend* occurs semi-spontaneously; while there is no explicit script for how and when *govend* dancing will take place, participants can reasonably expect and indeed look forward to *govend* as major feature of the event, as is the case throughout the case studies that follow this chapter.

The other context in which one sees *govend* in Istanbul, best described as "folkloric," illustrates the potential complexity of *govend*. *Govend* has become a marker of Kurdish identity due partially to the fact that large participatory dances are easier to teach than, for example, *dengbêj* singing or *bağlama* playing. The MKM-affiliated cultural centers in Istanbul, particularly the Mede Culture-Art Association (known as Med), teach classes and perform exhibitions of *govend* for audiences. This folkloric display of *govend* is somewhat dissimilar to the participatory *govend* that takes place during concerts and rallies. Hakan is a man in his mid 30s who leads *govend* education at Med. Every weekend, classes meet at the center to learn and practice *govend*s. The

students are mostly young Kurds. Many of them have spent the majority of their lives in Istanbul, and while they are familiar with the basic *govend* dances that are most common at concerts and political events, they have a desire to learn these dances more fully. Experienced dancers lead them through the dances and give important background information that Kurdish youth in Istanbul otherwise might not know.

During one such class on a Sunday in December, 2014, one of these experienced dancers led a group of 10 relatively new students. All of the students were young, ranging from teenagers to adults in their mid-20s. Men and women made up equal parts of the group, a fact that was useful for the choreography. Class began with a review of the dance so far; unlike *govend* as it is danced semi-spontaneously, the leader had arranged multiple dances to be performed back-to-back. While each dance could be danced in a repeated and self-contained manner, his choreography called for transitions that his students sometimes found difficult.

These classes are more than simply informative, however. Through dance, leaders teach students a bodily habitus that connects them with being Kurdish. While Turks and other inhabitants of Turkey dance similar dances, there are regional differences in motion, particularly fast shoulder movements and strong steps, that set apart many Kurdish *govend*s. Proficiency in these movements is a way to feel Kurdish in much the same way as speaking Kurdish.

2.9 Conclusion

In this chapter, we have seen three musical domains—*dengbêjî*, lament, and dance music—that play a large role in determining what "tradition" means for many Kurds. Though Kurds in Istanbul look to these forms of musical expression as central to Kurdish music, these types of music exist in changed forms in Istanbul today. *Dengbêjî*

and lament are more notable for their absence in Istanbul than for how they are performed in Kurdistan, though Kurds reference them in judging the aesthetic value of distantly related musical categories.

3 Contemporary Genres in Kurdish Music

3.1 Introduction: Kurdish Music in a Hostile City

Kurdish musicians in Istanbul create music within the broader context of Turkish society, which they often perceive as oppressive. Along with economic disadvantages and increased exposure to violence faced by Kurdish migrants, urban Turkish society is replete with negative stereotypes about Kurds.[30] Many urban Turks view Kurds as being uneducated and unmannered, causing or hoping for conflict, and as an increasingly unwelcome presence in western Turkey. Government policies have contributed to Turks' views of Kurds as backwards. Perhaps most egregiously, the government denied the very existence of the Kurdish people for long periods in the 20th century; the term "Mountain Turk," favored by the Turkish government, replaced "Kurd" in government discourse to imply that Kurdish traditions were merely degenerative blends of Turkish, Arab, and Persian influences.

In the Turkish-language media, these stereotypes take the form of narratives and character types that Turks and Kurds alike recognize as "Kurdish." *Güneşi Gördüm* (Tur: *I Saw the Sun*), a drama film released in 2009, is a recent prominent example of Kurdish stereotypes on screen. Though directed by a Kurdish filmmaker, Mahsun Kırmızıgül, *Güneşi Gördüm* represented a viewpoint on Kurdish issues that was largely sympathetic to the Turkish government and was met with approval by the then-incumbent Justice and Development Party (AKP).[31] The film tells the story of several

[30] For a detailed examination of these negative stereotypes, see Saracoglu 2011.

Kurdish families who live in a village in Turkish Kurdistan, where they are literally caught in the crossfire between the Turkish military and the PKK. After the military, portrayed sympathetically as simply trying to do the best thing for the villagers, tells them that they must leave due to the conflict, some members of the family migrate to Istanbul. There, they find themselves in a world for which they are unprepared; struggling to find work and left without any form of support, members of the family are killed, become criminals, or become trapped in poverty. The Kurds in the film are represented as having little agency, and are caught in a hopeless situation.

Güneşi Gördüm is widely regarded as an *arabesk* film; that is, many Turks and Kurds alike see a connection between the themes of the film and *arabesk*, an important genre of popular music characterized by lyrics that discuss love and hopelessness and associated with migrants from eastern Turkey. Though no longer as culturally relevant as in its 1980s heyday, *arabesk* music and film present an image of the east which is a different world compared to the urban west; those who cross from east to west are seen as backwards in their new environment, out of place, violent, and unable to adapt. A central theme of *Güneşi Gördüm* is that the difficulties eastern migrants face as they try to maintain a social order transplanted from the village to Istanbul are insurmountable and doomed to failure.

Many of the "eastern migrants" that are central to *arabesk* discourse are Kurds, but academic discussions of the genre rarely acknowledge the key role that Kurdish migrants and musicians have played in *arabesk*'s social origins. In fact, the Kurdish migrant experience is so inextricable from *arabesk* that it would be tempting to call it a

[31] "Kırmızıgül receives Cabinet's thumbs-up for 'Güneşi Gördüm'." *Today's Zaman* [Istanbul] 13 Mar 2009. Web. Accessed 13 Jul 2015.

Kurdish genre. Such identification is too simple, however; although Kurds may identify with many of the situations described in *arabesk* music and film, many resent such depictions and believe that *arabesk* is psychologically destructive. A deeper understanding emerges when Kurdish contributions and reactions to *arabesk* are considered than when they are ignored.

Examining *arabesk* also enriches a discussion of the more obviously Kurdish genres of *özgün* and *gerilla* music. These musical labels describe overlapping categories of left-wing song popular among Kurdish activists beginning in the 1980s. Musicians working in these idioms draw on the same pool of signs used in *arabesk*, but do so in support of political causes that they see as opposed to *arabesk*. These musical categories, *arabesk*, *özgün*, and *gerilla*, are the focus of this chapter. Through songs by important musicians associated with each category—İbrahim Tatlıses for *arabesk*, Ahmet Kaya and Grup Yorum for *özgün*, and Koma Awazê Çiya for *gerilla*—this chapter traces the sonic and visual signs that link these classes of music to one another, to older genres such as *dengbêjî* and *govend*, and ultimately to different ways to be Kurdish in Turkey today.

3.2 Categories of Modern Kurdish Popular Music

Kurds consider *arabesk*, *özgün,* and *gerilla* music to be "modern" because they are somehow disjointed from "tradition" in ways that other Kurdish musical genres are not. Such disconnect naturally leads many Kurds to question whether or not such "modern" music is really Kurdish in the way that *dengbêjî* and *davul-zurna* music are; however, *arabesk*, *özgün*, and *gerilla* music are constantly present in the daily lives of Kurds in Istanbul. Kurds listen to music of these types on their mobile devices, watch

performances of these songs at political rallies and nightclubs, and create new music in these forms. *Arabesk, özgün,* and *gerilla* music do not have the "traditional" clout attributed to musical forms such as *dengbêjî*, *qirix*, or *govend*, nor are they as agreed upon as representative of Kurds everywhere. Nevertheless, these contemporary forms of music, though not treated as traditional, are perhaps more influential and more relevant in contemporary urban Kurdish culture, particularly within the Kurdish activist community.

This distinction between "traditional" and "modern" music is not clean, and may have more to do with the perception of the legitimacy of the performer than with the song or genre. Zelal, whose views on "traditional" music I discussed earlier, referred to herself not as a *dengbêj*, though she sang pieces that are part of the *dengbêj* repertoire; rather, she referred to herself as a *stranbêj* (singer of *stran*s), citing her dislocation from traditional musical training as the reason she could not call herself a *dengbêj*. She explained further by calling herself a "performer" or "interpreter" (Tur: *yorumcu*) rather than one who creates (using the verb *yaratmak*). This illustrates a further aspect of the distinction between "traditional" and "modern" music: the perception of a break from tradition.

Other scholars have found a similar distinction in Kurdish music. In their 1996 paper on music in the Kurdish diaspora, Blum and Hassanpour identify two broad categories of music, which they call "folkloric" and "popular" song. While this terminology is similar, "traditional" and "modern" more clearly indicate the notion of a rift or disconnect that many Istanbul Kurds sense in their musical history. This difference may have something to do with the greater diversity within European diaspora communities, where music from Iran, Iraq, and Syria in Kurdish languages

other than Kurmanji and Zazaki are more represented compared to Istanbul. Without a sense of historical disconnect, Blum and Hassanpour's analysis of "popular" song is contextualized entirely within Kurdish music; they compare popular songs, called *goranî* or *stran*, to "folkloric" genres such as *heyran*, *lawik*, and *qetar*.[32] In Turkey, there is a considerable overlap between Kurdish and Turkish popular music which cannot be ignored; in fact, with the possible exception of *gerilla* music, Turks (or at least people singing in the Turkish language) create a significant amount of the music in all three of the genres examined here—*arabesk, özgün,* and *gerilla*. Despite these important differences, Blum and Hassanpour's definition of Kurdish popular music as "the music that Kurds most readily accept as their own when they participate in weddings and concerts, listen to radio broadcasts, and purchase or make copies of cassettes" generally applies in Istanbul, with digitally mediated music as an important addendum (Blum and Hassanpour 1996).

3.3 *Arabesk*

With roots in migration and strict cultural policy dating back to the beginning of the Republic of Turkey, *arabesk* is chronologically the first of the "modern" genres examined here. By virtue of its longevity and popularity, *arabesk* casts a long shadow; protest genres such as *özgün* and *gerilla* music respond at least in part to the aesthetics of *arabesk*. Typical *arabesk* themes of unfulfilled love, the difficulties faced in daily life, and hopelessness are directly linked to the migrant experiences faced by many Kurds in

[32] These genres are more important in Iran and Iraq than in Turkey. Of these three terms, Kurds in the activist community only used *lawik*, and then only when speaking Kurdish. They would fit into what Kurds call *uzun hava* in Turkish. Similarly, Kurds generally reserve the term *stran* to when they are speaking Kurdish, where it refers to all metered, strophic songs that they call *şarkı* in Turkish.

Turkey. These themes are dramatized in *arabesk* films such as *Güneşi Gördüm*. *Arabesk* is also a logical starting point for discussion because it bridges "traditional" and "modern" in several ways; musicians working in this genre use instruments typical of Turkish Folk Music (*Türk halk müziği*) along with electric instruments, and many activist Kurds view *arabesk* audiences as problematically conservative.

İbrahim Tatlıses, a singer and actor, is a principal figure in the history of *arabesk*. Orhan Gencebay is more often regarded as the "father" of *arabesk*, but Tatlıses, born in 1952, is a model figure of a different sort, whose colorful, violent, and tragic life reads like the plot of an *arabesk* film. Unlike *arabesk* film protagonists who cannot adapt to modern urban life, however, Tatlıses is extremely rich and successful. Known as "İbo" to fans, Tatlıses was born in Şanlıurfa Province in Turkish Kurdistan, near the border with Diyarbakır Province. He has identified himself in different ways over the course of his life, which is unsurprising for a popular and public figure: the careers of other musicians have been ruined when they proclaim publicly that they are Kurds. Tatlıses speaks Kurdish and identifies as a Kurd, yet at other times and in more public arenas, he has also insisted that he is a Turk, most likely to avoid accusations of Kurdish partisanship and separatism.

Like Orhan Gencebay, Tatlıses starred in dozens of films, usually playing a fictionalized version of himself (also named İbrahim). These *arabesk* films, such as 1987's *Dertli Dertli* (Tur: *Pained*), often tell the story of an impoverished villager who comes to Istanbul where, due to his inability to adapt to the harsh competition and loose morals of urban life, he suffers hardships that lead to violence and his death. In his actual life, Tatlıses has often been in the news for his colorful, borderline criminal lifestyle; along with beating his girlfriend, accusations of intimidating rival companies,

and investments in northern Iraq,[33] he has also been shot and hospitalized on numerous occasions, including most recently in 2011. Though these incidents have been reported negatively in the Turkish media, Tatlıses's behavior has largely increased his notoriety and added to his legitimacy as someone who lives an *arabesk* life.

Tatlıses's life story, like the genre of *arabesk*, is a story of provincial music coming to the center of Turkish society. Many urban Turks view such migration as bringing unsavory people whose backwards religious values threaten the Turkish nation-state project, built on secularism and modernity. Such views remain widely held and have been rightfully criticized elsewhere. My aim in discussing *arabesk* is to highlight the musical and symbolic role of Kurds in stereotypically Turkish domains. "Re-centering" the *arabesk* "debate" onto the Kurds is an important project in this regard. It is impossible to discuss any aspect of society and culture in Turkey without mentioning the nation's largest minority. In particular, any understanding of *arabesk* is incomplete without paying detailed attention to the "eastern migrants" so often mentioned. Due to successful efforts to push Kurds out of public discourse, however, such oversight is common.

In Turkish society broadly, *arabesk* is often popularly understood as part of the larger story of the interaction between the Turkish state, attempting to foster a unitary national culture, and those on the periphery (including religious fundamentalists, migrants, and Kurds) resistant to such a project. This story has been critiqued perhaps most completely in Martin Stokes' *The Arabesk Debate* (1992). For Stokes, arabesk provokes "debate" over the failure of Turkish secularism. In this debate, *arabesk* is

[33] Such investments in the Kurdish region were not looked upon favorably by the Turkish government, seen as implicit support of Kurdish independence.

linked to a political orientation that both engages with and also belies a perceived dichotomy in Turkish culture between the center and the periphery. Stokes critiques this center/periphery model by examining *arabesk*'s role in complicating the commonly-understood essential distinction between the "Ataturkian center-left" and "Sunni religious practice" (Stokes 1992).

There are many problems inherent in understanding Turkish-Kurdish society in terms of such dichotomies as the secular west versus the religious east. Nevertheless, many in Turkey understand their society in these terms, and academics and other observers wrestle with such simplifications regularly. Many such dichotomies collapse when another dichotomy is introduced—for example, an understanding of Turkish society built on a dichotomy between a "secular west" and a "religious east" cannot easily explain the ongoing conflict between the "Islamist" current government and Marxist Kurdish rebels, yet many Turks continue to view *arabesk* in terms of the former distinction. Kurds who view the "religious east" as a gross oversimplification view the *arabesk* debate differently. Opponents of *arabesk* in the Kurdish activist community do not see themselves as defending the Turkish nationalist center (often quite the opposite), nor do they see *arabesk* fans as threatening, invading outsiders. Looking at *arabesk* from a Kurdish perspective recasts the *arabesk* debate and leads to a more complete picture of music in Turkish society.

The potential contributions of a Kurdish-centric understanding of *arabesk* are best illustrated by examining a typical narrative of the genre. Nedim Karakayali's article on *arabesk* in the *Garland Encyclopedia of World Music*, for example, focuses on the relation of power between the Turkish center and the periphery. Whether the musicians themselves are assumed to be representing the periphery or their audiences, *arabesk* is

almost always associated with rural, socially conservative, and economically marginal areas far from Istanbul or Ankara. Karakayali presents the story of a "typical" *arabesk* musician in the following way, emphasizing that this myth is constructed: "Once they were poor rural migrants trying to survive in the big city. One day, by chance, their musical talent was discovered by a rich producer, and soon they became famous. Despite their fame, however, they did not lose their traditional values. Indeed, it is the memory of their days of suffering that inspires their music" (Karakayali 2001).

Karakayali does not name these musicians, and avoids marking details that would reveal their ethnicity, language, or religion. Such avoidance allows readers to assume that this periphery is Turkish, and that the "debate" or conflict at the heart of *arabesk* is between Turkish political elites and the Turkish "folk" (variously understood). But the literature on *arabesk* indicates that the issue is far more complicated. Stokes, for instance, has explored the issue of *arabesk* from a multitude of angles, including an analysis of *arabesk* in relation to Islam (Stokes 1992b), while Betul Yarar has discussed *arabesk* in terms of neo-liberal and neo-conservative politics in Turkey in the 1990s (Yarar 2008). What is still lacking, however, is an analysis of *arabesk* in terms of the Kurdish freedom movement.

For Kurds the conflict underpinning *arabesk* concerns political beliefs and the effect of such beliefs on social life. When considering whether *arabesk* is an appropriate genre, Kurdish activists do not see the debate as a conflict between clearly separable groups (secularists versus religious, elites versus outsiders) but rather between different ways of being Kurdish. Acknowledging that music can be a highly functional art form, along with visual arts and dance, Kurds in the freedom movement place a premium on music with clear, communicable functions. They are thus also likely to judge other art in

terms of its function. Their problem with *arabesk* is that it encourages, and indeed generates, a passive acceptance of injustice. A more extreme but common opinion expressed by Kurdish activist musicians is that *arabesk* is a tool of the political establishment to encourage complacency among Kurds.

The song and film "Kara Zindan" (Dark Dungeon), recorded by İbrahim Tatlıses in 1988, along with the film of the same name and year, illustrate *arabesk* aesthetics and conventions of the genre. This aesthetics informs later genres, even those politically distant from *arabesk*, that exist in the same semiotic system.

Bir telgraf cekmişsin	(I hear) You sent a telegram
geçmiş olsun diyorsun	You say "May it pass"[34]
çocuk gibi sevindim	I was happy like a child
suçum yok biliyorsun	I have no guilt, you know
çocuk gibi sevindim	I was happy like a child
suçum yok biliyorsun	I have no guilt, you know
Chorus:	*Chorus:*
kara zindan, kara zindan	Dark dungeon, dark dungeon
yaktım yandırdın beni ax	I burned, you set me on fire, ah
kara zindan, kara zindan	Dark dungeon, dark dungeon
canımdan ayırdın beni	You separated me from my soul
Cöktüm duvar dibinde	I collapsed at the foot of the wall
yaş birikti gözümde	A tear built up in my eye
inan feryat ederdi	"Believe," it was pleading
kim olsaydı yerimde	Whoever would be in my place
inan feryat ederdi	"Believe," it was pleading
kim olsaydı yerimde	Whoever would be in my place
(Chorus)	*(Chorus*)
Battı güneş karanlık	The sun set, darkness
sardı beni yanlızlık	Loneliness wrapped me
kırma ümitlerini	Don't break your hopes
yarınımız aydınlık	Our tomorrow is luminous
kırma ümitlerini	Don't break your hopes

[34] Often translated as "Get well soon," *geçmiş olsun* is also used to commiserate with someone having bad luck or to someone undergoing military service or serving a prison sentence.

yarınımız aydınlık	Our tomorrow is luminous
(Chrous, with variations)	(Chorus, with variations)
kara zindan, kara zindan	Dark dungeon, dark dungeon
evimden ayırdın beni ax	You separated me from my home
kara zindan, kara zindan	Dark dungeon, dark dungeon
eşimden ayırdın beni…	You separated me from my match…

Throughout the song, the singer expresses typical *arabesk* themes. The subject feels trapped, hopeless, and powerless. The song describes his progression from happiness and innocence ("I was happy like a child") to complete dejection ("you separated me from my soul") after the object of his desire seems to firmly reject him. In the first verse, the singer receives a telegram with a cold and emotionless message that cruelly reminds the him of his past carefree innocence. The chorus compares the singer's current despair to a dungeon and blames the object of his desire for this state ("I burned, you set me on fire"). The imagery links love to fire; lit by the beloved, love warms but ultimately damages the lover. The second verse shows the singer trapped, as if within walls. The desire to hope and the reality of his hopelessness continue to draw out the dungeon imagery. Finally, the last verse reveals a glimmer of hope: perhaps the beloved feels equally trapped; the singer wants to assure her that a brighter future is possible.

The narrator's entire emotional well-being seems to hinge on this relationship, reflecting an emotional fragility typical of *arabesk* songs. Though *arabesk* is generally linked to migrants, including Kurds, for whom economic and social upheavals contribute to feelings of alienation, the loneliness and hopelessness here is the hopelessness of love, as it is for most *arabesk* songs. It is this single-minded focus, which one might describe as a possibly fatal obsession, that makes *arabesk* dangerous in

the minds of Kurds on the far left. Many of my consultants used the word *çareşiz* (hopeless) to describe the lyrical themes typical of *arabesk*, but this song clearly offers hope ("don't break your hopes"). Hope and hopelessness are not the main issue here, according to Kurdish critics; rather, obsessing over such relationships drains the listener of energy and drive, diverting from a larger and more meaningful revolution.

The film in which this song appears provides another analytical angle. *Kara Zindan* was released in 1988 and stars İbrahim Tatlıses as a working-class migrant in Istanbul named Cemal. Cemal is engaged to a young woman, Ayşe, who works together with him in a textile factory. They live in a typical *gecekondu* neighborhood with other working-class migrants. Cemal, a hard worker with a conservative set of values, intends to save up money before marrying Ayşe. He jealously protects her honor; the word *namus* used in the film often refers specifically to a woman's sexual virtue. For example, when Ayşe buys a lacy nightgown for their wedding night, Cemal tells her that only "bad women" (*kötü kadınlar*) wear such things. For Ayşe, too, *namus* is a major concern; for example, Ayşe does not wear makeup despite the encouragement of a friend, thinking that Cemal would be infuriated. Ayşe has another suitor, a minibus driver named Idris, who comes to her sick father with his family to ask for her hand. When her father, who promised her hand to Cemal, refuses, Idris' family is deeply offended. Cemal saves enough money for the wedding and begins planning. Amid these plans, a jealous Idris rapes Ayşe, believing that the honor-bound (*namuslu*) Cemal would be unwilling to marry a compromised woman and back out of the marriage. Instead, Cemal publicly murders Idris and is sent to jail. Ayşe, shamed by her rape, is tormented by the other inhabitants of the *gecekondu* and, after the sudden death of her father, flees the neighborhood. Struggling alone in disreputable areas of Istanbul, she eventually enters a

brothel and becomes a prostitute. Cemal's friends and neighbors know of this, but do not tell Cemal while he is in prison. When he is released, Cemal searches for Ayşe. His roommate fears Cemal's reaction were he to learn of Ayşe's new life, visibly worried that Cemal might be driven to violence again. Nevertheless, he leads Cemal to the brothel where Ayşe works. To his roommate's admiration and relief, Cemal takes her back and is still willing to marry her. As they go back to start a new life, Idris' brother Selman, throwing away his promising future as a university student, shoots and kills Cemal.

Three themes found in this film—honor (particularly chastity, or *namus*), the plight of individuals in an uncaring society, and migrants' struggle to negotiate between their values and those of broader Istanbul society—are common throughout the *arabesk* film genre. Characters' concern with honor motivates much of the action in this film; Cemal's desire to do what he believes is honorable, Idris's belief that Cemal will not marry Ayşe if she is not a virgin, and the tension surrounding Cemal's discovery that Ayşe has become a prostitute are all directly tied to *namus*. After Ayşe is raped and left without a male protector, the *gecekondu* community turns on her, and strangers in other neighborhoods of Istanbul quickly take advantage of her. Finally, throughout the film, characters talk about the influence of Istanbul on their psyche. On one hand, Istanbul is seen negatively, particularly with regard to female sexuality and modesty. Ayşe's modesty in the beginning starkly is starkly contrasted with her Istanbulite friend's comfort with makeup and revealing clothes, and her appearance in the brothel is the ultimate result of losing her morals. On the other hand, Istanbul provides at least the appearance of opportunity. Selman, Idris's brother, dresses in jeans, a symbol of modern urban identity, and studies hard in school. However, this opportunity seems

illusory in the end when his parents force him to choose between avenging his brother and finding a better life.

Such themes make this a solidly *arabesk* film and reveal stereotypes of the Kurdish migrant as violent and unable to adapt to city life. In *arabesk* films such as this, Kurds see migrants like themselves depicted as violently concerned with women's chastity, even to the point of murder. "Honor killings" (*namus cinayetleri*), in which men kill unmarried women in their families whose *namus* has been compromised, have been a serious issue in Turkey in recent years, coinciding with the waves of rural-to-urban migration since the 1970s. Films such as *Kara Zindan* echo the widespread view that excessive concern with *namus* is a migrant, and therefore Kurdish, problem, which results from their inability to accept "modern" expectations of modesty and chastity encountered in Istanbul.

The film adds an analytic dimension for understanding the song "Kara Zindan." In the film, the song is heard when Ayşe is driven away from home while Cemal sits in prison. The song's dungeon is a clear parallel to Cemal's prison, serving as a metaphor for feeling trapped and unable to act. The song's hopeful lyrics in the third verse ("our tomorrow is luminous") are proven false in the film, where hope is futile. A luminous future remains tantalizingly out of reach for the film's protagonists; just as their dreams seem within their grasp, tragedy strikes.

The song's structure is also typical of *arabesk* songs. The verses consist of a single couplet with the second line repeated (ABB). Couplet verses (such as in Orhan Gencebay's "Batsın Bu Dünya") or three-part verses (such as in Orhan Gencebay's "Hor Görme Garibi") are both common in *arabesk* music. The chorus is also two couplets, whose final lines exhibit parallel structures with the following form: after a word

depicting the effect of love on the narrator ("I burned" and "from my soul"), the beloved is blamed for the narrator's condition ("you set me on fire," "you separated me"). Such parallelism sets up the subject as a passive victim of the beloved's effect on him. This passivity is at the core of activist critique of *arabesk*, and is built into the structure and lyrics of this song. The following outline breaks down the main sections of the song:

0:00 - 0:42	slow instrumental introduction
0:42-1:17	instrumental, verse melody
1:17-1:41	first verse
1:41-2:30	chorus
2:30-2:53	second verse
2:53-3:41	chorus
3:41-4:04	third verse
4:04-4:45	chorus and fade out

The quality of Tatlıses's voice is directly linked to the song's emotional themes by functioning as an icon for crying. In the verses, he sings with an edge on his voice, as if pushing or straining against a limit. Such strain is reminiscent of the vocal timbre of *dengbêjî*, though Tatlıses's singing lacks the distinct breaks typical of many *dengbêjî* singers. Despite this difference, *arabesk* and *dengbêjî* draw on the same techniques whereby interior emotional pain is made socially present in the voice. This iconic link with *dengbêjî* is a key way in which signs of Kurdish "tradition" are reshuffled for a distinct function in *arabesk*. The multivalent ways in which the song's subject is presented as suffering contribute to Kurds' views that *arabesk* encourages, and indeed fosters, passive victimhood.

3.4 *Özgün müzik*

Özgün müzik (literally "genuine" or "authentic music") is the name Kurds often use for music associated with protest that shares many of *arabesk*'s sonic properties without sharing its stigmas; Kurdish activists view *özgün* as a genre of resistance that contrasts *arabesk*'s passivity. *Özgün* music is located at the conceptual middle ground between quiescent *arabesk* and left-wing *gerilla müzik* further from the mainstream; Turkish-language Wikipedia has described as *özgün* as "protest-*arabesk*," though that label fails to acknowledge the ways that Anatolian rock and other popular genres have influenced *özgün*.[35] Like *arabesk*, *özgün müzik* is a popular genre that blends"eastern" and "western" elements, particularly musical instruments. Very few musicians are called "*özgün*" musicians, unlike the large number of musicians called *arabeskçi*; one of the few singers identified closely with *özgün* is Ahmet Kaya (1957-2000), a revered Kurdish singer and *bağlama* player who spent the end of his life in political exile.

Kaya's life, like that of Tatlıses and other Kurdish popular singers of their generation, parallels the history of the genre he performed. Born in Malatya to a Kurdish father and a Turkish mother, Kaya as a young man migrated to Istanbul, where he worked as a taxi driver before achieving success as a singer. His debut album, *Ağlama Bebeğim* (Tur: Don't Cry, My Baby), was released in 1985, the first of many Turkish-language releases. The title track contains optimistic lyrics that reveal Kaya's leftist political leanings.

Ağlama bebek ağlama sende	Don't cry, baby, don't you cry too
Umut sende yarın sende	There is hope inside you, tomorrow inside you

[35] "Özgün Müzik" <https://tr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Özgün_müzik> Accessed 10/22/15

Yağmur gibi gözlerinden akan yaş niye	Why these tears, flowing from your eyes like rain?
Bu suskunluk bu durgunluk sıkıntın niye	Why this silence, this stillness and worry?
Yağmur gibi gözlerinden akan yaş niye	Why these tears, flowing from your eyes like rain?
Bu suskunluk bu durgunluk kırgınlık niye	Why this silence, this stillness and resentment?
Çok uzakta öyle biryer var	There is such a place, very far away
O yerlerde mutluluklar	In those places there is happiness
Paylaşılmaya hazır bir hayat var	There is a life ready to be shared.
Ağlama bebeğim ağlama sende	Don't cry, my baby, don't you cry too
Acı sende hasret sende	There is a pain, a longing inside you
Dalıp dalıp derinlere düşünmen niye	Why are you thinking, so deep in thought?
Bu küskünlük bu dargınlık sıkıntın niye	Why this resentment, this anger and worry?
Dalıp dalıp derinlere düşünmen niye	Why these tears, flowing from your eyes like rain?
Bu suskunluk bu yorgunluk sıkıntın niye	Why this silence, this weariness and worry?
Çok uzakta öyle biryer var	There is such a place, very far away
O yerlerde mutluluklar	In those places there is happiness
Paylaşılmaya hazır bir hayat var	There is a life ready to be split,
Bölüşülmeye hazır bir hayat var	There is a life ready to be shared.

Though the song acknowledges pain, its lyrics offer far more hope than in most *arabesk* songs. Presumably addressing an infant, Kaya sings that, though there may be cause for tears now, there is hope—a place where a life waits to be divided and shared. The words used to describe the emotional state of the singer are of particular importance to the poetry of the lyrics, appearing in alternating sets (underlined in the above transcription): quietness or taciturnity (*suskunluk*), stillness (*durgunluk*), resentment (*kırgınlık* and *küskünlük*), anger (*dargınlık*), and tiredness (*yorgunluk*). These responses to grievance are reminiscent of *arabesk*'s representations of paralysis

and inability to act in songs such as "Kara Zindan" and Orhan Gencebay's "Sevecekmiş Gibisin." In this song, Kaya rails against such passivity and calls his listeners to action, a stance he maintained throughout his career; from this first song onward, Kaya exhorted his listeners to take action in a way that implicitly criticized the *arabesk* mindset. The goal of this action—a world ready to be shared—calls to mind the left-wing activism and protest that was a constant feature of life in late Cold War Turkey.

This song, like many others by Ahmet Kaya, draws on influences from Anatolian rock, including guitar-heavy instrumentation, while also including a *bağlama* melody that would be at home in *arabesk*. The song opens with a synthesizer and bass introduction that leads to two repetitions of the main verse melody on *bağlama* and keyboard. Kaya's voice is soft and, relative to Tatlıses's, relaxed and seemingly intimate, presenting a different connection between emotion and music than that found in "Kara Zindan." Instead of crying, as Tatlises seemed to do in his music, Kaya seems to be soothing someone else's crying. In addition, his pronunciation of Turkish words is closer to a standard Istanbul accent compared to typical *arabesk* singing styles. Kaya's singing is characterized by clear pronunciation of vowels and lacks the velars [x] and [ɣ] that are more typical of accents used in film to index Kurdish and eastern Turkish personas.

Kaya's career reached new heights in the 1990s, during the most violent period of the Turkish-PKK conflict. His album *Şarkılarım Dağlara* ("My Songs to the Mountains"), released in 1995, was highly successful and revealed Kaya's alignment with the PKK's cause. The song "Özgür Çağrı" ("Freedom Call") shows Kaya boldly approaching outright support for the revolutionaries:

Sana yalan söyleyemem	I can't lie to you
Darılırsın yavrucağım	You'll be angry with me, my dear
Ağabeyin bir gün dağdan döner	Your brother will return one day from the mountains
Giden gelmez, geri dönmez	The one who goes doesn't come back
Bilmiyormusun yavrucağım	Don't you know, my dear
Sen üzülme, sıra bende	Don't be sad, it's my turn
Gideceğim yavrucağım	I'll go, my dear
spoken:	
Elverir ki coşku	It's enough that excited,
Haylaz çocuklarını boğazlamasın	mischievous children not be slaughtered
Avunmak elbette kolaydır	It's easy to be preoccupied
Şehri yiğit bir türkü gibi dolaşmak	to wander the city like a valiant song
Dağlara destanlar, düşünmek kolaydır	It's easy to think legends to the mountains
Hapislere bir sevinç çığlığı gibi düşmek	to fall like a joyous shriek on the prison
Kızların diri göğüslerinde	on girls' living breasts
Matbaalarda	at the presses
Ve kongre zabıtlarında dünyayı tazelemek	and to revive the world in congress minutes
Yeryüzüne depremler düşürmek kolaydır	to release earthquakes upon the world
Çünkü binlerce militanın rüzgarlı macerası	Because the windy adventures of thousands of activists
Bir kurşun bile değildir namusun mavzerine	is not even one bullet in the rifle of honor
Gönlün kahpeliğine tutsaksın açıkçası	the release of captives to the heart's treachery
Asıl savaş alanı suskundur arkadaş	the true field of battle is speechlessness, friend
Sahipsizdir	It is masterless
Asıl savaşcılar afyonlu, mütevekkil	The true warriors are drugged, faithful
Öyleyse	If so
Şehrin girdabında çalkalanan zulüm	the churning cruelty in the city's maelstrom
Halkın şanlı isyanına işaret değil	is not a sign of the people's honorable revolt
Bodrum duvarlarına öfkeli yazıları	the enraged writing on the basement walls
Tırnaklarınla kazıyorsan da	That you carve with your fingernails
singing	
Sana yalan söyleyemem	I can't lie to you
Darılırsın yavrucağım	You're angry with me now, my little one
Ağabeyin bir gün dağdan döner	Your brother will return one day from the mountains

Giden gelmez, geri dönmez	The one who goes doesn't come back
Bilmiyormusun yavrucağım	Don't you know, my dear
Sen üzülme, sıra bende	Don't be sad, it's my turn
Gideceğim yavrucağım	I'll go, my dear
spoken	
Bulvara dökülen bildiriler	the notifications put up on the boulevard
Harcanan bunca emek, bunca değer	are so much spent labor, so much value
Fokurdayan metal potası	the roiling melting pot
İşleyen rotatifler	are the processing mills
Cesetleri iğnelemek gibi birşeydir	It's a thing like digging at a corpse
Ve zaman usulca göz kırpıp telaşına	and as time slowly winks at the turmoil
Homurdanarak çekip gitmiştir	and grunting, pulls out and goes
Yani bu	That is, this
Aşağılık bir dramdır artık	inferiority is finally a drama
Çünkü jarjuruna	Because
Boş kovanları dolduran adam	the man who fills the empty cartridges
En azından kendinden utanmalıdır	should at least be embarrassed
Yani yetsin diyorum	That is, it's enough, I say
Şarkılarınızı dağlarıma sürün diyorum	I say, spread your songs to my mountains
Uzatın ellerinizi diyorum	Spread your hands
Uzatın tanışalım	Spread out, let's get to know each other
Helallaşalım...	Let's raise ourselves up

(translated from Turkish by the author)

The song is rich with references to the guerilla warfare taking place in the mountains, and passages that contrast the mountains to the city. The sung segments of the song are from the point of view of an older brother telling a young sibling not to be sad, asking for understanding before joining the guerillas. The spoken segments are a poetic call to action. Throughout the song, Kaya claims that non-violent actions such as political rallies are unlikely to actually accomplish anything; the "breezy adventures of activists is not even one bullet in the rifle of honor." Here, honor is again *namus*, though not honor of a sexual nature. Like *namus* that appears in *Kara Zindan*, however, this is honor that must be defended; *namus* and violence are linked here as well as in familial contexts of chastity.

In 1999, after weathering accusations of supporting the PKK for years, Kaya gave a speech at a major televised music award ceremony. Accepting an award for artist of the year, he announced his plans to sing in Kurdish, something that he had yet to do:

> I thank the Human Rights Foundation, the Saturday Mothers, all the press workers and all the peoples of Turkey for this award. I also have something to proclaim: at this moment, on the album that I have prepared and that I will release in the coming days, I will sing a song in Kurdish and I will shoot a video for this song. I know that there are some television people among us who will volunteer to distribute this clip. If they don't, I don't know how they will make account with the people of Turkey."
>
> (translated from Turkish by the author)[36]

Throughout the 1990s, language use was a flashpoint for Turkish nationalists, with many examples of severe responses to public use of Kurdish. For Kaya, announcing plans to sing in Kurdish meant the end of his career. This further underscores the prominence of anti-Kurdish language sentiment in Turkish society, considering that the overt calls to arms in Kaya's music were not met with the same backlash. The responses from the public were so severe that he spent the remainder of his life—about one year—in Europe rather than face criminal charges and assassination attempts in Turkey. He died in Paris, France on the 16th of November, 2000 and is buried in Père Lachaise Cemetery.

Ahmet Kaya's music sits within a broader functional category of protest music associated with the left in Turkey. In the kaleidoscope of these left-wing political

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[36] At the time of writing, many video recordings of Kaya's speech could be found on YouTube, including at the following address: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C6lv2IIIZWU> (accessed 10/22/15). The original Turkish text is as follows:

> "Ben bu ödül için İnsan Hakları Derneği'ne, Cumartesi Anneleri'ne, tüm basın emekçileri ve tüm Türkiye halkına teşekkür ediyorum. Bir de bir açıklamam var: Şu anda hazırladığım ve önümüzdeki günlerde yayımlayacağım albümde bir Kürtçe şarkı söyleyeceğim ve bu şarkıya bir klip çekeceğim. Aramızda bu klibi yayınlayacak yürekli televizyoncular olduğunu biliyorum, yayınlamazlarsa Türkiye halkıyla nasıl hesaplaşacaklarını bilmiyorum."

movements, there are a vast number of small interests and focal points that might ideologically resemble one another but are strategically diffuse. Left-wing Kurds feel ambivalence about partnering with other leftist groups, feeling that, either by ideology or demographics, their purposes are opposed. There is a conceptual border region between Kurdish activism and other left-wing activism in Turkey. Artist Sevinç Koçak's article "A Few Questions for a Good Man: Why Are You an Enemy of Kurds, Dear Brother?" ("İyi Adama Bir İki Soru: Kürde Neden Düşmansın Canım Kardeşim?") eloquently articulates some of the frustrations that Kurdish activists feel towards other leftist groups. A post on the now-defunct art criticism and social commentary website *Kör Kâtip* (Tur: *Blind Clerk*) "A Few Questions for a Good Man" circulated among my Kurdish activist acquaintances in the fall of 2014. The post contrasted the fervor and activism of "good" Turks during the Gezi Protests with their apathy and even hostility towards Kurds during the ISIL-Kurdish conflict. Her characterization of these so-called "good" Turks turns bitingly sarcastic:

> How well you defend the sensitivities that worked to lynch Ahmet Kaya, whose songs never left your lips. You swoon over Che Guevara. You share his words by the baleful. So why do you never wonder what business Che, an Argentinian guerilla, had in the mountains of Bolivia?
> . . .
> Actually, you have no problem with Kurds. After all; you have Kurdish neighbors, your aunt's in-laws' so-and-so is a Kurd, if you discriminated, you wouldn't have taken a Kurdish wife, you have dear Kurdish friends—if only all Kurds were like them—even a Kurdish president… You poor thing. You, who hate Kurds, love Turkified Kurds. You don't suppose that's understood.[37]

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37 Şarkılarını dilinden düşürmediğin Ahmet Kaya'yı linç etmeye çalışan hassasiyetleri ne de güzel savunuyorsun. Che Guevara'ya bayılıyosun. Balya balya sözlerini paylaşıyorsun. Peki Arjantinli Che'nin Kübalı bir gerilla olarak Bolivya dağlarında ne işi vardı diye neden hiç düşünmüyorsun?
. . .
Aslında senin Kürtlerle bir problemin yok. Ne de olsa; senin Kürt komşuların da oldu, halanın kaynının baldızıgil de Kürt, ayrım yapsanız Kürt gelin almazdınız, sevdiğin Kürt arkadaşların var keşke bütün Kürtler onlar gibi olsa, hatta bu ülkede Kürt cumhurbaşkanı bile…
Ne kadar zavallısın. Kürtlerden nefret eden sen, Türkleşmiş Kürt seviyorsun. Anlaşılmıyor sanıyorsun.

This blistering challenge is delivered to leftist Turks who fail to support Kurds. Despite having similar political ideologies and respecting the same figures (Ahmet Kaya and Che Guevara), Koçak alludes to an ethnically-based rift in the left-wing community.

This is reminiscent yet distinct from another theorized rift in Turkish society between so-called "White Turks"—urban secularists—and "Black Turks"—pious ruralites. This color metaphor, first appearing in journalist Ufuk Güldemir's 1992 book *Texas-Malatya*, has since become a popular way to understand Turkey, with a 2012 *New York Times* article explaining the differences.[38] Like Koçak, Ciwan referred to the Gezi protesters disparagingly, though he called them "white Turks" while doing so. He would never call himself a "black Turk," however; leftist Kurds constitute a category oppositional to both.

Ahmet Kaya, as the singer most often and clearly associated with the label özgün, can be situated at the Kurdish pole of the özgün category. Other özgün musicians are associated with left-wing politics in Turkey more generally. Grup Yorum (Tur: Group Interpretation; i.e. the Interpretation Group) rivals Ahmet Kaya in prominence and importance in leftist political music in Turkey, and is often though not universally described as özgün. The reasons for this range from perceived identity to differences in sonic aesthetics. Unlike Kaya, the members of Grup Yorum are not Kurdish, though their music is often covered by Kurdish musicians and played at rallies that support Kurdish causes. Their music is more similar to Anadolu rock figures such as Cem Karaca (himself occasionally labelled özgün).

[38] Giridharadas, Anand. "In Turkey, Forging a New Identity." *The New York Times* 11/30/12, accessed 9/29/15.

Grup Yorum's name refers to the band's propensity for covering ("interpreting") songs from other musicians, particularly in the Turkish Folk Music (*Türk Halk Müziği*) and so-called "protest music" repertoires. The label "protest music, which is commonly used, is less useful than the more specific genre labels, focusing on a common context and function under which music made by musicians of different backgrounds may be lumped. Nevertheless, Kurdish musicians often speak of "protest music" as a concrete category, particularly when discussing songs of international origin that are commonly played at protests. "Bella Ciao" (Italian: Goodbye Beautiful) is one such song. Attributed to Communist partisans during the Italian civil war (1943-1945), it is used as an anti-Fascist anthem in many countries and informs some of the aesthetics of "protest music" in Turkey.

Turkish and Kurdish-language versions of the song are present in Turkey; more rarely, the "original" Italian lyrics are sung. The Turkish lyrics below are those sung by Grup Yorum on their 1987 album *Haziranda Ölmek Zor/Berivan* (It's Difficult to Die in June/Berivan[39]).

İşte bir sabah uyandığımda
Çav Bella Çav Bella
Çav Bella Çav, çav, çav
Elleri bağlanmış bulduğum yurdumun
Her yanı işgal altında

Behold one morning when I woke up
Ciao bella, Ciao bella
Ciao bella ciao ciao ciao
I found my homeland, its hands tied
Under occupation on every side.

Sen ey partizan beni de götür
Çav bella çav bella çav çav çav
Beni de götür dağlarınıza
Dayanamam tutsaklığa

Oh you partisan, take me too
Ciao Bella…
Take me with you to your mountains
I can't stand this captivity

Eger ölürsem ben partizanca
Çav bella çav bella çav bella çav çav çav
Sen gömmelisin ellerinle beni

If I should die as a partisan
Ciao Bella…
You should bury me with your hands,

[39] *Berivan* is a Kurdish women's name.

Ellerinle toprağıma	With your hands in my earth
Güneş doğacak açacak çiçek Çav bella çav bella çav bella çav çav çav Gelip geçenler diyecek merhaba Merhaba ey güzel çiçek	The sun will rise, flowers will bloom *Ciao Bella…* Passersby will say Hello, Hello, oh Beautiful flower

The left-wing protesters who sing "Çav Bella" (as "Bella Ciao" is known and pronounced in Turkish) constitute a far broader public sphere than those involved in specifically Kurdish causes. The protesters who camped in Taksim Square during the Gezi Park Protests of 2013, for example, exemplified this public for many Kurds. Several of my consultants, mainly young men and teenaged boys, had actively participated in the protests and described feeling frustrated with their fellow protesters. Kurdish protest movements, and the music associated with these movements, are often in these uneasy alliances with broader protest movements and musics in Turkey; however, the most extreme form of protest music, *gerilla* music, constitutes a separate category due to its divisive political message.

3.5 *Gerilla* music

Gerilla music is a term for contemporary Kurdish music made in support of the PKK and allied organizations such as the People's Protection Units (YPG) in northern Syria. These groups fight against the Turkish state and organizations such as ISIL in the mountainous rural regions of Kurdistan; because of their tactics, their supporters call them guerillas[40] (Tur: *gerilla*) and many governments call them terrorists. The

[40] A note on terminology: I will refer to the genre of music, which may or may not be made by active combatants, as *gerilla* music, and I will reserve the term guerrilla to refer to the method of warfare and those who participate in it.

musicians who play *gerilla* music are often PKK fighters, and some of them have died fighting against the Turkish government. Because *gerilla* music is officially banned in Turkey for supporting terrorism, PKK-supporting Kurds in Turkey tune in to *gerilla* music videos on Kurdish-language satellite television stations broadcasted from centers of the Kurdish diaspora in Northern and Western Europe. These stations, such as Stêrk TV (Denmark) and Med Muzîk (UK) were extremely important for the distribution of *gerilla* music in the 2000s; today, however, Kurds in Turkey can easily access *gerilla* music online as well.

Like practitioners of *özgün* and other genres of protest music in Turkey, *gerilla* musicians draw on a pool of common instruments, forms, and melodic contours that are shared by other genres. As such, the sound of *gerilla* music is not much different from that of other genres. What distinguishes *gerilla* music is the ways in which musicians combine instruments, lyrics, and visuals to reference and support radical leftist ideology. As Turkish-language comments to YouTube videos make clear, *gerilla* music videos are shocking to many Turks, with a focus on weaponry and guerilla training that seems to celebrate violence. However, no Kurdish activist with whom I discussed *gerilla* music expressed any shock or unease with such imagery. To understand how *gerilla* music fits into the larger picture of Kurdish music in Turkey, common references in *gerilla* music must be contextualized within ideologies of the Kurdish left.

Koma Awazê Çiya (Kur: Group Voice of the Mountain) is a well-known *gerilla* group that has been active since the mid 2000s. Their songs are often featured in pro-PKK concerts and rallies, either through recordings or in performances by other like-minded musicians. The group is headed by two vocalists, one man and one woman. Other musicians rotate on the group's recordings, playing instruments such as the

zurna, *baglama*, and *davul*. Because of the group's explicit support of the PKK, the precise number and identities of the members are not public knowledge.

In 2013-14 during my fieldwork, Koma Awazê Çiya's song "Şoreşa Waşokanî" (Kr: Washukanni Revolution) was especially popular in the Kurdish activist community. The song is an anthem of support for the YPG in Rojava (Syrian Kurdistan) that links their struggle to Washukanni, the capital of the Mitanni, a pre-Assyrian state in today's Syria. In 2013, as the ISIL-YPG conflict continued to escalate, Kurdish protest organizers in Turkey often played recordings of the energetic tune at rallies to support the Kurds in Rojava. A television in the lounge of the Mesopotamia Cultural Center, where activists often congregated, was often tuned to Stêrk TV. "Şoreşa Waşokanî" was a regular feature on this and other Kurdish television stations, forming a sonic backdrop to many of my informal conversations. Political rallies and pro-PKK television are the most common contexts for *gerilla* music, but street performers occasionally play these songs as well. In October 2013, I passed by a young child, most likely a Syrian Kurdish refugee, singing the song on the street in Taksim, a bag opened in front of him to collect coins. His performance of the song underscored the links between the activist community in Istanbul and the Kurdish populations on whose behalf they act.

This song is also popular on pro-PKK music television, where it is played with a video that displays a typical *gerilla* blend of happiness, grandiosity, *govend* dance, mountain scenery, and rifles. A post on Ekşi Sözlük, a Turkish Wikipedia-cum-Urban Dictionary, by user hakikifare describes Koma Awazê Çiya's videos in the following way: "They wander the mountains with long-barreled rifles in their hands, they dance folk dances, they sing songs. They romanticize guns and violence and make them seem so

beautiful that it's like the things in their hands are for love, not for killing."[41] This description suits parts of the music video for "Şoreşa Waşokanî," which depicts dancers in a green mountain valley, wearing the green *şalvar* and colorful dresses that are commonly understood as the Kurdish national costume. Never far from the dancers' hands are rifles which are never fired. Interspersed with these scenes are images of marching guerillas and shots of the Rojava landscape. Short video clips of combat training from YPG camps in Syria and Iraq, including the loud and sudden sounds of gunfire, intercut these peaceful scenes.

The blend of sonic techniques and imagery employed by Koma Awazê Çiya and other *gerilla* groups mix signs of "tradition" with signs of "modernity," placing the PKK struggle on an optimistic timeline of Kurdish history from which embarrassing features are excised. In this video, "tradition" is suggested by the instrumentation and setting. The song begins with an instrumental introduction played on the *davul* and *zurna*, the instruments most commonly associated with *govend* dance. The *bağlama*, which is indexical of Kurdish and Turkish folk music (*halk müziği*), accompanies the vocal segments. "Modernity" (that is, social relationships that result from ideologically-driven rifts from "tradition") is suggested primarily in the lyrics and on-display egalitarianism. Though the lyrics describe the YPG in terms of ancient history, the struggle against ISIL is portrayed as the best hope for a new, more equal world. This song, and many others

[41] "ellerinde uzun namlulu silahlarla dağlarda gezerler, halay çekerler, şarkı söylerler. hep mutludurlar. silahı, şiddeti öyle güzel romantikleştirip zararsız hale getirirler ki sanki o ellerindeki öldürmek için değil sevmek içindir." posted to eksisozluk.com by user hakikifare, 5/6/2009.

like it, represent optimistic views of the past and future that are an important part of Kurdish leftist discourse.

The features I am calling "traditional" and "modern" are neither stable nor mutually exclusive; they blend constantly in ways informed by leftist ideology. The YPG fighters are the heirs of the ancient Mitanni and the protectors of the contemporary Kurdish people; the dancers wear "traditional" clothing with machine rifles near at hand. The variety of symbols is partly a response to an ambivalence that Kurdish revolutionaries feel towards these "traditional" and "modern" categories. On one hand, pro-PKK Kurds in general exalt "traditional" symbols of Kurdish culture, such as costume and dance. On the other hand, they combat aspects of "tradition" that promote structural inequalities in Kurdish society.

The writings of PKK founder Abdullah Öcalan, whom many Kurdish activists esteem highly, provide keys to understanding the ways that these symbols are intended to be read; his ideological treatises are where the complex relationship between tradition and modernity in Kurdish socialism is most clearly seen. One particularly important treatise, published under the title *Prison Writings: The Roots of Civilisation* in 2007, was written under extremely difficult circumstances; after Öcalan's capture in 2000, he was imprisoned on İmralı Island in the Sea of Marmara south of Istanbul. The island prison's only inmate for 9 years, Öcalan had been continually surveilled and was allowed to meet with visitors very rarely. Over the course of several of these meetings, he had been giving stacks of hand-written pages to his lawyers; these pages, compiled into a five-part treatise on history and politics, formed part of his appeal to the European Court of Human Rights. Selections from these and earlier writings often appear in

Kurdish newspapers, especially *Demokratik Ulus* (Tur: *Democratic Nation*), and many Kurds have either read Öcalan's writings or have second-hand familiarity with them.

Öcalan's *Prison Writings*—a dense theoretical document with an ambitious political and historical scope—is important here for three reasons. It expands the timeline of the Kurdish conflict back to early historical societies and the Neolithic era; it articulates a socialist Kurdistan-centrism; and it establishes an opposition between egalitarianism and hegemonic hierarchies that frames the Kurdish socialist moral universe and traces this opposition back to the Neolithic period. Though Öcalan claims to be suspicious of socialist metanarratives ("If mythology and religion are an *opiate* for the people, manipulative science [i.e., what he elsewhere calls 'ready-made recipes as analyses of history and society'] is a blade piercing at the heart of society" [30]), his book nevertheless encourages a Kurdish, socialist metanarrative of history.

Öcalan's defense begins by discussing the Neolithic Revolution in Mesopotamia. The fact that he contextualizes his imprisonment within a narrative spanning 10,000 years indicates how important he believes the revolution in Kurdistan to be. Upper Mesopotamia, nearly synonymous with Kurdistan in *Prison Writings*, are where the roots of civilization—the subtitle of his book—originate. He views "civilization," beginning with the advent of agriculture, with extreme ambivalence, however, emphasizing the extreme inequalities that characterize agricultural societies. The ancient history of Mesopotamia, particularly as seen at archeological sites in Kurdistan from the Neolithic period such as Göbekli Tepe, is vitally important to Öcalan's ideology, because only by looking that far back can one find evidence of gender equality and classlessness in the region. Because of the antiquity of civilization in Kurdistan, Öcalan views the Kurds as a "mother" to Europe and the rest of the world:

> There can be no question that this most authoritative and well-established representation of contemporary civilization [meaning the European Court of Human Rights] is informed by European judgements of value. It seems somewhat ironic, though, that the Kurds, who are today seeking solutions to their own problems at the gates of Europe, are actually part of the the source that informed European civilization in the first place. An aged mother seeks justice with her children, whom she raised and nurtured over thousands of years, and who hardly recognize her anymore. (Öcalan 2007, 1)

He elaborates on the destructiveness of civilization further in the next section, "Slave-owning Society and the Development of Civilisation." There, Öcalan credits the Sumerians of southern Mesopotamia with the development of the state institutions that today dominate the Middle East and, due to that region's importance, the entire world: a class society, gender inequality, urbanization, economic and political institutions, empire, and religion. He explains each of these Sumerian innovations as the sedimentation of what he assumes were the Neolithic norms, developed in part in Kurdistan. "Without the cultural devices developed in the piedmonts of the Zagros [mountains in today's Kurdistan] and plains of the Fertile Crescent, and the social structures arising from them, there would have been neither Sumerian class society, nor state and superstructure institutions, nor, indeed, the subsequent line of development in civilization that we today construe (10)." Sumerian practices that set in motion exploitation throughout human history are often framed as deviations from the Neolithic status quo: "The transition from a society organized in kinship units to a political one (12) . . . Women formed a prominent part of the productive force of the Neolithic cultures that preceded and surrounded Sumerian society (15) . . ." etc. Mesopotamia, as the setting of the Neolithic Revolution and of the Sumerian empire, once played a central role in the formation of both hierarchical state societies and in

societies built on equality. These two social structures form the primary opposition that pervades Öcalan's thought.

Elsewhere in the book, Öcalan further expounds on Mesopotamia's importance by emphasizing the role played by the Medes in the formation of the concepts of "East and "West." The foundation of the Zoroastrian, Iranic Median and later Persian Empires signaled the beginning of a shift away from Mesopotamia as the center of civilization, and for Öcalan, the resulting dichotomy between two poles of regional power—Greece and Persia—eventually grew into a broader distinction between "East" and "West." Öcalan does not identify the Medes as Kurds, but such speculative identification is common among Kurds.[42] Even without this link, the implication that Iranic peoples in Upper Mesopotamia had such an important role in world history further elevates the global significance of the Kurds, the region's modern-day Iranic group.

Öcalan maintains an opposition between egalitarianism and hierarchy his history and offers a possible solution to the Kurdish conflict. The conflict between the Turkish state and Kurdish democracy movements is for Öcalan a continuation of the conflict between Sumer and its neighbors. By connecting the conflicts between states and minority groups in the region across history, Öcalan traces the origin of the various problems faced by Kurds in the twentieth century—both external pressures from the Turkish government and internal issues such as honor killings—to the same ancient source, Sumerian civilization.

Koma Awazê Çiya draws musical parallels to each of these three aspects of Öcalan's historical ideology in "Şoreşa Waşokanî." First, "Şoreşa Waşokanî" references

[42] One of my research sites, Mede Cultural Center, takes its name from this connection.

ancient history to consistently expand the scope and stakes of the Kurdish conflict, which fits with Öcalan's positioning of the PKK struggle in a prominent position in human history. Secondly, the YPG is by all accounts a radically egalitarian organization, and the dance shown in the video reflects this egalitarianism. In order to ensure gender equality, the YPG has a special women's branch, the Women's Protection Units (YPJ: *Yekîneyên Parastina Jin*). The dancing guerillas are divided equally between men and women, and both genders are shown in combat as well. Class equality is also implied by role-sharing in the video: no one singer dominates and the camera focuses on each of them equally. Finally, the focus on the YPG as "protectors of the people," and the implied global importance attributed to the group in lines such as "enemy of Turan,"[43] give the Kurdish struggle prominent place in the history of global socialism.

Gerilla music is a fitting final genre to examine in an overview of Kurdish music in Turkey because the links between Kurdish activist ideology and individuals' musical choices are most clearly seen in this genre. The lyrics, melodies, and instruments used by *gerilla* musicians point informed listeners towards older expressions of Kurdish music which themselves stand for a specific set of ideological positions. This relationship between music and political function is often bolstered by dance and visual imagery. *Gerilla* musicians such as Koma Awazê Çiya therefore bring together the disparate signs of Kurdish identity which one sees in music ranging from *dengbêjî* to *arabesk* into configurations that reflect and create political Kurdish identities.

[43] In the Persian national epic, the Shahname, Turan is the antithesis of Iran and represents the enemy. Here and elsewhere, this classical allusion refers to Turks generally who today inhabit the lands described as Turan in the epic.

4 Music Where Activists Relax

Kurdish activists prepare their public performances of resistance and protest in key social settings, places in Istanbul that bind the Kurdish community to the largely Turkish city they call home. In the following three chapters, I will examine the ways that Kurds use the genres described in chapters 2 and 3 in social settings, beginning with these informal social settings before moving on to clearly demarcated concerts in chapter 5 and planned protests and demonstrations in chapter 6. Rallies, protests, and concerts are sites for the intentional performance of the left-wing Kurdish political ideology generated and fostered in cultural centers, tea shops, and bars. The behaviors of Kurdish activists in such social settings are influenced by their political ideologies, the tension of Kurdish life in a Turkish city, and by their desires and needs to be social.

Music and drinks are at the heart of each of these settings. There are links between these substances and the sociality that they mediate—drinks, like music, orient people towards one another socially. These drinks, coffee, tea, beer, raki, and cigarettes, add a material dimension to social and musical analysis. In this chapter, I will analyze important settings, the symbolic implications of drinks and substances that are often the focus in these settings, and some potential tensions and ironies that arise when activism and material consumption meet.

4.1 Settings: Cultural Centers

Activism brews in cultural centers; even when Kurdish activists meet in these spaces to relax and socialize rather than to organize protest activities, they put into practice the political ideology that drives their activism. After its founding in 1991, the Mesopotamia Cultural Center quickly became a model for similar cultural centers

throughout Istanbul and the rest of Turkey. The center has changed location on several occasions, most recently from İstiklal Caddesi to nearby Tarlabaşı; both locations are central and well-connected to Istanbul's expanding public transportation system. The other cultural centers founded on the MKM model, Arzela Cultural Center in Şirinevler and Med Culture-Art Association in Bağcılar, are similarly accessible.

Kurds in Istanbul live in a variety of neighborhoods, but there are some areas of the city particularly known for large Kurdish populations. Some of these, such as the Demirkapı neighborhood of Bağcılar, are former slums on the periphery of the city called *gecekondu* (Tur: built overnight), while others, such as the Tarlabaşı neighborhood of Beyoğlu, have long been home to large numbers of migrants, "gypsies," and other marginalized peoples. The geography of these Kurdish neighborhoods in Istanbul reproduces the center-periphery relationship between the Turkish west and Kurdish east on multiple levels. Kurdistan is peripheral relative to Istanbul's center; districts within Istanbul such as Bağcılar are peripheral relative to Beyoğlu's center; and neighborhoods within Beyoğlu such as Tarlabaşı are peripheral relative to Taksim's center. This fractal arrangement—centers and peripheries at multiple scales—consistently places Kurdish spaces, such as the neighborhoods in which Kurds live and the cultural centers in which they meet, at the margins of Istanbul society, just as modern national borders place Kurdish regions at the margins of the Turkish state.

Cultural centers are part of a broader Kurdish political project to upend this geographic marginalization by putting Kurds at the center. In Turkey, where the very existence of Kurds has been denied and continues to be contentious in political discourse, cultural centers powerfully assert that Kurdish language and music are distinct and worthy of pride and study. While the MKM did not offer language classes in

2014 and 2015, several members worked closely with the Kurdish Institute of Istanbul (Kur: *Enstîtuya Kurdî ya Stenbolê*) in nearby Unkapanı and encouraged others to take Kurdish classes there.

At the Kurdish cultural centers in these communities, it is common for members to spend time drinking tea and talking to one another while waiting for meetings, rehearsals, or music lessons. This social dimension of activities at the MKM was just as important as the more "official" business of planning concerts and other events, and classes in music and dance.[44] The MKM and other cultural centers are reminiscent of Ray Oldenburg's "third place": they are neither home nor work, they provide visitors with a set of social relations, they allow for sitting and chatting while drinking, and people engage in socially levelling, deprecating humor and camaraderie (Oldenburg 2013). For Oldenburg, third spaces—often settings where drinks are sold and consumed—are especially important to counteract the alienation of Euro-American suburbs and vital for the fostering of democracy; Kurdish cultural centers are similarly oases in increasingly expensive Istanbul[45] and are models for ideal social and political relations that diminish the cost of entry and participation to an absolute minimum. When Kurdish activists engage in "third space" behavior at the Mesopotamia Cultural Center, they do so explicitly in ways that generate and reproduce their political ideology.

MKM leaders aim to create a space for the meritocratic egalitarianism typical of Öcalan's "democratic modernity". Egalitarian space must be carved out from the

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[44] The inner workings of planning and advocacy were largely conducted behind closed doors. Many Kurdish activists are wary of surveillance of any form, and considering the divisive nature of the organization, I did not attempt to enter these closed-door meetings.

[45] For a discussion of alienation in Turkish cities in general and Istanbul in particular, see the discussion of *arabesk* in chapter 3.

existing political and social order, dominated by hierarchies associated with Kurdish traditional "feudalism" and by hierarchies associated with urban "capitalist modernity." "Feudalism" manifests chiefly in deference to elders, especially to older men, while "capitalist modernity" is associated with economic struggles in expensive Istanbul and, especially for musicians, the pressure to produce profitable music.

Kurdish activists view "Kurdish" things—behaviors, social structures, and genres of speech or music—with either pride or embarrassment depending on how well they overlap with the aforementioned ideological categories of "feudalism," "capitalist modernity," or "democratic modernity." Activists are aware of the stakes: expressions and daily rituals such as greetings encode larger ideological meaning. At cultural centers, activists "perform" democratic modernity while attempting to protect against remnants of feudalism and inroads of capitalist modernity.

Competing ideas of "Kurdishness" are reflected in the ways that Kurds use specialized Kurdish vocabulary while speaking Turkish. This vocabulary is part of a broader context of global socialist political discourse in which forms of address have been used to reorganize traditional hierarchies. Left-wing activists in Turkey, Turks and Kurds alike, use the Turkish word for friend (*arkadaş*) as one of several glosses for the Russian term *tovarisch* or English *comrade*. In general use, *arkadaş* is a common, stand-alone noun; something like *Mesut arkadaşım* can be translated as "Mesut is my friend." Leftists in Turkey use "friend" as a sort of title, one that typically follows the name of the addressee; for example, *Mesut arkadaş* can be translated as "comrade

Mesut," with socialist or communist implications.[46] The Kurdish word *heval* similarly means friend and, when used after a name, comrade. It is the most common Kurdish word Kurdish activists use in otherwise normatively Turkish speech. Kurdish activists address one another often as heval, often when otherwise speaking Turkish, and refer to one another, as in *Mesut heval*.

The way Kurdish activists use *heval* indexes an aspirational, democratically modern way of being Kurdish. Calling someone *heval* recalls the equal status between the speakers and marks the social space and relationship as Kurdish, not Turkish. When one says heval, it reminds listeners of egalitarian socialist ideals and places the Kurdish language in a position of honor. The first time I used *heval* in this way early on in my fieldwork has stuck with me because it drew stark attention to the feeling of ownership socialist Kurds feel towards that word. I asked Idris, an activist and musician considered by most other activists to be more radical and politically active that themselves, where I could find Mervan, another activist musician. In imitation of my consultants at the MKM, I called him "Mervan *heval*." Idris seemed surprised and laughed at my usage of the term, telling me, "You're talking like us" (*bizim gibi konuşuyorsun*), i.e. the predominantly Kurdish leftist MKM members. Idris's amusement was similar to many other reactions to my participation in Kurdish political gatherings, a two-fold mix of inclusivity within a globally applicable leftist cause and amusement to see an outsider acting "Kurdish."[47]

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[46] Another term, *yoldaş*, can also be translated as "comrade," literally meaning a "road-mate" or fellow traveller. *Yoldaş* is more rarely used outside of socialist circles than the extremely common *arkadaş*.

[47] On several occasions I was informed of European and American volunteers fighting with the YPG or PKK in Iraq and Syria against ISIL; these model examples indicated some ideal outsider participation in Kurdish political activism.

Competing with the egalitarianism of *heval* are terms indexing hierarchical relationships typical of feudalism, which abound in the Turkish used by Kurdish activists. Abdullah Öcalan's nickname *Apo* is one such term that is particularly dense in signification. Terms for kinship relations, in particular, are used to show both respect and ingroup status: *abi* (short for *ağabey*, meaning older brother) and *amca* (meaning paternal uncle) are particularly common. Terms of respect for women, such as *teyze* (meaning maternal aunt) and *abla* (meaning older sister) are also occasionally used. A boy or young man may call an older child or approximate colleague *abi* (as in *Canıtın abi*, which is how some young MKM members referred to me); it is rarer for girls and young women to use *abi* for non-family members. *Amca* is used similarly but indexes greater social distance, which may be due to age or perceived seniority. The Kurdish equivalent of *amca*, *ap*, also means "paternal uncle" and is used to show respect to older men.

Diminutives index another category of relationship. In Turkish society generally, the diminutive *-cik* and its homologues *-cuk*, *-çük*, etc. are often combined with the first person possessive *-m* to form the diminutive suffix *-ciğim* (or *-cuğum*, etc; these suffixes are often elided to *-cım*). This suffix is appended onto names and terms of familial relation, e.g. *Serhatçığım* ("my little/dear Serhat") or *anneciğim* ("my dear mother"). In Kurdish and Kurdish-influenced Turkish, an *-o* ending serves a similar function. For short names, *-o* is appended to the whole name: *Can* becomes *Cano*. For longer names, only the first syllable is used, *Mustafa* becomes *Musto*.

Abdullah Öcalan's nickname *Apo* ("dear uncle"), then, indexes the speaker's relationship to the imagined Kurdish community. Apo can also be understood as the

diminutive of Abdullah, Öcalan's religiously derived first name[48]; consultants gave me both explanations, as have other academic observers (Mango 2005, Jongerden 2007). Calling Öcalan Apo indexes the speaker as being 1) respectful to Öcalan and therefore aligned with the PKK; 2) on familiar terms, as if Öcalan were a personal friend or relation; and 3) Kurdish, insofar as the term itself is layered with conventions of the Kurdish language. Thus, when a young MKM member referred to me as an "Apoist" (apocu) to facilitate my admission to a concert, the term connoted, in addition to political allegiance, a degree of inclusion within the Kurdish cause.

Kurdish forms of address, then, reference two different social models. The first, indexed by *heval*, is one in which all speakers are equal regardless of age and gender. The second, which is more common in older generations, reflects the more conservative, "feudal" social order in which men are accorded more public respect than women and younger people are expected to obey their elders. These are linguistic manifestationsof deeper values that also inform other aspects of Kurdish activists' behavior.

The hopes for democratic modernity contained in a word like *heval* are mirrored in the "rules" and guidelines instituted by the leaders of the MKM. Members of the cultural center are expected to share in certain tasks. By not hiring cleaners or repair professionals, the MKM could model an ideal socialist society while also keeping costs low. Duties included cleaning, cooking, and washing dishes. Food preparation and group consumption in particular are key parts of MKM life. On a typical day in fall 2014, community members would lead and participate in the center's "official" business of meetings, classes, and rehearsals. Meanwhile, certain members were assigned

[48] The first syllable of Abdullah, *Ab*, becomes *Ap* by a devoicing of final consonants typical in Turkish and Turkish-inflected Kurdish. With the Kurdish diminutive *-o*, this produces *Apo*.

watchman (*nöbetçi*) duty. As part of this duty, they were expected to sweep the floors, clean the tables in the main common room, and cook lunch using food purchased with money collected from everyone present. This practice of gathering money, usually a few Turkish Lira from each person, was referred to as *komün* (communal).

Such a division of labor was intended as a break from "traditional," "feudal" labor patterns in which older men did less than women and younger men. However, in actual daily life, members often performed tasks based on age and gender rather than sharing tasks and responsibilities equally. In particular, older men, generally singers with years of experience, would often casually order young men and boys to fetch things or clean. Cooking lunch also fell to the same few young people. While some degree of task specialization was due to the responsibilities of organization and management held by older musicians within the organization, such as arranging music, rehearsing, and holding meetings with community leaders and people in other organizations, some of the young people clearly felt that their duties included too many menial tasks.

4.2 Drinking Establishments

Of all the social spaces outside of cultural centers where Kurds gather, drinking establishments provide the clearest contexts for analyzing the sometimes uneasy encounters between leftist ideology and city life's social and economic demands. As Paul Manning explains in *The Semiotics of Drinks and Drinking*, drinks are closely tied to speaking; both drinking and speaking are semiotically and materially linked to the mouth, and talking over drinks often follows the short-term physiological effects those substances create (whether caffeine's excitement, alcohol's loss of inhibition, or smoking's release of tension). These substances, analyzed in more depth in the following

section, are just as intricately connected to the spaces in which they are consumed as they are to the kinds of social relations they mediate.

There are many businesses in Turkish cities which specialize in the serving of tea, ranging from tiny kitchens with a few stools to large, multi-room venues. While all might be described as "tea houses" (*çay evleri*), the businesses themselves go by a variety of names. The terminology of such names indicates the varied segments of the population they attract; a business called a *kıraathane* (lit. "reading house") will attract a predominantly adult male clientele, while one is more likely to see women and children at a teahouse with the word "family" (*aile*) in the name. Tea is a nearly ubiquitous feature of life in Turkey, whose per capita tea consumption is among the highest in the world. It comes as no surprise, then, that there are many places to drink tea, places which are tied to social types, explicitly in the above examples but often more covertly.

Hazzopulo Passage, home to a small tea garden in the back streets near Galatasaray High School, contrasts with Kaçak Çay's relatively closed environment. In this alley connecting İstiklal Caddesi and Meşrutiyet Caddesi, patrons drink tea, smoke cigarettes, talk, and laugh on low stools around small tables balanced on the cobblestones. Tea is relatively cheap ın Hazzapulo Passage, and the open-air format encourages smoking (*nargile* water pipes are on offer to customers.) Tea is represented by a bowl of sugar cubes individually wrapped on each table, and smoking by ashtrays; these two receptacles are constantly maintained by watchful employees who refill and empty them, respectively, every few minutes.

The Cumartesi Anneleri protesters discussed in chapter 2, for example, regularly meet in the Hazzopulo teahouse after each Saturday's sit-in to drink tea, smoke

cigarettes, and socialize. Hazzapulo Passage connects Tarlabaşı Boulevard and the surrounding heavily Kurdish neighborhoods with İstiklal, one of Istanbul's cosmopolitan centers. The spatial positioning and character of Hazzopulo act as a kind of map of the cafe's social role, located in between the MKM (where tea and socializing cost no money but potential ideological obligations are high) and İstiklal (where tea and socializing are expensive but no one has explicit ideological obligations).

Farther up the hill, deep in the network of streets surrounding İstiklal Caddesi, another predominantly Kurdish teahouse, Kaçak Çay Cafe, occupies the top two floors of a five story building. The political allegiance of the Kurdish owners and staffers strike the eye and ear upon one's entry into the cafe far more strongly than Hazzopulo: posters announcing upcoming protest rallies, concerts, and marches greet visitors as they step off the 5th floor elevator, and the sounds of özgün and gerilla music, often in Kurdish, drift down from the open-air top floor. On that floor, patrons sit at booths and tables, chatting, smoking, and drinking tea; despite official indoor smoking bans, the cafe staff often looks the other way when customers flout the law, and cigarette smoke also fills the lower indoor level. Like Hazzopulo Passage, Kaçak Çay is an important social space on the boundary of Kurdish activism, implicitly ratified by several leading musicians in the MKM community. Rather than spatially mapping this boundary, Kaçak Çay is marked musically as a safe space for activist attitudes directly in the heart of consumption-driven Beyoğlu.

If teahouses are the first step from the "democratic modernity" of the cultural centers toward the "capitalist modernity" of İstiklal's business districts, bars that host performances of Kurdish activist music are the second step. The attitudes of Kurdish activists toward these venues range from avoidance and mistrust to enthusiastic

embrace; this is due in large part to the kind of sociality they foster. Additionally, some Kurdish activists avoid certain bars for economic reasons; beyond the physical attributes of alcohol discussed below, most alcoholic beverages are far more expensive than tea, especially at bars that also host musical performance. For Kurdish activists seeking a place to socialize, bars are too expensive to be an effective "third space." By the same token, however, Kurdish musicians perform at bars which, because of the covers and high drink prices that disqualify them for socializing, are effective venues for live musical performance in a way that teahouses rarely are. For many Kurdish musicians, performing at these venues is both an economic necessity and a betrayal of socialist principles.

On Newroz, 2015, a bar/concert venue near İstiklal Caddesi called The Mekan[49] hosted a large Newroz event, highlighting Kurdish performers and attended by a large number of young people, some of whom wore scarves and bracelets in the Kurdish national colors of red, yellow, and green. The concert, headlined by guitarist and singer Burhan Berken, began at 8 pm and lasted well into the night. Before the opening act dance group GovendIstanbul took the stage in the center of the large hall, patrons stood around tables drinking beer and other beverages purchased from the long bar on one end of the room. In many ways, this concert was like others in The Mekan's schedule of events: dedicated to a music that might be described as alternative (other concerts that month included foreign artists from France and Senegal, as well as a so-called "Gypsy" night), attended by mainly young people and including not a small number of English-

[49] In Turkish, *mekan* can be a somewhat vague term, similar to English "venue." The full name of this bar is "The Mekan."

speaking foreigners. The music and political messaging of this event, however, is an example of Kurdish political ideologies bleeding into other areas of Turkey's margins.

The Mekan occupies upper floors in a building on Atıf Yılmaz Caddesi, one of the larger streets leading down from İstiklal Caddesi to Tarlabaşı Boulevard. As the name suggests, The Mekan is primarily a music venue; all the same, alcohol consumption is central to the functioning of the business. The spatial organization of the larger lower level reveals the importance of drinking as one organizing activity; walking into the venue, the stage is to the left, the sound engineer's booth is to the right while the back of the room is dominated by a long bar stocked with bottles of beer, liquor, and draft taps stretches across the entire back wall. In the center of the room, people buy drinks and congregate in groups around the tables as they listen to the music and talk to each other; the tall tables and stools are well designed to hold drinks and little else.

The space is also organized around music, of course; the stage, about 4 feet tall, easily demands attention, as do the speakers and lights that accompany performances on stage. Immediately in front of the stage is an open area where patrons often dance. Unlike the dancing spaces seen at political concerts and impromptu street dances, this space is ill-suited to large participatory dancing such as *govend* circle dance; rather, as in other dancing-oriented nightclubs and discotheques, the space is suited for packing dancers into small, mostly stationary spaces.

Burhan Berken, the headliner for that Newroz evening, performed covers of özgün songs, including several by Ahmet Kaya, along with several original compositions in similar style, mainly in Kurdish. As he played and sang, he encouraged audience members to dance, and a long, snake-like *govend* line dance emerged despite the awkward shape of the room. Musically and in terms of audience response, the Newroz

concert at The Mekan shared many characteristics with Newroz concerts in outdoor public spaces, but was critically different in key ways typical of concerts in bars. Burhan and his fellow musicians never called the audience to take political action, nor did they celebrate the achievements of guerilla groups. At politically oriented concerts, such speech is the primary activity, alongside music, which coordinates responses and ratifies social relations among participants. At bars such as The Mekan, this role is largely supplanted by alcoholic beverages, the nature of which largely informs the relative lack of overt political action in bars.

4.3 Substances

Drinks[50] constitute an important class of affective signs that are significant due at least in part to their material properties. Paul Manning, while avoiding overly deterministic claims, points out many of these properties relative to food: drinks affect drinkers more quickly than does food; drinks generally satisfy desires, not needs; and, while food is usually consumed only at certain times and in limited amounts, drinking is a more flexible activity (Manning 2012). These material properties alone cannot explain the significance of these substances, however. Caffeine, alcohol, and tobacco have each played different roles in discourses in Turkey. Kurdish activists' views and approaches to these substances—the way these signs "stand to" them—is the product of at least these two sets of characteristics, the material and discursive. In the following sections, I explore three classes of substance and unpack some of these significances.

[50] I use this term over "beverage" to call to mind alcohol and tea, excluding soft drinks and water. Additionally, "drink" also glosses the Turkish word içmek (to internalize) more closely, which is used for the consumption of liquids, soups, and smoke.

4.3.1 Tea

Tea is the most popular non-water beverage in Turkey,[51] but its primacy in Turkey is a 20th century phenomenon; coffee was once Turkey's caffeinated stimulant of choice. Indeed, coffeehouse culture in Europe can be traced to Ottoman expansion in the 17th century (source needed). Tea replaced coffee in Turkey in the 20th century, as coffee imported from Yemen became an expensive import after the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire. Most of the tea in Turkey is grown domestically along the Black Sea coast, particularly near the city of Rize, 55 miles from the Georgian border. Tea became a domestically produced substitute for coffee, and thus is a kind of coffee surrogate. Paul Manning characterizes the role of coffee in European and American cities as an emblem of modern urban life, and describes coffeehouses as the setting of egalitarian talk (Manning 2012). In Turkey, teahouses rather than coffeehouses are the primary setting for egalitarian talk. However, tea lacks the accumulated sediment of Turkish religious and social experience over many centuries and pales in comparison to coffee with regard to its place in ritual and linguistic idioms. The word for the color brown is literally "coffee-colored" in both Turkish and Kurdish (Tur: *kahverengi;* Kur: *qehweyî*); "breakfast" is literally "before coffee" (Tur: *kahvaltı*); and coffee grounds, not tea leaves, are the media for fortune-telling (Tur: *fal*), an elaborate ritual in Turkey. This relative absence of class associations, drink customs, and rituals further marks tea as a more "democratic" drink than coffee, and unlike coffee (banned alongside tobacco and alcohol by Murat IV in the 17th century) has always been permitted. No class or religious group

[51]https://ipa.sanayi.gov.tr/en/content/rize-tea-research-and-application-centre-groundbreaking-ceremony-held/2208

in Turkey, no political shade or ethnic group, forbids or discourages the consumption of tea; unlike beer and cigarettes, tea is enjoyed by atheist socialists and devout Muslims alike.

Turkish expressions metaphorically link drinks to other non-drinkable liquids and suggest symbolic affects; people associate drinks with metaphorical qualities that bleed into the drinker. Strong tea, deep red in color, is "rabbit blood" (Tur: *tavşan kanı*). The clear anise liquor *rakı* becomes opaque, white "lion's milk"—*aslan sütü*—when water is added. Not everyone prefers "rabbit blood" tea, and Turkish tea service allows for a variety of preferences. In Turkey, tea is prepared in a *çaydanlık*, a set of two stacking kettles that hold concentrated tea in one and hot water in the other. When tea is served, hot water is added to some amount of concentrated tea, allowing people to specify their prefered strength. In restaurants, homes, and social environments such as the Mesopotamia Cultural Center, people can ask for their tea to be "light" (Tur: *açık*, referring to the color) or dark and hard (Tur: *sert*): rabbit blood.

Smuggled tea (*kaçak çay*) is of particular importance to leftist Kurds in Istanbul. Though large quantities of tea are produced in Turkey, tea is smuggled into the country, often from South Asia via Iraq, Iran, or Syria. Kurdish activist drinkers prefer Ceylon tea (Tur: *Seylan*) for its strong, dark, and astringent brew and because they can avoid Turkish taxes. Anti-establishment Kurds and Turks buy such smuggled goods as explicit acts of resistance. Smuggled tea acts as an affective sign for Kurdish activist drinkers; there is a poetic link between the illicit, blood-colored, astringent drink and the social space this drink fosters. *Gerilla* videos occasionally depict guerrillas brewing tea over coals in the mountains; there, fighters and drink alike are shown to be strong, officially condemned, and associated with blood.

Tea, particularly “rabbit blood” tea that has been mixed with little water, is a stimulant that can cause heart rate increases, fidgeting, and other physiological effects that resemble emotional agitation. These short term effects of drinking tea are reinforced by the nicotine in cigarettes. Together these effects are linked through language and the body to action, activism, and resistance. Coffee, a similar stimulant, was briefly banned in the Ottoman Empire under the rule of Murad IV who recognized a link between coffeehouses and dissident talk, perhaps a link between this agitating drink and political agitation.

4.3.2 Beer and Rakı

Beer and other alcoholic drinks hold complex significance in Turkey, dating back to the Ottoman Empire. Although alcohol is forbidden according to many versions of Islamic teaching, non-Muslims in the Ottoman Empire, such as Greeks, Armenians, and Assyrians, as well as members of smaller Muslim sects, such as Alevis and Bektaşis, have had longstanding traditions of producing and consuming alcoholic drinks. In Ottoman cities such as Istanbul, *meyhane*s (Tur: “wine houses”) operated by non-Muslims attracted a mixed clientele that included Muslim patrons. Along with wine, produced in Anatolia and Mesopotamia since the Neolithic period, these wine houses served rakı, a distilled anise-flavored liquor produced from grapes similar to other Mediterranean drinks such as sambuca or ouzo. For Muslims, going to the *meyhane* meant crossing into a space that was locally illicit and marginal, yet globally connected to cultural practices of Christian western Europe. In contemporary *meyhane*s and in European-style bars and clubs, drinking, especially of rakı, continues to signal a western Turkish cosmopolitanism.

In the early days of the Republic, alcohol policy became a cornerstone of Turkish nation-building. After flirting with prohibition in the 1920s (as did states in Europe and North America), alcohol was brought under the control of a state-owned monopoly in 1932 (Evered and Evered 2015). Turkish political leaders, including Mustafa Kemal, saw alcohol as a key component in Turkey's westernization. Like headscarf bans, a national alcohol habit—complete with a national drink, rakı—signified a break from Ottoman theocracy and an embrace of perceived European cultural norms. Many secular Turks see Mustafa Kemal as the preeminent model for secularism; his reported habit of drinking vast quantities of rakı daily further binds that drink to secular nationalism. As political historians Evered and Evered have explained, alcoholic beverages began to be associated with different social types in the early Republic. Due in no small part to Mustafa Kemal, rakı was associated with men, while other drinks, especially wine and beer, were for women and youth. By establishing a government monopoly on alcohol sales, the government hoped to make alcohol consumption a "culturally grounded habituation;" drinking alcohol was "an act of not only recreation but also as an expression of nationalism, secularism and/or their abandonment of traditional moral and societal conformity" (Evered and Evered 2016).

Since the Justice and Development Party's rise to power in 2002, numerous restrictions on the sale of alcohol have been put into place along with hefty excise taxes. Many Turkish secular nationalists see these laws as attacks on Mustafa Kemal's vision for the country and a move toward an Islamism reminiscent of neighboring Iran. Alcohol continues to be at the center of the debate about what kind of nation Turkey should be; it is a convenient surrogate for complex arguments about religion and modernity.

The significance of alcohol to Turkish secularists was underscored during the Gezi Park protests of 2013, when the drinking of beer and rakı became a point of difference between the protesters and the government. Many protesters viewed the planned demolition of Gezi Park as one aspect of a broader shift in the Turkish political landscape, along with restrictions on the sale of alcohol, censorship, and privatization. Drinking beer in public became an explicit act of protest.

The consumption of raki and to a lesser extent beer is accompanied by ritual utterances, spoken with irony by the protesters as they toasted the prime minister while flouting his laws. The most common toast in Turkish is *şerefe*, literally "to honor." Though the words for toasting in Turkish and other languages might be different, the act of toasting is viewed as directly correlating to practices in Europe and other "modern" societies. Anthropologist Webb Keane, writing on the language ideologies that support Indonesian as a national language, summarizes one goal of modern, national languages: they "should take a recognizable place in the cosmopolitan plane of other languages understood to be modern" (Keane 2003). Toasting, like drinking itself, establishes Turkey as a cosmopolitan, modern linguistic entity; just as every nation has a national drink, so does every national drink have a national toast (for example, *na zdroviya*, *prost*).

Along with this semiotic transparency, the actual words of the toast do matter. Toasting şerefe, "to honor," is on its face a celebration of a masculine value that reinscribes the links between alcohol, men, and the public sphere. Unlike namus, seref is rarely tied to sexual conduct; like the related Arabic word *sharif*, it connotes strength of character or nobility. Such terminology enables the act of toasting to have a different significance in Turkish than in other languages.

As is often the case, Kurdish perspectives upset convenient dichotomies used to explain Turkish society. Many Kurdish activists are committed to lessening the influence of religion in politics and society, yet also view alcohol negatively. Despite the contradictory nature of these two linkages—one to Europe-facing modernity and the other to Turkish public masculinity—they both factor into the negative attitudes to alcohol prevalent in the Kurdish left.

4.3.3 Cigarettes

Cigarettes, relative to tea and alcohol, represent a more complex affective symbol. Tea can function as an affective symbol of relative equality and resistance to international capitalism, and alcohol can function as an affective symbol of westward-looking public masculinity; the primary qualities of cigarettes—addictiveness, ease of consumption, and long-term bodily harm—allow them to "stick" to a number of social types and ideologies. Cigarettes attach themselves to their smokers, who, once addicted, may either justify or regret their addiction based on ideological grounds. Cigarettes are also even easier to consume than drinks, requiring no particular prior state such as hunger or thirst and, to a certain limit, leaving the smoker with the option to smoke another. Thus cigarettes are the ideal shared consumable, an ideological double-edged sword; sharing cigarettes may be invoked as part of a leftist communalism or used in miniature guest-host rituals to create hierarchies of obligation.

Smoking has a long history in Turkey, once a major region for international tobacco production. So-called "Turkish" tobacco, grown in former Ottoman Europe, continues to be popular throughout the world. Associations between smoking and Turks exist throughout Europe, evidenced in the common expression "to smoke like a Turk."

Such associations seem to be rooted in fact; polls have shown higher per capita cigarette consumption in Turkey than any other country.

Smoking, like drinking tea or alcohol, is a legal activity, yet those who so choose can smoke in a way that shows a lack of respect for the Turkish government. One common way to smoke illegally is to flout Turkey's official ban on smoking inside restaurants and other businesses. At Mezzo, Kaçak Çay, and many other drinking establishments, smoking is permitted in a partially enclosed top floor, while a fully enclosed bottom floor is officially smoke-free; this distinction is often blurred by patrons and workers alike. Alongside this relatively minor act of rule-breaking, smokers may also buy illegally smuggled cigarettes from roadside vendors. Like *kaçak çay*, such purchase avoids excise taxes; sellers in this parallel economy are often Kurds or members of other minority groups.

4.4 Possible Ironies and Contradictions: Boundaries and Policing

Boundary sites are flexible, which makes them sites for possible irony at multiple levels. Several consultants remarked on the ideological disapproval that many MKM organizers felt toward any form of engagement with capitalist businesses. Leftist ideology is at odds with social drinking on several levels. On the first and most basic level, hanging around a bar and spending money to have fun is a bourgeois activity. More complexly, intoxication is viewed with mistrust by many Kurdish leftists. When I asked my consultants why this might be, answers varied depending on the individual's skepticism toward this particular tenet of Kurdish socialism. Ümit, a young activist heavily involved in protests and concerts organized by the MKM, worked at Mezzo and Starbucks in addition to participating in the maintenance of the cultural center's

facilities. His explanation focused on the dangers of alcoholism in the migrant community. Others explained the disapproval in more strictly ideological terms, grouping alcohol alongside *arabesk* music as dangerous psychological traps that blunt revolutionary impulse and produce complacency.

5 Solidarity with Rojava and Şengal: Kurdish activist music onstage

Concerts, rallies, and protest demonstrations are the most identifiable and significant sites for Kurdish political activism. Each year, the musicians and organizers at the Mesopotamia Cultural Center plan one major concert at a large indoor venue, meeting and rehearsing over months. These yearly concerts, which require considerable planning and attract audiences in the thousands, are a major regular event in the cultural center's calendar. Compared to all but the most well-attended protests and demonstrations, the concerts are often the largest gatherings of politically minded Istanbul Kurds in a given year.

The focus of this chapter is concerts, using the case study of the Solidarity Concert for Rojava and Şengal, which took place in Istanbul on September 14, 2014. Sites of activism such as this concert allows us to view the life of musical genres in a social sphere that is particularly significant to Kurds in Istanbul. Additionally, my analysis contributes to recent scholarship on concerts, tradition, and values. In his study of changes in a Balinese festival, David Harnish shows that festival participants make choices that depend on their own understandings of tradition and modernity, though they still view the festival as fostering unity (Harnish 2005). Writing about *kirtan* singing in a Utah Hari Krishna festival, Sara Black Brown demonstrates that participatory singing in concerts fosters a liminal state of being that enables feelings of unity between participants of differing religious backgrounds (Brown 2014). I analyze Kurdish activist concerts as highly participatory rituals in which organizers and audience members model activist behaviors and social relations.

Each year, concert organizers highlight an issue and plan the concert's imagery and fundraising to benefit this cause, which is generally tied to whatever events

currently dominate the news. Most concerts feature the same repertoire and excite similar emotions even as the political arrangement shifts. These shared features reflect an implicit goal of unifying Kurdish activists; the MKM's yearly concerts are of central importance to the existence of a Kurdish activist community in a non-Kurdish city. This is particularly important in Istanbul, where Kurds live in a cosmopolitan environment. If a Kurdish-speaking person in Istanbul were to identify foremost as a Muslim or Turkish citizen, as many do, activists fear that their willingness to self-identify as a Kurd would diminish. Kurdish activists often express the belief that this process, which they term "assimilation" (Tur: *asimilasyon*), is encouraged by malevolent actors, including the Turkish government and their puppet-masters in Washington. In the face of these pressures, the creation and continued existence of a Kurdish activist community in Istanbul, one whose members consistently identify as Kurds and give their money and time in support of Kurdish political causes, is a significant achievement.

The yearly concerts organized by the MKM musicians are rituals that model the social and political order of the Kurdish community, in which ideological leaders—particularly Abdullah Öcalan—are engaged in an ongoing project of awakening Kurds in Turkey from feudalism and docility. Concert performers and speakers rehearse and reinforce calls to demonstrate against and even combat the Turkish state and global capitalism, to value their language and protect the ecological balance of their homeland, and to fight for the rights of women and minorities. Anthropologists and sociologists since the time of Durkheim have pointed out that individuals experience the social whole in rituals, a concern of particular importance to Kurdish activists. In the face of assimilation pressures, the mere assemblage of a small-scale activist Kurdish society year after year (which, I argue, is precisely what these concerts are) ensures the

continued existence of a Kurdish activist public. Without these regular gatherings of activists in relatively private settings, there would be no protests by activists in front of unsympathetic observers.

5.1 Background and Setting

To judge from how MKM members promoted it, their 2014 concert was a direct response to pressing developments of utmost ideological and in some cases existential importance for Kurds: the success of a Kurdish democratic experiment in Syria *mentioned above*, and the threats that experiment faced. During the second of my two periods in the field in 2014, international and domestic news was dominated by growing concern over the rise of ISIL. Kurds in Turkey saw their fellow Kurds in Syria and Iraq as bearing the brunt of ISIL's attacks and putting up the only significant resistance to the group's spread. This dire atmosphere was a marked change from the previous year, when news outlets popular among activists such as the newspaper *Özgür Gündem* focused, often jubilantly, on the establishment of a Kurdish autonomous government in northern Syria. The origins of this government and of ISIL, in part, trace back to the instability of the Syrian civil war. Northeast Syria is home to a predominantly Kurdish population and is considered by many Kurds to be one of the four regions of Kurdistan; its Kurdish name, Rojava, means "west," or more poetically, "sunset." As in northern Iraq, the collapse of Syrian government authority in the region provided Kurds with an opportunity for self-government, in this case over three non-contiguous cantons abutting the border with Turkey. The military force that established this control, the People's Protection Units (Kur: *Yekîneyên Parastina Gel*, or YPG), was lauded as heroic by many Kurds in Turkey who saw them as brave defenders of democratic-socialist values, carving an autonomous region out of the chaos of the Syrian conflict where the

rights of all ethnic and religious minorities are protected from despotism and religious extremism on all sides. Kurdish leftist activists in Istanbul viewed the People's Protection Units as a promising emblem of their hopes for increased Kurdish autonomy. The Kurdish press, joined at times by international journalists, characterized the polity established by the PPU as a beacon of democracy and equality.[52] My Kurdish consultants viewed Rojava as a glimpse of a possible future were the Kurds to be successful in achieving greater autonomy.[53]

Before ISIL dominated the news, MKM members supported the "revolution" in Rojava with great optimism, making the threat posed by ISIL all the more worrying. As ISIL grew in power, their forces (or "gangs"—*çeteler*—as the Kurdish media referred to them in a delegitimizing move) besieged the region of Şengal, a mountain area of Iraq near the border with Syria.[54] The Şengal mountains and the town of Şengal were historically the center of the Yezidi community, an endogamous Kurdish group that holds special significance in some expressions of Kurdish nationalism. Though Yezidis speak Kurmanjî, they differ from their predominantly Sunni Kurdish neighbors by practicing a religion that secular Kurds generally view as a survivor of a pre-Islamic Kurdish religious tradition, along with the Yarsani or Ahl-e Haqq people of Iranian Kurdistan. The origins of these religions and the precise relationship between them is the subject of considerable debate; the Kurdish nationalist position, articulated by

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[52] A later example summarizing these hopes: Enzinna, Wes. "A Dream of Secular Utopia in ISIS' Backyard" *The New York Times* 24 Nov 2015. Accessed 30 Mar 2016.

[53] The importance of Rojava and the YPG at this time is reflected in the ubiquity of the song "Şoreşa Waşo Kanî" (sometimes referred to as the "YPG Marşı", or YPG March) by the gerilla group Koma Awaze Çiya ("Cry of the Mountain"), discussed in chapter 3.

[54] Readers may be more familiar with this location as Sinjar, the Arabic name most commonly used by English-language media. Reflecting my consultants' usage, I will use the Kurdish Şengal in place of Sinjar.

Kurdish scholar Merhdad Izady, identifies the Yezidi, Yarsani, and Alevi religions as branches of a pre-Islamic Kurdish "Cult of Angels" called Yazdânism (Izady 1992), while the *Encyclopedia Iranica* calls this view "spurious" (Allison 2004). By attacking both the YPG and the Yezidis of Şengal, ISIL thus assaulted two extremely potent emblems of the Kurdish leftist worldview: Şengal, the home of the Yezidi ur-Kurds and a symbol of Kurds' ancient connections to their land; and the Rojava revolution, a symbol of Kurds' aspirations for their future where the political ideology of Kurdish leftist thinkers was finally being implemented.

After pushing back the Iraqi Kurdish *pêşmerge* forces defending Şengal, ISIL forces massacred the Yezidi people and committed numerous atrocities in August, 2015. Serhat Kaplan, one of the chief organizers of the concert, emphasized this massacre in explaining the concert's purpose. Details of mass beheadings, rape, and the enslavement and sale of Yezidi women, were widely circulated and discussed in the second half of 2014. In response to these developments, organizers expanded the concert's focus to include raising awareness and funds for victims of the massacre along with their original message of solidarity with Rojava.

These recent events contributed to a sense of urgency in the Kurdish community and press. News of events in Syria and Iraq exerted a profound effect on the mood of musicians and activists associated with the MKM. If this "concert for solidarity," as it was advertised, had been planned only to raise money and awareness for the plight of the Yezidi people, one might expect that the musical repertoire and speeches would play upon Istanbul Kurds' widespread anger, horror, sadness, and other emotional responses to the events in Iraq and Syria. Yet many of the songs and speeches were triumphant and energizing, which suggests that regularly recurring concerts are not merely

reactions to immediate circumstances and geared toward raising funds for a cause, but also serve an ongoing need to nourish the community at large.

The two focuses of the event, Rojava and Şengal, would have been more dear to leftist Kurds than to other segments of the Istanbul population, yet the concert was advertised publicly, as if to attract as broad a public as possible. The very day I arrived in Istanbul in 2014, I encountered a small group of familiar people handing out flyers near Galatasaray High School (fig. 4.1). Flyers were posted throughout Taksim and Tarlabaşı, in businesses run by Kurds and beside other posters on walls along busy streets in commercial Taksim. The eye-catching design, with a peacock feather to symbolize the Yezidi people, seemed to be everywhere, from a large poster-sized version inside the MKM itself to leaflet-sized forms outside cafes and stores throughout the neighborhood. This was not a secret event only for people connected to the MKM network, but was enthusiastically open to relative outsiders. The ubiquity of promotional materials indicates a "wide net" approach, intended by leaders at the MKM to counter assimilation by bringing in "the *halk*" (Tur: people)—as many potential members of the Kurdish activist public as possible.

To accommodate a multitude, the concert took place in the well-known *Bostancı Gösteri Merkezi* (Bostancı Exhibition Center), a large concert venue in Bostancı, a neighborhood on Istanbul's Anatolian side. This venue has hosted several famous Turkish artists, including megastars Tarkan and Sezen Aksu. Inside, a large open atrium with concession stands led to multiple entrances to the concert hall itself. As I arrived with a delegation of music students from the MKM, other Kurdish activists were busy putting important finishing touches on the preparations, setting up several boxes labelled "Aid for Şengal" near the doors inviting voluntary donations. Beyond these

boxes, doors led to the main hall, an auditorium with seating for more than 1,500 people and additional standing room for many more on the floor in front of the stage. As people began to arrive, the logo of the MKM was projected onto a circular screen above the stage; there, a few musicians set up musical instruments and other amplification equipment.



Figure 2: The flyer for the Şengal concert. Across the top, it reads “Art flows for Şengal and Rojava” (Kurdish) and “Solidarity for Şengal and Rojava” (Turkish). Along the right side is a list of the artists who performed in the concert, including the ensemble Şahiya Stranan. Underneath information about time and place on the left side, the three MKM-affiliated cultural centers are listed as ticket sales points. The peacock feather is a reference to the centrality of Tawûsê Melek, the Peacock Angel, in Yezidi belief.

5.2 Indoor concerts and Intimacy

Concerts, as rituals of the Kurdish activist community, are rich with signs that invoke a particular ideological narrative of Kurdish history. Broadly speaking, these signs point eastwards and backwards to an imagined pre-modern Kurdistan, and outwards and forwards to a hoped-for socialist Middle East. Though I saw people of all ages, the majority were young, and the average age appeared to be less than 30. Some concert-goers were wearing so-called national Kurdish clothing, costumes as emblematic of tradition as are halay dancing and dengbêj singing. At least two young men wore pleated trousers, shirt, and jacket tied around the waist with a wide colorful belt. This is a martial costume, worn by guerrilla fighters across Kurdistan who are rarely depicted wearing anything else. Kurdish scholar Maria T. O'Shea has traced this costume to Iraqi Kurdish pêşmerge, where the hardiness of the outfit was well suited to the harshness of guerrilla life. The ubiquity of this outfit is, to O'Shea, a direct result of the constant intermittent warfare in the region (O'Shea 1996). For their part, several women of different ages wore colorful multi-layered dresses with often elaborate jewelry around the forehead and neck. Many others wore headbands and scarves in the Kurdish colors of red, yellow, and green.

While groups and families filled the seats, songs common to other such events played via CD over the auditorium's loudspeakers. One such piece, Koma Awaze Çiya's "Oremar," describes a guerrilla operation surrounding the village of Oremar (Tr: Dağlıca), most likely the October 2007 clashes between the PKK and the Turkish military in the district of Yüksekova, in the far southeast corner of Turkey near the Iraq border.

Oremarê bilind e	Oremar is high,
zozan û gelî gund e	with fields, valleys, and villages.
gerîlla lê bune kom	Guerrillas gathered
çar hawîr dor gowend e	and took up a dance,
hevalan serî hilda	Friends rose in rebellion!
[tilîlî]	*[ululation]*
Chorus:	*Chorus:*
Zinar li ser gowend e	Zinar is at the head of the dance,
bejna zirav lewend e	the thin man is free.
Şîyar li ser gowend e	Şiyar is at the head of the dance,
cewbelek û lewend e	the watchman is free.
şer û ceng û dîlan e	It is war and battle and wedding
rex rexa mertalan e	The group is the party of those who rise up,
şure deste gerîlla	It is the sword in the hand of the guerrilla
li neyaran ferman e	It is the edict of the enemy.
gerîlla xweş tolhilda	The guerrilla has taken beautiful revenge.
[tilîlî]	*[ululation]*
Chorus	*Chorus*
sê roj sê şev berxwedan	A struggle for three days and nights,
çember girtin bernedan	they seized the perimeter and did not let it go.
pergala turanîyan	They devastated
kirne dîlo perîşan	the ranks of the Turanians.[55]
hevalan serî hilda	Friends rose in rebellion
[tilîlî]	*[ululation]*
Chorus	*Chorus*
gowend geş bû li çîyan	The dance shone in the mountains
kurdîstan bû serhîldan	Kurdistan became an uprising
bextê romê hejandin	They attacked the throne of the Rum[56]
li cîhane deng wêdan	They announced their voices to the world
gerîlla xweş tolhilda!	The guerrilla has taken beautiful revenge!
[tilîlî]	*[ululation]*

[55] This refers to the Turks.

[56] Again, here, this is referring to the Turks in a somewhat archaic language.

Chorus *Chorus*

Typical of *gerilla* music, "Oremar" blends sounds and lyrical imagery pointing to the past with aspirations for the future of the revolution. In the introduction, a *zurna* plays a loosely metered melody accompanied by a *davul*.[57] *Zurna* and *davul* were the most common instruments in ensembles that once played music for the *halay* dancing described in chapter 2, but they are now losing ground across Turkey to the electrically amplified *bağlama* (*elektrosaz*) and other wedding band instruments such as the electric keyboard and drum set. The lyrics juxtapose war, battle, and weddings, suggesting a parallel between the Kurdish struggle and triumphal celebration. Following ululation, the song indexes the physical act of dancing, appropriate for both fighting and celebration.

After this introduction, the main body of the song begins. First, an acoustic guitar outlines the chords with a strong, march-like accompaniment on the *davul*. The *baglama* comes in next, playing a riff that further emphasizes the chords. Soon after, the *zurna* player introduces the main melody, repeating the first phrase twice before the vocals begin. The first verse structure establishes the pattern followed in the rest of the song. A leader (first, a male vocalist) sings two lines, which is then repeated by a larger group. Each verse has two of these call-and-response segments. In a live dance setting, a dance leader at the head of a line of dancers often sings out a line which the other

[57] The *zurna*, discussed in Chapter 2, is a short double-reed instrument common throughout Turkey and the Balkans if not beyond. It has a very loud tone and is most suited to outdoor spaces. The *davul* is a large two-headed drum played with a thin stick in the left hand and a larger stick in the right. The *davul-zurna* wedding ensemble is typically played outdoors.

dancers repeat. After two rounds, the lyrics declare, "*Hevalan serî hilda!*" (Friends rose in rebellion!) prompting the women to ululate (Tr: *zılgıt;* Kr. *tilîlî*). This verse is followed by a unison chorus which describes the dance leader as free ("*Zinar li ser gowend e…*"). The song continues in this verse-chorus format, with the male vocalist and another female vocalist alternately leading the call-and-response in the verses. Between the verses, a *kaval* and *zurna* alternate their solos.

As this song played over the loudspeakers, many audience members sang and clapped along while others found seats and chatted with their neighbors. Some women ululated mid-verse, an act of participation and intensification that typically signifies celebration and excitement. It is important to note that this song's lyrics are intensely polarizing in Turkish society, with lyrics extolling guerrillas who are officially branded as terrorists and at whose hands many members of the Turkish military have died. At this well-attended concert in Istanbul, however, audience members strongly identified with the guerrillas and the PKK and celebrated their struggle. Compared to other Kurdish political activist events, concerts—particularly indoor concerts—are intimate in the sense that Kurds can engage in such behavior as celebrating guerilla fighters which would in other more public contexts meet fierce opposition.

Participants in this kind of event typically chant political slogans. On this occasion, during a break in the music played over the loudspeakers, a group of young men began to chant: *Bijî berxwedana Rojava!* (Long live the Rojava resistance!) which, along with similar chants, elicited applause. The man sitting next to me referred to the chanters dismissively as "Marxist youths" (*Marksist gençler*) while clapping along and questioned why these young men needed to shout their views out to a crowd of sympathizers. Outside passersby could be usefully informed of the Kurdish position,

but why did they chant here? His question, though dismissive, raises an important point about who slogan-chanting is for, whether chanters have an intended audience or whether they do it for themselves. Slogan-chanting is so common at these intimate concerts that groups of chanters often interrupt the speaker or greatly extend applause between songs. Although older men and women of all ages often initiate chants, at concerts young men are almost exclusively the ones to initiate the chants. On several occasions, these enthusiastic young participants stepped out on stage during a singer's performance with their faces covered by *puşi* (the checkered scarf called keffiyeh in other contexts) and held flags, posters of Abdullah Öcalan's face, and two fingers making the victory sign. These actions are extensions of the concert slogan chant: symbols of resistance to an oppressive and enemy mainstream deployed in a context where such resistance is lauded. Some people, such as the man who sat beside me that day, do not feel the need for such behavior and even question others' motives in these showy displays of political sentiment. However, the young men most likely to be involved in violent clashes with police and counter-protesters in public, these actions are tantamount to rehearsals. Concerts are safe places to practice before these men commit themselves to more public forms of protest, where the stakes are likely to be much higher.

Throughout Turkey, protest slogans of this type are commonly heard in the Turkish language at public outdoor protests supporting ideologies across the political spectrum. At specifically Kurdish issue-related events, particularly protests aligned with HDP democratic socialism, one also often hears them in Kurdish. In all of the protests I attended, I rarely encountered Kurdish slogans without Turkish slogans also being chanted, particularly in public. This concert, with its paucity of chanting in Turkish, was

a notable exception. Kurdish was dominant during the introductory remarks and the short speeches throughout the concert as well. The balance of languages here reveals the relationship between slogan-chanting and perceived audience. If the purpose of a protest chant is to raise awareness, the most commonly-understood language should be used, with the minority language allowing protesters to express pride in their identity or other sentiments depending on the individual. The dominance of Kurdish at the Şengal concert indicates that many people assumed they were in a primarily Kurdish-speaking space.

While some people responded enthusiastically to "Oremar" and other songs played over the sound system, the pre-concert music was largely ignored by the gathering crowds. In the open area in front of the stage, as colored lights bounced across the floor and a machine filled the area with smoke and a distinct smell, a group of young people, men and women, danced a very common *halay*, which is usually called the *gerilla halay*. As in many of these folk dances, the dancers form a line, usually curved as if the line were part of a larger circle. They link pinkies and hold hands up somewhere near shoulder height. In more basic *halay*s, it is simplest to describe the number of steps forward and back. For this *halay*, the dancers take two large skipping steps toward the right, moving the circle. Four steps carry the dancer back, expanding the circle. The steps begin again with the right foot crossing in front of the left foot. This dance is typically executed forcefully, with the large, commanding steps allowing the dancer to stomp and move energetically. As Gülsüme indicated, such moves are normal for dances with warlike connotations. *Gerilla* music videos and news programs often depict soldiers and guerrillas practicing such dances to prepare for battle. This particular dance seems to have been a more modern invention, though Welat, a dancer at the Med Kültür

Merkezi, told me in a conversation on December 8, 2014 that it is likely a variant of dances from the Diyarbakır region. Dancers who perform this *halay* in public are usually young (the dance is, after all, energetic) and politically supportive of the PKK and other far-left organizations. In Istanbul, the dance is a common way for people to perform their resistance to the government and to assimilation, showing solidarity with the guerrillas in the center of Turkish society. One aspect of this "performance" involves singing. Although songs in the *halay* form are often performed and recorded by professional or dedicated amateur musicians, most of the time the dancers themselves will sing as they execute the steps of the *halay* in a circle. During the concert of September 14th, a particular group of young people sang and danced to music of their own, ignoring three different songs that played on the loudspeakers. More concert-goers began to join, slipping in among the existing dancers or else moving to the end of the chain. By the time the dancers dispersed, the group had grown from 12 to more than 30.

5.3 Ideology Rehearsed

As a ritual of Kurdish political activism, the Şengal concert reinforced core tenets of Kurdish leftist ideology. As the speeches and songs indicate, this reinforcement was often overt, with speakers and singers extolling socialism, ecological balance, and equality for women. The concert began with a typical "greeting" (Turkish: *selam*; Kurdish: *silav*), the formal act of welcoming the crowd to the event. A woman wearing a white traditional dress embroidered with flowers mounted the stage and addressed the crowd in Kurdish. It was Rugeş, a singer from the MKM who often organizes these sorts of events. She recited a poem in Kurdish and then translated it into Turkish. Both the original and the translation provoked applause from the audience:

> I wish I had been in the Sinjar Mountains beside Dixweşe Erdî. I wish I could have been there at Mosul, on the back of a white horse. When the innocents were stricken down, I wish I could have swept in and carried them off to the mountains of Kurdistan. (translated from Turkish by the author)

This poem not only reinforced the concert's purpose of showing support for the refugees and people of Şengal, but also, more broadly, reinforced the connection between symbols of Kurdish identity and the BPD/PKK ideology of democratic socialism. The Kurds in attendance form an intimate community with expectations for how such concert/rituals proceed. Serhat Kaplan told me later,

> We try to put on a concert like this every year… As a cultural center our goal is to move from such projects into the lives of Kurds living outside the Middle East[58]… Other than social media, people find out about our concerts through the BDP's foundations, the municipality foundations and other organizations that are close to us and think like us. (translated from Turkish by the author)

The ideological importance of the Yezidi people to this expression of Kurdish identity was emphasized throughout Rugeş's speech. The pre-Islamic faith of the Yezidi people and their closed, endogamous culture is an affirmation of the ancient ties of the Kurds to the region, and Kurdish activists' defense of their religious rights provides an opportunity to assert themselves as defenders of the rights of all minorities in the Middle East. Such assertions, which came up often as I asked people about the concert later, often cast the political situation in starkly black-and-white terms. This division comes largely from Abdullah Öcalan's concept of democratic modernity, the political ideology advocated as the antithesis of the current hegemonic world order which he calls capitalist modernity. In the words of a prominent PKK leader, Mustafa Karasu,

[58] At times, Kurdish migrants spoke of Istanbul as part of the Middle East, and at other times as part of the "West" (particularly as it is geographically in Europe). The decision seems based on context and the point that the speaker is trying to make. Here, Serhat is emphasizing the Diasporic nature of the Kurdish community and the MKM's role in propagating Kurdish culture in that community.

"Capitalism, with its mentality, economy, sociality and culture is a totality. To reject, surpass and exclude oneself from capitalism as a totality is vital" (Karasu, "The Process of Democratic Solution and the Socialist Struggle in Turkey").

Along with being places to foreground one's Kurdish identity, events such as this concert are also chances to practice disassociation from capitalism. Before the music started, people walked through the seats trying to interest people in getting a copy of various left-wing publications such as *Demokratik Modernite*, which regularly includes articles and excerpts written by Öcalan. (Consultants, as if deflecting an implicit cynical criticism, emphasized that these publications must be sold, not given away, in order to keep them afloat in a capitalist world.) Singing and dancing *halay*, without amplified instruments and without spending extra money, is also seen as a resistance to capitalism as much as it is an expression of Kurdish identity. The slogans and other symbols (flags, banners, and the framing provided by the concert organizers) are other important discursive spaces for the performance of anti-capitalist Kurdishness. In the chant I specifically noted at this event, the "resistance" (*berxwedan*) of Rojava is usually interpreted as the creation of a truly socialist system in the heart of Middle Eastern despotism and US-backed pseudo-democracies.

On the other hand, this performance of anti-capitalist ideology competes with the surrounding capitalist context. As more people came into the concert hall, some people began walking up and down selling wristbands, multi-colored *puşi*s, and other small trinkets. These items themselves (which I have bought) could be thought of as symbols of Kurdish resistance, generally being in the colors of the Kurdish flag (red, yellow, and green). On the other hand, the shouts of the people selling them clashes with the symbols of resistance on more economic lines. At another event in Kadıköy, a World

Peace Day rally on September 1, 2013,[59] I saw similar sales being made. The young Kurdish man I was with, Şiyar, ignored them as they went by. When I asked him about it, he said that it's better not to buy things to have fun. His position might have been extreme, representing the views of a college-aged young person, but based on peoples' reactions to sellers of these items I believe he is far from alone. Another sign of capitalism in this decidedly anti-capitalist context is the sale of water: I noticed that no one came by selling water at the beginning, but as the event progressed and people began to dance and exert themselves, a few people appeared selling 500ml bottles of water for 1 lira, making a decent profit.

After reading the poem, Rugeş went on to ask for a minute of silence for Şengal and Rojava. During the silence, many people held their hands up in the peace sign and stared ahead or looked down. Such moments of silence are normal at concerts that are intended to remember a specific event or to raise awareness of an ongoing tragedy. Often, these remembrances do indeed pass in silence, but on this occasion, as is sometimes the case, someone in the crowd began to sing.

Îro çerxa şoreşê, fireh digerîne	Today the wheel of revolution turns broadly
Li qadên cîhanê, deng dilezîne :||	In the world's squares the sound echoes
||: Destarê proleter, hûr diherîne	The mill of the proletariat grinds flour finely
Ket xar û nû keran qada hildîne :||	Labor-devourers and bosses are being driven out

[59] World Peace Day (Tr: *Dünya Barış Günü*) celebrated on this day is a continuation of the celebration of the Soviet Union's defeat of Nazi Germany. The celebrations I attended focused on resistance to fascism to create a lasting world peace and were attended by many groups from leftist organizations, not only Kurds.

||: Nav dîwarê zîndana, heya serê çîya	From within dungeon walls to the summits of mountains
Hildin ala sor, berxwedan jiyan :||	Raise the red flag, long live the resistance
||: Rê, ronahî rêberê me xwîna şehîdan	The road, the luminous guide is the blood of our martyrs
Rêberê me ye partîya kârkêran :||	It is our guide, the workers' party

This song is called "Çerxa Şoreşê" (Wheel of Revolution), but is usually referred to as the *gerilla marşı* (Guerrilla March or Anthem). As this alternate name suggests, the song is important to the PKK, with one consultant calling it the "PKK national anthem" (*PKK milli marşı*). Like many other Kurdish political songs, this march follows a call and response format; the second half of each line (*fireh digerîne*, *deng dilezîne*, etc.) is repeated by the crowd. Each couplet is also repeated. Melodically, the song begins a fifth above the final note and progresses through several melodic sequences. The pitch collection is that of *uşşak* makam, similar to a melodic minor scale but with the second scale degree slightly lower. In all the concerts and protests I attended, I never heard this song performed without high levels of audience participation. Oftentimes, young men shout the response lines with such enthusiasm that discerning the melody becomes impossible.

This context of performance highlights the song's political and social importance. At this concert and others like it, "Çerxa Şoreşê" was sung during a time dedicated to remembering those who have suffered and been martyred in the name of freedom and resistance. The lone voice singing from the crowd and near-unanimous response is a performance of solidarity with the cause. Additionally, the song's poetic Kurdish text

with communist imagery encapsulates two of the main features of the PKK struggle: Kurdish identity and leftist ideology.

5.4 Mezopotamya Dans and "Celebration of Songs"

When the minute of silence ended and the song was over, people clapped and sat down. Rugeş finished her introductions with a description of the event and introduced the first group, Mezopotamya Dans. As she finished her introduction, she moved backstage and took her place in a small choir of three other women, Ruken, Zelal, and Nurcan, all wearing the same dresses. (These clothes are usually kept at the MKM and are used as concert uniforms. The male equivalent is the Kurdish traditional dress described above). On the other side of the stage, a kaval player, Şiyar, sat down and began to play an unmetered *uzun hava* (long air) as Mezopotamya Dans's performance began.

The performance was, in some ways, atypical of these concerts. As Serhat Kural, one member of Mezopotamya Dans, put it:

> It's not extremely common, but it does happen. We're (Mezopotamya Dans) celebrating our 10th anniversary this year, for example. For 10 years Mezopotamya Dans has been operating professionally. And also we don't usually perform in venues like that. We make our exhibitions on dance and theater stages.

After an atmospheric back-and-forth between the *kaval* and the women's voices, four dancers came on stage and knelt as a recording of *erbane* and other percussion played through the loudspeakers. The dancer on the left began to move back and forth, rocking and moving his hands. The dancer to his right, a woman, gradually picked up the motions of the dance and was soon moving in approximate unison with the dancer

to her left, a sort of heterophony in motion. As the music increased in volume and intensity, the other two dancers also became pulled in to the dance, following in the motions begun by the first dancer but adding slight variations of their own. The dance changed as a whole, as well; when all four dancers were involved, their motions became more energetic and took them closer and closer to standing until, finally, all four were standing and dancing in a line, much like a traditional *halay*. This modern dance did not seem to resonate strongly with the crowd, who talked and moved throughout the performance without paying close attention. In later conversations with musicians who were not involved with this concert but had attended, they confirmed my impressions about the attitude of the audience.

As Serhat Kural himself said, this type of performance might not be particularly common at events like these, but I believe it does illustrate one of the goals of the MKM concerts. When I asked him about the instruments and particularly about what he called an "East-West synthesis" (*Doğu-Batı sentezi*), Serhat Kaplan, the concert organizer, said that one of the goals is "to create an ambience, and beyond that, to present the best performance possible." Some of the MKM musicians I spoke to, Serhat Kural chief among them, wanted to not only maintain the roots of Kurdish music as they saw them (including the traditions discussed in chapters 2 and 3), but also to make the best music possible, to be avant-garde while also being "authentic" to Kurdish sounds and political values.

The flyer displayed above was the same image shown on the ticket, which I held in my hand as the concert began. The artists in the left column are listed in alphabetical order except for the group "Şahiya Stranan," a Kurdish phrase that means "Celebration of Songs." This group was the main feature of the concert. The other artists, with the

exception of Ferhat Tunç, probably the most famous artist at this concert, performed only one song each. Şahiya Stranan, the ensemble made up of MKM musicians, performed sixteen.

Some of the songs	*Original performer*	*English Translation*
Jiyanek Nû	Koma Amed	A New Life
Kulîlka Azadî	Koma Amed	Flower of Freedom
Çena Zalima	Mervan Tan	Under the Oppressor
Can Ape Me	Hozan Comert	Our Dear Uncle
Axa Zerin	Hozan Hogir	Agha Zerin
Âşıkların Sözü Kalır	Baba Zula	Ashiks' Words Remain
Zagros	Koma Rewşen	Zagros
Se Jînên Azad	Delila	Three Free Women
Azadê	Agirê Jiyan	Freedom
Kızıl Günler Açınca	Koma Berxwedan	As Red Days Dawn

On the left side of the stage, where the four women had been standing during the Mezopotamya Dans performance, they were joined by other vocalists to form a choir. This choir of five women and seven men had a microphone and music stand for each person and was angled slightly towards the center of the stage. On the right side of the stage, the instrumentalists sat in three rows. Along the back row, a drummer (Serhat Kaplan) sat behind a drumset, with two guitar players and other percussionists playing the *erbane* and *bendir* sitting to his left. In front of this row, Nurhak, a light-haired young man, doubled on tenor saxophone and Western concert flute. To his right, a man played the bass guitar and to his left, Şervan played the violin. In front were more so-called *renk* (color) instruments: Ruşen playing the baglama, Siyar playing the kaval, as well as a bearded man doubling on *mey* and *zurna*.

Before the first song, Rugeş introduced Şahiya Stranan as a whole: “This stage is the stage of guerrillas, Hogirs and Mizgîns [two famous martyred guerrillas]! This stage is the stage of the wheel of revolution [*çerxa şoreşê*]!” Each of these pronouncements earned applause from the crowd, and as the musicians took their places, Rugeş announced “Şahiya Stranan” from “Navenda Çanda Mezopotamya.” While people clapped, another group of young men began to chant, but their words were lost in the din of the room.

5.5 Jiyanek Nû: Freedom and Socialism

Each song flowed into the next without any introduction or description. While the choir provided vocal accompaniment, most of the songs were led by a soloist who emerged from their position in the choir to sing in the center of the stage. In later interviews, Ruşen confirmed that the songs were chosen by the vocalists in coordination with the MKM central planners. However, the first song, “Jiyanek Nû”, or “A New Life”, was sung by the choir as a whole with no soloist and established the energy that would be maintained throughout the concert. The tempo—a fast march—and energetic performance reinforced that the overall function of the concert was not to remind the audience about the horrific tragedies that the people of Şengal had suffered, but rather to reinfuse the community with revolutionary spirit. As soon as the beat was established and the melody began, the crowd began to clap along and show signs of excitement and energy.

“Jiyanek Nû” was written by members of Koma Amed, one of the first MKM affiliated *gerilla* groups in the 1990s. Like much *gerilla* music of that period, it shows a strong influence from anthems of international socialism, a martial sound that

symbolizes counterculture and resistance. The song begins with an instrumental introduction. Compared to other versions I had heard, particularly the recording that had been posted online, the song was played faster, and Nurhak's tenor saxophone prominently led the melody. The intro melody establishes a minor-key march, with no sign of any *koma*s (the intervals that are sometimes described as half-flats and the like), and outlines a basic i - iv - V - i progression. After the saxophone played this melody once, the women in the choir joined in on open syllables. The song's lyrics are a declaration of the goals of the revolutionary movement. Like "Çerxa Şoreşê" and "Oremar", the lyrics are replete with Marxist-Leninist imagery, including references to a socialist future and commitment to a common struggle.

This song showed few, if any, of the "traditional" musical features examined in Chapter 2. The vocal style of the singers was strongly choral, influenced far more by *şan* style (from French *chant*, referring to singing disciplined according to Western pedagogy) than by the throaty (*gırtlak*) sounds of *dengbêj*. At no point during this performance of "Jiyanek Nû" was there any hint of the characteristic rapid oscillations of vocal register that *dengbêj*s use. This confirms the overall goals of the event: rather than using more traditional singing techniques that might signal crying to the listener and point towards a shared experience of sadness, this revolutionary march was intended to energize the listeners and to create a shared sense of future purpose and renewed commitment. Another way in which the song departs from *dengbêj* features is in the role of the voice within the ensemble. Unlike *dengbêj* music, which is typically unaccompanied and sung solo, this song used rich instrumentation and a twelve-person chorus. Just as the vocal quality of the singers pointed towards the intended ideology of the event, this instrumental structure fit with the principles of the *kom* movement

discussed in Chapter 3. No one person is the focus, and while the instruments and voices play different roles, they contribute in different ways to the same common goal.

In a followup interview, Ruşen, who played *bağlama* in the concert and was instrumental in organizing it, used the word *canlandırmak* (to energize or renew) to describe the committee's goals as they selected the songs. This first choice, in many ways, reflected this desire to create energy, and the audience's response showed the success of those efforts. The song ended with a thundering repetition of the final lines of the last verse and was met with applause and cheers by the crowd. As the musicians prepared for the next song and the applause died down, I heard yet another group, mostly if not all men, chanting "*Bijî Serok Apo*" (Long live Leader Apo!)

5.6 Kulîlka Azadî: Freedom and Ecology

The second, "Kulîlka Azadî" (Flower of Freedom), contrasted strongly with the march-like energy of "Jiyanek Nû" As the soloist, a middle-aged woman named Nurcan, took center stage, the ensemble began to play the introduction. The violin played the opening lines of the melody, with bowing and microphone placement emphasizing a harmonic-rich tone. This tone calls to mind Eliot Bates' description of the aesthetic of shine (*parlak*) valued by Istanbul recording engineers (Bates 2010). The violin part was complemented by parallel thirds on the *kaval*, which also produced heavy vibrato and rich overtones. These two instruments, along with the *mey*, are most often cited as being capable of imitating the sounds of the voice. Interestingly, in this introduction, the musicians employed techniques that point towards the *dengbêj gırtlak*: timbral complexity and crying-like melodic motions.

After the intro, Nurcan sang a few lines of the song before the audience realized what it was and began to clap. Although similar in many ways (the percussion and bass guitar accompaniment pushed the overall style closer to rock in terms of chordal organization), the melody was strikingly different from the previous song. Altogether much slower, with a far less driving percussion accompaniment, "Kulîlka Azadî" was also melodically organized around the Kurdî makam. In cases such as these, in which a *makamsal* melody is accompanied by instruments that are played with the logic of Western chords, the *koma* structure of the makam is generally smoothed out; here, Kurdî became something closer to a Phrygian mode. Another major difference was in overall vocal style. Unlike the *şan* style of the previous song, Nurcan's vocals presented more of the features that are usually called *gırtlak*: at the very least a deep vibrato and at most a controlled series of vocal breaks marked many of her phrase endings and held notes.

Lyrically, "Kulîlka Azadî" exhibits a different tone than the songs above while supporting the same ideological position. Unlike the chorus of "Oremar", which glorifies the dancing guerrilla, or "Çerxa Şoreşê", which overtly glorified symbols of socialist revolution, "Kulîlka Azadî" references the beauty of an individual and the natural world, as the chorus demonstrates:

Tu kulîlka azadî yî	You are the flower of freedom
Strana welatê me yî	You are the song of our nation
Hespê şehî dibezî	You run like a horse's mane
Çiya û zinaran bira	Brother of mountains and rocks

Though not indicated directly in these lyrics, the person being praised in this Koma Amed song is a guerrilla, whose struggle for freedom and connection to the

landscape of Kurdistan is a large part of what makes them beautiful. In particular, the words *strana welatê me* (song of our nation) are particularly resonant, specifically referencing music and the Kurdish nation together in a song that, while still replete with elements taken from Western and broader Turkish musical culture, is still specifically and pointedly Kurdish in sound and language.

The previous songs have shown the overlap that exists in Kurdish political music between the struggle for Kurdish rights and the broader struggle against capitalist hegemony. This song, however, focuses more on freedom for Kurdistan. Like many other *gerilla* songs, it makes extensive reference to physical geography and landscape (mountains and flowers) that distinguish Kurdistan from other parts of Turkey, particularly urban Istanbul. This ecological theme in *gerilla* music is also demonstrated in the names of such groups as Koma Awazê Çiya, translated above as "Cry of the Mountain." This highly influential group has produced a number of videos showing a mixed group of men and women (the musicians) carrying rifles and musical instruments through rural mountain settings, setting up camp, and singing and dancing. These videos, such as the video for the song "Oremar" discussed above, emphasize the happiness that comes from being in nature as a key part of the guerrilla experience, and rarely if ever show gunfire or other signs of violence.

5.7 Sê Jinên Azad: Freedom and Women

Another important dimension of the different overlapping struggles represented at a concert such as this can be seen in the song "Sê Jinên Azad", "Three Free Women." Originally written by Delila, another well-known *gerilla* musician, "Sê Jinên Azad" was

performed later in the Şengal concert by Nurcan, who I later saw perform this song several more times at similar community center concerts.

We wekî soza xwe kirî bû yek	As if you had promised one another
Heval Zeynep di çû li dû te hat Meryem	Comrade Zeynep left and Meryem came
We wekî soza xwe kirî bû yek	As if you had promised one another
Heval Meryem di çû li dû te hat Gulan	Comrade Meryem left and Gulan came
Demsal payîz bu dem hin zû bû	Autumn has come too early
Nekin jinen azad hun kûda diçin	Three free women, don't do this, where are you going?
Hûn li benda buharê bûn	You were waiting for spring
ha buhar hat, hûn kûda diçin	Look, spring is coming, where are you going?
Dilê we yi germ ruyê we ken bû	Your faces smiling, your warm hearts,
Nekin jinên azad hûn kûda diçin	don't do this, free women, where are you
Dilê axê sare nekin kûda diçin	going?
Hûn tenînin govend ma fireh	Without you the *halay* is empty
Ew govenda qede ey heval Zeynep	This dance doesn't end, eh comrade Zeynep
Ew govenda qede ey heval Meyrem	This dance doesn't end, eh comrade Meryem
Axîna dilê we bi rabe qede	May the pain in your hearts be at an end
Îxanet li binike hûn bizanibin	Know that treachery is in your past
Hun li benda buharê bûn	You were waiting for spring
Ha buhar hat, hûn kûda diçin	Look, spring is coming, where are you going?
Dilê wê yî germ rûyê we ken bû	Your faces smiling, your warm hearts,
Nekin jinên azad hûn kûda diçin	don't do this, free women, where are you
Dilê axê sare nekin kûda diçin	going?

As is often the case when this song is performed, the audience responded forcefully as soon as they realized what song it was. Lyrically, the song relates the martyrdom of three guerrilla women. This somber theme is reflected in the musical choices of the performers, particularly instrumentation. However, this sadness is not intended to create feelings of despair, but rather to emphasize the nobility of sacrifice made by guerrilla women. At this performance, like others I saw, people (particularly

young women) exhibited powerful emotional reactions to the music and lyrics, often singing along and holding up the victory hand sign.

Compared to the other songs I have examined thus far, "Sê Jinên Azad" was performed in a much softer way. Percussion was used sparingly, not providing the same level of continuous accompaniment as prior songs, and the primary instrumentation, the *kaval* and *mey*, suggested close, intimate voices. Melodically, the song is in a minor or bûselik mode, and as in all the songs discussed in this chapter, features regular repetitions every two lines.

Long before American and European media became fascinated with the image of the Kurdish woman fighter,[60] *gerilla* musicians had been writing songs about Kurdish women in the freedom struggle. Delila (whose code name refers to a kind of mountain flower, reinforcing many of the themes discussed above), herself a guerrilla who was eventually killed, is a particularly important example of the female guerrilla figure, and her song "Sê Jinên Azad" is well-known. This emphasis on the role of women in the freedom struggle is reflected throughout the works of Abdullah Öcalan:

> I have often written about "total divorce", i.e. the ability to divorce from the five thousand years old culture of male domination. The female and male gender identities that we know today are constructs that were formed much later than the biological female and male. Woman has been exploited for thousands of years according to this constructed identity; never acknowledged for her labor. Man has to overcome always seeing woman as wife, sister, or lover – stereotypes forged by tradition and modernity. (Abdullah Öcalan, "Killing the dominant male: Instituting the Third Major Sexual Rupture against the dominant male")

[60] And, reciprocally, there was an interest among Kurds in the Western interest in Kurdish women fighters. During my fieldwork in 2014, I often was asked to translate parts of an Australian *60 Minutes* documentary to Kurdish activists; it was widely shared on Facebook and liked by non-English speaking Kurds. The documentary can be found here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lro62AJ6e7M (accessed 1/6/15)

The image of the Kurdish woman as a fighter, not as a "wife, sister, or lover," isan important reason songs like "Sê Jinên Azad" are so central in the Kurdish freedom movement. In the 90s, my consultants told me, the MKM and *gerilla* groups took Öcalan's logic so far as to say that MKM musicians and revolutionaries should not have romantic partners, but should be devoted to the cause. Those days are clearly over, but their legacy remains. Just as the freedom struggle connects protecting the symbols of Kurdish culture with socialist ideology and ecology, the "resistance" of Kurdish activists in Istanbul such as those who participated in the Şengal concert is also a resistance against the patriachal culture they see around them.

In Turkey, particularly among urban Turks, there is a perception that Kurds are particularly repressive towards women, and that problems such as honor killing are strictly a Kurdish issue. "Sê Jinên Azad" and the female guerrilla figure are musically performed counter-narratives that recast the Turks and the Turkish government as defenders of patriarchy, and the Kurds as the chief advocates of women's rights in a particularly patriarchal region.

5.8 Other Performers

Serhat Kaplan described the other performers who were on the bill as *bize yakın sanatçılar* ("artists who are close to us"). As I observed, this closeness is far more ideological than anything else. With perhaps one or two exceptions, everyone from the MKM who performed in Şahiya Stranan was a native Kurdish speaker, and the Zazakî speakers were far more comfortable in Turkish. Some of the guest artists, such as Metin Kahraman and Ahmet Aslan, are well-known Zazakî-speaking musicians. Some, such as Haluk Tolga İlhan and Yaşar Kurt, are not Kurds, and sang *özgün*-influenced music in

the tradition of Kazim Koyuncu. Linguistically and stylistically, there was little to unite the remaining artists.

One thing that did unite them, however, was the fact that all were known for playing in bars and other concert spaces. MKM musicians, in general, do not play in alcohol-oriented *kapitalist* venues such as the Jolly Joker and the Mekan. Like many other rules at the MKM, this injunction has lessened since the 90s but is still widely observed. The guest artists, each of whom played only one song, show that this ideological gap is not uncrossable; these less ideologically stringent musicians form a network surrounding the MKM as a center of Kurdish music that connects to other parts of the countercultural left in Turkey.

One artist did play more than one song: Ferhat Tunç, who closed the concert with several songs by Ahmet Kaya. These songs got an enthusiastic response from the crowd, even coming at the end of a four hour long concert, an enthusiasm that speaks to the continued relevance of Ahmet Kaya in Kurdish political music today. One Ahmet Kaya song that frequently appears in such settings, "Kadınlar" ("Women"), is particularly interesting here.

Üç etekli ak pusulu türkü bakışlı	Three skirts, white compass, songlike looks
Kadınlar yürüyor dağlara doğru	Women are walking to the mountains
Leylak moru gül kurusu dağlara doğru	The purple of the lilac, the dried roses, to the mountains
Özlemlerle acılarla bir Anadolu	An Anatolia with longings and pains
Sivaslı mı Urfalı mı bilemem gayri	From Sivas, from Urfa, I don't know
Kadınlar kadınlar dağlara doğru	Women, Women, to the mountains
Çalı çırpı sıla gurbet dağlara doğru	Brushwood, weapons, homesickness, to the mountains
Sarı sıcak ak cibinlik dağlara doğru	Yellow hot pale netting, to the mountains

Ordu ordu çekip gider ay çiçekleri	They go as an army, the sunflowers
Bakma Turaç bakma bana bakma el gibi	Don't look, Turac, don't look at me, don't look, be like a hand
Bilemezler avcının kim olduğunu	They can't know who the hunter is
Sezmişler düşmanın kokusunu	They have gotten the enemy's smell
Kadınlar kadınlar dağlara doğru	Women, women, to the mountains
Özlemlerle acılarla bir Anadolu	An Anatolia with longings and pains
Bu sıtmalı gecelere bu beşikleri	To these malarial nights, these cradles,
Bakma Turaç bakma bana bakma el gibi	Don't look, Turac, don't look at me, don't look, like a hand

Ahmet Kaya's style, like many of the artists who have come after him and look up to him as a great innovator and important figure of Kurdish music, is heavily rock influenced. This song in particular is driven by electric guitar and drumset percussion, and structurally owes much to *Anadolu rock*. Like the guest stars at this concert, it might not conform linguistically or stylistically to the music produced by the MKM artists, but it dovetails with the main ideological functions of the concert. First, the song is understood to be describing people joining the guerrillas, and was one of the songs that resulted in Ahmet Kaya's exile from Turkey on grounds that he was a PKK supporter. Like the socialist march "Jiyaneke Nû," it is a song of ideological struggle. Secondly, it emphasizes ecological themes. The mountains, the flowers, even the mosquitos are part of a right and proper return to the natural world. Finally, the song exalts women, particularly women who take up arms and are not seen simply as wives, sisters, or lovers.

5.9 Conclusion

Throughout the concert, the crowd went through similar reactions: dancing *halay*, chanting slogans, holding up the victory sign, chatting and not paying particular

attention. By the time Ferhat Tunç finished his last song, many of them were already out the door into the cool summer night. In post-concert conversations, consultants confirmed many of my overall impressions; like me, they thought that the energy level at the concert was notably high and that the *halk* (people) were engaged. They discussed which of the artists they thought did a good job and disagreed about whether certain performances had been successful, mostly expressed in musical and affective terms.

This concert, a bounded, intimate event in front of a sympathetic audience, is an example of one of many types of musical performance sponsored by the MKM and its related organizations. Like other concerts, it was focused around a particular incident, but the music rarely addressed that incident directly. The more important functions of the concert were to reinscribe Kurdish group identity with other ideological meanings. Through the examples I analyzed here, I have shown three of these ideological subtexts: socialist ideology through "Jiyaneke Nû," ecological/geographical identification through "Kulîlka Azadî", and specific views of women through "Sê Jinên Azad." Additionally, I have pointed to ways that these same ideological themes are shared in Kurdish and Kurdish-supportive contexts outside of the MKM system through "Kadınlar."

6 Protest: Kürt Lafı

6.1 Protest in Turkey and in Kurdish life

Protests are a major activity supported by Kurdish activist organizations such as the MKM, and as such are central to Kurdish musical life in Istanbul. During my fieldwork, my schedule was largely structured around them. On a typical week, I would begin hearing about a planned protest scheduled for a particular time and place during conversations at the MKM. The sheer number of these events meant that attending and recording these protests comprised the bulk of my research experience timewise. In this chapter, I will show the ways that Kurdish political activists use music to protest. Like the concert setting examined in the previous chapter, the musical forms used in protest combine musical elements that are considered distinctively Kurdish with elements in common with broader musical trends. A detailed examination of three of these protests will show how Kurds in Istanbul use music to reconcile individual experiences and causes into a broader context of public political life.

In Chapter 3, I discussed some of the important genres of Kurdish music that are intimately connected with post-1970s political and social disruptions, especially the PKK-Turkish conflict. *Gerilla* music and socialist marches are often used by Kurdish musicians and protesters in public, planned protest contexts. These performances are highly participatory and take the form of marches or sit-ins in heavily populated areas. Various theoretical frames exist to explain what happens in participatory protest environments. Durkheim's concept of "collective effervescence," originally developed to explain religious practices, has been widely used to describe what happens when people gather for other purposes as well. In protests, individuals direct strong emotions toward

specific goals and symbols, which come to stand for and unify the group (Emirbayer 1996). The specific act of walking, too, can be thought of as generating intersubjective relationships. Along with transforming shared space, marching protesters connect with those marching with them as well as those who have marched before them (Bonilla 2011). One goal in examining several contrasting protests with respect to musical performance is to describe the shared intersubjectivities that this participatory musical experience foster. Analyzing these protests allows for an understanding of what being Kurdish in Istanbul today means for participants.

The protests that I examine in this chapter were connected to causes that people in Turkey associate with the Kurdish community, and my analysis will largely contextualize them within Kurdish musical life. However, they must also be understood within the broader context of protest in Turkey. Public protest in Turkish cities, such as Istanbul, Ankara, and Izmir, is a common phenomenon, and protesting publics gather to make their presence felt on behalf of a variety of causes. These protests are often large events that are covered in the international press, such as the anti-Israel protests in the aftermath of the so-called "Mavi Marmara" event[61] in 2010 or the Gezi park protests of 2013. Far more common than these highly visible events are the protests that occur on a near-daily basis in crowded pedestrian areas in Turkish cities. Protests, large and small, are concentrated in specific neighborhoods, such as Taksim Square in Istanbul (see Chapter 1 for a detailed description) and the Kızılay neighborhood of Ankara.

[61] see, for instance, Al Jazeera's coverage of the ship's return to Istanbul, which has resonances with the protests I will be examining—use of the images of martyrs' faces, chants—though from an ideologically opposed political viewpoint. This is an example of protest by a different Turkish public, protesting in the same way.
http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2010/12/201012261473378510 9.html

People gather under myriad banners in these protests, literally and figuratively. Many of the protests I attended and in which I participated were focused on issues of specific interest to the Kurdish community, or were attended by groups from different left-wing organizations, Turks and Kurds alike. However, on any given day in Taksim Square, one might see protests coordinated by a variety of organizations, including Turkish nationalist groups, religious foundations, anarchists, student groups, or advocates for the rights of ethnic and religious minorities. Whether they are highly visible and well-attended or a gathering of only a dozen people, protests are a long-standing and accepted part of the political process in Turkey (Gündoğar 2005).

Despite their vast differences, the signs, chants, and speeches at protests in Turkey generally frame the participants as a community that is marginalized in the conventional political process, at least in terms of the specific issues at hand. Political opportunity theory, described by sociologist David Meyer, provides one possible framework for understanding protest in Turkey. As Meyer puts it, "the key recognition in the political opportunity perspective is that activists' prospects for advancing particular claims, mobilizing supporters, and affecting influence are context-dependent" (Meyer 2004). In Turkey, the various activist movements that converge in public demonstrations choose protest because of the political context, a political structure that creates their grievances and circumscribes their potential actions. For this reason, understanding why Kurds protest in Istanbul today requires an examination of the broader political context.

Because different groups have protested for many reasons throughout the past century in Turkey, the structure of political opportunity has attracted scholarly attention. Tracing changes since the late Ottoman era, political scientist Ersin

Kayacıoğlu notes an oscillation between "liberal and repressive regimes." From 1923 to 1945, the first 22 years of the Republic of Turkey saw a single-party state under the Republican People's Party (CHP) that greatly limited voter choice while simultaneously attempted to generate national solidarity. The post-war period saw contests between two parties, the CHP and the Democrat Party (DP). After a coup in 1960 and the execution of Adnan Menderes, the leader and founder of the DP, a new constitution was written and religious, socialist, Marxist-Leninist, and other formerly excluded political parties began to participate in government.

This sudden move to a liberal constitution during the height of Cold War antagonism created intensely polarized politics in Turkey during the 1970s. Political student organizations were founded, with positions ranging across the political spectrum. Organizations on the right and left experienced vastly different protections and political opportunities, however (Zürcher 2004). Far-right nationalist organizations, such as the Grey Wolves, were shielded from prosecution by sympathetic government officials. Left-wing student organizations were formed as well, though they had no covert supporters in official posts (Marcus 2007). These organizations were responsible for a period of political violence in Turkish history that has important ramifications today, with up to 1500 deaths between 1977 and 1979 alone (Zürcher 2004).

This Cold War context is important to understanding present-day leftist protests in Turkey, including Kurdish protests, for at least two reasons. First, people refer back to the 1970s and the overt polarization of Turkish society on political lines to understand the contemporary political structure in Turkey. According to this common view, the Grey Wolves and other organizations are supported by the "deep state" (*derin devlet*), a

"dark network" within the government and military in Turkey (Demiroz and Kapucu 2012). In the 1970s, many large-scale acts of violence were attributed to Counter-Guerrilla, a Gladio-like organization similar to other "stay-behind" secret NATO armies in Europe intended to mount guerrilla operations in the event of Soviet invasion and to subvert and discredit left-wing activities. The Susurluk scandal, which came to light in 1995, and the Ergenekon network, revealed in 2001, are more recent events that have retrospectively confirmed the existence of conspiratorial factions of fascists, supported by the CIA and the direct enemy of democracy and Kurdish rights in Turkey (Demiroz and Kapucu 2012). Given this ongoing history of covert right-wing influence, protesters associated with left-wing political causes strongly believe that conventional political involvement is, for them, impossible. When left-wing protesters in Turkey rail against fascism, imperialism, and capitalism, and accuse the Turkish government of being controlled by the United States, these statements must be understood in the historical legacy of political violence in the 70s. As I will show, this moral universe of oppressed people standing up to a system controlled by dark conspiracy is performed in many aspects of Kurdish protests.

The other legacy of this period of Turkish history, of paramount importance to Kurdish political activism, was the formation of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) in 1978. The PKK, discussed earlier in chapter 1, has proven to be the longest-lived and most important left-wing organization to arise from that turbulent period. Though the goals of the PKK have changed, particularly after the capture of Öcalan in 1999, Kurds ascribe the Kurdish national awakening and any gains made for Kurdish cultural/linguistic rights to the PKK struggle. One of the results of this history is that today, the protesting public in Istanbul that gathers to demand increased Kurdish rights

always employs Marxist/socialist language and symbols. The link between Marxist-Leninist ideology and Kurdish nationalism that constituted the founding vision of the organization supports Zürcher's claim that the right-left divide overlays older divisions in the region. For many Kurdish activists, wanting increased autonomy for the Kurds goes hand-in-hand with resisting capitalist hegemony. As I will explain in this chapter, these activists, through the slogans and music they chant and sing during their protests, perform a specific version of what it means to be Kurdish.

This is not necessarily the case in the other regions of Kurdistan. The traditional power structures that Kurds in Turkey (particularly urban Kurdish youth) claim is as much an enemy as the Turkish government remain prominent in Iraq and Iran. The Kurdish government of northern Iraq, led by Masoud Barzani, is regularly accused by Turkish Kurds of perpetuating an entrenched feudal political structure and is seen as uncomfortably close to Erdoğan's regime in Turkey. This attitude is reflected in reporting by Kurds in Turkey as well as by outside observers.[62]

Protests in support of Kurdish causes generally attract leftists from other communities in Turkey, but Kurdish activists I spoke to had an uneasy relationship with Turkish leftist organizations. Bager, an electrician in his early 30s, told me in a conversation that the "Turkish left" were nationalists, and that he didn't like them (November 23, 2014). Gülsüme, a psychologist who works closely with rights organizations, told me similar things. She accused one organization she worked with, the Human Rights Foundation (İHD), of showing preference to causes of interest to

[62] See, for example, Karakoçan, Delil, "Barzani Uzaklaşıyor..." *Özgür Gündem*, 22 Nov. 2013, for a Kurdish source, or Natali, Denise, "PKK Challenges Barzani in Iraqi Kurdistan." *Al-Monitor*, 9 May 2013, for an international source.

Turks over more serious crises affecting Kurds. This assessment is particularly striking considering the activitiÇes of the İHD, which I will discuss below.

6.2 Typology of Protest

Two words are used in Turkish for what I have been calling "protest.[63]" *Protesto*, borrowed from Italian in the mid-to-late 19th century, is used for a formal declaration of opposition as well as to a demonstration event. Along with its verb form, *protesto etmek*, it implies a response to a particular grievance or action. A typical sentence using *protesto* takes the following form: *subject* protests *grievance* [direct object] (possibly to *authority* [dative]). These translated headlines from *Özgür Gündem*, an important Turkish-language newspaper that focuses on Kurdish and minority issues, all use *protesto*: "Attack on HDP protested" (26 Feb 2015), "Murder of Özgecan Aslan being protested" (17 Feb 2015), "Protest to Davutoğlu in Dersim" (24 November 2014).

The other term, *eylem*, is more general and can be translated in most contexts as "action." When applied to events, it might best be translated as "demonstration," though perhaps "activity," the action of activists, better expresses the Turkish meaning. First appearing in 1935, *eylem* is a relatively new word, an example of a neologism created by the Turkish Language Foundation to replace Arabic and Persian-derived vocabulary (in this case, the replaced word was *faaliyet*, which remains in use though might be better translated as "operation"). Unlike *protesto*, *eylem* can be translated as many different kinds of action. When it refers to a kind of demonstration, it implies a proactive stance

[63] The following etymological information comes from *Sözlerin Soyağacı*, an etymological dictionary of Turkish (Nişanyan 2009), and from the most recent edition of the Redhouse Turkish-English Dictionary.

rather than a response, with militant implications. The following headlines from *Özgür Gündem* all use the term *eylem*; the different translations demonstrate the varied but related meanings of the word: "Assassination Operation in Şengal" (18 Feb 2015), "Call for Emergency Action for Sick Prisoners" (3 Mar 2015), "Sit-In Demonstration for Kobanê in Front of Parliament" (26 Sep 2014).

This terminology reflects some of the different forms that protests in Istanbul take, though the choice of terms also reflects a political stance. Some protests (*protesto*s) are responses to past or planned actions by governmental authorities, while others (*eylem*s) are calls to action. However, regardless of the immediate context, Kurdish activists who are engaged in the Kurdish freedom movement tend to refer to their actions as *eylem*s. Such usage reflects the militant and proactive narratives of revolution that have long been associated with the cause of Kurdish rights and autonomy. Indeed, this preference for taking action and not merely responding to or passively accepting an unjust status quo is reflected throughout Istanbul Kurdish musical life (see, for example, the discussion of *arabesk* in Chapter 3).

Though the terminology can indicate the precipitating factors that led to a protest or to protesters' understanding of their goals in a larger political narrative, whether an event is called a *protesto* or an *eylem* says little about the kinds of activity that takes place. Other factors have more significant effects on the actions of protesters. The physical space of crowded urban areas, such as pedestrian squares and busy streets, limits the ways that groups can gather and protest. At the same time, such spaces provide protesters with audiences and purpose. If protest does not disrupt, it is ultimately pointless; regardless of whether or not the protest's message is

communicated successfully or the public opinion changes (however that might be defined or measured), protest organizers seek the attention that public areas enable.

Being in public, in front of passersby that might be uninformed, unsympathetic, or hostile differentiates protest from the concerts discussed in previous chapters. Even if similar ideas are expressed in similar ways, through chanting, singing *gerilla* songs, and displaying politically charged imagery, concert-goers can expect to face no disagreement from others nearby in closed environments. Protest-like actions, like those discussed in the preceding chapter, are an important feature of Kurdish activist-organized concerts. By getting up on stage with their faces covered and holding up a large picture of Öcalan at a concert, concert-goers are rehearsing for the real performance: public street protests.

Three forms of street protest are common in Istanbul. *Oturma eylemleri*, or sit-ins, are a common protest format for public squares, such as the area in front of Galatasaray High School and Taksim Square. The Cumartesi Anneleri (Saturday Mothers) protest discussed below is an example of this type of protest. Marches (*yuruyuşlar*), in which activist groups meet at a certain point and walk together to another point, is another prominent form of protest. One such march to draw attention to the siege of Kobanê is discussed below. The last form is intermediate between sitting and marching, in which people assemble, stand, and chant, but do not sit or attempt to block others' movements. Though I have not encountered any term for this form of protest (such events are referred to as *eylem*-s with no other qualifier), it usefully illustrates that these categories are fluid and that one type of protest can easily become another.

6.3 March for Kobanê

The activities of Kurdish MKM activists in 2013 and 2014 were greatly affected by ongoing (March 2015) conflicts in Syria and Iraq, in particular the battles between ISIL and Kurdish defense forces. This was particularly evident to me during the fall of 2014, when the Istanbul Kurdish public followed news in Kobanê, a Kurdish-populated town in Syria close to the border with Turkey, with rapt attention. There, from October 13, 2014 to January 26, 2015, ISIL fighters besieged the city, which was defended by the Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG), the Women's Protection Units (YPJ), and other groups (including US-led coalition airstrikes). The television in the MKM's main sitting room, a new addition between my 2013 and 2014 visits, was often set to news broadcasts in Turkish or Kurdish; these broadcasts always focused at least in part on the latest developments in Kobanê, showing the daily activities of front-line Kurdish soldiers and reporting on the changing battlefield and the casualties of the day. Students and musicians at the MKM talked and argued extensively about the situation in Kobanê, often discussing the most recent allegations about the complicity of the Turkish government in supporting and arming ISIL militants.[64]

Outside the MKM, it was clearest to me that showing support for the people of Kobanê was among the most important causes in the Istanbul Kurdish community. Numerous protests were organized and enacted to show solidarity with the people fighting in Kobanê and to demand answers from the government on their complicity. As the fighting in Kobanê dragged on, reports circulated in Istanbul that ISIL was being

[64] These allegations were reported in the international press at the time, and as of writing are still circulating. For one example of this reporting, see "While Kobane Burns; Turkey and Syria." Economist (US) 11 Oct. 2014: n. pag. Web.

supported by Turkish forces. The allegations ranged from Turkish security turning a blind eye to the flow of fighters through Turkey to join ISIL, to stories of Turkish military vehicles actively transporting fighters and arms across the border.

It was at the height of these allegations and widespread rumors, on October 15, that I attended a protest in Taksim in support of the YPG's fight against ISIL in Kobanê. The protest took the form of a march, a *yürüyüş*, that began in Tünel Square, where protesters gathered and began to form a marching order. Like many protests that are attended by different groups, representatives of different organizations brought banners, flags, and signs, which they passed out to their members and allies. In this way, each group claims a section of public space for its members and visually marks this space with symbols. The colors of the Kurdish flag (red, yellow, and green) are commonly used by Kurdish organizations and by supporters of the YPG. Protest participants, myself included, were handed yellow sheets of paper with a green-bordered red star in the corner. At the center of these small signs was a picture of a man in camouflage and a *pûşî*, visually marking him as a guerrilla fighter. Below this picture was the man's name and the date on which he fell in combat in Kobanê. I asked several people if they knew anything about the man in the picture and learned that the details of his life and death were perhaps less important to many participants than the broader YPG/ISIL conflict in which he had died.

Some protesters formed groups, holding larger signs or flags that marked them as part of specific organizations such as the Revolutionary Anarchist Operation (DAF), or banners that identified them as members of political parties such as the Peoples' Democracy Party (HDP). The arrangement of these groups imposes a structure on the space of marches. This structuring can be more or less rigid; at another demonstration I

attended in January 2014, student groups lined up as if in regimental formations. At the Kobane protest, however, the groups were organized more loosely. They gathered around banners in smaller groups of up to twenty people, or marched in pairs or threes separately from any specific organization.

This march, like many others like it, ended in the open area in front of Galatasaray High School. The total marching distance was not particularly long, just shy of one kilometer, and even at a slow pace, it took only about thirty minutes for most of the marchers to reach the final destination. While marching, protesters shouted slogans and held their hands in the air in the "victory" symbol alongside their signs and banners.

One way to describe this protest is in terms of participatory reactions at multiple scales. At the micro level, protesters initiate or join in different kinds of activities. Some of these, like chanting slogans, observing silences, and displaying hand symbols, are started by one or more people and then picked up by others. Slogans, in particular, are highly dependent on participation. If others do not follow along, the slogan will likely fade away. The more people participate, the more likely it is that the slogan will continue to spread to others. This dynamic mirrors the development of the social movement as a whole, a similarity that is consistent with the protest as a ritual for the protest movement. At a larger level, protests that fail to attract participation are likely to fade away, while increased participation amplifies the message of the movement. Thus, slogans are not only a defining part of the soundscape of this and similar protests, but are a representation of the protest in microcosm. I will discuss the slogans at this and similar events below.

When most of the marchers reached Galatasaray High School, the march stopped and the protesters filled the open space, making it difficult for pedestrians to pass by. A

representative from the Peoples' Democracy Party (HDP) spoke to the crowd, which was for the most part attentive and applauded many of her words. Her speech framed the event as a show of support for the Peoples' Protection Units (YPG) and Women's Protection Units (YPJ) fighting ISIL in Syria, while also accusing the Erdoğan government of complicity with ISIL gangs.[65]

The speech did not last long, and afterwards it seemed as though the scripted portion of the march was over. Such moments are critical for protests, as noted by Snow and Moss (2014). Drawing on several scholarly traditions of understanding spontaneity, they have theorized a number of possible relationships between spontaneous action and hierarchical organization in social movements. This dynamic is significant in protests planned and attended by Kurds such as this one, a planned, organized event with a clear script. This march for Kobanê, for example, was organized by a number of political groups and coordinated by the HDP; the open secret is that these organizations are linked through PKK networks. Just as left-wing protesters in Turkey see their ultimate opponent as the "deep state" and hidden capitalist control structures, the Turkish mainstream media accuses them of being secretly controlled by a villainous shadowy organization. If a protest event is over-scripted, such accusations take on legitimacy. A careful balance must be struck in performance between organization and spontaneity.

In Kurdish protests, two common "spontaneous" acts include slogan chanting and antagonizing the police (rock-throwing, etc). These spontaneous acts are neither strictly planned nor unexpected. Exactly when they occur is not pre-planned, but the

[65] Given this framing, this march could be thought of as a proactive demonstration of support or as a response to a grievance. My consultants called this event and most others an *eylem*, though it might also be described as a *protesto*. The preference for *eylem* over *protesto* is part of a larger trend of preferencing revolutionary action over responsive complacency.

fact that they will occur is anticipated and (especially for slogan-chanting) encouraged. These spontaneous elements serve an important function: they give legitimacy to protest as a reflection of individuals' genuine emotions and preempt claims that they are skillful manipulations. Killian (1983) noted that Civil Rights leaders in Tallahassee emphasized the spontaneous nature of the bus boycott against a white narrative that the boycott was planned and scripted by outside forces: "evidence of spontaneity, of impulsive protest against tired feet as well as against white supremacy, and of lack of organization and planning was welcome as ammunition against such charges [that the boycott and sit-ins were the result of an outside conspiracy] to those researchers who wrote as the conflict was going on (782)." Similarly, I argue that slogan-shouting and other spontaneous action during protest is an important counterbalance to the otherwise scripted nature of the protests. These protests exist in a moral universe of resistance to invisible evil structures on one hand and spontaneous and authentic, i.e. heartfelt action on the other. Spontaneous acts such as slogan chanting and *halay* dancing are strategies that help counter claims that the Kurdish freedom movement is the result of an external conspiracy.

Snow and Moss identify what occurred next as "script dissolution": "the event has ended, and there is no additional script for subsequent action." They hypothesize that "there will be increased probability of spontaneous collective action, particularly in the case of contestation over emotionally charged issues (1131)." In the Kobanê protests, this spontaneous collective action took forms that are typical of Kurdish protest events. Slogan chanting continued, and the slogans turned increasingly charged. This culminated with the chant "Kobanê düşerse İstanbul'u yakarız" (If Kobanê falls, we will burn Istanbul down). A similar protest slogan, "Kobanê düşerse İstanbul da düşer", was

reported by the Turkish press, though this slogan does not fit any typical metrical patterns.[66] As many of the participants began to leave, others began to dance *halay*, one of the circle dances discussed in chapter 2.

6.4 Saturday Mothers

Every week, a group of around 40 people gathers in the square near Galatasaray High School for a sit-in protest (*oturma eylemi*). Though the group consists of men and women of varied ages, the group is often called the Saturday Mothers (*Cumartesi Anneleri*). According to the Human Rights Foundation (*İnsan Hakları Derneği*), the NGO that coordinates these protests, the purpose is to raise awareness about military and police abuses and brutality in Turkey, to reopen the files on missing persons believed to have been secretly executed by the state, and to hold the killers (many of whom are still active in government) accountable. Şekernas, an elderly woman who was one of the original Saturday Mothers and still attends the weekly protests after twenty years, described the purpose of the protests in this way: "Many of us have lost sons and husbands. We know they are dead. All we want is their bones."

A few minutes before noon on Saturdays, the group gathers in front of the Yapı Kredi Yayınları publishers' office and bookstore, across from a cafe and in the shadow of Galatasaray High School. They greet each other like old friends, and indeed many of them have been participating in this protest since the mid 1990s. While the protest is in part a remembrance of deeply sad parts of the participants' lives, they laugh and hug each other as they gather and prepare for the protest. Each week, someone brings a large

[66] "'Kobani Düşerse İstanbul Da Düşer'." Milliyet [Istanbul] 10 Oct. 2014: n. pag. 10 Oct. 2014. Web. 6 Apr. 2015.

bag of laminated signs and distributes them. Each sign has a picture, the face of someone who was arrested and never seen again. Most of these signs depict young men, though several older men, young boys, and a few women are also represented. By contrast, the average age of the protesters is older. Many participants appear to middle-aged or older, including a dedicated group of older women, the "Saturday Mothers" themselves.

After the signs are distributed, a large banner is stretched out on the ground where it can, in theory, be read by passersby. The sign reads "The perpetrators are obvious, where are the missing?" (*Failler belli, kayıplar nerede?*) This message can be difficult to read on some weeks, however. On top of the sign, sometimes obscuring the text, is the laminated picture of one of the missing. Each week, a different person is the focus of the protests; this person's story will be told and often members of their family will speak. A few red carnations are placed on the banner along with the picture, and more are passed out to those holding signs.

At 12:00, the protesters sit or stand in loose rows behind the banner, holding up their signs. At the front of the group, the older women sit on small stools. They wear white headscarves with colorful fringes, a conservative style of dress associated with rural areas and elderly people. Behind them, the rest of the protesters sit and stand facing out towards the street. A large wireless speaker, prone to both ear-splitting feedback and randomly cutting out, amplifies the voices of the speakers. A representative from the İHD briefly introduces the group and the first speaker, often a member of the lost person's family. Two or three people usually speak, the other participants listening somberly. There is rarely slogan-chanting, though occasionally poems will be read with pre-recorded musical accompaniment.

Though the Saturday Mothers protest is not explicitly connected to Kurdish organizations, many of the participants and their dead relatives are Kurds. Their stories often take place in Kurdish cities such as Diyarbakır. My interest in this protest began when my consultants at the MKM told me that the older women there would be able to tell me about lament, discussed in chapter 2 above. However, in the months that I engaged in participant-observation at these events, I never heard lament. Indeed, the Saturday Mothers protest is an illustration of the changes in lamenting contexts. It was a Saturday Mother protestor, Güzelanne, who forcefully explained the limits of lament in the face of tragedy discussed in chapter 2: "When these things happen, you don't cry and lament. You should resist."

Other protesters express similar sentiments. Lament is reserved for tragic, unexpected loss; in my interviews and conversations, three people used car accidents in which young people die as a classic context for lament. The Kurdish political struggle, however, is not seen as an appropriate context for lament by many Kurds. Like *arabesk*, activists see lament as a response that generates or indicates complacency and passive acceptance of tragedy. In an interview on November 22, 2014, Gülsüme, a Kurdish activist who worked for the İHD in Istanbul, told me about the funeral that took place in Suruç (near the border with Syria) for a YPG fighter who had died in Kobanê: "No one was crying. After the ceremony, people began to throw slogans. Some of the young people made a vow to dedicate their lives to the struggle." This attitude is reflected throughout the Kurdish activist and militant community.

6.5 Cevahir Mall

One more example illustrates the intersection of *gerilla* songs and protests, and also reveals how Kurdish activists organize protests. On October 8, 2014, I was told to come to the MKM by 4 for a protest that would be attended by many musicians. When I got to the MKM at about 3:25, it was more full than I have ever seen it. At least twenty people sat in the main sitting room, with others filling the hallways, balcony, and offices. I was greeted by Azad, a young aspiring singer who often socialized at the center during the day. He joked that today the whole community was there (*bütün cemaat burada bugün*); many of the assembled people were musicians I recognized from prior concerts and meetings, representing the MKM's extended network. Azad told me that there would be a protest: he expected that everyone would set out from the MKM together and head to Tünel, a typical protest script that I had come to expect. On this occasion, however, the organizers had a more complex protest in mind. I ran into Rusen and Umit as well, and they seemed in as much of a bustling rush as everyone else I knew. It seemed to me that many things were being done last minute (a suspicion that was confirmed later on, as it turned out), and many of the people who came in I vaguely recognized; there was a lot of friendly greeting and afterwards people sat and chatted with each other in various places. I supposed that this was the occasionally-referenced "MKM musicians" in force: all people ideologically or otherwise linked to the MKM that want to help provide a unified voice for issues important to the Kurdish community and its allies.

At around 4, Rojda walked up to the main sitting room and addressed the crowd. She explained that the plan was to do a sit-in protest at the Cevahir Mall in Mecidiyeköy, an affluent neighborhood north of Taksim. The protesters were to all leave Tepebaşı in small separate groups and enter the mall as if they were all unconnected. Like most

malls in Turkey, Cevahir Mall has metal detectors and security guards who check bags as people enter the mall. In order to avoid suspicion, the protesters would all enter the mall group by group and meet near the front main doors at exactly 5:00 pm. Curious as to the reason for this more complex plan, I asked Serhat, a MKM coordinator. He explained that the decision was to attract attention—to "bring a voice" (*ses getirmek için*), as he put it. Specifically, the goal of the protest was to bring awareness of the YPG fight against ISIL to a place where actively ignoring such concerns and the expansion of capitalism was the normal order of business.

Cevahir certainly fits that bill. It is an enormous mall, extremely clean and modern. American businesses sit side by side with upscale Turkish stores; the food court has a Burger King, a Popeye's, and döner for three times the price as in Taksim. I went by taxi with three MKM musicians: Rişad, Ramazan, and Rugeş. When we got to Cevahir, our bags were scanned and we walked through the metal detectors. After strolling through the mall for twenty minutes, we met Çiya, a respected singer of *gerilla* songs who often leads in concert performances and moved towards the site of the protest.

Most of the others were already there. By 5 o'clock, it was clear that a large group had gathered, drawing attention and partially obstructing others' paths. Signs had been brought to the event in large bags, and they were unfurled and the musicians formed a large semicircle. The signs were handwritten, displaying short slogans in Kurdish (such as "Jin Jiyan Azadî" and "Bijî Berxwedana Kobanê") and longer statements in Turkish.

As the protest started, clapping and protest slogans. A few young men, including Ümit, whose statements on protest I referred to earlier, began several slogans that the participants chanted and clapped along with. Rojda, a prominent musician and leader in

the MKM community, coordinated several of these as well; as discussed above, there was a balance between organized control and spontaneous participation. After five minutes, several musicians brought out e*rbane*s, the frame drums also known as *def*. At first, the musicians playing erbane had difficulty finding the beat of the slogans; a more experienced musician, Ruşen, took one of them and established a beat that the chanting settled into. This loud clapping further drew people's attention and soon there were people watching from all sides and from the multiple levels of the mall—one more reason that the mall was a good choice for maximum exposure.

This continued until Rojda cut it off and tried to address the crowd. The lack of amplification made it difficult to hear; after the protest, the musicians argued about why no one had thought to bring some kind of megaphone. During this discussion, Rugeş said that the onlookers likely misunderstood or dismissed the protest due to this lack of communication; she speculated that they would have just seen the entire event as some "Kürt lafı" (Kurdish babbling) and nothing else.

After the address, everyone sat down and began singing. Accompanied by the *erbane*-s again, the musicians moved smoothly from one song to another with no pause except for a period of clapping and drums. Weysi led the first song, Serhildan Jiyane ("Resistance is life"), a *gerilla* song.

These examples have elements that counteract the narrative of assimilation and resistance. The influence of leftist political music and chants in Turkey more generally is absolutely inescapable at these events. Despite this seeming concession to a broader, non-Kurdish, urban musical norm, protest music is never discussed as a sign of assimilation. Instead, protest music is a music of resistance, and as such, it is seen as a tool to push against various forms of hegemony. Additionally, since the late Ottoman

period, there has been a link between Kurds and protest in Turkish society. Thus, one cannot claim that protest music is external to Kurdish society or is "non-Kurdish," nor is it exclusively a Kurdish cultural domain. Instead, it is not exclusively Kurdish, but is shared by politically active and often marginalized groups in Turkey generally.

6.6 Slogans, broader narratives, and political opportunity

There is a certain pattern to chants that characterizes protests in Turkey, though similar examples can be found globally. The pattern can be described as two 4-beat sections, represented as follows:

|| **X** . **X** . || **X** **X** **X** .

The syllables of the chant fill in this pattern while preserving this structure of accents.. The first "measure" or half of the slogan is characterized by (approximately) evenly spaced utterances, a steady beginning. The second "measure" of the slogan is characterized by more utterances, often twice as fast as the onsets in the first measure. The playing of erbanes at the Cevahir mall protest bears this analysis out. For example, "Jin, Jiyan, Azadi," a common slogan for PKK/HDP supporters, is chanted in that pattern:

|| **jin** . ji-**yan** . || **a**- zad- **î** .

(Ku: "Woman, life, freedom.") The two syllable word "jiyan" is chanted quickly, and while the second syllable is stressed, it lands solidly on the second "beat" as if it were a one syllable word. Another common example, which was also chanted at the Cevahir Mall Protest, fits this same form:

|| **Ka**- til **İŞ**- İD || **İş**- bir- **lik**- çi **A**-K- P

(Tr: ISIS murderers, in union with the AKP)

This same form emerges in other protest contexts in Turkey, not only ones associated with Kurds. One of the most prominent slogans to come out of the Gezi Park protests, which is now a template for expressing solidarity with struggles elsewhere, goes as follows:

|| **Her** yer **Tak**- sim || **He**r yer **di**-re- **niş**

(Tr: Everywhere is Taksim, everywhere is resistance.)

When used elsewhere, other place names are substituted for Taksim, as seen in the protests for Kobane:

|| **Her** yer **Ko**-ba- ne || **Her** yer **di**- re- **niş**

(Tr: Everywhere is Kobane, everywhere is resistance.)

There is another form which is more common in Kurdish, particularly for chants starting with 'Bijî" (Long live, like "vive" or "viva"). This form can be represented as three "measures" of two beats.

|| **Bi**- jî || **ser**- ok || **A**- po!

(Ku: Long live Leader Apo—Abdullah Öcalan).

If a longer slogan is being chanted, the earlier pattern of an even beginning and denser end is continued, even if three measures have replaced the above two.

|| **Bi**- jî || **ber**-xwe- dan-a || **Ko**-ba- ne!

(Ku: Long live the resistance of Kobane. In place of Kobane, I have heard Rojava, Kurdistan, YPG, YPJ, and other three syllable words.)

This link between Kurdish slogans and a particularly recognizable rhythm create an apparent sonic distinction. Though not every Kurdish-language slogan starts with the word "Bijî," those that do are extremely common. This likely aids supporters of Kurdish protest causes who speak little or no Kurdish; if one knows words such as "bijî" or "berxwedan", and the names of important people and places, one can easily follow such slogans and join in. Perhaps for this reason, the above rhythm is a quickly recognizable feature of Kurdish protests.[67]

Protest slogans of these types are common in Turkish, and at Kurdish issue-related events, they are often also chanted with Kurdish words. In all of the protests I have attended, I rarely encountered Kurdish slogans without Turkish slogans also being chanted, particularly in public. By contrast, closed events with largely Kurdish participants tend to feature primarily Kurdish slogans; at the concert for Şengal, the dominance of Kurdish was striking, particularly in the lack of spontaneous Turkish slogan-chanting. In other words, at most protest events (particularly public events), if there are slogans, they will be in Turkish, with Kurdish slogans also possible. This indicates general goals for protesters. If the purpose of a protest is to raise awareness,

[67] These two rhythms do not tell the entire story, of course; another Kurdish language slogan, "Bê Serok Jîyan Nabe" (There can be no life without the leader, meaning Öcalan) is chanted to a different rhythm and is quite common. || **Bê** ||Se**rok** ||Jî**yan** ||**Na**be

the most commonly-understood language should be used, with the minority language allowing protesters to express pride in their identity or other sentiments depending on the individual.

As seen above, chanting seems to be spontaneous, with an individual or small group finding an opportunity and beginning the chant which spreads (or dies out quickly; at the Kobane march, for example, two young men tried to initiate a long, multisyllable slogan in Kurdish which failed to catch on, likely due to its complexity). When I asked Ümit, a young activist who works at the MKM's recording studio, why he starts to chant at specific points, he told me that he thinks of a slogan, waits for an opportunity, and then starts to chant loudly to lead others. In a paper on spontaneity in protest contexts in the US, Snow and Moss refute the idea that spontaneous (that is, not structurally premeditated) action, such as beginning and spreading a chant, is primarily mimicry, which implies a mindless action. Instead, they describe the framing as "organized but not entirely organized" (Snow and Moss 2014).

Protest slogans of this form are not unique to Istanbul or protests in Turkey. The first slogan rhythm in particular has connections to global protest contexts, particularly to socialist popular movements. One important popular chant "El pueblo unido, jamás será vencido," and its later English equivalent "The people united will never be defeated," fit this form as well:

el||**pueb**lo u**ni**do ja||**más** se**rá** ven**ci**do

The||**peo**ple u**ni**ted can ||**nev**er **be** de**fea**ted

This chant became popular in Chile leading up to the 1970 campaign of Salvador Allende (Wessel, 102), and became well-known internationally through a song by that name, recorded in 1973 by the Chilean group Quilapayun (Boyle, 291). The song features

the slogan, chanted by the band's eight members, at the beginning and throughout the song. "El Pueblo Unido Jamas Sera Vencido" has inspired similar songs in other languages during times of left-wing protest. These similar songs, in turn, have also inspired slogans with similar rhythms. An example of regional importance is the slogan "Arise, demolish the foundations of the palace of the enemy"[68] used in protests leading to the 1979 revolution in Iran and by left-wing protestors during the aftermath of the 2009.

|| Bar **pā**xiz az **jā**kan || ba**nā**ye **kā**x-e **dosh**man

One reasonable conclusion from this rhythmic analysis, then, is that chants such as "Jin! Jiyan! Azadî!" and "Her yer Taksim, her yer direniş!" are drawing on a common tradition of left-wing protest as "El pueblo unido jamas sera vencido." The political ideologies of the chanters in these different contexts, though not necessarily identical, are closely allied and are structured around right-left political polarization that hearkens back to the Cold War. In fact, this analysis further links protest rhythm to common narratives of political identity.

This understanding is structured by several core elements. First is a belief that socialist movements are held back by shadowy capitalist/fascist forces, with the United States as the ultimate enemy. In Chile, the CIA-backed coup that overthrew Allende in 1973 confirmed this; in Turkey, protests are often framed as being against "imperialism" and "capitalism," common enemies that transcend the particulars of the situation. Related to this understanding of activism as protest against shadowy capitalist puppet-masters is the view of police and military as tools of fascism. Regularly occurring and

[68] Persian: بر پا خیز، از جا کن، بنای کاخ دشمن (Barpāxiz, az jākan, banāye kāx-e doshman)

important protests on İstiklal Caddesi, the Cumartesi Anneleri (Saturday Mothers) and the Hasta Mahpuslar (Sick Prisoners) protests, focus on the disappearances, secret killings, and prison abuses perpetrated by the Turkish police and *jandarma* (rural military police force) and protected by successive Turkish governments. These deaths and subsequent protests resonate with the experiences of the *desaparecidos* and their families in South America.

This understanding of the political structure in Turkey, especially when placed into dialogue with other political contexts that are perceived as similar, also includes an understanding of political opportunities. Left-wing protesters in Turkey see secret killings and police brutality as integral, not accidental, parts of the political structure. Kurds in particular see their lack of rights and recognition as consequences of a fundamentally flawed capitalist-imperialist system. At the same time that the political structure creates these grievances, it also circumscribes the possible responses to them. When the political structure is ultimately controlled by a "deep state" with American capitalists pulling the strings, "conventional" political participation, such as voting, becomes an exercise in futility. This gives protest a central role in political activism.

Thus, the rhythms of the chants themselves show ties to broader protest movements worldwide. The chants, alongside speeches and banners present at the protests, show the kind of political framework in which protesters position themselves. The act of protesting itself also reinforces this view: protest becomes the primary option when other forms of political participation are made impossible. This analysis of protest rhythm links Istanbul protests to other protests and political traditions of the global left, reveals an understanding of political structure, and allows an interpretation of the goals of protest.

Another reading of this rhythm is possible, however. The Shahada, or *Kelime-i Şehadet*, is also chanted to the same rhythm:

|| **lā** ʾi**lā**ha ||ʾ**il lā- llāh**

Richard Wolf has pointed out that this rhythm also appears in a common chant in South Asia during the India-Pakistan Partition:

|| **Pa**ki**stan** ka || **na**ʿ**rah kya**

||**la** ʿi**la**ha || **ʿil la- llah**

Wolf's analysis of this example uses Jakobsen's *poetic function* to show connections and contrasts between an assertion of Pakistani identity and a proclamation of the unity of God (Wolf 2014). Connections between Kurdish protest slogans and religious chanting traditions are less clear. I suggest that in Turkey, even members of protesting publics who do not come from a religious background, chant is a sacralized genre. Though the Shahada and protest chanting may not be explicitly linked in the minds of protesters, they are used in similar ways for similar ends in Turkey and Kurdistan. While *zikr* and the Shahada orient participants toward a religious and/or devotional intersubjectivity, slogans orient protesters towards a revolutionary Kurdish intersubjectivity.

Conclusion

In this dissertation, my goal has been to give answers to basic questions. What music do Kurds in Istanbul listen to, perform, create, and call their own? Where do Kurdish musicians draw inspiration, and what do they hope their music will accomplish? Drawing creatively on diverse sources, from *dengbêj*s of decades past to current *gerilla* musicians extolling fighters in Syria, Kurdish activist musicians in Istanbul perform the Kurdish nation, creating and sustaining an ideologically motivated sense of what it means to be Kurdish. This performance, connected to political advocacy institutions, is directly responsible for the existence of a Kurdish activist public in Istanbul and throughout Turkey. At the fuzzy boundaries of what Kurds identify as their music, the distinction between the *arabesk* and *özgün* genres shows the importance Kurds place on music and its psychological and ideological consequences. At the heart of all of the categories and contexts of music I have discussed are links between emotion, ideology, and identity.

The performance of the Kurdish nation has had significant consequences in the region, some of which attracted the attention of international media to Turkey and Syria as I conducted fieldwork and wrote this dissertation. Some of my findings here might be of interest to those seeking to understand the support Kurdish militias enjoy in Kurdish communities far from sites of open conflict; music has long been and continues to be a dynamic link between Kurdish migrants in the west and guerrillas in the east.

Along with these political concerns, this study has implications for the broader field of ethnomusicology as well. My discussion of Kurdish understandings of tradition and modernity is, in some ways, a study of postcolonial (or at least post-imperial) identity making where distinctions between self and other, colonizer and colonized are

blurry and constantly reasserted by Kurdish activists. Institutions and public protest play a significant role in organizing resistance to assimilation. Left-wing Kurdish activism is only one of the many causes that brings protesting publics out into Istanbul's streets, albeit a highly significant one. In this dissertation, I have examined the links between Kurdish protest chants and demonstration behaviors and those in other contexts, from neighboring Iran to distant Latin America. It is my belief that Kurdish protest in Turkey reveals the significance and reach of protest phenomena of potential comparative interest to scholars working in different global contexts.

This dissertation also brings up a number of important questions that are beyond its scope. How does Kurdish music and protest in Istanbul differ from similar activism in Europe, where large Kurdish populations live outside of Turkey's borders and laws? What about Kurds outside of Turkey and Kurds whose first language is not Kurmanjî or Turkish? And what of Turkish Kurds who do not align with the leftist ideology of the freedom movement? The Kurdish activists whose views I represent here make strong claims about what it means to be Kurdish—politically, emotionally, and musically—but they represent only one subgroup of those who call themselves Kurds. Examining other Kurdish musics would put their (and my) claims about Kurdish music, politics and sentiment to the test and possibly reveal conflicts and accordances that would generate a more nuanced and richer understanding of Kurdish music. Finally, links between music, sentiment, and loss—of language, land, and life—are certainly not unique to Kurds, not even in Kurdistan. Other minority groups that from a Turkish perspective are "eastern"—Armenians, Assyrians, Laz, and many others—have similar and intertwined histories, long-standing connections to the Kurds and their music, and are similarly marginal in Turkish society, if not more so. In this dissertation I have argued that

studies of Turkish music that ignore the Kurds are necessarily incomplete; it is just as true of a study of Kurdish music that ignores other minority groups in Turkey.

Throughout my fieldwork, Kurdish activists generously explained their movement and music to me partially in the hope that I would, in some way, be able to further their activism. It seems only appropriate, then, to end with this simple but important message, one that has been in the background of the entire dissertation and at the core of diverse institutions and ideologies: the Kurds exist and can no longer be silenced or ignored.

Appendix A: Glossary of Terms

Arabesk	Genre of popular music associated with migrants and themes of alienation.
Cumartesi Anneleri	"Saturday Mothers," a weekly sit-in protest in Istanbul demanding answers from the government concerning loved ones secretly killed by the state.
Davul	Large double-headed drum used to accompany *govend*/*halay* dancing.
Dengbêj	Singer of unaccompanied long airs called *kilam*s, regarded as an emblem of Kurdish traditional culture.
Gecekondu	"Built overnight," slums that are home to rural-to-urban migrants in large Turkish cities.
Gerilla	Genre of popular music written by or about guerrilla fighters.
Govend (Kur) *Halay* (Tur)	Line or circle dance sometimes accompanied by *davul* and *zurna*. Often danced at weddings and public demonstrations.
Kilam	Loosely-metered songs that make up the *dengbêj* repertoire.
Mey	Double-reed instrument with a mellow tone, used as an emblem of easternness in Turkey.
Namus	honor, particularly women's chastity.

Newroz	Spring equinox celebration common throughout West and Central Asia, but with more recent political meanings for Kurds in Turkey.
Özgün	Meaning "authentic," a descriptor applied to leftist popular musicians whose music shares *arabesk* sound but not themes.
Qirik (Kur) *Gırtlak* (Tur)	"Throat" or "gullet," a term used to describe a vocal quality seen as typical of Kurdish music.
Stran	(Kur) song. A singer of songs is a *stranbêj*.
Tembur (Kur) *Bağlama* (Tur)	Long-necked lute common throughout Turkey and used for many styles of music, including folk music and *arabesk*. Also known as *saz* (instrument).
Zemar (Kur) *Ağıt* (Tur)	Lament, typically a private expression of grief for unexpected death.
Zurna	Short loud double-reed instrument used to accompany *govend*/*halay* dancing.

Appendix B: Acronyms

BDP	Peace and Democracy Party. *Barış ve Demokrasi Partisi* (Tur). Kurdish political party in Turkey from 2008 to 2014 that enjoyed the support of many left-wing Kurds.
HDP	Peoples' Democratic Party. *Halkların Demokratik Partisi* (Tur). Political party formed as a more inclusive left-wing party than previous Kurdish parties.
MKM	Mesopotamia Cultural Center. *Mezopotamya Kültür Merkezi* (Tur) or *Navenda Çanda Mezopotamya* (Kur). An important cultural center for Kurdish activism in Istanbul.
PKK	Kurdistan Workers' Party. *Partiya Karkerên Kurdistanê* (Kur). Militant left-wing Kurdish organization engaged in armed conflict with the Turkish state since the 1980s.
YPG	Peoples' Protection Units. *Yekîneyên Parastina Gel* (Kur). Armed branch of the Kurdish administration of Syrian Kurdistan, or Rojava.

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