

VOICE AS A SPACE OF MEMORY AND SONOROUS OBJECT
IN THE DENG BĒJ TRADITION

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VOICE AS A SPACE OF MEMORY AND SONOROUS OBJECT

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ABSTRACT

Voice as a Space of Memory and Sonorous Object in the Dengbêj Tradition

This thesis studies the dengbêj tradition as a space of memory where alternative interpretations of the past and present, acoustic communication of different voices and female singing voices dwell in. This study initially argues that dengbêjs' kilams include rich historical contents by addressing that kilams have been regarded as alternative narratives bearing different interpretations of the past. Secondly, it has been pointed out that dengbêjs' voices embody a kind of acoustic language that is beyond a certain system of language. Each dengbêj possesses her/his unique timbre; therefore, their singing voices are explicated as sonorous objects that introduce dengbêjs as unique beings. Lastly, this study addresses that women dengbêjs create their public spheres through a reciprocal communication of different female singing voices. Women dengbêjs reconceptualize public spheres within which they re-establish their positions in the society by showing solidarity among women and resisting against the double oppression based on the pressure of the patriarchal Kurdish society and the politics of denial. Methodologically, this thesis is composed of textual analyses, semi-structured and unstructured interviews, and sociological observations. Existing studies on the dengbêj tradition usually consist of textual analyses focusing on the semantic substance of kilams. At that point, this thesis aims to contribute to these studies by pointing dengbêjs' voices as a sonorous object that manifests the performer as a unique being.

ÖZET

Dengbêj Geleneğinde Hafıza Mekanı ve Sedalı Bir Nesne Olarak Ses

Bu tez, içerisinde alternatif geçmiş ve şimdi anlatılarını, farklı seslerin akustik iletişimini ve kadın seslerini barındıran bir hafıza mekanı olarak, dengbêj geleneğini ele alır. Bu çalışma ilk olarak dengbêjler tarafından icra edilen kilamların, alternatif geçmiş ve şimdi anlatıları içerdiğine işaret ederek, kilamların tarihsel olarak zengin bir içeriğe sahip olduğunu tartışmaktadır. İkinci olarak, bu tez dengbêjlerin seslerinin belli bir dil sisteminin ötesinde, başka bir akustik dil oluşturduğunu ortaya koymaktadır. Her bir dengbêj sadece kendisine ait olan biricik gırtlak sesine sahip olduğundan, dengbêjlerin sesleri, onları biricik varlıklar yapan sedalı nesnelere olarak incelenmektedir. Son olarak, bu çalışma kadın dengbêjlerin, kilam icra ederken oluşturdukları müşterek iletişimle kendi kamusal alanlarını yarattıklarından bahsetmektedir. Kadın dengbêjler kendi içlerinde dayanışmayı güçlendirirken, diğer bir taraftan da patriyarkal Kürt toplumu ve inkar politikalarına dayalı çift boyutlu baskıya karşı direnerek, toplum içerisindeki yerlerini yeniden konumlandırmanın yanısıra mevcut kamusal alanları da yeniden şekillendirmektedirler. Metodolojik olarak bu tez, metin analizleri, yarı yapılandırılmış ve yapılandırılmamış görüşmeler ve sosyolojik gözlemlere dayanmaktadır. Dengbêj geleneği hakkında var olan literatür genellikle kilamların semantik içeriğine yoğunlaşan metin analizlerine dayanmaktadır. Tam da bu noktada bu tez, dengbêjlerin sesini icracının biricikliğini ortaya koyan sedalı bir nesne olarak ele alarak var olan bu çalışmalara katkı sağlamayı amaçlamaktadır.

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GLOSSARY

Agha	Landlords.
Badînan	A region that used to stretch for miles from Beytülşebap to Amediye and Duhok and used to be the name of one of Kurdish <i>beylics</i> existed between 13 th and 14 th .
Bêrî	Milking animals.
Botan	The old name of Şırnak region whose people were called as Botî and used to be one of the Kurdish <i>beylics</i> existed between the 1300s and 1800s.
Brakuî	Fratricide.
Çîrokbêj	Storyteller.
Çîrokbêjî	Art of storytelling.
Çiyayî	Highlander.
Dengbêj	Kurdish bard/oral poet who sing recitative ballads.
Destan	Epic ballads.
Deştî	Lowlander.
Dilok	Love ballads for folk dances.
Dîwan	A place where dengbêjs gather and sing.
Firarî	Fugitive.
Heyranok	Love ballads.
Kilam	Recitative ballads sung by dengbêjs.
Kilamên/Stranên Kar	Work ballads.

Kilamên dîlanê/dawetê/govendê	Ballads performed for folk dances.
Kilamên şer	War ballads.
Lawje/Lawik/Lawij	Another term used for the kilam.
Lorik	Lullaby in Kurdish.
Mehkûm	Captive.
Meşkê	Ballads sang while making the churn.
Miqam	A term used by dengbêjs for naming a certain singing style or genre that does not correspond to the maqam defined in the Western or Middle Eastern musicology.
Mîr	Kurdish landlords.
Narînk	Ballads sang for the bride at weddings.
Nexweşî	Disorder
Payîzok/Pahîzok	Ballads sang in the autumn.
Serhed	The region including Iğdır, Kars, Ardahan, Ağrı and a part of Van. And people living in these areas are called as Serhedî.
Serşok	Ballads sang for the groom at weddings.
Şeşbendî	Usually epic ballads sang for folk dances.
Stran	Another term used for kilam.
Tenûr	Oven made in a hole in the earth.
Teşî	Ballads sang while twisting the spindle.
Zom	Foothills where people go to collect plants and grazing.
Welatê xerib	Foreign country

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Through the dengbêjî (the dengbêj tradition) I may be a part of the past and the events experienced by Kurds, I may become a part of their life. But of course, these are invisible things. We have learned them through the voice. We may have this chance through the voice without a spectacle or reading some sources (D. Fîkrî, Yüksekova, January 20, 2017).¹

Dengbêjs may be described as Kurdish bards who tell recitative ballads using their voice effectively without playing an instrument. Their recitative use of timbre conveys various feelings, senses and cultural codes as well as Kurds' counter-collective memories that are alternative narratives of the past challenging the perception of homogenous Turkish nation. While dengbêjs' *kilams*² are regarded as the tool of conveying alternative narratives of the past to the future, the uniqueness of dengbêjs' voices also specifies their sonorous identifications. In this respect, this thesis discusses the dengbêjs' voices as a sonorous object that identifies dengbêjs as unique individuals. Furthermore, dengbêjs' voices have rich vibrations, strong intonations going back and forth between the high and the low-pitches. Their unique use of the timbre provides a ground for interpreting different feelings and emotions and transmitting certain affects without requiring a semiotic signification. Hence, this thesis argues that dengbêjs' voice as an object transmits the affects composed of the feelings of sorrow, pain, excitement, and enthusiasm as well as conveying the Kurds' counter-collective memory. Voice as an object possesses a sort of epidemic effect enchanting the audiences. To illustrate, a kilam (ballad) telling the story of a forced

¹ "Dengbêjlikle, geçmişin, insanların (Kürt toplumunu kastederek) başına gelen olayların, onların yaşantısının bir parçası olabiliyorum. Ben de dahil oluyorum onların yaşantısına. Tabi bunlar görünmeyen şeylerdir. Biz sadece sesle bunları öğrendik. Okumakla değil, görüntüyle değil, sesle öğrendik."

² Kilams are recitative ballads sang by dengbêjs.

displacement can spread the feeling of sorrow among the audience. Even the audience that has never experienced the forced displacement can feel the sorrow. However, the feeling of sorrow is not only conveyed by a specific chain of meanings, but it is also transmitted by the style of the use of the dengbêj's voice. In other words, the melodized tone of voice as an object provides a dialogical or reciprocal communication of voices (Cavarero, 2005, p. x), bodies and feelings. Voice as an object specifies particular feelings, senses and cultural codes, which cannot be archived in historical documents. A dengbêj's kilam sung in the form of lament can convey the feeling of sorrow and pain to the listener. For example, a kilam of a folk dance can mobilize the listener's feeling of enthusiasm and draws her/him to dance. Therefore, it is important to argue that a study on the dengbêj tradition should also focus on dengbêjs' unique use of timbre beyond the order of language.

Furthermore, this thesis also reveals that dengbêjs learn dengbêjî by listening to talented dengbêjs. Although dengbêjs' melodies can be described by the musical notation, they usually do not know the ordinary musical terms and notes. They usually indicate that they learn different genres and styles of telling the kilam by listening to other dengbêjs. Since "voice as an object (Dolar, 2006, p. 3)" becomes the fundamental tool for dengbêjs' training, it can be assumed that dengbêjs' voice creates a dialogical and reciprocal communication of voices. They not only transmit the feelings, senses or a specific chain of meanings but they also convey different genres and styles of the use of voice. Additionally, the unique way of using their voice has its own spatial originality. To explicate further, dengbêjs classify their use of voice through the terms of *çiyayî* (highlander) and *deştî* (lowlander). A talented dengbêj or listener can determine the performer's locality from her/his voice. In the light of these, dengbêjs' voices have a great influence on my initial confrontation

with the voice as a phenomenon or “as an object” (Dolar, 2006, p. 16), which give identification to the bards. When I was listening to dengbêjs on the radio or cassette player, I could recognize the dengbêj from her/his voice. That is to say, an audience can recognize the dengbêj by listening to her/his voice without requiring the personal information about her/him. The voice provides a reciprocal communication with the audience, which manifests itself sonorously to the other. Considering the voice as an object identifying the performer sonorously, their timbre is just like a fingerprint that allows the audience to recognize the performer’s identity. I have been also enchanted by dengbêjs’ talent of storytelling transmitting the Kurds’ counter-collective memories, regrets, hopes, senses, and even emotions. Therefore, the voice does not only identify the performer but also conveys the meaning as the “lever of the thought” (Dolar, 2006, p. 11). Every kilam has its own story revealing a specific plot whereas every voice has its own unique identity enchanting the audience sonorously.

I grew up in one of the ghettos of İstanbul where Kurds have been talking about their silenced memories, language, their struggles, revolts, and defeats against the Turkish state—in their mother tongue, Kurdish, and sometimes in Turkish. Since the spoken and written expression of the Kurdish language was forbidden until the early 1990s, Kurds were obliged to communicate with each other in private spheres. Therefore, especially illegally recorded voices in the form of cassette became one of the main methods to pursue reciprocal communication among the Kurds. These publicly forbidden and privately performed or heard voices challenge the silence by providing a communication between the Kurds living in Turkey. Especially dengbêjs’ voices used to circulate among different Kurdish communities in the form of cassettes. Dengbêjs’ kilams not only circulated the forbidden Kurdish language

among the Kurds, but they also transmitted “different registers of truth” in Meltem Ahiska’s words about politics of archives in Turkey (2006, p. 22). Considering a number of stories of buried cassettes recorded in Kurdish, it can be said that dengbêjs’ narratives were considered as a danger revealing some historical and political tensions in Turkey. Although the Kurdish language and the Kurdish issue were not allowed to be discussed especially in public, I used to register different narrations of the past through the dengbêjî, which challenges the Turkish official history. Therefore, I grew up with a “double consciousness” (Du Bois, 1940, p. 3) reserving Turkishness to the public and Kurdishness in private spheres. We could not express our critical perspectives about the Turkish official history, it was not possible to reveal ethnic, religious and political differences in Turkey. When those issues were mentioned, they were presented as a forbidden zone. However, the voices of dengbêjs, have managed to convey both Kurdish language and alternative historical narratives.

Dengbêjs’ voices comprising storytelling, laments and kilams used to echo in our house. Although I was not able to fully understand their meanings, I was excessively influenced by their melodized tone of voice. Especially my father used to sit in front of a cassette player and explicate what these voices tell in detail. Especially the voices of Karapetê Xaço, Kawîs Axa, Meryem Xan, Fatma Îsa, Mihammed Arifê Cizîrî, and Kazo were echoing in our house as well as in my consciousness. Their narratives were sometimes about desperate love stories, heroic events, and sometimes about bloody conflicts between two Kurdish tribes or about the atrocities committed against Kurds and Armenians. My father’s relationship with the cassettes sometimes seemed very romantic. Most of the time, I even could not understand how he was fascinated by these small cassettes that he played for many

hours without a break. After I began to understand dengbêj narratives better, I realised that hearing these voices was a sort of ritual for him and for many people whose language, identity and voice were silenced. These melodized voices are considered both as an artistic performance enchanting the audiences and as a womb of Kurds' counter-collective memories. However, these voices also represent a sonorous identification among the Kurdish communities. Dengbêjs' use of voice changes according to specific geographical differences; therefore, the style of the use of voice usually specifies the dengbêj's locality. Thus, in dengbêjs' performances, voice exists through its paradoxical being based on its in-between-ness that goes beyond the language or the concern of aesthetic pleasure. Dengbêjs' voices go beyond the language or being an aesthetic pleasure haunting audiences' personal, spatial, temporal perception as a sonorous object. It can be commonly observed that the audiences or the performers usually express how they are driven to imagine the narrated space, time, characters and senses through dengbêjs' voice and performances. In that sense, voice can also be thought of as an affective drive mobilizing the audiences to imagine and pass through the other's interpretations of some events, emotions, and senses.

Demonstrating that, I believe that grasping the voice itself as a sonorous object considering its different functions can be significant to provide a different point of view to the studies on dengbêjs, which usually discuss the dengbêj tradition as a tool of transmitting the Kurd's counter-collective memories. In this respect, this study especially aims to focus on how the voice functions as a tool for conveying meanings and some unarchivable cultural codes composed of regrets, hopes, secrets, feelings, and emotions. Moreover, this thesis reveals that dengbêjs' voices provide a sonorous identification of Kurdishness. Even if different kilams can include

contradictory stories especially about conflicts between different Kurdish tribes, the unique use of timbre embodies an acoustic representation for the Kurdish identity. Singing kilams becomes a common way of self-expression for many Kurds. Despite contradictory stories and different styles of singing, dengbêjs' voices suggest a plural acoustic language and memory through their unique tones of voices and stories. Furthermore, it is addressed in the thesis how different genres and styles of the use of timbre identify dengbêjs' spatial belongings. Finally, I discuss the silence within silence by grasping how women were silenced in the dengbêj tradition, who were also silenced by the Turkish state oppression.

Dengbêjs have identified themselves as “the guardians of Kurdish society” (Hamelink, 2016, p. 317) saving the Kurdish culture, language, and tradition. Although the Kurdish language was forbidden for many years in public spheres in Turkey, we were able to listen to dengbêjs in private spheres such as home or institutions where Kurds were politically organized. Especially dengbêjs' unique way of employing the voice and their “melodized tone of voice” (Amy de la Bretéque, 2012, p. 129) have played a critical role to perform the previously forbidden Kurdish language and to interpret the alternative narratives of the past. To illustrate, dengbêjs' narratives include certain historical events, which have been silenced and censored by the official authorities in Turkey. Metin Yüksel explicates in detail how some Kurdish songs were banned by the Turkish state (Yüksel, 2011, pp. 89- 91). He also states that the Turkish state requested the French authorities in Beirut to ban some Kurdish songs and sue their composers. He explains that the Turkish state attempted to ban the Kurdish songs and oppress the dengbêjs with the reason for the violation of “territorial integrity of Turkey.” Therefore, dengbêj tradition has been suffering from the political tensions in Turkey since the establishment of the

Republic of Turkey. Especially the conflicts between the Kurds and the Turkish state since the establishment of the Republic of Turkey have negatively influenced the dengbêj tradition. The ban of the public use of Kurdish until the 1990s can be stated as one of the specific examples of the state oppression of the Kurds in Turkey.

Therefore, this thesis also focuses on the historical background of some political tensions to illustrate why dengbêjs' kilams have been regarded as dangerous sources violating the integrity of Turkey. This study also asserts that the kilams function as different registers of truth suggesting alternative narratives of the past challenging the official Turkish history.

Benedict Anderson refers to the novel and the newspaper as two fundamental forms for representing the imagined community that is the nation (2006, pp. 24-5). In a similar vein, it can be asserted that specific radio stations such as the Radio Yerevan and Radio Baghdad and some TV channels composed of MED-TV, MMC have paved the way for the representation of an imagined national Kurdish community. Amir Hassanpour states that Kurds have been practicing “the sovereignty in the sky” through the Kurdish radio stations and TV channels (Hassanpour, 1998, p. 53). In these stations and channels, especially dengbêjs have critical importance as active agents representing a social body for Kurds living in Turkey. If these radio stations and TV channels are considered as “national flags” then dengbêjs can be considered as the fundamental motives on these flags (Hassanpour, 1998, p. 53). Dengbêjs reconstruct the past from their personal points of view whereas they call themselves as ‘living archives’ of the Kurdish culture and history. Inspired by Amin Hassanpour’s argument about the Kurdish radio broadcasting as sovereignty in the sky, I suggest that dengbêjs establish a sort of “sovereignty in the voice” by suggesting a new social body and sonorous memory for

Kurds. Their musical interpretation of the past, certain emotions, feelings, hopes, and regrets provide an acoustic language for the listeners diminishing the distance among the Kurdish communities. The Kurdish TV channels and radio stations have included various dengbêjs that belong to different Kurdish communities in Iran, Iraq, Turkey, Syria, and Armenia. Dengbêjs differ from each other in terms of their musical genres, styles and unique tone of voices. In this respect, dengbêjs' narratives inform the audiences about various experiences of Kurdishness in different Kurdish communities that do not have a unified state. Thus, it can be asserted that dengbêjs have established a new social body by their acoustic language. Therefore, it can be stated that dengbêjs' unique voices embody a common realm where different Kurdish communities come together.

As stated above, one of the fundamental objectives of this thesis is to handle the grain of voice as an affective object. I believe that it is necessary to research the voice further in the dengbêj tradition since it creates a sonic enchantment as an object. Similarly, Mladen Dolar indicates that the realm of the voice exists beyond language. He grasps the voice as an object, which is a "part neither of language nor the body" (2006, p. 73). Since the source of the voice is not determined, its mobility among different individuals cannot be controlled, unlike gaze. Preclusion of gaze is possible by the castration of the ability to see; however, voice has a complex relationship even with its own owner. It has a paradoxical existence that belongs to neither the body nor language especially during the singing (Dolar, 2006, p. 32). Acoustic quality of voice corresponds to an excess violating the borders of body and language. Voice requires semantics in order to spread a chain of meaning to different individuals, but still, it has a paradoxical characteristic going back and forth between body and language. In the mobilization of dengbêjs, this paradoxical existence of

voice opens a door for the continuation of a banned language and paves the way for the circulation of alternative narratives of memory. In other words, voice as an object becomes a sort of site of memory where dengbêjs collect and reinterpret their subjective narratives of past, of feelings, emotions, etc. They not only learn different memory narratives, but they also learn different kinds of *miqams* (maqams). Although different forms of miqams will be described in chapter three, *narînk*, *serşok*, *payîzok/pahîzok*, *heyranok*, *şêşbendî*, *lawje/lawik/lawij*, *kilamên kar*, *kilamên dîlanê/dawetê*, *lorik* can be indicated as widely known miqams in the dengbêjî.³ So, it is not only collective historical memories that are circulated but also the memory of the voice. Different miqams of kilams have been conveyed from generation to generation without necessitating a particular musical knowledge. Dengbêjs have been learning and performing the voice by hearing the miqams⁴ of specific genres and styles of kilams. Dolar states: “(...)it is precisely the voice that holds bodies and languages together. It is like their missing link, what they have in common. The language is attached to the body through the voice(...) (2006, p. 60).” In relation to that, dengbêjs’ unique use of their timbre manifests a sonorous memory bearing the Kurds’ counter-collective memories. Dengbêjs’ unique voices provide an opportunity for the Kurds to convey their narratives of the past through their own subjective and collective perspectives. In dengbêjs’ sonorous memory performances, the voice as a threshold unifies the dengbêj and the audience, body, and language. Thus, it can be

³ Unlike some researches classifying the kilams through the *ussak*, *huseyni*, *nevruz*, *kürdî* maqams, dengbêjs’ understanding of maqams radically differ from these classifications that can be seen within the interviews done for this thesis. Especially in the third chapter dengbêjs’ description of maqams is mentioned in detail.

⁴ In the following chapters, some interviews are going to reveal that most of the dengbêjs are illiterate. And these people indicate that they have learnt their art by hearing and performing various *maqams* in the call-and-response duets.

asserted that dengbêjs' voices and the desire of interpretation create a counter-collective memory and a sonic representation of Kurdishness.

Different Kurdish communities use different genres, styles of kilams and dialects; therefore, they sometimes cannot understand each other due to the differences in dialects. However, voice as a sonic object materializes certain feelings and emotions such as enthusiasm, excitement, sorrow, and pain. Hence, voice as an object of musical performance has a sonic quality transgressing the system of language. Voice as a sonic or a phonic object creates its unique language beyond the semiotic order based on logos in the dengbêj tradition. As soon as dengbêjs' narratives are vocalized, they transgress the performer's body and reach the others' ear. Although different voice recording technologies or the emergence of the Internet where voices have been stored recently have transformed the habits of listening (Kuruoğlu, Ger, 2014), especially in a live dengbêj performance, voice epidemically spreads from one body to another beyond the performer's control, as well as from one territory to another. As a result, dengbêjs' voices can enchant and mobilize the audiences by encouraging them to imagine some narratives of the past including particular unarchivable emotions and senses such as pain, sorrow, excitement, and enthusiasm. Thus, the voice of a dengbêj creates a reciprocal communication between the performer's voice and the audience's perception by blurring the bodily, temporal and spatial borders. The voice of the performer, in a way, interacts with the audience's emotions, senses, and memory. Voice creates a sonic conductivity bearing some emotions and feelings composed of sorrow, excitement, etc. Even if local dialects differ from each other, the audiences can still express that they feel the sorrow or excitement materialized by the singing dengbêj's voice. Of course, the aesthetic quality of voice plays a critical role in order to establish an authority upon

the audiences as a carrier of some emotions and feelings. A performer is not considered as a dengbêj without a strong and beautiful voice (Hikmet, 2012, pp. 292-3). Similarly, John Miles Foley states that: “Voice quality, volume control, intonation, and especially silence are taken as constitutive dimensions that deserve decoding because they’re part of the performance” (2002, p. 95). Hence, not only the meaning of the kilams but also the voice used in the performance is essential. Further, in the interviews, dengbêjs generally indicate that they begin to sing by mimicking their dengbêj masters and then they begin to jam with them. These improvisations aim to train the dengbêj to use her/his laryngeal effectively and become a good composer who has a strong memory. Therefore dengbêjs’ artistic talents are based on performative and reciprocal call-and-response duets. Thus, we can assume that for dengbêj performances, voice can be considered as a sonorous object enchanting its audiences and creating a reciprocal interaction besides its characteristic as a tool of the meaning.

Furthermore, there are different genres and styles in the dengbêj tradition that are named after their geographical locations such as Botan, Badînan, Serhed, etc. (Çakır, 2018, p. 198). To illustrate, a person who listens to dengbêjs can distinguish a kilam of Serhed region from that of Cizîra Botan. A highlander dengbêj has a high-pitched voice whereas a lowlander dengbêj has a low-pitched voice (Şen, 2016, p. 52). Therefore, we can assume that the geographical characteristics of the voice specify the dengbêj’s locality thanks to their own unique way of the use of laryngeal. In this respect, the geographical description of various dengbêjî genres and styles explain how voice as an object allows the bards to possess identity and gain a uniqueness through their unique voice. At that point, Adriana Cavarero’s terms such as “uniqueness” and “reciprocal communication of voices” are referenced in order to

provide a theoretical background to shed a light on how voice functions as a label of each unique self (2005, p. 16). According to Cavarero, voice is a unique thing, which is beyond verbal communication; it provides a sort of musical exchange introducing one unique self to another (2005, pp. 29-30). In addition, call-and-response duets among dengbêjs can be evaluated as a reciprocal communication of voices by introducing every unique voice to another. Although I am going to discuss this subject further in the following chapters, it is important to mention here one of the dengbêj nights that I had a chance to visit. During the whole night, dengbêjs competed in terms of the quality of their voices and the strength of their memory as composers. Two women and two men made call-and-response duets for four hours. The confrontation of these four dengbêjs provided a sonorous enchantment upon me as a participant. Their voices not only conveyed different stories but they also as sonorous objects manifested each performer's uniqueness. Hence, it can be asserted that voice is not only as a tool of signification but also a sonorous object in the dengbêj tradition. It enables the dengbêj to introduce her/his "unique self" to other people through a sonorous realm.

1.1 Literature review

In Kurdish, *deng* means voice and *bêj* means to tell. Dengbêjs are the talented people who possess the ability to tell stories of war, love, *brakuji* (fratricide), mourning and epic through the melodized tone of voice. On the one hand, there are multiple types of kilams: lawijs/lawiks are the heroic ballads narrating the tales of Kurdish heroes; heyranoks are the love ballads which include erotic poetry and unfulfilled love stories; payîzoks are the ballads performed in autumn; narînks are the ballads told for the brides; serşos are performed for the groom; loriks are lullabies narrated for the

infants; *destans* are the ballads narrating epic stories; *bêrîtes* are narrating heroic events and battles with a mellifluous and low-pitched voice; *diloks* are the ballads of dance in weddings; *şebendîs* are the kilams performed in a *dîwan*; kilamên kar are work ballads such as *teşî* (spindle) and *meşkê* (churn).⁵ On the other hand, all these different genres of kilam can also be considered as miqams by most of the dengbêjs that were interviewed with. Compared to the Western musicology, Turkish musicology can suggest some musical classifications composed of *huseynî*, *ussak* and *hijaz*, *rast*, *nevruz*, *kürdî*, *çargah*, *bûselik* maqams.⁶ However, these are controversial classifications. These maqams are not even known by the dengbêjs. Instead, dengbêjs use the term of miqam in order to remark their style of telling the kilam (Çakır, 2010, p. 27). Additionally, the genre and style of the way voice are used also reflects the dengbêj's locality. Performers' localities (homelands) determine unique styles and genres of the use of timbre (Serhed, Botan, Hekarî, etc.). Even the particular tribe one belongs to has a critical influence on the performer's use of the voice since the performer has been trained by a specific style and genre of dengbêjî. Use of specific styles and genres of voice can represent a specific locality and construct social belongings, which are explained further in chapter two. Thus, the uniqueness of voice creates each dengbêj's sonic identification, which determines the locality. Different genres and styles of the voice circulate among different Kurdish communities thanks to the dengbêjs' kilams. Kilams transmit both certain historical events as alternative narratives of the past and certain feelings and emotions that cannot be archived in historical documents. Inspired by Cavarero's

⁵ Nezan Newzat, Çelebi, et al, "Geleneksel Kürt Müziğine Genel Bir Bakış." *Kardeş Türküler*, www.kardesturkuler.com/paylasim/28eylul2006.htm (Date accessed: 27 Feb, 2019).

⁶ Especially *huseynî*, *ussak* and *hijaz* maqams can be referred as the commonly used musical forms in dengbêjî which is available at <http://www.kardesturkuler.com/paylasim/28eylul2006.htm> (Date accessed: 27 Feb, 2019).

conceptualization of “the reciprocal communication of different voices” (2005, p. 209), I argue that kilams enable dengbêjs to spread their unique styles and genres of voices in different Kurdish regions.

Although dengbêjs can be considered as a sort of storytellers they differ from the storytellers in terms of their melodized tone of voice. *Çîrokbêjî* (storytelling) is about to die whereas dengbêjî could survive until today. It is still possible to hear a dengbêj’s voice in a street, bazar or even on the internet whereas it is hard to come across with çîrokbêjs. Although çîrokbêjî used to play a critical role for the transmission of Kurdish epics such as *Siyabend û Xece*, *Heso û Nazê*, *Mem û Zîn*, and *Memê Alan*, it could not be maintained up to the present. It also does not mean that dengbêjî has continued in the way it used to. Among Kurdish oral traditions, the dengbêj art has been still performed today. In most of the interviews, dengbêjs assert that technological developments –especially the spread of television– urbanization and forced displacement have very negative effects upon oral traditions among Kurds. If the dengbêj tradition survived until today, it could be thanks to its melodized tone of voice. Dengbêjs can still leave a mark based on their sonic uniqueness, which makes them strikingly recognizable subjects among Kurdish communities. Since çîrokbêjs did not use the melodized tone of voice, the tradition of çîrokbêjî could not be maintained until today. Instead, the dengbêj tradition has maintained the epics narrated by çîrokbêjs recently thanks to their melodized tone of voice. Additionally, the dengbêj tradition is confused with *stranbêjî* (the art of folk singing) in various academic writings, these terms radically differ from one another. To explicate further, kilams are sung as recitative ballads without using an instrument whereas *strans* are sung by means of some instruments. In other words,

stranbêjî can be considered as the art of singing whereas dengbêjî can be regarded as the art of telling stories with the melodized tone of voice just like bards.

Mehmed Uzun refers to the dengbêjs as the people who turn their voice into a sort of space where they archive their collective memories (2004, p. 11). They have been regarded as the bearers of the Kurdish culture, language and history (Şen, 2016; Hamelink, 2016; Yüksel, 2011; Nezan, 1996) and they have been considered as the voices of pain and enchantment by expressing the unspeakable traumas or heroic events (Amy de la Bretéque, 2012). Moreover, dengbêjs also transmit various local narratives in different Kurdish regions including Iraq, Iran, Syria, Armenia, and Turkey. Regarding that, Ahmed Aras describes dengbêjs as the talented masters of voice who spread the historical, social and political events over these four different places (Aras, 2011, pp. 36-39). So, dengbêjî is considered not only as an artistic performance enchanting its audiences but also as a way for communicating with the past. In parallel with that, in many interviews conducted for this thesis, most of the dengbêjs call themselves as “the living archives of Kurdish culture.”

Several studies, articles, theses, books, and workshops have been organized regarding dengbêjî. Initially, I would like to address *The Sung Home*, Wendy Hamelink’s ethnography as the only ethnographic book discussing the dengbêj tradition. Hamelink provides a brief historical development of the dengbêj tradition through particular methods such as narrating life stories, conducting interviews and employing discourse analysis. Hamelink elaborates on how dengbêjs describe themselves as “the guardians of Kurdish history and culture” (2016, p. 1), and how dengbêjî functions like a “home” (2016, p. 282) where dengbêjs perform their memories, narratives, and various collections. Hamelink basically investigates such contextual themes in dengbêjî as atrocities committed against Armenians, Alevis,

and Kurds; tribal conflicts among different Kurdish communities; traditionally gendered ideologies and inequalities. Hamelink also indicates how the dengbêjî tradition was banned and silenced by the state and how this tradition has pursued its existence through dengbêj performances in the private spheres despite the oppressive policies of the Turkish Republic. Although she uses a considerable number of interviews and discourse analyses, she only focuses on the communicative quality of dengbêjî rather than its sonic effectivity. In other words, Hamelink does not focus on how voice functions as an object and how it identifies the dengbêjs through their sonic uniqueness.

Metin Yüksel also prepared a Ph.D. dissertation entitled “Dengbêj, Mullah, Intelligentsia: the Survival and Revival of the Kurdish, Kurmanji Language in the Middle East, 1925- 1960” which discusses the historical background of dengbêjs, mullahs and, intelligentsia in relation to the history of nationalism and state in the Middle East. He indicates that dengbêjs used to serve for the *mîrs*⁷ by narrating the *mîrs* as heroic people. Then, he also shows how dengbêjs were silenced after the suppression of *mîrs* and how they reappeared in recent political movements as the symbols of Kurdish national identity. I believe he provides a critical historical frame by revealing how dengbêjs’ depended on *mîrs* and how they recently depended on some specific institutions founded via the Kurdish political movement. He remarks that the dengbêj tradition not only produces a rich set of meaning but also contributes to the survival of Kurdish language as a form of oral poetry (2011, p. 108). To my

⁷ The word of *mîr* was used for Kurdish landlords who were autonomous in the Ottoman Empire. With the establishment of the Turkish Republic, they were oppressed and exiled to different places. Every *mîr* used to have a dengbêj in order to memorize his heroic deeds. Following the suppression of *mîrs*, dengbêjs had also lost their authority and were silenced until the reappearance of Kurdish political movements.

observations, he does not reveal how the musical tone of voice has a critical influence upon the transmission of a specific set of meaning.

Clémence Scalbert-Yücel's article also discusses how the art of dengbêjs has been institutionalized as a tool for the production of particular political discourses (2009, p. 19). She also strikingly states that dengbêjs are invited to different sorts of festivals organized in different cities to exhibit their "local culture," in order to display the 'East.' Furthermore, Kurdish institutions and political organizations also approach dengbêjs in order to reconstruct their "silenced past" by revitalizing the Kurdish national memory. When dengbêjs participate in the activities organized by the Kurdish movement such as festivals, cultural activities, they are requested not to sing kilams about tribal conflicts among the Kurds. Scalbert-Yücel argues that whatever the motivations of these actors are, both the Turkish state and the Kurdish political movement lead to similar results: "a deep transformation of the practice, making the dengbêj a more 'frozen' than 'living' heritage" (2009, p. 20). Both the state and the Kurdish political movement produce certain discourses such as displaying the Eastern or a national subject representing the Kurds. Dengbêjs confront with various limitations by being requested not to sing about political events when they participate in a certain activity held by an official institution of the state such as municipality or TRT-6.⁸ In a similar way, the Kurdish political movement encourages them to sing whatever they want except for tribal conflicts. I think this imposed censorship emerges from the project of representing a national identity against the state politics silencing the Kurds. However, dengbêjs can still sing about tribal conflicts by transgressing the request of the Kurdish movement. I think there is

⁸ Dengbêjs encounters with TRT-6 is discussed in detail on the pages 56-7. The name of this state-run Kurdish TV channel has been changed as TRT Kurdi.

a zone of conflict between the Kurdish movement and dengbêjs, women and male dengbêjs especially in dengbêj houses and cultural centres founded by the Kurdish political movement. This zone of conflict is what makes the dengbêj tradition a living heritage rather than a frozen archaic tradition. Of course, this does not mean that the dengbêj tradition has not been transformed over time due to several factors such as urbanization, development of different voice technologies and so forth.

In addition to these, Marlene Schäfers specifically investigates how female dengbêjs attempt for making their voice more hearable in domestic and public spheres in her Ph.D. thesis (2015). Even if she writes about the voice both as a ‘human vocal apparatus’ and as a symbol of subjectivity or agency, she emphasizes female dengbêjs’ voices as an affective vocal apparatus to transmit affects based on a semiotic interpretation (Schäfers, 2015, p. 14). In this way, she does not explicate the unique, sonorous quality of different dengbêj voices.

Finally, studies on the dengbêj tradition commonly discuss the dengbêjî as a communicative artistic performance bearing the meaning. I believe that the sonic sphere of the voice has not been covered sufficiently in these studies. Therefore, I aim specifically to discuss the voice as an object in the dengbêj tradition. In chapter three, this thesis explains how the voice as an object allows the dengbêjs to possess uniqueness and how the tone of the voice identifies dengbêjs. A voice cannot correspond to a linguistic voice suggesting a proper meaning structured by the system of language (Dolar, 2006, p. 32). To illustrate, singing is beyond the language introducing codes and standards of its own (Dolar, 2006, p. 30). Voice as an affective drive and as an object enchants the audience and goes beyond the borders of the performer’s body by imposing itself on ‘the other’. Dengbêjs’ voices blur the words

and make them difficult to understand. Their unique use of timbre interprets what cannot be expressed in spoken and written language such as senses and emotions.

1.2 Chapters

After the introduction, the first chapter initially focuses on the effects of “the organized amnesia” (Özyürek, 2011, p. 3) imposed on the new citizens of the early Republic in Turkey. Especially Paul Connerton’s description of social memory (2007, pp. 13-4) is used in order to discuss how society remembers the past in Turkey through organized oblivion. The organized amnesia in Turkey aimed to produce the new bodies of the Republic through the replacement of the multicultural heritage of the Ottoman Empire with the new regime as a homogenous and secular nation-state (Özyürek, 2011: 3). Regarding that, the reforms implemented during the early Republican era actually reorganized the social memory of the society for the sake of Westernization and secularization (Özyürek, 2011, pp. 4-6). In the light of Connerton’s (2007, p. 14) and Halbwachs’s (1992, p. 40) description of social and collective memory, it can be assumed that the nation-building project actually has reorganized the social memory in Turkey as well. This kind of reconstruction of the past has triggered an organized forgetting, which leads the society to remember according to the already given codes and laws framed by the Turkish nation-state. In relation to the recollection of the past, the concept of folklore also has played a very critical role in the production of the new regimes of truth within the nation-building process. To illustrate, Arzu Öztürkmen specifically argues how the folklore was used as a political tool to produce a homogenized culture and to invent new traditions for the newly founded Turkish state (2001, p. 209). One of the Kurdish intellectuals, Cewad Mervanî states how he has been requested to collect Kurdish kilams, epics,

stories and translate them to Turkish (Merwanî, 2010, p. 18). Moreover, in some of the interviews, some of the dengbêjs indicate that they were requested to convert Kurdish traditional kilams into Turkish national songs by the TRT (Turkish Radio and Television Association) employees. Some Kurdish kilams were converted to Turkish whereas some of them were forbidden by the Turkish state by the claim of violating national integrity (Aksoy, 2014, p. 85). Due to the ban on Kurdish and alternative history narratives found in kilams, some of the kilams were perceived as threats. In addition, this chapter indicates how the discourse of folklore was used as a disciplinary mechanism aiming to establish its own national regime of truth by converting and banning some Kurdish songs. Despite the politics of forced forgetting, dengbêj narratives bring the silenced voices and narratives to the light by their sonic art. The suppressed Kurdish culture, language, and public memory have been vocalized and sustained by dengbêjs' voices. Thus, this chapter interrogates how silencing the past turns into a melancholy (Navaro-Yashin, 2012, p. 15) producing mechanism upon the Kurds as “silenced others” in Turkey. On the one hand, this melancholy producing mechanism destroys individuals' capacity to express their own memorial experiences, but on the other hand, particular memories and testimonies have opened a place to narrate the past in different registers of truth. Although these alternative narratives are based on personal expressions vocalized by dengbêjs, some of these kilams –especially the *kilamên şer* (pieces of conflict) – still reveal some historical facts such as the oppression of the Ottoman Empire and the Republic of Turkey upon the Kurds. Also, there are some kilams revealing how Kurds were in alliance with the Ottoman Empire. Furthermore, dengbêj performances have been going through a transformation with the various technological developments. Although these developments intend to revitalize the

dengbêj art, they have played a significant role in transforming it into a nostalgic form of art that is about to die out. Dengbêjs recently appear as archaic subjects living in a nostalgic past. Very few dengbêjs can compose new kilams, they generally repeat the old kilams that were composed and transmitted by older generations of dengbêjs alongside those played on Radio of Yerevan or Radio Baghdad. A large number of the dengbêjs I interviewed complained about the effects of media such as TV, internet and so forth. They view the emergence of TVs and the internet to play a negative effect on the dengbêj tradition. The interviewees usually assert that habits of listening music have been transformed. Since listeners prefer to listen to short songs with backing tracks, dengbêjs' kilams have been also shortened and reformatted by backing tracks. These new regulations limit dengbêjs' control of their voices and stories. Walter Benjamin have discussed how the epic side of truth is gradually removed from the realm of communication; instead, the new forms of information occupied the realm of the storytelling (1969, pp. 91-2). Considering Benjamin's argument on the removal of the storyteller as a subject from the realm of the truth production, dengbêjs who are the talented epic narrators recently have been turned into nostalgic objects representing a distant past. In relation to that, I focus on one of the recent Dengbêj Nights⁹ organized in the name of Nesrîn Şêrwan who died in 1990; I explicate how she as a subject bearing the memory has been transformed to an object/topic of memory. Thus, this chapter finally concludes that dengbêjs have been turned to objects/topics of memory who used to be the subjects carrying memory.

The second chapter grasps the voice as an object that identifies the subjects through its sonorous characteristics. Voice is actively used as a lever of thought;

⁹ <http://gazetekarinca.com/2018/12/istanbulda-dengbej-nights/> (Date accessed: 20 Jan. 2019)

however, it can be considered as a sonorous object which enables the individual to possess a unique sonorous identity. In relation to that, this chapter initially aims to discuss the borders of the voice with the help of Mladen Dolar's concept of voice as an object (2006, p. 16). He basically notes that the object voice is more than a tool of signification or a source of aesthetic enchantment. He understands the paradoxical existence of the object voice by addressing its dual characteristic based on interiority and exteriority. Dolar asserts that voice, on the one hand, creates some divisions between the subject and the other, body and language, linguistic and ethical, art and science, on the other hand, it connects these to each other (2006, pp. 102-3).

Considering this, it can be asserted the dengbêj performance unifies the performer with the audience, body with language, art with memory. The object voice creates its affective economy among the Kurds by liberating itself from the performer's control and circulates among the different Kurdish communities as a sonorous label of Kurdish culture and society. Therefore, it can be assumed that sometimes the voice is more than semiotics transgressing the performer's body and enchanting the audiences' perception as a sonorous object. Additionally, dengbêjs' traditional way of the use of their voice introduces their unique self to the audiences through a sonorous representation. To exemplify, there are some regions which have their unique sonic labels such as Badînan, Serhed, and Cizîra Botan. A listener of dengbêjs can recognize to which region the performer belongs. All these sonorous representations are introduced through the melodized tone of voice. So, the melodized tone of dengbêjs' voice is behind the semiotics enabling different voices to reciprocally communicate with each other. Moreover, dengbêjs' sonic labels create a common identification for the all Kurdish communities. Their unique use of timbre creates a sort of collective, national Kurdish identity transmitting some

specific unarchivable secrets, emotions, and senses (Bilal, 2006, p. 68). Besides semiotic structures of kilams, the sonic quality of dengbêjs' voice makes the context of kilams more memorable. The quality of a melodized tone of voice thus provides the continuation of the memory. Therefore, in order to gain authority and identity, dengbêjs are supposed to use their timbre in a talented way, they also possess a strong memory. Due to their sonorous effectivity upon the individuals, dengbêjs have been influenced by political tensions. They have been imprisoned, exiled or tortured since they bear alternative narratives of the past challenging the official history in Turkey. But they, in a way, have pursued to sing their own and the others' silenced testimonies. Recorded dengbêj voices by gramophone, tape recorder or CDs can circulate all around the world via the transgression of the borders of the oppressive Turkish state. They made some radio broadcastings in certain stations such as Radio Yerevan and Radio Baghdad. These radio stations have enabled the voice to circulate in the Middle East and created a reciprocal communication among the different Kurdish communities. In these stations, various programs have been made; however, for most of the audiences, hearing the dengbêjs' voice creates a unique sonic effect what encourages them to remember better. So, voice as an object creates its unique affective economy transgressing the fixed borders of the performer's body and the state's oppressive body.

There are different types of silences in the dengbêj tradition. Women and male dengbêjs' understandings of oppression differ from each other. Even if the dengbêj tradition provides a sonorous memory where different voices communicate with each other, it does not mean that all dengbêjs equally participate in dengbêj performances. Male dengbêjs state that the dengbêj tradition has been suffered from the denialist and oppressive politics whereas women dengbêjs much more point to

the patriarchal pressure on the singing female voice in Kurdish society. Therefore, the third chapter basically explicates how women take a place in the dengbêj tradition, what kind of problems they confront with and how women struggle for their singing voices against the gendered ideology in Kurdish society. It is commonly discussed that male dengbêjs used to sing in *dîwans* that used to be the assemblies of agha and/or sheikh whereas women dengbêjs' alternative performance places have been overshadowed. I think limitation of the dengbêj art to *dîwans* can mislead us about the women's status in the dengbêj tradition. In this respect, I would like to argue that women organize their own *dîwans* which are around the *tenûr* (oven made in a hole in the earth), *zom* (the foothills where usually women go to collect some edible plants and grazing) and in the house. On the one hand, the dengbêj tradition can be regarded as a threat subverting the Turkish official history, on the other hand, female dengbêjs are also silenced by the male-dominated tradition. To illustrate, most of the female dengbêjs point out that they have been confronting with many obstacles produced by both male dengbêjs and male relatives. Hearing a woman's voice is considered as a shameful act according to some religious perspectives (Schäfers, 2016, p. 26); therefore, women's performance has been silenced by men whose voice was also silenced by the Turkish state. Most of the women interviewees also reveal that they feel more comfortable when they go to *zom*, *bêrî* (milking) for grazing and prepare some dairy products. These uplands are usually remote places from the cities and villages and women generally deal with the preparation of dairy products. Therefore, women feel more comfortable to sing kilams in those realms that can be regarded as alternative public spheres. Women also have played a great role in the lamentation performances which are usually performed by women during funerals at cemeteries or in private places where men are not allowed to enter (Aras,

2014, p. 118). Recently, women dengbêjs express that they are more visible in the public spheres thanks to the women perspective of Kurdish political movement based on women's liberation. Yet, they express that they still confront many difficulties due to the male-based characteristics of public spheres such as concerts, festivals, dengbêj houses and coffeehouses. In addition to the patriarchal structure of Kurdish society, the forced displacement has also a great influence upon the female dengbêjs who usually perform in alternative public spheres that are usually their workplaces such as bêrî, zom, house, and tenûr. Therefore, they believe that they both struggle against the organized amnesia imposed by the Turkish state and resist the patriarchal Kurdish society.

The thesis concludes by revealing three fundamental characteristics of dengbêjs' voice: as a tool of meaning that materializes the language, as an object possessing its unique affective characteristics and as a sonorous label specifying the performer's identity. To illustrate, dengbêjs' voice has conveyed the alternative narratives of the past as a tool of meaning. And voice also transmits some unarchivable emotions and senses via its sonorous affective economy, which transgresses the order of language system and the performer's body by spreading to others' ears. As another critical point, dengbêjs' voice establishes the performer's identity as a sonorous label through a sonorous interpretation which is beyond the ordinary system of language. In the light of their unique way of the use of the voice, dengbêjs' narratives differ from normal daily speech semantically and poetically (Amy de la Bretèque, 2012, p. 129). The unspeakable and inexpressible experiences, feelings and emotions can be revealed through the dengbêjs' voices. Especially the kilams sung from the subject positions of women can be about women's regrets, love, sexual desires that have been oppressed by patriarchal social structures. So, the

musical effectivity of the voice determines the transmission of memory, voice as a sonic label and specific sonic identifications.

1.3 Methodology

This thesis is based on semi-structured and unstructured interviews, textual analysis and ethnographic observations. With the help of one of my friends, dengêj Weysî who work in Navenda Çanda Mezopotamya¹⁰, I made acquaintance with some researchers and dengbêjs in order to undertake a preliminary investigation. I did preliminary field research through the methodology of unstructured interviews. In the winter of 2017, I went to Van and interviewed with Îkram İşler and Îhsan Colemêrgî who are famous Kurdish researchers and writers dealing with history. We brainstormed to provide some questions for the preparation of a semi-structured interview. Especially the questions related to the Kurdish public memory and history were structured after these interviews. And then I went to Hakkari, Yüksekova, where I interviewed with Selîm Bulut¹¹ who deals with Kurdish dances and music in one of the Kurdish associations. In the light of these interviews, I conducted unstructured interviews with three dengbêjs by the names of dengbêj Fîkrî, Îsmâîl, and Newzat. Thereby, the basic questions of this thesis were prepared as they can be seen in the Appendix A.

I had the chance to meet various dengbêjs during my preliminary field research; therefore, I could contact certain people to do interviews with them. I did the field research in the summer of 2017 with sixteen people, including a person who

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¹⁰ Mesopotamia Cultural Centre was founded in 1991 as an art centre where Kurds gathered together and produced their art works. Despite different sorts of oppressions, they still maintain to produce art works.

¹¹ He used to work in Kurd-Der (Kurdish Language Research and Development Association). However, he recently cannot pursue his research due to the closure of this association by one of the recent decree-laws.

runs a dengbêj café and fifteen dengbêjs. First of all, I did seven interviews in Şırnak: one in Cizre, three in the province of Şırnak, three in Uludere. Secondly, I went to Van and did four interviews: three in the centre of Van and one in Erciş. I also went to a dengbêj café in Erciş in order to make some observations. Then, I did five interviews in the centre of Hakkari. Finally, I interviewed two women dengbêjs Dengbêj Henîfa and Kurdê both in İstanbul. I undertook these latter interviews relatively late, in 2018 since Henîfa and Kurdê came to a workshop organized by a group of Kurdish students. All the interviews were conducted in Kurdish; however, sometimes dengbêjs spoke Turkish in some parts of interviews. The detailed list of the interviewees can be seen in the Appendix B. The data discussed in this thesis, therefore, is based on interviews with dengbêjs. While to examine all the data provided in these interviews and observations is not possible, all of them somehow contributed to the overall study.

I attempt to reflect on what I ‘hear’ from these people in multiple parts of this study. Additionally, I joined a workshop¹², which was continued from December 2019 until the end of February 2019. The training of the workshop was provided by Alî Tekbaş who is the soloist of one of the most famous Kurdish bands known as *Lawje*. The workshop aimed to establish a bridge between the traditional dengbêj culture and new Kurdish generations. This workshop has also provided an invaluable ground for me to observe the ways in which dengbêjs and younger Kurdish generations interacted.

In the light of these interviews and sociological observations in dengbêj houses or Alî Tekbaş’s workshop, I aim to engage with the dengbêjs to observe how

¹² In December 2018, Alî Tekbaş invited me for a workshop of Kurdish Traditional Folk Melodies (Atolyeya Newayên Kurdî yên Gelerî/ Kürt Geleneksel Halk Ezgileri).

their singing voices function. Simultaneously, I aim to contribute to the debate on memory politics, nationalism and the Kurdish issue. Although this thesis is shaped by my analyses and interpretations, I have tried my best to let my perspective be reshaped by the interviewees' perspectives. While the introduction and second chapter consist of mostly theoretical debates, the data collected from the field research and their analysis are found in chapter three and four. One of the fundamental methodological obstacles that I have experienced in my field research was asking about the sonorous and affective quality of the voice to the dengbêjs. Since they have mostly focused on the semiotic substance of kilams, they rarely talk about the sonorous quality of their voice. Despite constituting difficulties at the moment of the research, I later discovered how dengbêjs classified the voice sonorously as the voice of çiyayî or deştî. This is a significant point that supports my argument regarding the sonorous and affective quality of the dengbêjs' voices and the discussions on the uniqueness of the voice, the sonorous characteristics of voice beyond the semiotic substance of the language.

CHAPTER 2

ORGANIZED AMNESIA; REMEMBERING AND FORGETTING THROUGH THE HISTORIOGRAPHY

It is quite hard to speak in such a critical process. We can't speak, we can't say whatever we think. It is such a disorder that I even can't express(...) If someone asks why you are here, tell them you just came to ask *kîras fîstan* (a traditional Kurdish women's dress), you came only for *kîras fîstan*... (D. Silêman, Şırnak, July 28, 2017).¹³

Dengbêj Silêman is a tailor who is almost 80 years old. Although he is not able to sing kilams recently, he is still known as a talented dengbêj in one of the districts of Şırnak known as Roboski. When I first met him, his tailor shop was surrounded by police barricades. These barricades were there because the tailor shop is next to the local municipality where a trustee ('*kayyum*' is the Turkish official name) has been appointed recently.¹⁴ Furthermore, Şırnak was a place where the state of emergency that was declared after the curfew processes were strictly implemented. In eastern Turkey, encountering such an atmosphere is not an exceptional case. After I entered the shop, I saw that he was sewing a traditional Kurdish dress. I explained to him the scope of my research. Although I stated that this study is limited to the dengbêj tradition, his immediate response was that he could not talk about politics. This was puzzling for me because I had not even mentioned a word about politics. Then, I suddenly realized that not only his self-censorship and silenced voice but also, the

¹³ “Di wextekî wesa da zehmet e mirov dengê xwe bike. Em nikarîn biaxivîn, em nikarîn her tiştê xwe bêjîn (...) Nexweşiyek we ye ku min teqet çî nîn e bêjîm (bêdengî)... Ger yek pirsyar ket, hûn pirsyarê *kîras fîstan* kiriye, ber *kîras fîstanê* hatine wêre”

¹⁴ Between the 2016 and 2017 trustees were appointed to eastern and south-eastern municipalities on charges of terrorism [For more details see the report of The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR); https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Countries/TR/OHCHR_South-East_TurkeyReport_10March2017.pdf]

language he uses are very much intermingled with a politics based on organized amnesia. At that moment, I felt that I was keeping a sort of Pandora's box in my hands. After that moment, I could not intervene in his speech, he was speaking with his stream of consciousness. He gave me one of his CDs that were recorded in a TV broadcasting. And he said that he has not sung a kilam for many years since he believes that singing Kurdish kilams bring about a sort of disorder. Throughout the interview, he stressed repetitively that Kurds are in a position to *nexweşî* (disorder) for long years without giving more detail. He actually points out the ongoing political pressure on the Kurds by naming it as a sort of disorder. And at the very end of our conversation, he recommended me not to speak the details of our conversation with anyone else. Instead, I was recommended to tell that I went to the tailor shop to buy *kîras fîstan*. Even though we didn't speak anything about politics, his anxiety related to self-censorship is already a political response. He was like a spectre who lost the ability to speak. This loss was not a loss of memory or language, but a silence based on the unspeakability of the past/recent traumas. Ultimately, his interpretation of the *nexweşî* and his anxiety reveal the influence of oppressive state politics composed of the attempts of assimilation, the denial of identity, and the ban on Kurdish language. In the light of this encounter, this chapter examines three fundamental issues. Initially, it presents a historical background to explicates what kinds of voids and silences exist in the Turkish historiography. Secondly, I discuss how memories are vocalized in the *dengbêj* tradition opposing the official narratives of the past. Finally, I attend to the question of how the *dengbêj* tradition has been instrumentalized as a tool of politics and how the instrumentalization of *dengbêj* tradition produces certain political discourses. Thus, this chapter investigates

memory politics in Turkey in detail by understanding the dengbêj tradition based on different interpretations of the past challenging the nexweşî.

From the beginning of the 16th century until the beginning of the 20th century, Kurds used to be recognized as autonomous communities by the Ottoman Empire (Bedirxan, 1997, p. 9). In the late 19th century, *Aşiret Mektepleri* (Tribal Schools) and *Hamidiye Süvari Alayları* (Hamidiye Light Cavalry Regiments) were established to control the Kurdish population (Rogan, 2009, p. 83-107). Especially the Kurdish tribal leaders' children were gathered by these institutions as a part of the population policies to take such centrifugal forces as tribes under the effective central imperial control. Towards the establishment of the Republic of Turkey, the politics of regulating the population was maintained by either forcing into exile or by the confinement of Kurdish mîrs and sheikhs into prisons to destroy the social cohesion of Kurdish communities (Güneş & Zeydanlıoğlu, 2014, p. 10). With the Lausanne Agreement, the official borders of the new nation-states were clarified, and the Kurdish territories were separated between the four newly emerging nation-states (Beşikçi, 1990, p. 22). Whereas Kurds used to live as autonomous communities for centuries under the rule of the Ottoman Empire, they were reidentified as “mountain (dağlı) Iranians, Turks or Arabs” by the Lausanne Agreement signed under the rule of the newly founded nation-states (Bedirxan, 1997, p. 9). İsmail Beşikçi addresses this agreement as a turning point where Kurds were internationally colonized by different nation-states (1990, p. 21). Aimé Césaire's discussion of the colonization can be useful to provide a further description to analyse how the Kurdish population was distributed to the four different nation-states. He investigates how the European colonialism suffocates the Africans, Indians, and Asians in the name of civilization and reveals that colonizers only highlight the progress, achievements such as the

diseases cured and the improved standards of living by ignoring how the colonized societies were drained of their essence, torn from their gods, lands, habits (2000, pp. 42-3). The Republic of Turkey state used a nationalist agenda whereas the redefinition of Kurds as ‘mountain Turks,’ the translation of Kurdish folk songs into Turkish without specifying their origins display that the newly emerged regime also includes a colonialist attitude. The discourse of the mountain Turk is similar to the discourse of ‘barbaric Negro’ as argued by Aimé Césaire as the production of white colonizers (2000, pp. 21), the discourse of ‘mountain Turks’ is also an invention of the Turkish state for the redefinition of the Kurds in order to produce a homogenous Turkish nation. To produce a pure nation for the new regime, all ethnic, religious and racial differences were intended to be homogenized by means of forgetting, ignoring, silencing, dominating and rejecting (Güneş & Zeydanlıoğlu, 2014, p. 8). The Kurdish territories were renamed, and many Kurds were forcefully displaced from their lands.

The nation-building process produced a sort of “organized amnesia” and attempted to eliminate ethnic diversities insisting on a homogenous history, nation and homeland (Özyürek, 2011, p. 3). While Armenians and other ethnoreligious communities were eliminated to produce a unified nation, Kurds were regarded as a natural component of Muslim society (Güneş & Zeydanlıoğlu, 2014, p. 8).

Therefore, Kurds were exposed to assimilation and Turkification policies. Mehmet Bayrak’s *Kürtler’e Vurulan Kelepçe Şark Islahat Planı* provides certain historical documents revealing the political agenda of the Turkish government based on the discourse of Turkification (2009). To assimilate the Kurds for the sake of the nation-building process, the Turkish state aimed to destroy their memories initially by banning their language, then the publications on the Kurdish language and Kurds, and forcefully displacing them (Bayrak, 2009, pp. 128-30). The discussion of

memory, in this case, could be better understood in the light of Simonetta Falasca Zamponi's arguments on memory politics in the fascist Italian regime administered by Mussolini. Zamponi investigates how fascists bridge the rupture between the past and the present, and how they fashion a new way of remembering and storytelling by creating a simulacrum of an organic wholeness (1998, p. 418). She writes:

(...) fascism created the simulacrum of a national community, a fake organic whole founded on the suppression of the traditional social ties and dependent on the absolute submission of its members to the regime. Fascism aimed to delete differences among its subjects; to create a homogeneity, as symbolized by the fascio, which implied discipline, unity, and subordination to the will of the leader (Zamponi, 1998, p. 440).

By considering Zamponi's discussions of fascism and the erasure of diversities in society, one can discover similar characteristics in the nation-building process in Turkey. To put in concrete terms, ethnic, religious, political and cultural pluralities were rejected for the establishment of a homogenous Turkish nation. Different reforms were declared to frame the cultural body of the new Turkish nation-state in the name of secularization and Westernization (Özyürek, 2011, pp. 4-5). Especially Turkish elites expanded their energy for the rejection of Kurdish identity through different means such as dislocation, converting Kurdish village names into Turkish and prohibition of the Kurdish language (Jongerden, 2009, pp. 9-11). All these interventions from the 1920s onward resulted in a series of Kurdish revolts, which were harshly suppressed by the state. The unjust treatments in Zilan (1930), Dersim (1938), Maraş (1978), and Sivas (1993) among many others have caused numerous traumatic memories. Thus, the Kurds did not fit into the nation-building project; furthermore, they have resisted against the organized amnesia brought by Turkification policies.

The simulacrum of national wholeness by ignoring ethnic, religious, political pluralities in the society, leads the people to a melancholy producing mechanism.

The erasure of diversities from the communities or conversion of different identities into Turkishness creates a feeling of loss that is the embodiment of melancholy among the non-homogenized society. In an environment where the constitution of collective memory serves the legitimation of the nation-state, the acts of forgetting and remembering have become integral to political power. Since different interpretations of the past can threaten the imagined national wholeness, the Turkish state has framed a collective identity through selective forgetting and remembering framed by nationalist historiography. Towards the 1980s, the revival of Kurdish nationalism can be evaluated as a rupture in the official narratives of history, nation, and homeland or as a failure of organized amnesia. For example, Diyarbakir Prison can be regarded as one of the fundamental symptoms of this rupture. On the one hand, the Turkish state systematically tortured political prisoners in Diyarbakir prison in the 1980s, on the other hand, this prison was determined as a centre of education for disciplining the prisoners. Certain acts of remembering and forgetting were engraved on the prisoners' bodies and minds. Especially the national anthem and certain slogans or songs glorifying Turkish nationalism were dictated to the prisoners. Esat Oktay who was the director of Diyarbakir Prison was also calling that prison a 'school.' At Oktay's command, military authorities claimed that they were taming the intimate enemies of the nation. The Turkish state preferred not to kill the prisoners; instead, letting them live was a way of disciplining and punishing them through the discourse of Turkification. In Diyarbakir Prison, the prisoners were forced to listen to and sing Turkish songs and the national anthem and had to repeat phrases glorifying Turkishness (Zeydanlioğlu, 2009, pp. 10-1). Speaking Kurdish was forbidden whereas speaking Turkish was imposed. So, the Kurdish prisoners were forced to forget their mother tongue and their ability of speaking was castrated.

Considering this, the Diyarbakir Prison is not only a place where the political prisoners were tortured and killed but also a discursive force to pursue the nationalist regime of truth.

Here we see how the truth effects of nationalism were recreated targeting particular bodies. The state had encouraged the academics and intellectuals to produce knowledge about the Kurds' Turkishness. Various studies were produced by the Turkish Language and Turkish History Institutes and the Institute for the Study of Turkish Culture; and these studies usually alleged that Kurds were a Turkish community belonging to Central Asian Turks (Beşikçi, 1990, pp. 217-22). The knowledge of theoretically, scientifically and legally 'proven' Turkishness based on organized amnesia was literally carved on the prisoners' bodies in Diyarbakir Prison. Although the discourse of Turkification performs and produces power, it also renders it fragile making it possible to be challenged. This can be traced in how Turkification as a nationalist discourse has triggered the emergence of various counter-discourses and resistances in Diyarbakir Prison. Despite the risk of further torture, singing in Kurdish has been one of the fundamental acts of resistance against the politics of forgetting (Zeydanlıoğlu, 2009, p.11). As Foucault explicates, power is productive and circular (2001, p. 120), domination does not function as a smooth system. Instead, it also invokes certain resistances. Even if the prison was considered as a laboratory where Turkishness was carved on the prisoners' bodies and mind, the prisoners struggled for their memories, testimonies, and regimes of truths by speaking, singing and shouting slogans.

Eventually, Diyarbakir Prison turned into a place of resistance that has challenged the project of creating a homogenous Turkish nation. Influenced by what has happened in Diyarbakir Prison, some of the radicalized Kurdish young people

organized an armed struggle named as PKK (the Kurdish abbreviation for Kurdistan Workers' Party). The conflicts between the state and the PKK started in 1984. Moreover, throughout the 1990s and 2000s, many pro-Kurdish political parties were founded. They are as follows: People's Labor Party (Halkın Emek Partisi), Democracy Party (Demokrasi Partisi), People's Democracy Party (Halkın Demokrasi Partisi), Democratic People's Party (Demokratik Halk Partisi), Democratic Society Party (Demokratik Toplum Partisi) and Peace and Democracy Party (Barış ve Demokrasi Partisi). Although these pro-Kurdish parties had democracy in their political agenda, many of them were closed on the grounds of conducting subversive and separatist activities threatening the unity of the nation. Recently, the People's Democracy Party was founded; however, its parliamentarians, activists, and politicians were also arrested over the years.¹⁵ Looking at the political history we can see that the attempts to assimilate and silence the Kurds were challenged by different forms and attempts of the Kurdish political movement.

In today's Turkey, there is still an ongoing political tension, which has been observed in the recent curfew processes.¹⁶ Between 2015 and 2017, many residential areas were destroyed in Sur, Cizre, the centre of Şırnak province, Yüksekova, and Nusaybin.¹⁷ Millions of people have been influenced negatively. Various NGOs including THIV¹⁸ and OHCHR¹⁹ pointed to the violation of international human

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¹⁵ “Gözaltına Alınan HDP'li 12 Vekilden 9'u Tutuklandı, 3'ü Serbest.” *Bianet*, 4 Nov. 2016, m.bianet.org/bianet/siyaset/180431-gozaltina-alinan-hdp-li-12-vekilden-9-u-tutuklandi-3-u-serbest. (Date accessed: March 20, 2019).

¹⁶ Hakikat Adalet Hafıza Merkezi prepared an online map in order to follow the human rights violations during the curfew process: <http://hakikatadalethafiza.org/sokaga-cikma-yasaklar-ve-sivil-olumler/> (Date accessed: June 12, 2017).

¹⁷ Especially Sur became the place for people escaping from the state terror in Elazığ, Palu. Yüksekova was a place for the forcefully displaced people whose villages were burned in the 1990s. So, today these people are again and again forced to leave their homes.

¹⁸ <http://tihv.org.tr/79-gun-suren-yuksekovasokagacikmayasagi-gozelem-raporu/> (Date accessed: June 29, 2017)

rights. Numerous atrocities have been legitimized in the name of protecting the nation from ‘internal and external enemies.’ The discourse of protecting the nation from the ‘traitors’ and ‘terrorists’ still reproduces itself even if the political conjunctures have changed throughout history. Ultimately, this cycle of conflicts addresses the limits of organized amnesia.

2.1 Public memory as a zone of conflict

The act of remembering enables individuals to interact with the past; on the one hand, it draws individuals to express their memories and create a common past. In other words, collective memories belonging to certain societies are manifested in individual memories. Thus, it can be argued that memory occupies a threshold between the individual and the society, the past and the present. Maurice Halbwachs, who is considered as one of the leading figures of memory studies, theorizes memory as a socially constructed realm. Although he affirms that group memory manifests itself in individual memories, he also notes that the individual remembers the past by placing himself in the perspective of a certain group (Halbwachs; 1992, pp. 39-40). Thinking in line with Halbwachs’ conceptualization of collective memory, it can be argued that even personal memories of the individual require the interaction with the other people to be conveyed to the future. This conceptualization is important to show how the memory of a community is manifested through the individual. It is usually agreed that individuals living in a certain society interact with a common past; however, it does not mean that all these individuals agree with a certain collective memory. Even though Halbwachs does not deal with the ruptures in the

¹⁹ http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Countries/TR/OHCHR_South-East_TurkeyReport_10March2017.pdf (Date accessed: June 29, 2017).

collective memory, he mentions briefly that the past is not preserved but is reconstructed in the present implying that the common past is not an intact entity (1992). In a similar vein, Esra Özyürek theorizes memory through the conceptualization of public memory. She is inspired by Arjun Appadurai and Carol Breckenridge's definition of public culture that considers the public as a zone of debate rather than a fake organic wholeness (Özyürek, 2011, p. 8). In this respect, Özyürek thinks that collective memory is not a unified narrative of the past. Instead, different groups and individuals have their unique narratives of memory that do not fit into a certain public memory (Özyürek, 2011, pp. 8-9). Özyürek's focus on public memory can be illustrative to understand that memory exists in an open-ended relation of power challenged by different acts of remembering. Paul Connerton's conceptualization of social memory also discusses that every new order promises a subversion of the previous one. However, the new order absorbs the rule of the old order by the recollection of the past through commemorative ceremonies and bodily practices (Connerton, 1989, p. 10). All of these different conceptualizations of memory – collective, public, or social- illustrate how remembering and forgetting are inevitably related. Societies remember through a kind of recollection of the past but always re-shaped by different dynamics of forgetting. The Turkish historiography suggests a collective memory based on a nationalist Turkish history; however, different acts of remembering as foster- counter- collective memories that challenge this fixed narrative of the past. Therefore, we can say that public memory turns to a zone of conflict where the national historiography and different narratives of the past clash.

The politics of memory especially in the nation-building project aims to replace the everyday memory of individuals with the reproduction of the past by

nationalist historiography. Thus, nation-states as ‘imagined communities’ require the production of a usable past for the representation and legitimation of their new regimes. Benedict Anderson suggests the term imagined community to discuss the social and discursive production of nationalism in the 18th and 19th centuries (2006, p. xiii). In Anderson’s account, an imagined community gives its members a collective identity by regulating their historical, social and geographical belongings. Consequently, the invention of collective memory has been regarded as a fundamental tool in the nation-building process. In a similar vein, Melissa Bilal notes:

(...) national identity in Turkey, Turkish national culture, and official Turkish History were conducted through the repression, denial or assimilation of ethnic identities and cultures in Anatolia. The very result of Turkification during the institutionalization of the Republic has been the displacement of different ethnic groups from the collective memory of people living in Turkey and from the cultural representation of Anatolia (2006, p. 73).

Thus, the constitution of a homogenous collective memory to represent the collective identity of a nation can mean the erasure of ethnic, religious and politic differences from the realm of collective memory.

The idea of ‘homogenous and linear time’ suggested by modern nation-states opens a slit between what one knows and what has happened in the past (Edkins, 2003, pp. xiii-xiv). However, the discourse of homogenous past also renders the national historiography fragile. Jenny Edkins puts forward the open-endedness and fragility of the historiography as follows “The story is never finished: the scripting of memory by those in power can always be challenged, and such challenges are found at moments and places where the very foundations of the imagined community have been laid out” (2003, p. 216). Considering Edkins’ focus on the open-endedness of the story, in Turkey the official historiography and different narratives of the past conflict with one another radically. Büşra Ersanlı states that the Turkish

historiography functions for legitimating the Turkish Republic as a nation-state by ignoring certain historical dynamics (2003, p. 239). The kind of historiography that is the erasure of certain facts from the realm of the history produces a sort of discontinuity. Although official narratives of the past intend to produce organized amnesia through selective exclusions and inclusions, the silenced and oppressed narratives based on oral narratives, artistic interpretations such as literature and, music challenge the selective historiography (Neyzi, 2010, p. 443).

During the nation-building process in Turkey, Kurds have been considered as a threat that should be contained within the new nation-states. It has been intended to assimilate them with the urge to produce a homogenous national body. However, denialist and oppressive policies of the Turkish state have been challenged by the oppressed people. In the same vein, Cengiz Güneş and Welat Zeydanlıoğlu indicate that:

With the rise of the Kurdish nationalist movement and mobilisation, a serious blow was dealt with the Kemalist myth of an ethnically homogenous country made up only of ‘Turks’ and Turkish speakers. The Kemalist policy of Turkification through denial and repression of the Kurdish ethnicity has without any doubt contributed both to the assimilation of millions of Kurds into mainstream Turkish society, but also to the politicisation and radicalisation of millions of Kurds in defence of their political, linguistic, and cultural rights... Indeed, the rise of Kurdish nationalism remains an undeniable and unforgettable traumatic reminder that Turkey has not completed the making of a homogenous nation-state of Turkish speakers (2014, pp. 11-2).

In a similar vein, Mesut Yeğen addresses that it was aimed to assimilate Kurds as Turks while using politics of discrimination against non-muslim communities in Turkey (2006, pp. 54-5). However, Kurds have turned into quasi-citizens, even into ‘a disappointment’ overwhelming nationalist politics that targeted to produce a homogenized nation (Yeğen, 2006, pp. 74-88). Ultimately, each community possesses different acts of remembering the past. Even if the national historiography

claims a homogenous collective memory, the oppressed ones' oral traditions and the artistic interpretations of the oppressed continue to reveal a counter-collective memory.

2.2 Dengbêjs' narratives as different interpretations of the past

If we go back to dengbêj Silêman's silence that was mentioned in the beginning of this chapter, we can say that the repression of the Kurdish language and identity function as a nexweşî producing mechanism drawing individuals to a feeling of loss and silence. When I visited the bazaar of Roboski, many people talked about the quality of dengbêj Silêman's voice as a dengbêj. They also indicated that he has not been singing for years since he has been afraid of getting into trouble for using Kurdish or talking about the Kurdish issue. On the one hand, dengbêj Silêman was listening to dengbêjs on the cassette player when I first saw him. Even if he lapsed into silence by not singing kilams, he still desires to listen to dengbêjs on the cassette player. When I asked him why he quitted singing, he was yearning for the dengbêj art by complaining about ongoing political tensions. Even though he states that he refuses to sing kilams and to talk about politics to cope with nexweşî, his "silence" creates a feeling of melancholy that is the loss of his dengbêj art and ability of self-expression. In this respect, the term of nexweşî corresponds to the feeling of melancholy left behind a desperate experience of loss. Providing an elaborated discussion on Freud's article, Navaro-Yashin comments on the melancholy:

(...) Freud (2001 [1917]) studied melancholia as an inner state of being – a psychological condition generated out of the loss of a loved object who could not be grieved over. If mourning allowed for grieving, and therefore an overcoming of the feeling of loss through the lapse of time, melancholia resisted such closure (2009, p. 15).

Since any sort of political demand for the Kurds was regarded as a threat, Dengbêj Silêman preferred to keep his silence as a person singing Kurdish ballads. In this respect, we can see that he suffers from the loss of his ‘language’ due to the ongoing effects of political pressure. So, nexweşî producing mechanisms have limited the Kurds’ capacity to tell their own experiences and testify to their collective memories. Therefore, oral narratives and artistic interpretations appear as commonly used alternative ways of bearing the past and coping with the nexweşî (Çiftçi, 2014; Gültekin, 2013; Kevirbirî, 2002; Kızılkaya, 2000). Although oral narratives can include highly personal views, exaggerations and even (semi)fictive interpretations, they still present alternative narratives of the past. Annette Wieviorka discusses the significance of literature as a way of bearing witness by exemplifying certain writers who focus on the mass murder of Jews in the Nazi concentration camps (2006). In the same vein, Marc Nichanian argues that the literature can bear limited witness for the *Catastrophe* experienced by the Armenians. In the light of the ‘witnessing literature,’ I argue that dengbêjs narratives provide an alternative interpretation of the past embodying the silenced narratives in voice and words.

My first observation that comes from the fieldwork is that performing a kilam enables dengbêjs to express their feelings whereas making a speech limits their capacity of expression. Even if women dengbêjs’ unique experiences are discussed in detail in chapter two, I would like to state that women have encountered different obstacles while participating in public. However, singing kilams and lamenting sometimes enable women to shape certain narratives in public as active agents.

Dengbêj Rehîma whose family was forcefully displaced in the 1990s²⁰ states that it

²⁰ A total of 3.206 villages were destroyed or burned down between the 1990s and the beginning of the 2000s (Jongerden, 2006: 62) According to Internal Displacement Monitoring Center (2014). The estimated number of the displaced Kurds is 954.000; according to Hacettepe University (2006), it is

was forbidden to visit the village for 7 years. After the ban was removed, she revisited the village with his brother Salih. Since she had seen that the poplar trees were toppled and faded, she could not speak. She says that she preferred to sing a kilam instead of talking. She has told me:

A journalist came to our village, he came, and he was one of our relatives. His name was Kamil Demir. He came and asked ‘What are you doing here? Could you tell me what happened here?’ I didn’t tell anything. I said I don’t want to tell. What I feel from the heart I... I turned and looked at the village, and my heart was burned. And I began to sing a kilam (D. Rehîma, Hakkari, August 25, 2017).²¹

Rehîma Öztaş’s silence against the journalist stems from the incommunicability and unspeakability of the traumatic forced displacement. When someone faces a traumatic experience, the system of language has a limited capacity for transmission and interpretation. Dengbêj Rehîma had left her village after she married in 1975. Therefore, she was not forcefully displaced, unlike her family. However, she interacted with the past catastrophic event as a pseudo-witness by listening to the events from the narratives of her family. She also turns into a witness by visiting the destroyed village after the removal of the ban. Therefore, she liberates the testimonies of the ones who ‘touched the bottom’ (Agamben, 1999, p. 34) and challenges the unspeakability of the catastrophic event by singing kilam:

Look at Gûzareş what a beautiful place

I said, Salih look at how Gûzareş is splendid

I said Salih I cannot bear this sorrow, oh boy, what a beauty

Salih, my brother! Say within 7 years, thirty people of this village...

—
somewhere between 954.000 and 1.201.000 and 3.000.000 for the Kurdish Human Rights Project (2007).

²¹ “Kameraciyek hate wêre, kameraciyek hat mirofê me boxwe bû. Navê wî Kamil bû, Kamil Demir. Hatine me gote ‘hewe çi heye? We çi divêt bêjin mesele çi ye, bo me biaxivin.’ Min negot, min çi tişt bo negot. Min gote, ne ez nabêjim. Belê min bo xwe dilê xwe da çi kir ewek... Min berê xwe da gundê, dilê min gelek bo sot. Min jî hindê kilam pêra got.”

Say how people died with sorrow and dreams in their heart)

Say Saliho wey Saliho oy oy oy!

Wey Saliho your sister can sacrifice herself for you

We said, Salih look at that majestic mountain!

Salih, my brother! Say how our graveyard is in ruins

My brother, Salih! Say it has been 7 years, no body prayed for the dead people

Say Saliho oy Saliho oy hoy wey, Saliho your sister can sacrifice herself for you.²²

Shoshana Felman who has written on trauma and memory takes silence not as a loss of the ability to speak; instead, she regards the silence as a refusal to acknowledge the people (1992, p. 183). Sometimes a catastrophic experience cannot be expressed through ordinary language since its aftereffects transgress the border of an ordinary language. Thinking in line with Felman's theorization of silence, it can be asserted that dengbêj Rehîma's refusal to make an ordinary speech emerges from the unspeakability of a traumatic or catastrophic event. Finding the village in ruins and death of some of her forcefully displaced relatives with the feeling of homesickness shatter her language. However, she still has the feeling to tell something concerning the traumatic experience of forced displacement. On the one hand, the real

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²² Bera xwe bide Gûzareşa mal xirab çend şerîn e
Min got Salih Beg tu berê xwe bide Gûzareşa rengîn ax çendî geş e
Salih Beg min go ez we barê nav da neşêm, ax lawo çendî xweş e
Bêje Salih birayo ew e heft sal e sîh insanêd vî gundê...
Beje çawa xem û xeyalên xwe hemî birin çûne malqa
Bêje wey Saliho vey Saliho oy oy oy
Wey Saliho oy oy oy xwişk bigorî
Me go Salih Bey tu bera xwe bide çîyayekî salihê
Ax law çend bilind e
Salih bira min go piştta zozan e o la berda gundê
Bêje Salih birayoo ew e heft sal e... Gûzareşa rengîn axax çend delale
Bejê Salih bira min mexbera me ay o law çend bêhal e
Bêje Salih birayo ew e heft sal e miryên qebran belê ne fatheyek law ne sehlayek
Bêje wey Saliho wey Saliho oy hoy wey Saliho xwişk bigorî

witnesses already lost their capacity to testify and were doomed to silence; on the other hand, the silence that draws the pseudo-witness to narrate the unspeakability of catastrophic events possesses a dialogical and communicable characteristic. While dengbêj Rehîma began to sing lament mentioned above, her mother was accompanying her by sighing and prolonging the last syllables of some verses. Dengbêj Rehîma's mother asserted that she cannot remember and sing kilams since she is 81 years old. However, dengbêj Rehîma's singing voice drew her mother to accompany the kilams and to interact with the past. Rehîma and her mother wove an acoustic language that conveyed an affective, sonorous interpretation to me as a listener rather than only a semiotic-based representation. On the one hand, dengbêj Rehîma not only turns herself into a pseudo-witness by lamenting in the form of singing kilam, but also calls the listener -especially his brother Salih- to bear witness.

Dengbêjs' performances through the melodized tone of voice actually have enabled the Kurds to communicate their subjective/collective. Dengbêjs' voices provoke people's feelings because the human voice "enhances the sense-making effect unlike mechanical voices" (Dolar, 2006, p. 22). Dengbêj Miqades reveals "When I tell a kilam, different sorts of feelings composed of sorrow, merriment, pain emerge (...) If I sing kilams on the earthquake of Van, it reminds the feeling of that day (D. Miqades, Van, August 1, 2017)."²³ Indeed, it is clear that the melodized tone of the human voice triggers some feelings and draws the audiences to remember. Moreover, especially in a dengbêj gathering, performing a kilam draws the other dengbêjs to tell another one. Although they ritually compete with each other, the feelings that they remember move them to sing a kilam. In the same vein, Ramazan

²³ "Yanî tiştan heye carinan hesta girîn têtê, carinan hestekî şabûnê têtê, hestekî kederî ye, hestekî iiii (...) mesela deprem çêbûysa, hesta depremê..."

Aras puts forward that the kilams composed of pain, suffering, rebels, heroes, martyrs, innocence and misery enable the survivors of political violence to express their feelings and to cope with their sufferings (Aras, 2014, p. 119). Thus, different sorts of effect transmitted through the voice provoke a sort of communication of the feelings. Especially the singing voice makes more meaning than mechanical voices since it invokes the senses. Even if one doesn't understand the content, as in the case of a non-speech voice, it enchants the listener. Although dengbêj Silêman was excessively frightened, the majority of my interviewees stated that their melodized speech enables them to tell their feelings and to make their voice hearable by the other people. Therefore, dengbêjs determine that telling the kilam can relieve them since being silenced 'drives them crazy (D. Îsmet, Newzat, Maaz, 2017; Henîfa 2018). Ultimately, performing a kilam as a melodized speech paves the way for dengbêjs to tell their feelings and expressions including the unspeakable ones.

Additionally, we can say that the dengbêj tradition enables moving beyond the Turkish nationalist historiography. Dengbêjs' kilams have conveyed the past as alternative narratives of testimony. Especially some specific kilams can include the historical turning points for Kurds. Different Kurdish revolts have been among the fundamental themes in kilams. Within these kilams, the people who were killed during the rebellions were memorized by the dengbêjî. So, dengbêjs as the bearers of the past bear witness in place of the "drowned ones" in Primo Levi's words about witnessing in Auschwitz. Since the drowned one lost his ability to speak, the survivor becomes the witness in lieu of the drowned one (Agamben, 1999, p. 44). Agamben tells that: "The language of testimony is a language that no longer signifies and that, in not signifying, advances into what is without language, to the point of taking on a different insignificance - that of the complete witness, that of he who by definition

cannot bear witness” (1999, p. 39). Inspired by Agamben, it seems tenable to argue that dengbêjs’ kilams constitute a new language for the one who did not have the chance to testify. These pieces cannot guarantee a complete witness; however, they manifest sonorously what cannot be witnessed. For example, *Momen* is one of the well-known kilams that is about the murder of a 12 years old little girl who has 3 brothers. Although it is not exactly known when happens this event, there is a place with the name of *çiyayê* (mountain) Momen in Hakkari. Momen every day brings the animals to grazing. One day she realizes that a lamb is hungry in the flock and cannot move. Momen embraces the lamb and begins to pray to God for food to feed the lamb. At that moment, milk comes out from her breasts. Her brothers realize and decide to kill Momen to restore their honour. So, this kilam is a story of honour killing. Momen cannot speak as a real witness who was killed by her brothers; however, her murder has been narrated by kilams. The catastrophic event experienced by Momen has been lamented by dengbêjs as pseudo-witnesses.

Dengbêj narratives put forward the ‘epic side of truth’ by testifying the past from their subjective point of view that challenges the official narratives of the past. Dengbêjs subjective and circular narratives can be changeable whereas the nationalist historiography reduces the past into a piece of information that excludes the other’s alternative narratives. Therefore, their narratives embody the epic side of truth that can be reconstructed in multiple ways. Within kilams, the Kurdish characters identify themselves as *fîrarî* (fugitive), *mehkûm* (captive). Those archived as fugitives by the official historiography are re-narrated as heroic characters or innocent victims from an epical perspective. Kilams have been considered as alternative sources of memory. Dengbêjs are regarded as historians narrating past events. For example, dengbêj Fîkrî used to work as an employee in a high school in

Yüksekova, he, therefore, could afford a gramophone or go to İstanbul to record some of his kilams. In the 1980s, he was charged with having a gun in his house and sentenced to 4 years. Throughout his imprisonment, his family had buried his cassettes and gramophone records in the ground in order not to be exposed to police raids. Since dengbêj Fîkrî believed that singing Kurdish is just like having a gun, he had stopped singing kilams and worked as a smuggler for years after he was released. Throughout this process, he says that he even forgot to sing kilams and even his memory. Therefore, he points out that singing kilam bridges people with their memory while being silenced triggers a sort of forgetfulness. Therefore, he expresses kilams as a source for the knowledge of the past as follows: “All these are significant because they tell my origin, my past, and they receive all these things through a feeling of delight. I was deprived of my past since I have no book, no history. It hasn't been written. Then, how can I know what happened? Thanks to kilams ... (D. Fîkrî, January 20, 2017).”²⁴ He especially addresses the kilamên şer that reveal the historical power struggles between the state and Kurds and among different Kurdish tribes. He asserts the kilams as alternative narratives for bearing witness to the past. He points to the piece about Bişarê Çeto in order to demonstrate that it reveals a critical, historical background consisting of various Kurdish tribes. In his examples, kilams possess historical importance. Bişarê Çeto is one of the well-known kilams narrating how the Ottoman Empire considered Kurdish tribes as a danger during the period of regression and attacked these tribes to guarantee the empire's territorial

²⁴ “E bunlar neden önemli olmasın ki! Benim aslımı anlatıyor, benim geçmişimi anlatıyor bana hem de dinleme zevki vererek. Ben geçmişimden hiçbir haber alamamışım, çünkü benim kitabım yok, tarihim de yok, yazılmamış. Nereden bileceğim ne olduğunu? Kilamlardan...”

integrity.²⁵ Another example, the piece of *Rebenim* refers the fugitives from the Agirî rebellion (Çelik, 2015, pp. 199-20); and another one *Lo Mîro* is about three people - who joined in the Sheikh Said Rebellion and were killed by the Turkish army (Hamelink, 2016, pp. 177-192). Additionally, Metin Yüksel points out that Kurdish oral poetry functions like Kurdish hidden transcripts and historical counter-narratives by exemplifying one of Şakiro's kilams, *Ferzende Beg* that provides a ground to investigate the Mount Ararat Revolt (2016, p. 662). Hence, these kilams include rich content to investigate how the transition towards the nation-building process has influenced the Kurdish regions.

Kilams thus function as alternative archives as opposed to the organized amnesia imposed by the Turkish Republican historiography. There are various archives in the Ottoman Archive under the control of the state. There is limited access to these archives. Even if people have access to these archives, these sources are the selection of a one-sided historiography. Dengbêjs' narratives stand out as significant sources for knowing the past since their narratives are usually accessible by everyone. Having a cassette player was expensive for many people until 1970s; however, newly emerged technological advances enabled the switch from expensive vinyl to inexpensive tape (Reigle, 2013, p. 7). On the one hand, dengbêjs have also spread their kilams by participating in various dengbêj meetings and weddings. Since dengbêjs kilams include historical references, their kilams expand different narratives of the past among the Kurdish community. Considering this, dengbêjs' narratives can be considered as a practice of "insurrection of the subjugated knowledge" (Foucault, 2003, p. 7) resisting organized amnesia. Dengbêjs unveil the

²⁵ Said Olgun's article, basically discusses Bişar and Cemil Çeto brothers mentioning on the Ottoman Archives of the Prime Ministry. The article is available at: <http://dergipark.gov.tr/download/article-file/307133> (Date accessed: September 29, 2017).

officially or unofficially banned Kurdish language, the cultural and moral codes which have been subjugated by the repressive Turkish state. In this respect, the dengbêj tradition suggests counter memories and discourses. Dengbêjs do not only convey the past to the future but also reconstitute it over and over. Although Kurds do not have a unified homeland, dengbêjs cross the existing borders through their kilams. The kilams told by dengbêjs create an imaginary world that exists sonorously. Dengbêjs' perception of belonging does not match the official interpretations of history, nation, and homeland. Dengbêjs' kilams specify two diverse places: one is Turkey as a *welatê xerib* (foreign country) and the other is the world that dengbêjs created through their voice. Similarly, Estelle Amy de la Bretéque's study on the Yazidis of Armenia shows that dengbêjs divide the world into two kinds of places: those of the household/village and those of exile (2012, p. 138). Hanifi Barış and Wendelmoet Hamelink's article also shows that dengbêjs living in Turkey interpret the state and borders by the dichotomies of the foreign and home (2014, pp. 35-6).

The majority of my interviewees identify themselves as living archives of the Kurdish culture and think that they convey the oppressed Kurdish language and history to the future. This reminded me of Hamelink's focus on dengbêjs' redefinition of dengbêj art by the discourse of guardians of Kurdish heritage (2016, p.79). Dengbêjs' self-perceptions have been influenced by certain dynamics especially by the Kurdish political movement that claims to revitalize the Kurdish heritage from a nationalist point of view. Therefore, some of the interviews – especially those who participate in dengbêj houses— identify themselves as “living archives.” Even if dengbêjs' redefinition of the dengbêj art has been shaped according to certain political discourses, their narratives, still, include rich historical

references. In this respect, they regard their narratives as alternative sources to narrate the past from different points of views resisting the official Turkish history. Thus, dengbêjs' urge to unveil alternative narratives of the past is both to convey the past wrongdoings against the Kurds and to transmit the cultural and moral codes of Kurdish communities to the future. Dengbêj Maaz is 56 years old and living in the centre of Şırnak. He had used to earn his living by doing village work until he and his family were forcefully displaced in the 1990s from the village of Deştalê. After the forceful displacement, they had to come to the centre of Şırnak and leave their main sources of revenues and even social habits like singing kilams. After the displacement, he began to work as a truck driver between Iraq and Turkey. Until recently he was dealing with the collection of local stories and kilams in Mem û Zîn Cultural Centre; however, his collection was lost in the curfew processes.²⁶ When I asked him how he became a dengbêj and continued his dengbêj art, he responds that singing a kilam enables people to interact with the past, present, and future. He exemplifies that Salihê Şirnexî²⁷ sang a kilam on the murder of Bîşeng Anîk (Şırnak, July 23, 2017). Although the policemen told her family that she committed suicide, it was commonly agreed that she was murdered by torture under custody. He narrates:

In 1992 there were conflicts, but those days weren't like the conflicts going on recently. She was wounded during the Newroz festival (...) She was killed. My uncle Salih composed a kilam about her (silence for a while) She was killed in 1992, she hadn't admitted the accusations and was murdered. If he hadn't composed a kilam, nobody would have known how she was murdered. Once an event is archived, it never disappears (Maaz, Şırnak, July 23, 2017).²⁸

²⁶ Mem û Zîn Cultural Centre used to be at the centre of Cizre that was one of conflict zones between 2015-2016.

²⁷ He died waiting for an ambulance in 2015. His house was in the conflict zone; therefore, the ambulances were not let to enter to the conflict zone (<https://www.demokrathaber.org/guncel/sirnak-ta-hastaneyeye-kaldirilamayan-dengbej-sirnexi-yasamini-yitirdi-h59620.html>) (Date accessed: June 18, 2017).

²⁸ "Di 92an de dîsa şer tê da çêbûy bes neholê bû. Di Newrozê de Bîşeng hat kuştin (...) hat kuştin. Rehmêtî xelê min ê Salix stranê liser got. 92an de Bîşeng hat kuştin (bêdengî)... hin tişt qebûl nekir û

Considering this, we also see that dengbêjs create the narratives as well as transmitting the past. They have played a critical role for memorizing alternative narratives of the past by resisting the politics of forgetting produced by official narratives. Salihê Şirnexî tells his kilam:

Well my pretty Bîşeng, I promise that I will never forget you
Oh God, I will engrave your name on the world history
I hope God destroy traitors and slanderers' house
How did you destroy our house?²⁹

As observed above, Salihê Şirnexî designates himself as an authority memorizing the past. And he identifies the security forces who murdered Bîşeng Anik as traitors and slanderers. Even if these narratives have been created from dengbêjs' point of view, they nevertheless reveal what has been silenced and lost in the official narratives.

Arzu Öztürkmen comments on the power of oral history by saying that "...collecting Turkish narratives on the memory of past communities reveals categories of the ethnic/religious and social 'others,' and brings forward a necessity to move beyond the Turkish national framework" (2006, p. 98). Dengbêjs' narratives also provide different perspectives transmitting alternative interpretations of the past.

Dengbêjs' use of Kurdish or interpretation of the past manifests a counter-discourse against the Turkish official historiography which has named the Kurds as mountain Turks. Even Kurds' existence was denied, Kurdish traditional music was considered as a threat (Kuruoğlu & Ger, 2014, p. 14). In the beginning of 1920s, the Turkish state intended to control the Kurdish music since they were invoking

kuştin. Ew e stran li ser gotiye. Heke stran li ser negotiba, kesek nezaniba bi vî şiklê hate kuştin. Mealum e ew tişk bikeve arşivê, girîngiya vî winda nebe."

²⁹ "Erê Bîşenga minê, minê digot lê te ji bîr nakim
Xwedê ez ê rabim navê te li tarîxê dinyayê kar kim
Belê Xwedê xira bike mala van xayîn û bêbextan
Belê çawa mala me bi destên xwe xira kir."

Kurdish nationalism (Aksoy, 2014, pp. 90-1). Moreover, Kurdish music was ‘Turkified’ through the translation of Kurdish folk songs into Turkish without acknowledging their ethnolinguistic origins (Aksoy, 2014, p. 85). Recently, the Turkish state put another oppression on Kurdish music by censoring Navenda Çanda Mezopotamya (Mesopotamia Cultural Center) and banning the blacklisted Kurdish dengbêjs and singers from all national TV channels and radio stations (Akson, 2014, p. 92). The dengbêj houses have been negatively influenced by the ongoing oppressive policies. For example, the dengbêj house of Van was given the fire department of the local municipality after the appointment of a trustee to the municipality of Van. The one in Cizre was turned into a place where TRT-6 get its rehearsals of traditional Turkish music (D. Henifa, İstanbul, December 24, 2018). Despite these oppressions and censorships, kilams have provided an alternative, imaginary world where multiple testimonies have been narrated composed of conflicts or collaborations between Kurds and the Ottoman or Turkish governments, or a woman’s scream who was killed, or a lullaby sang by a father whose wife passed away.

Dengbêjs’ voice as a space of alternative narratives of the past has enabled the divided Kurdish communities to get information about what happens in the other Kurdish regions. In kilams one hears and learns about the other Kurdish regions even if s/he has never been there. Kilams provide a rich and limited content about different geographies, tribes, epics, and figures (Hamelink & Barış, 2014, pp. 48-57).

Therefore, the dengbêj tradition transgresses the borders fixed by different nation-states. It is in this capacity of creating a collective identity, the dengbêj tradition has been demonized. Especially Kurdish cassettes listened to secretly in the 1980s were considered as arms (Reigle, 2013, p. 9). However, illegal cassettes and radio broadcastings continued to impact listeners by enabling people to listen to Kurdish

and different voices rising from different Kurdish regions (Reigle, 2013, p. 11).

Therefore, the story of cassettes buried in the ground is one of the commonly referred experiences among Kurdish people. Inspired by the affective economy created by Kurdish cassettes, Kuruoğlu and Ger say: “Things do not just “represent” and “communicate” but “objectify” identities, relationships, symbols, values, meanings, power, and tensions...” (2014, p. 2). Considering their statement, dengbêjs’ voices in the form of cassette founds a new social body (Kuruoğlu & Ger, 2014, p. 11). In the light of these, it can be stated that generating a shared repertoire based on similar voices, experiences and emotions unite people across the geographies. Dengbêjs’ voices, especially in the form of cassette, enable people to interact with each other, past or present. So, dengbêjs’ voices objectify a collective representation across different Kurdish regions by transmitting certain narratives of past, emotions, and feelings. Especially for the dengbêjs living in Turkey, dengbêjs’ singing voices embody a common medium in which they collect their narratives and unique voices. Dengbêj Îsmâil is from one of the villages of Hakkari. However, he was negatively influenced by political tensions in the 1990s. His testimonies guided him to sing kilam. He says:

The local authority called and said: All villagers should hide Kurdish cassettes and voice recording; soldiers will raid and search. My mother’s voice, some epics composed of Destanê Gimgim, Mem û Zîn were recorded in the cassettes. All of them including my mother’s voice were buried in the ground. This influenced me very much. My mother’s voice was buried in the ground. There is no Kurdish archive and it hasn’t existed at all. Every kind of archive was forbidden and locked somewhere. I stored all of them in my mind and voice. When the local authority told us to hide the tapes, there were some papers, a cassette player and a tape, we buried all of them under the earth. And I stored all of them in my mind. So, my interest in dengbêjî comes from those days. I decided to transform myself into an archive (D. Îsmâil, Hakkari, January 16, 2017).³⁰

³⁰ “Mixtarê gund telefonkir û got: Gundiyan bila bandêd Kurdî, yanî qaset, hemû jixwe bibin, veşêrin, esgerî dê hêt, taqîb ket. Dengê dayika min hebû (...) Mem û Zîn di nav da bû, Kela Dimdimê di nav

Dengbêj Îsmaîl will never find his ‘mother’s voice’ anymore since the place where it was buried is forgotten. On the one hand, the loss of the voice triggers a sort of melancholia haunting Dengbêj Îsmaîl’s memory; on the other hand, it turns to a constructive and creative force leading him to recall the past. He states that he buckled down to his practice of dengbêjî to cope with the forgetting and the loss of his mother’s voice. For Dengbêj Îsmaîl ‘the loss turns into a way of belonging (Bilal, 2006, pp. 67-8).’ Additionally, Dengbêj Îsmaîl becomes a different register of truth through stories of destruction and repression. Ahıska talks about two types of registers of truth: one is an official history based on dead signs of an absent past and the other is ongoing references to the repression and destruction in the excess of stories (2006, p. 22). In a similar vein, Dengbêjs Îsmaîl’s narrative of the past exemplifies the latter type of register of truth.

What makes a story enchanting is the uniqueness of the voice. The human voice has the ability to create an effect upon the audiences. Therefore, the sense-making power of story (Benjamin, 1969, p. 27) in kilams is emerging from the voice. If the voice disappears, it loses its effect upon the audience. Remembering the loss of his mother’s voice draws Dengbêj Îsmaîl to improve his dengbêjî. For that reason, even if the voice is buried in the ground or lost, the unique effects and memories remain. Dengbêjs’ voices create a place where the Kurds dwell in through their sense of belonging, voices, languages, and memories. The majority of my interviewees say there is no difference between the cassette and weapon in the eyes of the state.

Tahsin Özmen’s short film Mast (2015) can exemplify the demonization of the

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da bû, ew bandor çava li ser min kir? Dengê dayika min veşartin.... dengê kirin bin axê da (...) Eee dîroka Kurdî, edebiyatê Kurdî, hemû di nav dengbêjî da ne, bo çi? Arşiva Kurd çi nîne jixwe, arşiva Kurd çi nebû. Hemû qedexe bûn, hemû qefilkirî bûn. Min kire di mêjiya xwe da. Ew dîroka ku mixdar telefonkir, gota bandê veşêre, me li ser vê jî tiştên wisa nivîsî me hebûn, gote vê kaxizê bibe, em biçin, me bandekî, teybekî û kaxizê girtin veşartin. Min jî hemûya wan xist di mêjî û dengê xwe da. Eee yanî hejîkirina min a dengbêjî ji wan rojan hat. Min jî got bila ez bi xwe bibima arşivek.”

dengbêjs' voice. In the film, a little boy named Ali tries to bring a Kurdish cassette to his grandfather during the years when Kurdish music was forbidden in Turkey. At one point, a weapon and a cassette meet each other in a yoghurt bucket. The protagonist, Ali hides a cassette and a woman hides her weapon in a yoghurt bucket. The parallel is striking to show that independent of the content of the cassette, singing in Kurdish and recording the dengbêjs' voice were criminalized by the Turkish state (Fîkrî, Yüksekova, January 20, 2018). As dengbêj Henîfa stated, some dengbêjs were taken under custody and some were arrested during the recent conflicts between 2015 and 2017. Even some wedding ceremonies were raided due to Kurdish kilams and songs.³¹ Nûdem Durak, who is the soloist of the Koma Sorxîn, and known by her dengbêjî in Cîzre, Şîrnak. She was charged to be a member of an illegal organization because of the songs and kilams that she sang.³² In the spring of 2018, RTÜK (Turkish Radio and Television Association) prepared a list³³ of banned songs consisting of 142 Turkish and 66 Kurdish songs and kilams. Turkish pieces were censored on the grounds of their improper content for the society's moral norms whereas some Kurdish kilams and songs were banned on the ground of violating the nations' integrity. Although the decision made a reference to the content, the kilams, actually vary in their content, including stories of love, conflict, and epic. So, we can say that it is not the mere content but the voice that has been censored. Kurdish language and its embodiment in a voice still constitute a threat to the myth of homogenous community.

³¹ Some links are available: <http://vehaber.net/kurtce-sarki-soyleyen-sanatcilar-ve-dugun-sahibi-gozaltina-alindi>, <https://gazeteyolculuk.net/adanada-polis-dugunu-basti-kurtce-sarki-soyleyen-sanatci-orgut-propagandasi-iddiasiyla-gozaltina-alindi> (Date accessed October 11, 2017).

³² Nûdem Durak was sentenced to 19 years due to the songs and ballades that she sang. The detail news is available in this link: http://songfornudemdurak.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/Nudem_Durak_zu_19_Jahren_verurteilt.pdf (Date accessed: October 11, 2017)

³³ <https://tr.sputniknews.com/turkiye/201802281032436652-atila-sertel-trt-yasak-sarki/> (Date accessed: October 12, 2017)

Although dengbêjs confront various oppressive and denialist politics, their voices have become a sort of imaginary space for Kurds where they create their own national narratives. Therefore, dengbêj narratives can be taken as specific cases for understanding the suppressed knowledge of the past and the resistance through the Kurdish language. Although the state falls on deaf ears, dengbêjs just like Sirens put forward the sonic quality of their voice and transmit alternative narratives of past through their melodized speech. Their melodized tone of voice makes what they sing about more rememberable. In this respect, dengbêjs can manage to exercise power among Kurdish society. They both have pursued the existence of Kurdish language and also received the lost knowledge of their collective past. Alî Tekbaş in one of his workshops said that dengbêjs are the mediators among various Kurdish communities divided through different states (2018); they carry different sorts of experiences, testimonies, and memories between the divided lands of Kurds. So, in a sense, they provide a critical interaction among different Kurdish communities. In this respect, it can be asserted that dengbêjs' narratives composed of different individuals' testimonies and stories are the spaces where Kurds come together. Although Kurds do not possess a unified land, nationality, even language; via dengbêj narratives they can embody a collective social body. Of course, this does not mean that there are no divisive features; however, dengbêj performances in the form of cassette and radio broadcasting have enabled Kurds living in Turkey to listen to each other's unique or similar voices, experiences, feelings, and emotions. Thus, dengbêjs' voice supplies linguistic and cultural unification among the Kurds especially living in Turkey.

2.3 The transformation of the dengbêj tradition from living heritage to frozen image

The research and sources on the history of the dengbêj tradition are limited.

However, it is commonly agreed that the dengbêj tradition has been radically transformed in the last century (Nezan, 2006; Yüksel, 2011; Şen, 2016; Hamelink, 2016). Dengbêjs used to be dependent on the Kurdish sheikhs and mîrs. They used to sing kilams memorizing these sheikhs and mîrs as heroic characters, and they were paid in return to their glorification of the sheikhs and mîrs in the dîwans (Şen, 2016, pp. 46-7). Therefore, it can be asserted that dengbêjs used to perform under the patronage of the Kurdish sheikhs and mîrs. With the transition from the Ottoman Empire to the Republic of Turkey, these sheikhs and mîrs were oppressed on the grounds of their separatist attitudes. Due to the changing political agenda with the foundation of the Turkish government, the Kurdish music was silenced from the 1920s to the 1960s (Regie, 2013; Kuruoğlu & Ger, 2014).

In the 1950s and 1960s, the dengbêj tradition reappeared thanks to the Kurdish radio broadcasting. Although recording and publishing of Kurdish cassettes and book used to be targets of oppressive policies in Turkey, the dengbêj tradition could circulate among Kurds through illegal cassette recordings (Scalbert-Yücel, 2009, p. 8) and the Kurdish radio stations broadcasting from Bagdad and Yerevan (Kreyenbroek & Allison, 1996, pp. 72-3). Especially women dengbêjs began to be heard on the radio. Before the Kurdish radio broadcasting started, women dengbêjs were confronting various difficulties due to the patriarchal structure of the Kurdish community. With the emergence of Kurdish radio broadcasting, women dengbêj spread their voice to the whole Kurdish communities; and their cassettes began to circulate between different Kurdish regions. Dengbêj Sûsika Simo is one of the pioneers of the Kurdish broadcasting in the radio of Yerevan. Additionally, Meryem

Xan, Eyşe Şan, Nesrîn Şêrwan, Elmas Muhamed are among fundamental names contributing to the Kurdish broadcasting of the radio of Baghdad. The majority of my interviewees stated that they were encouraged by the dengbêjs' voices rising from the radio of Bagdad and Yerevan. In parallel with that, Wendelmoet Hamelink notes that Kurdish radio broadcasting is a sphere where different kilams came together from different regions (2016, p. 26). So, these stations were transformed into a common space where both women and male dengbêjs gather. The Kurds living in Turkey used to listen to these radio stations illegally despite the oppressive politics. As it can be seen in most of the interviews, dengbêjs singing on the radio spread various style and genre of kilams among the Kurdish community. Therefore, kilams provided a new social body by introducing dengbêjs' voices as sonorous and unique objects. Although there used to be different dialects in the Kurdish language, dengbêjs' voices as a sonorous object represented a social body for Kurds especially in Radio Yerevan and Radio Baghdad (Kuruoğlu & Ger, 2014, p. 3).

Even if Kurdish radio broadcastings resisted against the ban on the Kurdish language, occasionally various political tensions influenced the dengbêj tradition negatively in Turkey. Especially from 1960 military coup d'état to the 1990s³⁴ dengbêjs were doomed to silence. Even if people used to listen to Kurdish music in private spheres, these spheres were intervened by police raids to collect Kurdish recordings. Therefore, the process between the 1960s and 1990s has been remembered by narratives of burying the cassettes in the ground. However, the Kurdish political movement began to use art and cultural activities as a tool for organizing the Kurds in the 1990s. Especially the foundation of NÇM in 1991 was

³⁴ In 1991 under Turgut Özal's administration, the ban on the use of Kurdish in recording and publishing was removed.

one of the fundamental turning points for the Kurdish movement to pursue its organization activities. Music was specifically used as a political tool to constitute a collective identity based on a national Kurdish art and culture. In this respect, in the beginning of the 2000s, the dengbêj tradition was also revitalized by the Kurdish political movement to represent and perform the Kurdish national identity publicly. Until the 2000s the Kurdish political movement had considered the dengbêj art as a backward tradition glorifying the feudal sheikhs and mîrs (Şen, 2016; Hamelink, 2016) However, recently this tradition was reconceptualized through certain political discourses to represent the Kurdish nation, language, and culture. Dengbêjs began to appear in local festivals and on TV channels to tell political kilams on the Kurds (Scalbert-Yücel, 2009, pp. 11-2). In 2007, dengbêj houses were opened and became part of the ‘projects’ symbolizing ‘the Kurdish nationality’ (Scalbert-Yücel, 2009, p. 13). On the one hand, the dengbêj houses as a project intended to revitalize the tradition; on the other hand, these houses politicize the dengbêjs according to the current political discourses. Dengbêj Miqades as a dengbêj participating to dengbêj house actively tells numerous kilams on Demirtaş³⁵, the international women’s day, Sur.³⁶ However, Dengbêj Rehime and Heybet prefer to tell heyranok, pahîzok, *bukê*, lorik instead of political kilams. Considering the difference between them, dengbêj houses shift the dengbêjî from the performance of the tradition to the representation of the Kurdish nation. Of course, it does not mean that traditional characteristics of the dengbêj art have been removed from the realm of the dengbêj tradition. However, it is clearly observed that especially women dengbêjs singing in a dengbêj house participates in the performance of dengbêjs in a more politicized way, unlike the

³⁵ He is a former co-chair of the pro-Kurdish People’s Democratic Party (HDP).

³⁶ She refers the conflicts broke out between the Turkish state and the radical Kurdish youths in 2015.

women dengbêjs who pursue the tradition in daily life. They actually become active agents in the policy-making processes by producing political discourses. Indeed, this difference reveals that there are different forms for performing the dengbêj tradition. Although they perform different genres and styles of kilams in different places, differences that dengbêjs have represented a collective identity. Multiplicities in the dengbêj tradition address that public memory or identity is a zone of conflict where different social characteristics differentiate dengbêjs from one another or sometimes where these differences are in solidarity with one another.

After the Kurdish political has begun to use the dengbêj tradition to produce national representations, the Turkish state has instrumentalized the dengbêj as a political tool in the peace process between 2011-2013. Dengbêj (*Ozan*) is a television program broadcast on TRT- Kurdî where different national folk songs are converted to Kurdish. For example, *Çanakkale Türkiüsü* is a well-known national folk song in Turkey glorifying the Turks' fight in World War I. This folk song was set to music by Metin Barlik³⁷ for the commemoration of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk on November 10, 2018. Thus, instrumentalization of Kurdish music at the service of the representation of Turkish nationalist politics continues in different forms. To put in clearer terms, dengbêjs were called by TRT-6 on the condition that they do not sing political kilams. Dengbêj Bedir says: "They called me to perform on TRT-6, and they asked 'Which kilams are you going to tell?' I said, 'I am going to tell certain kilams on what happened to our society.' He said 'No! We can't allow that you criticize the system by your kilams.' I didn't go since I didn't admit (Van, August 1,

³⁷ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0P1WCtzIMv0> (Date accessed: October 15, 2017).

2017).”³⁸ In addition to that dengbêj Maaz also states that he was invited to a fair where different cultures in Turkey were displaced. However, he was requested not to sing politic kilams. As it is clearly seen in the above examples, dengbêjs are still exposed to censor used by the official state authorities. Even if it seems that dengbêjs have played a critical role by representing the Kurdish citizens in Turkey thanks to TRT-6, their kilams have been censored or they are requested to convert Turkish national songs to Kurdish. Therefore, the state reconceptualizes the dengbêj tradition by tearing it away from its original roots and silencing it by censoring the kilams. Although their public visibility increases, their voices are reduced to a tool of politics.

The proliferation of technology and the increasing urbanization of Kurds has also influenced dengbêj performances negatively. Although the dengbêj tradition has always used the developing technologies to revitalize itself, it cannot make a room for itself in the current capitalist market without transforming itself. A kilam used to be performed for hours and days in the past. However, today dengbêjs are exposed to time limitations. In most of the interviews, dengbêjs state that they are requested to limit their kilams with a couple of minutes. In the modern music industry, people’s voices are regulated by developed technologies and their performances are limited with a couple of minutes. Therefore, dengbêjs’s improvisatory performances and use of the pure human voice do not match to the modern music industry. Dengbêjs state that they suffer from limitations in television broadcastings, festivals, and cultural centres. Dengbêjs sing more freely in dengbêj houses whereas they feel uncomfortable and are exposed to limitations in TV broadcastings, festivals and

³⁸ “Rojekî ji TRT-6ê min gazî kirin. Û gote ‘Hekê tu heri tu yê çi bêjî?’ Min jî got ‘bûyerên di navê helqê Kurda da çêbûyî hemûyan bejim.’ Got ‘Na, Em nikarin tu tiştên ku zirar bide sistêmê bêjî. Min jî qebûl nekir û neçûm.”

cultural centres where they share the stage with modern music groups and technologies (Hamelink, 2016, p. 194). The development of different technologies and institutionalization of the tradition through the foundation of dengbêj houses or television broadcasting has created a sort of oblivion where unique characteristics of the dengbêj tradition have transformed. With the emergence of Mp3 and the advent of YouTube in 2005, the mediums of music listening have been shifted from music objects such as discs and cassettes to the new media consisting of sounds stored on the Internet (Regie, 2013, p. 14). On the one hand, these new developments enable the Kurdish music to spread across different geographies; on the other hand, they let everyone with the access to the Internet to become a potential distributor of recordings stored on the Internet (Regie, 2013, p. 14). In parallel with that, the interviewees commonly agree that dengbêjs' authority over their voices has been limited by these advances. For example, Mahmud Berazî's adapts some backing tracks to kilams by using developed music technologies.³⁹ He usually works at kilams sang without using an instrument. In the light of this, dengbêjs' pure voices have been transformed by certain music technologies. In parallel with that, dengbêjs usually point out that the dengbêj tradition is about to become extinct due to the new technologies of the production of the narratives. They actually reveal that they are alienated to their voices due to the mass reproduction technologies. Their kilams stored on the Internet can be distributed by everyone with access to the Internet.

Dengbêjs, the audiences and the spaces where performances occurred all have been transformed over time. Paul Connerton classifies two types of place memory: memorial places as place-names, and locus as a house or a street (2009). To explicate further, memorial places create representations, new forms of remembering marking

³⁹ He adapted a backing track to one of Şakiro, dengbêj Qaso and Ewdilezîzê Leşker's some kilams.

out certain positions in social interaction (Connerton, 2009, p. 10). On the other hand, the locus is a site of memory where everyday provisions and habits of a community occur (Connerton, 2009, pp. 18-19). Building on the arguments of Connerton's conceptualization of two types of place memory who presents modernity as an era of forgetfulness, I suggest similar processes are at work in the recent transformations of the dengbêj tradition. The replacement of the traditional spaces with the modern dengbêj houses or urbanization, the emergence of Internet and the audience's changing expectations and habits of listening have drawn the dengbêj tradition to a sort of transformation. Today, it is assumed that the dengbêj tradition is performed in dengbêj houses and cultural centres. However, it used to be performed in plateaus, houses, streets, dîwans. Especially after the forced migrations occurred in the 1990s, Kurds fell apart from their living places. Thus, the displacement of Kurds and urbanization influenced the dengbêj tradition. The dengbêj tradition was institutionalized through the emergence of dengbêj houses that can be classified as memorial places representing the dengbêj tradition. However, some of the dengbêjs kilams can be considered as locus places that remind Kurds' original living places. For example, pahîzok is one of the genres of kilams that is generally sung in autumn in mountainous places such as Hakkari, Şırnak, and Van in Turkey. These kilams are usually about nature and the yearning for the spring. They represent the beauty of the spring after the long winter days. However, they cannot be created anymore due to urbanization. Especially a part of the dengbêj history disappears with the alteration of performance spaces. Even if some pahîzoks have been performed by dengbêjs in certain dengbêj houses that are memorial places, new forms of pahîzoks cannot be created today. The 'milieux de mémoire (real environment of memory)' is replaced with 'lieux de mémoire (sites of memory)'

where the dengbêj tradition is displaced as a nostalgic tradition (Nora, 1989, p. 7). Recently dengbêj nights are organized in the name of old famous dengbêjs. However, these commemorations and ceremonies address the dengbêj art as a dead heritage that is supposed to be memorized. For example, a dengbêj night was organized in the name of Nesrîn Şêrwan. The invited dengbêjs told different kilams composed of lawik, heyranok and so forth. Although listening to a dengbêj requires the audiences to discipline their body, the audiences were smoking and making noise, taking photos and videos. Indeed, this atmosphere demonstrates that the ongoing dengbêj tradition and the listeners' new habits of listening are in tension with one another. However, displaying dengbêjs as performers of the Kurdish identity also gives audiences pleasure. So, displaying dengbêjs as performative objects reduces them to nostalgic spectacles. In the light of these, the dengbêj tradition is not considered as a living heritage in modern times. Walter Benjamin writes that "the epic side of truth, wisdom is dying out" in the modern age (1969, p. 86). Considering Benjamin's focus on the disappearance of the storyteller from the realm of narration, a similar statement can be suggested that dengbêjs who are the talented epic narrators are recently turned into nostalgic objects representing a distant past and 'unreturnable home.'

To conclude, dengbêjs consider themselves as archives of the oppressed Kurdish language and memory. Their mind embodies a space where they archive their interpretations of counter-collective memories. On the one hand, these interpretations transgress the borders of the official narratives of the past; on the other hand, they evoke the people to witness the past through different, sonorous interpretations of the past. While conveying the past to the future, they reconstruct the counter-collective memory by their imaginations, exaggerations, and perceptions

without claiming their narratives as pure truths. The urge to interpret what has happened in the past or what is lost in the present draws them to tell kilams to perform in the voids of official history. Even if the dengbêj tradition has altered radically with the alteration of original performance spaces, it still paves the way for different interpretations of the past and coping with nexweşî that is an unspeakable experience. It enables the feelings composed of merriment, thrill or sorrow to communicate between different Kurdish regions and communities. They can turn every place to a dîwan without requiring any institutionalized space or discourse. They can sing kilams on a tree, stone or a summer wind; on death, a loss or catastrophe; on a feeling of merriment, sorrow or regret.

CHAPTER 3

DENGBÊJS' VOICES AS A SONOROUS OBJECT

Dengbêjs' voices are not necessarily a tool of self-expression. They manifest the sonorous multiplicity of voices as well as various meanings. The majority of the research on dengbêjs usually ignore the sonic and affective characteristics of the voice, instead they present voice as a tool of representation or empowerment. The absence of the voice is considered as a sign of pressure whereas arising voice is regarded as a sign of having agency. Voice should also be considered as a sonic object beyond the metaphor of agency or suppression. Shifting the attention from the meaning of voice to its sonic and affective quality, this chapter discusses the multiplicity in the dengbêjs' voices. This chapter addresses three main questions: How does dengbêjs' voice as a sonorous and affective object transgress and regulate the semiotic structure of the kilam? What kinds of sense does the dengbêj's voice create upon the listeners? How does the uniqueness of each human voice create a sonorous identification?

Various studies on voice in sociology, anthropology, and ethnomusicology argue that the voice is a medium to understand how subjectivity is constructed sonically. However, these studies mostly do not address the sonic and affective quality of the voice. The uniqueness of each human voice has been ignored by privileging the meaning. Adriana Cavarero's book *For More Than One Voice* reconceptualizes the voice as a sonic object challenging the Western philosophy that has a logocentric metaphysical tradition (2005). According to Cavarero, the voice, and the meaning, the phonic and the semantic should be sharply distinguished to reveal the sonic and affective quality of the voice (Cavarero, 2005, p. 21). Cavarero

argues that voice is a phenomenon that “precedes, generates, and exceeds verbal communication” (2005, pp. 29-30). She grounds her theory of voice through Kristeva’s conceptualization of semiotic *chora* that is the wordless language among the mother and infant (Cavarero, 2005, p. 170). Thus, she evaluates the voice as a pre-symbolic origin that is both ontologically and temporally prior to the signification (Cavarero, pp. 132-8). I contend that Cavarero brings a striking critique to the studies on voice by drawing our attention from ‘what is spoken’ to ‘who speaks.’ In the light of all these, this chapter specifically aims to understand ‘who sings the kilam’ instead of ‘what kilams tell.’

In the dengbêj tradition, the voice and the plot of the kilam are in tension with one another since the sonorous quality of the voice draws the listener’s attention from the story to the enchanting voice. Sonorous interpretation is over the semiotic substance because the effect created by the quality of the voice has played a critical role in the transmission of the story narrated by the kilam. In a similar vein, some of the interviewees in this research have stated that the irresistible enchantment of the voice sometimes overshadows the plot of their kilams. Even if the melodized tone of voice specifies the quality of the meaning, its sonorous grain always has the risk to oppress the meaning. Mladen Dolar remarks that singing is a bad communication since it blurs the semantic substance (2006, p. 30). The voice has a surplus meaning, which always carries the risk of shadowing the semantic interpretation (Mladen Dolar, 2006, p. 30). Dengbêj Bedir used to be official in one of the official institutions. After he had retired, he began to improve his dengbêj art professionally. Recently, he participates in certain dengbêj meetings and festivals. Considering his own observations in dengbêj meetings and festivals where they perform in front of a community, he tells that:

When people listen to a dengbêj, they don't pay attention to the story of the kilam. They say, 'What an enchanting voice!' Of course, as a dengbêj, you have either miqam or voice with a high pitch. If you don't have a voice with a high pitch, you have the miqam. If you don't tell with miqam, you can't sing kilams. Once I told a kilam in a community, one person said, 'What an enchanting voice!' and I asked him 'What did you understand?' He said, 'I don't know, your voice had an excessively high-pitch (Van, August 1, 2017).'⁴⁰

As can be clearly seen in this example, the listener is usually enchanted by the sonorous and affective quality of the voice without understanding the words. Then we can argue that the sonorous and affective quality of the voice creates a reciprocal communication transgressing the semiotic substance of the meaning. Even if it fails to convey a suitable meaning to the listener, it can spread the effect of enchantment. I have also met dengbêj Evdulrehman who runs Cizre dengbêj house. Even if a trustee was appointed to the municipality, he still runs the dengbêj house. Due to his position in the dengbêj house, he can hear different singing styles. He reveals that the dengbêj house is considered as a space where different voices and memories come together and embody an acoustic language and memory transgressing the semiotic-based language. On the one hand, dengbêjs' acoustic language and memory provide a social body representing Kurdish community. In a similar way, dengbêj Evdulrehman reveals that singing voice can create an affect bringing people together by the acoustic quality of the voice rather than the semiotic substance of the kilams. He says: "A couple of musicians visited the dengbêj house in Cizre. I told the kilam and they accompanied me with their instruments. They were strangers; however, we could make a duet (Cizre, July 25, 2017)."⁴¹ These statements put forward that voice

⁴⁰ "Wextê dengbêjan guhdar kin, naveroka kilamê guhdar nake, nave kilamê da çi heye. Dibêjin 'çi deng e!' Jixwe dengbêjîyê da ya miqam ya dengê te yê bilind. Dengê te bilind nebe miqama te heye, miqama te tune be jixwe tu nikarî bêjî. Kilamekî dibêjim, dibêjin 'çi xweş e.' Ez dibêjim 'min çi got?' Dibêjin 'willa niza dengê te zehf bilind bû.'"

⁴¹ "Sê mizîsyen hatine mala dengbêjan. Min kilam digot, ew jî pê enstruman alî min dihatin. Biyanî bûn bes dîsa jî me duet kir."

can communicate reciprocally without requiring a semiotic interaction. In my research, voice as a sonorous object creates its acoustic language by creating a reciprocal communication of voices without requiring a common semantic substance (Cavarero, 2005, p. 14). Ultimately, the majority of the interviewees have emphasized that the quality of voice creates an effect that cannot be revealed through a semiotic interpretation framed by an ordinary speech.

More specifically we can say that the sonorous structure of the kilam frames the semiotic order in the dengbêj tradition. For example, dengbêjs mostly prolong the last syllables of the stanzas, and the usual composition of the words can be reorganized according to the rhyme. Therefore, the content-based music transforms into a phone-based grain in the dengbêj tradition. To exemplify further, during the workshop held by Ali Tekbaş, he sang a kilam known as narînk in Botan:

Narînkê em hatin te wo	Narî-î-nê-ê em ha-a-a-tî-î-î-n te-e-e-wo
Delalê em hatin te wo	Dela-ha-lê em ha-a-a-tî-î-î-n te-e-e-wo
Tu bike hay karê xwe wo he-wo	Tu bi-i-ke ha-ay ka-ha-ha-rê-hê-hê xwe-he- he-wo
Şîn û girî bêfeyde wo	Şîn û gi-hi-rî bê-hê-hê fe-e-e-eyde-he-he-wo
Narînkê guharê zêro	Narî-î-î-nê-ê gu-u-ha-ha-rê-hê-hê zê-hê-ro
Delalê guharê zêro	Dela-ha-lê gu-u-ha-ha-rê-hê-hê zê-hê-ro
Tu razê ha îşev têro	Tu ra-a-zê ha-a î-î-şe-e-e-ev tê-hê-hê-ro
Sibe ye wey ûxir xêro	Sibe-e-ye wey û-û-xê-hê-hê-hêr xê-ê-ê-ro
Xanikê malbaba li kolanê nê-hê-hê	Xa-ni-kê ma-halba-ha-hab-ko-o-o-o la-ha-ha- nê-hê-hê
Olîkê malbaba li kolanê nê-hê-hê	Olî-hî-kê ma-halba-ha-hab-ko-o-o-o la-ha-ha- nê-hê-hê
Xêlyûk hemî darêjanê ê-ê	Xêlyû-ûk he-e-mî-î da-ha-ha-rê-ê-ê-ja-a-a-nê- ê-ê
Bûye roja xêr û zamanê	Bûye-e ro-o-ja xê-ê-êr ze-e-e-e-ma-a-a-nê-ê-ê

This kilam is sung through the miqam of narînk, which is told for the brides. The organization of the words is not provided via an ordinary linguistic order. On the contrary, auxiliary⁴² voices that do not correspond to meaningful words are commonly used to obtain a certain musical rhythm. The syllables are not pronounced in an ordinary way; they are intermingled with one another according to the miqam. To put it concrete terms, within the narînk cited above, the voice of ‘wo’ does not possess a meaning, but it is used as an auxiliary voice to produce a certain acoustic harmony. These sorts of auxiliary voices are also commonly heard within other dengbêj performances. Although they do not have a specific meaning, they are used to begin the kilam or to end the kilam. In addition to these, dengbêjs shift their voice from the high-pitch to the low-pitch by prolonging the last syllables of the stanza to rest their vocal folds. Poetic verses are evaluated by their metric value rather than their meaning (Cavarero, 2005, p. 80). Hence, it can be suggested that the enchanting effect of the phone regulates the semiotic order in the dengbêj tradition. Since the sonorous and affective grain of the voice creates certain effects that cannot be received by ordinary semantic interpretation, dengbêjs sometimes privilege the voice rather than the words.

Furthermore, dengbêjs can alter the words of kilams over time. For example, in one of the workshops organized by Alî Tekbaş, the kilam of *Keleşo*⁴³ was discussed in detail. The love between Seyran and Îsa is narrated in *Keleşo*. Since Seyran is older than Îsa, she calls him with an idiom of ‘*nû bi daro* (the boy who has just been an adult).’ However, most of the dengbêjs have been replacing the idiom

⁴² *Hay, hoy, ahiii, lê, lo* are commonly heard auxiliary voices in the kilams.

⁴³ “*Keleşo, nû bi daro* (Yong boy, you just have been an adult)

Wey lo lo lo lo wey lo lo lo (Wey lo lo lo lo wey lo lo lo)

Lawiko, nû bi daro (Yong boy, you just have been an adult)

Yar dilê min û emrê te (Oh my heart and your age)”

with the word ‘*nobedaro* (guard).’ Hence, the alteration of the word causes a sort of contextual confusion. Despite the contextual confusion, this kilam have been spread through its recent adaptation as *nobedaro* since vocalizing the word of *nobedaro* is easier than sounding the idiom of *nû bi daro*. Therefore, *dengbêjs* have been telling the kilam in this form. Considering these, the pleasure taken in hearing a melodized tone of voice can be more fundamental than the semiotic structure of a kilam. Both the auxiliary voices and the adaptation of new words prove that the semiotic structure of the language is always at a tension with the sonorous and affective voice in the *dengbêj* tradition.

3.1 Sense-making capacity of the *dengbêjs*’ voices

In some case, the sonorous and affective grain of the *dengbêjs*’ voice can completely suppress the semiotic structure of a kilam. Only the tone of the voice can specify the listener’s feelings. For example, *Hoy Hoy Memo* or *Mem Ebasî* is one of the well-known kilams that is told in weddings in Hakkarî and Cizîre Botan region. Although it is told with an enthusiastic tone of voice for dancing at the weddings, the plot of the kilam reveals that it is a lament narrated by a mother whose son was killed.

According to the version told by Salihê Şirnexî, Memo’s father leaves the house for a reason, and, he does not return for many years. Once he left the village, he did not realize that his wife was pregnant. After 15 long years, he returns home in the middle of the night. He sees that someone lies down next to his wife. Since Memo’s father is unaware that he is the father of the child, he is suspicious that his wife has betrayed him. He kills the man to take revenge; however, soon afterwards he realizes that the boy is his young son. After the father kills his son, Memo’s mother begins to sing kilams in the form of a lament:

Hay hay Memo

Ebasî⁴⁴ beautiful Ebasî

My poor son Ebasî beautiful Ebasî

Hay hay Memo there is a shirt on his dress

My poor son there is a shirt on his trousers

Hay hay Memo

Your damned father speared

My poor son his head fell down his rib⁴⁵

As stated above, this kilam is a lament; however, it is told as a kilam of folk dance in the miqam of *govend*. Govend is a genre of miqam that is usually performed at weddings with a joyful rhythm. With the miqam of govend, tens of people dance with small steps by linking their arms with each other's arms (Nezan, 1996, p. 17). Even if many of the kilams in the form of govend are composed of joyful stories, the kilam of, Hoy Hoy Memo basically presents a lament. Although laments are performed in the mourning rituals and funerals with a sorrowful tone of voice, some laments are performed at weddings with an enthusiastic melody to make people dance. At that point, different tones of voice create different effects upon the listeners. Lamentation through a sorrowful tone of voice makes the listener cry and mourn whereas an enthusiastic tone of voice makes people dance. Therefore, this kilam can be suggested as one of the striking examples to reveal how the semiotic

⁴⁴ This term is probably is a name of specific community.

⁴⁵ Hay hay Memo

Ebasî xweş Ebasî

Jaro lawo Ebasî xweş Ebasî

Hay hay Memo kurtekî l'ser kirasî

Jaro lawo kurtekî l'ser kirasî

Hay Hay Memo

Bab korê be rim dane

Jaro lawo serê giha perasî.

This kilam was recorded in July 23, 2017 after I had interviewed Cemalê Mihê.

structure of the kilam is suppressed by the affective and sonorous grain of the dengbêjs' voices, and how different tones of voice create different effects. Even though dengbêjs' voice has a semantic substance, their voice transgresses the semiotic substance of the kilams. Therefore, it can be asserted that their voice as a sonorous and affective object has a particular sense-making capacity.

Furthermore, the effect created by the sonorous quality of the voice invokes certain feelings that are lost in a semiotic interpretation. Even if the listener doesn't understand the semantic substance of a kilam, the tone of the voice can remind her/him of certain feelings. Dengbêj Bedir says:

Once an artistic activity was organized and dengbêj Yusuf competed with a singer. The singer said, 'I cannot understand what you told; however, your voice burned my heart. Nobody manages to tell in the way you tell.' That was real, it is the effect of the voice (Van, August 1, 2017).⁴⁶

Thinking the singer's response, sonorous and affective voice can create an intimate interaction between the dengbêj and the listener through its unique sonorous substance without requiring semiotic interpretation. Each dengbêj expresses her/his feelings through the timbre rather than the semantic structure. Therefore, the listeners' attention can be shifted from the semiotic substance of the kilam to the sonorous and affective quality of the voice. The sonorous and affective voice draws the listener to regress to a complex web of feelings and memories that cannot be determined completely by the semiotic order.

Especially the feeling of sorrow and pain are mobilized through the sonorous and affective structure of the voice. Even if the words explicate sorrow or pain, the vocalization of these feelings creates a different and unique effect upon the listeners. Especially the vibration in their voice and the sharp shifts between the high and low

⁴⁶ "Rojekî mêşa hunerê hebû, Dengbêj Yisif ketiye yarışmeyê li gel sanatçiyek din. Sanatçi got "Kardeşim ben senin ne söylediğini bilmiyorum ama senin sesin beni yaktı. Bu sesle kimse söyleyemez!" Ew tişteki rastî bû, belê ew tesîrê dengê ye."

pitch turns their voice into an affective drive draws that the listeners to receive this sonorous interpretation rather than the meaning. Dengbêj Miqades says “I express my feelings of sorrow and pain by telling kilam. When I sing kilams on the Van earthquake, the whole people cry. They cry because they know this feeling of sorrow and pain (Van, 2017, August 1, 2017).”⁴⁷ Even if here dengbêj Miqades does not directly focus on the voice, it supports the argument that the quality of voice has played a critical role in spreading the effect upon the listeners. In another example, dengbêj Kurdê tells: “We went to a commemoration organized for the Halabja massacre. When we told the stran on Halabja, all women cried (İstanbul, December 24, 2018).”⁴⁸ Certain feelings are conveyed to a sonorous interpretation through the dengbêjs’ sound waves. The kilams in the form of laments are usually performed in funerals, in daily conversations, and in narrating heroic epics (Amy de la Bretéque, 2012, p. 143). Laments create strong aftereffects of sorrow upon the listeners; therefore, telling a lament can be dangerous and can even cause death (Amy de la Bretéque, 2012, p. 143). In the light of these examples, we can argue that kilams in the form of laments should be regarded as ‘a creative pulling together of affect’ rather than a cathartic experience (Feld, 1990, p. 257). In addition to laments, there is another form of kilam, *kilamên dîlanê/dawetê/govendê* (kilams for the Kurdish folk dance) which is sung in ceremonies and weddings to call the people to dance. Since the performers regulate their dance moves according to the rhyme of the kilams, their bodies are excessively affected by the sonorous substance of the kilam. Hence, both the laments and *kilamên dîlanê/dawetê* influence people’s feelings and even their

⁴⁷ “Ez derdê xwe, êşa xwe dikime kilam. Gava ku ez li ser erhêjîyê Wanê kilamek dibêjî, hemû kes digirî. Hemû digirî çimkî hêmû jî dazane ew êşê, ew elemê.”

⁴⁸ “Em çûn salvegera Helepçeyê. Me stranek got, hemû jin girîn.”

bodies. Therefore, voice as a sonorous and affective substance passes through listeners' feelings and bodies.

However, we should also note that the voice creates a rupture between the present and past, body and consciousness. A listener usually desires to find any proper meaning in the kilam; however, s/he can have a tendency to abandon her/himself to the rhythm. The similar process is at work for the dengbêjs, they lose themselves when performing. Both the listener's and the dengbêj's temporal and spatial perception can be radically altered by the sonorous and affective quality of the voice. For example, dengbêj Cemalê Mihê says:

Once I begin to sing kilams, it reminds me of love. I mostly remember my love. I was fourteen, fifteen years old, my wife was, too. When I sing kilams, I take her hand and we go to Botan. I remember the whole of my life. When I sing kilams, I am not aware of myself. It is such an urge, I sing kilams ceaselessly (Şırnak, July 23, 2017).⁴⁹

Cemalê Mihê was born in 1957 in one of the villages of Şırnak known Dergûlê. He is a well-known dengbêj who was negatively influenced by the forceful displacement. He used to make his living from crop and animal husbandry in the village. Since the ongoing political tension in numerous villages in the 1990s, he had to settle in the centre of Şırnak. Therefore, he states that singing kilam or hearing a singing voice reminds him of his past and the world that he lost. Even if he lives in another place and time, a singing dengbêj voice provides a sonorous memory that draws him to remember. Voice itself becomes a way of belonging that manifests an acoustic language and memory. Thus, the urge of imagination is tempted by the sonorous and affective voice that draws the performer or the listener into a world of fantasy. The voice functions as the core of fantasy that invokes imagination. The dengbêj or

⁴⁹ “Wextê ez kilamekî dibêjîm evînî têtê ber çavê min. Pitir eşq û evînî têtê bîra min, ez hê 14, 15 salî me, hevala min jî eyen we ye. Ez destê parka xwe digrim û em çîn aliyê Botan. Ew hiyat têtê ber çavê min ho. Cara ez kilamekî bêjîm min hay jê xwe tune ye willa. His carina welî min digire, ez bi seatan dewam dikem.”

listener's temporal and spatial perception is interrupted by a sonorous intervention that makes the dengbêj or the listener to imagine a fictive time and space. In the interviews, dengbêjs mostly express that they start to imagine when they hear a dengbêj's voice or sing a kilam.

Telling a kilam also produces an effect of relief for the dengbêjs. They specify the urge of telling a kilam as an unconscious reaction. Marlene Schäfers addresses dengbêjs' voice as a medium of sound and affect that both stands for an agency and have an agency (2019, pp. 469-70). Voice creates its acoustic language without being totally dependent on the semiotic-based language system. Dengbêj Îsmet is from the centre of Hakkari whose grandfather, father and his brothers are also well-known dengbêjs. He used to work as a truck driver. However, he states that he also maintained the dengbêj art throughout his life especially in weddings and during long winter nights. Once he expresses his relationship with his own voice, he says that "When I remember a kilam, I must tell it. If I don't vocalize, it drives me mad. Until I tell the lawje, it haunts me and annoys me. I desire to hear my voice (Hakkari, August 23, 2017)."⁵⁰ Additionally, dengbêj Newzat is one of the dengbêjs I interviewed in Yüksekova. He is a building worker and lives in a village of Yüksekova. He says that he cannot sing when someone else requests. He indicates that "In order to sing kilams I should desire it from the heart. Without the urge to sing kilams I can't tell. When I desire to tell a kilam I should tell it to relieve myself (Yüksekova, January 17, 2017)."⁵¹ He continues by saying that he is inspired by nature; therefore, he desires to sing in the village where he lives. He says:

⁵⁰ "Wextê lawjekî tête bîra min, lazim e ez bêjîm. Ger ez nêşêm bêjim ez dê nesax kevim. Heta ez bêjîm ew lawje jî mêjîyê min naçîte, min rihetsiz diket. Ez heskem dengê xwe gulê bim."

⁵¹ "Wextê lawjek bejim lazim e ez heskem bejim. Ger ez hes nakem bejim, ez neşem. Ema wextê ez heskem bêjim jî lazim e ez bêjim dilê xwe rihet kem."

I sometimes cannot stop myself. Even neighbours come next to the windows and listen to me for hours. I just cannot cease the desire to sing kilams. One day I visited my sister living in İstanbul. When I began to sing a kilam, one of her neighbours is troubled with my high-pitch voice. I got angry since I could not complete the kilam.⁵²

The desire to sing kilams is considered as an urge here haunting the dengbêj, and even annoying her/him. Thus, the sonorous interpretation invokes the effect of relief upon the dengbêjs. The voice can overshadow the speech by replacing it with a hearable pleasure (Cavarero, 2005, p. 99). Sonorous interpretation of a feeling transgresses the semantic signification. The urge to signify the meaning is replaced with the desire to hear the voice.

The voice can be considered as an evanescent sound; however, its effects created upon individuals demonstrate that it functions as an affective and sonorous object. Mladen Dolar addresses the voice as follows:

The acousmatic voice is simply a voice whose source one cannot see, a voice whose origin cannot be identified, a voice one cannot place. It is a voice in search of an origin, in search of a body, but even when it finds its body, it turns out that this doesn't quite work, the voice doesn't stick to the body, it is an excrescence which doesn't match the body (Dolar, 2006: 60-1).

Thinking in line with Dolar's statement, we can say that the voice epidemically spreads to different ears by transgressing the borders of the individual bodies. Its ambiguous source and sonorous flux invoke concrete actions not contemplated in consciousness but produced in this trans-individual realm. The circulation of the voice as a sonorous affective object among different individuals creates a collective being based on a trans-individual interaction. Circular characteristic of the voice provides a plural form of being shared by different individuals simultaneously. For example, sonorous and affective quality of the voice in folk dances pushes

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⁵² “Ez neşem xwe rawestim. Car caran cinarêd me jî têtin ber pencereye me û bi seatan guyê xwe dene min. Ez neşem xwe jê vê hîsê xelas kem. Rojekî, ez çûm mala xwişka xwe, mala wê li Îstebol. Rojekî min lawyek digot, cînarek wê hat û gazinde kir. Min neşiya bêjim ber hindê gelek kerbê min vebû.”

individuals to act together by entwining their arms around each other. People pay attention to the rhyme during a folk dance rather than the story of the kilam. Thus, dengbêjs' melodized tone of voice creates concrete effects upon the listeners by drawing them to feel and act. The acoustic substance of the kilams passes from the dengbêjs to the listeners 'as a sonorous flux of irresistible delight (Cavarero, 2005, p. 88).' Music or its aftereffects matter more than the story.

3.2 The reciprocal communication of dengbêjs' voices

Voice provides a musical exchange introducing one unique self to another.

Considering Lacan's *mirror stage* as the first confrontation with the other and initial stage of becoming a subject, some studies suggest that the voice comes before the gaze for the identification of the individual (Cavarero: 2005; Dolar: 2006; Kreiman & Sidtis, 2011). Jody Kreiman and Diana Sidtis assert that 'recognition begins even before birth' between the mother and the infant (2011, p. 160). Mladen Dolar argues that the self-recognition through voice produces the same effects in the infant as the ones accompanying the self-recognition in a mirror (2006, pp. 39-40). In a similar vein, Cavarero addresses voice as a grain existing as a pre-language and semantic chora by rethinking maternal relationality between voice and speech, infant and mother (2005, pp. 132-8). Inspired by Kristeva's conceptualization of chora, she notes: "In short, not only does the pure semantic not exist (as Plato dreamed), but the semantic role of speech is intrinsic to a vocalic that anchors it the bodily drives (Cavarero, 2005, p. 136)." In the light of these thoughts, shifting the attention from the semantic order to the voice can be useful to reveal how dengbêjs achieve their sonorous uniqueness in the reciprocal communication of different voices.

Dengbêjs usually receive their style and genre of voices from their mother. Most of the dengbêjs I interviewed in this research said that they have inherited their style and genre of telling kilam from their mothers' loriks. Dengbêj Îsmâil says "The dengbêj tradition originates in the mothers' lullabies and voices (Hakkarî, January 16, 2017)."⁵³ And they also reveal that they have improved their voice by making call and response duets with talented dengbêjs and mostly with their mothers. Dengbêj Newzat states "When I came to the house, I was doing practice with my mother. If I didn't remember, she used to tell me. I was collecting whatever I heard (Yüksekova, January 17, 2017)."⁵⁴ Most of the dengbêjs reveal that they still pursue their mothers' styles of singing. Hence, it can be suggested that the tradition of dengbêjî has also a maternal structure emerging from the reciprocal sonorous communication of the mother and child's voices. Voice bridges the mother and child as a sonorous object beyond a semiotic substance. Without paying attention to the story of the kilam, a proper miqam is taught to the child. Beyond the semiotic realm, the child is taught to hold her/his breath by blowing her/his breath in a straw that is put into a glass filled with water. Another method to train the voice, the child leans her/his back on the wall and push it to straighten the diaphragm. Call and response duets are used as the most fundamental method to teach certain miqams. In the light of all these trainings, it can be suggested that the urge to have a certain miqam creates a sonorous memory established a maternal link between the mother and the child. Of course, some dengbêjs can learn singing from different dengbêjs or their fathers. However, most of the dengbêjs consider that their mothers' voices have an immense influence upon them.

⁵³ "Dengbêjî ji lorînên dayikan hatiye, ji qerînên dayikan hatiye. "

⁵⁴ "Ez dihatima mal da, min tiştek fêm dikir fêm dikir, fêm nedikir jî dayika min bo min berdewama vê digot. Di her gavê da jî min xwe vidigirt."

The call and response duets are at the core of the dengbêj tradition since these duets constitute the realms in which different voices confront with each other. As I have argued before, the sonorous and affective grain of the voice plays a critical role in these duets overshadowing the semantic structure of the kilams. Dengbêjs practice and improve their voice through these reciprocal interactions. They try to discover their ability to control the vibrations in their timbre mostly ignoring the semiotic substance of the kilam. Even if the plot of the kilam has been considered to play a critical role in the dengbêj tradition, the most fundamental aspect is how to control the timbre and embody a particular miqam. In this respect, the call and response duets have been very significant in conveying different miqams. Considering that the voice circulates as a sonorous object in the dengbêj tradition, Dengbêj Kurdê's statement is significant:

When we were kneading the dough, we were telling the kilam. We were telling a kilam according to the rhythm of kneading the dough. Henîf was telling a kilam, I was responding to her, she was telling, and I was responding to her. The same kilam, the same voice, and same breathing... We practiced, practiced and practiced. I still can't sing in the way she sings. My voice has a high pitch; however, Henîf sings the kilam with a rich vibrato. There is something special in her voice. Her voice has a qualified miqam, but mine is not as talented as hers (İstanbul, December 24, 2018).⁵⁵

I would say what is special in Henîfa's voice is the sense-making capacity of her voice that cannot be expressed through a semiotic signification. Because the voice as a sonorous and affective object creates its acoustic interpretation beyond the order of language, dengbêjs privilege the miqam in the voice or vibrato in the voice rather than the story of the kilam.

⁵⁵ "Me taskêk da hevîr dikir, me digot ew kilam pê ve tê. Henîf digot û min zivirand, we digot û min zivirand. Eynî kilam, eynî deng eynî nefes. Holê bêje, hole bêje, me welî got û got û got. Hêj jî ez heku Henîf neşêm bêjim. Dengê min bilind e, ema dengê Henîf diqulipîne, nav dengê wê da tiştek dî heye. Miqama wê teji ye, ya min piçki hindik e."

The above examples illustrate that the singing voice creates aftereffects upon the listeners. These epidemic effects of the kilam spread from the dengbêj's individual body as a unique voice and approach to the listener's ear as a sonorous object. Both the dengbêj's and the listener's ear or the whole body is bombarded simultaneously by 'the metrical speech and instrumental melody (Cavarero, 2005, p. 84).' While the voice shatters the borders of the bodies and subjectivities, it also bridges different bodies and subjectivities as an affective and sonorous object. This sonorously manifested intersection enables a reciprocal communication between the dengbêj and the listener since both the dengbêj and the listener are provoked by the enchanting effects of the voice. For example, in the dengbêj night organized in the name of Nesrîn Şêrwan or in dengbêj houses that I visited, the listeners were beating out the rhythm of the kilam through their claps or shouts. Even the listeners sometimes were crying or laughing at the kilams due to the sonorous and affective quality of dengbêjs' voice. Hence, it can be said that voice creates a collective, trans-individual communication that unifies the dengbêjs and listeners as an alternative collective unity.

3.3 Is there a geography of voice?

I have argued before that the voice has a quality to introduce the self to 'the others' through a sonorous interpretation without requiring a semantic description. Thus, the voice comes before the semantic meaning to introduce one's unique self. Especially human voice conveys so much about the people as individuals (Kreiman & Sidtis, 2011, p. 1). We can know the individuals through their voices and learn about how they feel, even where they come from. The dengbêjs' voices reveal their sense of being and sonorously manifest their unique identity by distinguishing each voice

from the others. We can see this in the call and response duets that Dengbêj Kurdê, Henîfa, Avdilayê Goyî, and Cemalê Mihê made (İstanbul, July 23, 2017). Although they sometimes repeat the same verses, the sonorous uniqueness in their voice introduces them as different individuals. Each dengbêj has a unique tone of voice. If we look at what the kilams tell us rather than who sings the kilam, we can miss the sonorous uniqueness of each voice, and reduce the acoustic substance of the voice to a semiotic signification. Dengbêjs obtain their uniqueness through their voice as a sonorous object that identifies ‘its master’ as a unique self. There is ‘a musical exchange of voices,’ especially in the dengbêj tradition (Cavarero, 2005, pp. 29-30). Dengbêjs are trained by a certain group of dengbêjs making call and response duets. In these duets, their unique voices interact with each other in a reciprocal invocation. Each voice possesses its uniqueness, and the mutual genres of kilams or miqams enable the dengbêjs to gather and introduce their sonorous uniqueness. In this respect, dengbêjs’ voice is a sonic object identifying them as unique individuals. Dengbêj Henîfa says “I remember that day when my relatives recognized my aunt’s voice in the Radio of Bagdad. We didn’t know where she had run away when she left the village. However, we could recognize her thanks to her voice (December 24, 2018).”⁵⁶ This example also reveals that individuals’ identities can be introduced sonorously without requiring any external image.

Additionally, geography has played an essential role in shaping the voice. A dengbêj living in the highland has a high-pitched and sonorous voice whereas the one living in the lowland has a low-pitched and mellifluous voice (Kevirbirî, 2002, p. 24). Demonstrated by the interviews made for this study, the dengbêjs usually

⁵⁶ “Ew roj tête bîra min, miletê me dengê meta min di radyoyê da naskir. Wextê meta min reviya ji gundê, me nazanî ku vê çûye. Me dengê wê naskir.”

identify the dengbêjs from their voice, and they specify them via two main classifications: the voice of a highlander (çiyayî) and the voice of a lowlander (deştî). For example, Dengbêj Kurdê indicates that she has a low-pitched and mellifluous voice as a highlander whereas dengbêj Henîfa possesses a high-pitched and sonorous voice with a rich vibrato as a lowlander. Similarly, it is also possible to make a distinction between dengbêj Newzat's voice as a highlander and dengbêj Fîkrî's voice as a lowlander. While Newzat sings a kilam with a rich vibrato, dengbêj Fîkrî has a soft and low-pitched voice. Thus, this classification reveals how geography has a fundamental influence on the dengbêj's voice. The influence of geography on the voice can enable the listener to specify the dengbêj's identity, especially the place where s/he comes from. Dengbêjs introduce their identities and geographical belonging through their voice.

In this respect, the dengbêjs of Van and the dengbêjs of Şırnak and Hakkari are totally different from each other.⁵⁷ Both their styles of the using the timbre and the genres can be distinguished from each other. Hence, the miqams that dengbêjs use can reveal the dengbêj's homeland and even tribe. For example, dengbêj Newzat indicates that: "In order to tell the way I sing kilams, you should practice from childhood until now. You should be *Pînyanîşî*. If you are not *Pînyanîşî*, you can't use your voice in the way we use. We tell different styles of kilams; however, nobody can sing kilams in the way we tell (Yüksekova, January 17, 2017)."⁵⁸ *Pînyanîşî* is one of the well-known tribes in Hakkari and they are known with their talented

⁵⁷ Dengbêj Miqaddes, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_4IlhtP77rk, 2015 Van (Date accessed: June 7, 2018)

Dengbêj Henîfa û Kurdê, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z5c14kZbUDo>, 2016 Şırnak (June 7, 2018).

⁵⁸ "Bunları söylemek için çocukluktan beri pratik yapmalısın, yada *Pînyanîşî* olmak lazım. Eğer *pînyanîşî* değilsen sen sesini böyle kullanamazsın. Mesela bizdekilerin önemli bir özelliği var, biz herkesinkini söyleyebiliriz ama herkes bizimki gibi söyleyemez."

dengbêjs. Dengbêj Newzat's statement reveals that even one's tribe can be specified from his/her voice. Therefore, it can be asserted that the dengbêj's voice is a sort of sonorous label identifying the dengbêj's belonging. By identifying himself as a dengbêj of Hakkari, dengbêj Îsmet says "The dengbêjs of Serhed region sing kilams with a treble voice that is radically different from our style of telling the kilam. They can't use their timbre with the vibrato (Hakkari, August 23, 2017)."⁵⁹

The voice functions as a sonorous object that identifies the dengbêj's belonging. Especially the style of using the timbre enables the listener to recognize the dengbêj's identity. A qualified listener can recognize the dengbêj's identity through her/his use of timbre without requiring any semantic interpretation. For example, dengbêjs of Şırnak are called as *Botî*⁶⁰ whereas dengbêjs of Iğdır, Kars, Ardahan, Ağrı and a part of Van are called as *Serhedî*.⁶¹ Dengbêjs of Hakkari are also classified as dengbêjs of *Badînan*.⁶² The use of voice alters from region to region and, from tribe to tribe.

The voice is not only an instrumental tool for transmitting the memories to the future. The voice functions as an affective sonic object influencing the listener's feelings and even bodies. Going beyond the semiotic order enables the dengbêj to express what is lost in the language by using sonorous interpretations. Certain interpretations materialized through dengbêjs' voices also transmit the memory. Especially the sorrow or enthusiasm materialized by the memorialized tone of voice can invoke certain affects. These invoked affects manifested sonorously by the voice

⁵⁹ "Dengê dengbêjên Serhedê gor me gelek eceyb e, dengê xwe gelek bilind amel diken. Dengê xwe şîba me neşên amel ken, dengê wan gelek duz e."

⁶⁰ Botan was used to be one of the Kurdish beylics existed between 1300s and 1800s. Şırnak zone was used to be called as Botan and the people were also used to be called as Botî.

⁶¹ The zones of Iğdır, Kars, Ardahan, Ağrı and a part of Van are called as Serhed by Kurds. And the people living in these areas are called as Serhedî.

⁶² Badînan was used to be one of the Kurdish beylics existed between 13th and 14th centuries. It was used to stretch for miles from Beytülşebap to Amediye and Duhok.

embodies a memory of senses and feelings. In the light of these, sonorous interpretations also embody a language and a memory without requiring a semantic signification. Dengbêjs' conceptualization of miqam suggests a sonorous memory based on dengbêjs' unique styles and genres of singing kilams.

Dengbêjs share their voices as well as their stories and memories. Their melodized tone of voice provides a sonorous realm where different dengbêjs' voices reciprocally communicate. By singing kilams, dengbêjs establish a plurality based on uniqueness or singularity of different beings. Drawing on Arendt's conceptualization of "political being," Cavarero notes that:

Arendt's plurality is, first of all, a character of the human condition, the incontrovertible fact of an elementary ontology, or, perhaps, a radical phenomenology. Every human being appears to others and thus is different from "anyone else who ever lived, lives or will live." From birth, which announces the human being as a new beginning, everyone shows him- or herself to be unique. This is what men have in common: uniqueness in plurality, or the uniqueness that makes them plural and the plurality that makes them unique. As the greatest sphere of activity in which men communicate and distinguish themselves, politics is called on to this plural status (Cavarero, pp. 191-2).

Considering this, dengbêjs uniqueness also emerges from their communication with the others that makes them political beings sharing their singularity in a plural interaction.

The reciprocal communication created by dengbêjs' sonorous reciprocal interaction manifests each dengbêj's uniqueness whereas their unique beings create a plurality. Therefore, the voice as a sonorous object becomes a medium transmitting what is lost in the semantic structure of the language. Considering this, language should not be seen only as a system of signification, the melodized tone of voice can also become a way of communication. Characteristic of timbre arising from the body can suggest a communication by interpreting the individual's sonorous uniqueness. His/her unique timbre can represent a sonorous memory in an environment where the

Kurdish is forbidden or censored. The system of language is not only a semantic signification, but it is also a way of acting that is internalized by a community. Therefore, dengbêjs' melodized tone of voice creates a network where different voices interact with each other through an alternative musical language. Once dengbêjs sing kilams, their voice as a sonorous object introduces their unique self to 'the other'. The uniqueness of the voice streams from the impossibility of representation of the voice. Thus, 'there is no need for the recognition of the one's external image,' voice already introduces itself as a sonorous object specifying the dengbêj's agency (Dolar, 2006, p. 40). Voice and sound differ from one another since voice belongs to a certain subject. Whereas the sound doesn't signify a certain subject, the voice identifies the one who emits it even when it is animal (Cavarero, 2006, p. 177). In the light of these, dengbêjs' voices manifest dengbêjs as political beings that communicate with each other through the uniqueness of their sonorous interpretations. Voice embodies a space of action where a number of singular or unique voices communicate in a plurality.

To conclude, I have tried to shift the attention from the semiotic-based perception to a voice-centred understanding by discussing dengbêjs' voices as sonorous objects. I have specifically referenced dengbêjs' different styles of singings and acoustic interpretations. I tried to square the circle by providing such a research with dengbêjs who are very much intermingled with the semiotic structure of kilams. However, I would like to grasp the dengbêjs tradition from a different point of view by focusing on uniqueness in dengbêjs' voices. Even if the kind of study requires a detailed analysis of the act of hearing and also particular interviews done with listeners, the scope of this thesis is limited to interviews done with dengbêjs. In the

light of these, the debates suggested by this chapter aim to raise new questions about the dengbêj tradition by focusing on the acoustic quality of dengbêjs' voices.

CHAPTER 4

FEMALE VOICE AMONG MALE VOICES

The dengbêj tradition has changed a lot over the years; it is very different from what it used to be in the past. The tradition has been silenced by many factors including the official language, the identity politics in Turkey, the developing technologies and the impact of patriarchal society. We have to note different types of silencing in the dengbej tradition. On the one hand, developing technologies have transformed the listeners' habit of listening in the last decades. The listeners usually prefer short-term digital recordings instead of long-term epic and poetic narratives. Accordingly, live dengbêj performances based on improvisation are now replaced with the easily controllable digital recordings. On the other hand, the dengbêj tradition has faded due to the oppressive state politics. There are also the effects of patriarchal attitudes. Consequently, women dengbêjs have been pressured by the Kurdish patriarchal society that assumes the singing female voice as a shame. Women dengbêjs have a very different understanding of silence from what male dengbêjs mean by silence. In the light of this statement, this chapter discusses how women dengbêjs express what they understand as silence, where they perform the kilams, and how their voice transforms from a shameful act to an audible, sense-making challenge against the patriarchal Kurdish society.

4.1 The singing female voice in a patriarchal society

Due to the patriarchal structure of Kurdish society, the dengbêj tradition has been associated with male dengbêjs. It is usually presented as if dengbêj performances are limited to male dengbêjs' narratives and dîwans. But in contrast with this, kilams are

usually narrated from the subject position of women. For example, *Derwêşê Ewdî* is one of the well-known kilams told in various Kurdish regions. This kilam is told from the subject position of a woman whose name is Edûlê. It is about a tragic love story between Edûlê and Derwêş. Since a tribal conflict breaks out between different families of the Mîlan tribe, hundreds of people are involved in a war. As one of the sides in the conflict, Edûlê's father stipulates that Derwêş fights for him in order to marry Edûlê. So, Derwêş decides to fight for Edûlê's father. However, he is fatally injured during the conflict, and Edûlê laments by telling her pain in a kilam. Another example comes from Meryem Xan, who is one of the famous women dengbêjs who has challenged the patriarchal society. She is married to a Kurdish mîr, but her husband doesn't let her sing kilams. Although Meryem Xan loves her husband, she prefers to continue her dengbêj art by leaving her love behind. *Mihemedo Ronî* is a kilam where Meryem Xan laments her passion for her husband. Moreover, Karapetê Xaco's famous kilam known as *Lawikê Metînî* is also told from the subject position of a woman. Although she falls in love with a boy, she is forced into marriage with someone else. Therefore, this kilam is a scream for her lover and her dead mother. She laments her suffering and desperation by telling the kilam.

Additionally, singing kilams makes room for women to express their sexual desires and fantasies. The epic of *Zembîlfiroş* has been narrated through the call and response duet that is performed by the characters Gulxatûn and Zembîlfiroş (basket seller). Gulxatûn is a married woman but she tries to convince the zembîlfiroş to make love with her. Since zembîlfiroş is married and an ascetic man, he rejects Gulxatûn. Their story has been told among Kurds as one of the well-known love epics as follows:

You basket seller, poor boy,

There you go, come to the lord's bed,
Put on the Lord's dress.
You boy approach to my belt,
If you manage, we will have fun,
It is not a sin for you.

Said: My lady with a silken neck,
Who am I to come to the lord's bed,
I don't wear the Lord's dress.

-You, basket seller, poor boy,
You compare yourself with everyone,
Come on and sleep with me on the fur and wool.
You boy approach to my belt,
If you manage, we will have fun,
It is not a deception for you,

-My lady with the thin neck,
You flavorful syrup,
You are the womb that is a sin to me.
You boy, I've had enough of your excuses,
Come on and sleep with me on the quilt and mattress,
Taste my rose and apples (Cindî & Evdal, 2008, pp. 389-90).⁶³

As stated above, Gulxatûn's expresses her sexual desire by singing a kilam.

Although the Kurdish society has a patriarchal social structure, kilams can pave the way for women's self-expression. Even a male dengbêj can sing this kilam without

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⁶³ Zembîlfiroş, lawkê feqîr,
Tu keremke ser doşeka mîr,
Bikşîne qelna wezîr.
Lawik were misiletê,
Vê şuxlî da kara me tê,
Eslê te ra gune ne tê.
Got: -Xatûna min e garden herîr,
Hedê min çi ye ez bê m ser doşeka mîr,
Ez nakişînim qelina wezîr.
-Zenbîlfiroş, lawkê avas,
Tu gerek xwe bikî qeyas,
Were razê nav kurk û livas.
Lawik were misiletê,
Vê şuxlî da kara me tê,
Eslê te ra ew lêp ne tê,
-Xatûna min e gerden tamam,
Tu şerbeta kas û du cam,
Tu serdapê li min heram,
Kuro, bes e bike filan û bêvan,
Were raze nav doşek lihêfa,
Her tim tev da gul û sêva (Cindî & Evdal, 2008, pp. 389-90).

censoring Edule's sexual desires. Lila Abu-Lughod reveals how poetic discourse paves the way for women's expression of subversive sentiments in Awlat 'Ali society (2016, pp. 251-2). Inspired by Abu-Lughod conceptualization of poetic discourse, it can be asserted that singing kilam provides a ground for women to express their oppressed sentiments as a counter-discourse challenging normative honour codes. Hence, kilams become liberated spheres for women through which they express and interpret their desires, feelings, and emotions. Considering this, it is not a coincidence that most of the kilams have been told from the subject position of women.

However, there is an important reversal. Although dengbêjs' kilams are usually narrated to express the desires and experiences of women, they have been performed by the male dengbêjs. Of course, it does not mean that only women express their feelings and desires through the dengbêj art. Male dengbêjs also reflect their dreams and emotions by singing kilams from the subject positions of women. Metin Yüksel asserts that the method of speaking in the voice of female member increases the sentimentality according to male dengbêjs (2010, pp. 132-3). However, still, that does not clarify why female dengbêjs have been disregarded in the dengbêj art despite their echoing voice. Women dengbêjs have experienced many obstacles, especially in public spaces due to certain moral codes that pretend singing female voice as a shameful act. Even, women dengbêjs were exposed to public oppression and even violence. Cemalê Mihê says:

There were dîwans where dengbêjs gather; however, women were not let to participate in dîwans. It was considered as a shame. If a woman sang a kilam in the middle of a wedding, she either would be killed or would not let to sing. There used to be many women dengbêjs and poets. My mother, Rehîm was a dengbêj. When she began to sing kilam, it didn't end until the morning.

But they didn't sing in the public, it was assumed as a shameful act (C. Mihê, Şirnak, July 23, 2017).⁶⁴

Most of the kilams used to be performed by men in public places. Therefore, women dengbêjs commonly agree that women's voices are seized by the male dengbêjs. Dengbêj Gazî expresses this statement as follows "Indeed, the art belongs to women. The dengbêj tradition belongs to women. Women told and men seized the women's words (Tahaoglu, 2012)."⁶⁵ Similarly, dengbêj Miqades says: "The dengbêj tradition belongs to the mothers since they sing lullabies. They sing for their beloved one, child, lover, brother and sister. However, men seized their kilams. Therefore, women are not visible (Van, August 1, 2017)."⁶⁶ Most of the kilams told from a woman's subject position have been performed by the male dengbêjs in the public for decades. Since it is commonly agreed that women's voice should not be heard by men (*dengê jinan nekeve ser mêran*), women's voices have been banned, especially in the public spheres. The female voice telling the kilam has been considered as a shameful act by the patriarchal Kurdish society (Hamelink, 2016, p. 397). It is also assumed that religion has played a critical role in identifying women's voice as a shameful notion (Schäfers, 2018: 13). For example, the Naqshbandi tariqa has forbidden to sing the kilam for women (Çiftçi, 2014, p. 80). As women living in a Muslim society, both Meryem Xan and Eyşe Şan confronted with the barrier of Islamic beliefs. However, Yezidi women dengbêjs such as Fatma İsa, Asliqa Qadir and Armenian women dengbêjs such as Gula Bavfile, Pêroya Têxûtê could sing the

⁶⁴ "Berê dîwan çêdibû, pîrek nedihatin, digotin şerm e. Mesela pîrekek hatiba dîwanê da gîr bikira an wê kuştiban an jî nedihêştin. Hebûn şaire jin zehf bûn. Diya min Rehîm dengbêj bû. Diya Rehîm stran bigotiya heta spêhê vê stran xilas nedibû. Lê bele civatê da nedigotin, digotin şerm e."

⁶⁵ "Aslında sanat kadından gelmiş. Dengbejlik kadından gelmiş. Kadınlar söylemiş erkeklere mahal olmuş."

⁶⁶ "Dengbêjî ji dayikan maye, ji dayikan hatiye. Ber çik û lorandin e, li ser ezîzê dilê xwe, kurê xwe, mêrê xwe, birê xwe, xwuyê xwe, kê li ser çiyê lorandiye, gotiye. Bes mêrîkan ji wan sitendin, jinika berçav nema."

kilam publicly (Çiftçi, 2014, p. 80). So, it can be said that moral codes including different religious dynamics have a critical influence on the women's dengbêj performances.

Because of the patriarchal pressure, Meryem Xan was forced to leave her husband to pursue her dengbêjî (Yaş, 2015, pp. 120-5). Dengbêj Gulbihar (Fatima Mihemed) was oppressed by her husband's family due to her dengbêjî and forced to leave her husband to continue the dengbêj art (Yaş, 2015, pp. 406-13). Nesrîn Şêrwan is one of the famous dengbêjs who suffered from the patriarchal Kurdish society. Dengbêj Henîfa is one of Nesrîn Şêrwan's relatives born in Dergûlê, Şîrnak. She says "(...) she used to love her cousin; however, he cheated on her with someone else. People don't talk about the truth; they assume that she killed her son and left her village. She went to Baghdad (İstanbul, December 24, 2018)."⁶⁷ Dengbêj Henîfa is younger than Meryem Xan and Nesrîn Şêrwan, however, she has also experienced similar obstacles. As a woman dengbêj, she reveals how she has suffered from the patriarchal social structure:

I used to tell stran, I used to tell bêrîte, lawik. My father always used to get angry and say, 'It is a shame that your voice is heard by men!' (...) When my husband heard that I sing the kilamên dawetê, he used to beat me. One day he came and beat me in the middle of the wedding. He said 'It is a very embarrassing act that a woman's voice is heard by men (İstanbul, December 24, 2018).'⁶⁸

4.2 Pain as a communicative and collective experience in the female voice

The women dengbêjs usually associate themselves with pain and sorrow. Therefore, they sing their desires, feelings, and emotions in the form of kilam by crystallizing

⁶⁷ "(...) hejî pismamê xwe fikir, pismamê wê jî xiyaretî lê kir. Weca vê nabêjin dibêjin kurê xwe jî kuşt û çû. Çû bajarê Bexda da derkeft."

⁶⁸ "Min stran digo, min berîte digo, min lawik digo. Her tim babê min diheyidand û digo 'Eyb e dengê jinan ser meran bikev. Eyb e!' Weca wextê zalamê min zanî ez cergê dawetê bejim dihat dane min. Rojekî di nîveka dawetê da dane min û got 'Weca dengê jina ser meran bikeve tiştek kirê e!'"

the pain in their voice. While they materialize the pain through a sonorous interpretation, they become active agents instead of passive individuals. The pain transforms into a constructive and communicative tool mobilizing women dengbêjs who have been exposed to the pressure of the patriarchal social structure. For example, dengbêj Henîfa repositions women as the ‘spring of the strans.’ She says:

The tradition of dengbêjî is a Kurdish art, Kurds’ existence, identity, the culture of Kurds’ ancestors, the core of Kurdistan. Mothers are the spring of the strans. Stran belongs to women since mothers are sorrowful individuals. When her child is arrested, she feels sorrow. When her child disappears, she feels pain. When her child takes to the mountains (*joining to guerrilla movement*), she feels pain. When her child is not good or killed, she feels pain. By the inspiration of pain, they tell their strans. I always remember in our origins and culture; women are the spring of strans (Henîfa, Van, August 1, 2017).⁶⁹

As can be observed in her words, the feeling of pain is addressed as an urge drawing the dengbêj to sing kilam. Dengbêj Henîfa points to the dengbêj tradition as the signifier of Kurdishness. On the other hand, she repositions women’s narratives as the source of the dengbêj tradition. At first glance, she relates women’s feelings, lives, activities and even subjectivities with the domestic roles or the gendered division of labour. However, she also points to women as the real source of the dengbêj tradition. Therefore, we can argue that women dengbêjs’ have subverted the gendered roles by not precisely fitting into the already given gendered roles. Even though male dengbêjs have intended to seize the women’s kilams or stigmatize their voice as a shame in patriarchal public spheres, women dengbêjs have pursued their narratives by creating alternative public spheres. Ultimately, they have rebuilt alternative social structures by transforming their pain and sorrow to kilams instead of being doomed to silence. Dengbêj Henîfa and Kurdê’s children support their

⁶⁹ “Hunera dengbêjî hunera Kurda ye, hebîna Kurda ye, nasnameya Kurda ye, çanda bab û kalê Kurda ye, bingeha Kurdistanê ye. Weca dayîk kaniya stranê ye. Stranê ji dajika dest pê dike çimkî dayîk xemdar e: kur bê girtin xemdar e, kur bê wenda kirin xemdar e, kur biçît çiya xemdar e, kur nebaş be xemdar e, kur bê kuştin xemdar e. Bi vê xemê dibêjin.”

mothers' dengbêj art by encouraging them to sing kilams in public. Thus, dengbêj Kurdê and Henîfa's struggle for their voice can overwhelm certain cultural norms.

Nadia Seremetakis delves into the politics of pain by arguing that Maniat women's performance spaces correspond to alternative social structures that are at the margins of patriarchal social structure (1991, p. 203). She puts forward that women's mourning performances challenge the patriarchal social structure by pointing to the possibility of a socio-political resistance (Seremetakis, 1991, p. 4). Similarly, women dengbêjs associate their dengbêj art with sorrow and pain. They transform their sorrow into dengbêj performances through which they express their emotional, experiential and semiotic interpretations. Most of the women interviewees in this research state that they married at a very young age. They point to their feeling of sorrow and pain as a fundamental core that leads them to become a dengbêj. Dengbêj Henîfa's following expressions support this statement:

If I didn't feel sorrow, I couldn't become a dengbêj. When I was ten years old, I got married. If I didn't experience the oppression and hardship, I wouldn't have become a dengbêj. The reason why women become dengbêjs is that women were exposed to oppression, they were pressured, their rights are ignored (İstanbul, December 24, 2018).⁷⁰

In a similar vein, dengbêj Miqades identifies herself with suffering by saying the following words "(...) I nicknamed myself as *derdbêj* (the person who sing on the pain and sorrow) Mikades. All Kurdish women are *derdbêj*. Could a single woman ever sing together with Şakiro, Zahir, Kazo? It was not possible! Meryem Xan and

⁷⁰ "Mesela xemê min nebûya ez nedibûm dengbêj. Wextê ez neh salî, ez dam mêrê, zilm û zorî li min nekir, ez nedibûm dengbêj. Ji ber ku zilm jinê hatiye kirin, ji ber ku jin hatiye perçiqandin, ji ber ku bêjin heqê jinan nîn e."

Ayşe Şan changed many things. Women used to be captive (Van, August 1, 2017).⁷¹

She explicates how she began singing kilams:

I began to sing kilams when I was 12 years old. (...) Once upon a time, nobody could tell whom s/he loves. A group of people used to take the decision. Once upon a time, there were men's dîwans, there were lords and aghas that were tyrants. A well-esteemed person who took place in the dîwan was either an agha or a lord, and they used to decide even our marriage. (...) Therefore, I became the victim of my father's demand. My uncle promised one of his friends that I would marry him. He was older than my uncle, I was 12 years old. He had seven children, many grandchildren. I was his third wife, the other two had died. He didn't leave his children. We grew up together. I sang about my childhood (Van, August 1, 2017).⁷²

To get rid of the obstacles oppressing women's demands, feelings, and emotions,

women dengbêjs have created an imaginary world where they raise their voice by

singing the kilam. For example, dengbêj Henîfa says that she used to get relaxed by

singing kilam:

When we were displaced and came to Şirnak, my uncle fell in love with a woman and abducted her. According to the tribal rules, I was married to a man by the bride exchange custom. I was ten and the man that I was forcefully made to marry was thirty years old. I was like a gazelle, used to go to the field, washing the clothes, trees, milking, fishing, collecting the hawthorns. I was getting relaxed by singing the kilams (İstanbul, December 24, 2018).⁷³

By the inspiration of pain, women empower their capacity to express feelings that

have been oppressed and ignored by the patriarchal society. Although the patriarchal

society doesn't want to hear these voices, women have raised their voice by singing

⁷¹ "Min bixwe ji xwe ra laqaba xwe, navê xwe gotiye Derdbêj Mikaddes. Jina Kurd hemû derdbêj e. Jinek dengbêj bêxwedê çûba li cem Şakiro rûne, Zahir rûne, Kazo rûne, bêje heye? Tune ye! Jin blindest bûn."

⁷² "Min dest bi dengbêjiyê di 12 saliya xwe da destpêkir. (...) Zemanekî çî kes nedikare bêje kurê filankesê, keça filankesê tu vê bixwaze. Te dî civat ji xwe ra runişt... Zemanekî dîwan hebû, ewk hebû, beg hebûn, axa hebûn, hukumdar bûn. Mesela yekî di dîwanê da runişt, yekî piçekî hebera wî derbas dibe, yan axa bû, yan beg bû digot em ê keça te bidin wî. (...) Ber vê qasê, bavê min ez kirime qurbana soza xwe. Apê min soz da hevalê xwe, hevalêkî ji wî mestir. Ez jî 12 salî bûm, eee ew jî... heft zarokên wî hebûn, bûka wî hebû, neviyên wî hebûn. Ez çûm, bûm jina sisê. Du heb miribû. Wan jî neberde, zarê wan bimîne li ber destê helqê. Em bi hev ra mezin bûn, li gel wan zarokan. (...) Ser zaroktiya xwe, yanî min edî li ser zaroktiya xwe stran got."

⁷³ "Wextê em ji gunda koçber bû, em hatî Şirnexê. Mamê min hej qîzikekê kir, ez kirime berdaliya mamê min. Ez deh salî dan sih saliyê. Ez deh salî, ez wek xezalan bî. Ew qas jehatî bî, ji çolê re ez diçû, cil ez diçû, dar ez diçû, ber pazî ez diçû, ez diçû masiya, ez çû guhûjan. Min stran digot dile xwe rehet fikir."

the kilam. Therefore, it can be stated that they haven't acted precisely in the way the patriarchal society expects.

4.3 The subversion of the patriarchal social structure by women dengbêjs' voices

Deniz Kandiyoti discusses women's position in a patriarchal society by arguing that women are not just passive individuals obeying the patriarchal rules. On the contrary, she asserts that women have short- and long-term strategies to cope with the patriarchal society in different social locations (1988, pp. 285-6). Inspired by Kandiyoti, it can be argued that women dengbêjs don't fit into a certain patriarchal order. Instead, they reconstruct their positionality by creating different locations for their expressions. What I mean by this is that women dengbêjs have performed by creating alternative public spheres that manipulate and challenge the patriarchal public spheres. While Abu-Lughod addresses the women's performances of poetry by stating that women's oral poetry makes their personal experiences culturally valued terms during the performance (2016, p.242). In a similar way, women dengbêjs manage to shift the pretention of singing female voice from a 'shameful act' to a 'publicly valued act' by expressing their private sentiments in public performances.

The dengbêj tradition is usually associated with dîwans where male dengbêjs used to perform kilams for aghas and lords. However, the limitation of the dengbêj tradition to dîwans should not make us ignore women's positions in the dengbêj tradition. As mentioned above, male dengbêjs used to occupy the public sphere by pushing the women dengbêjs to the peripheries. However, women dengbêjs have managed to create their unique public spheres where different women's voices reciprocally communicated with each other. Women have transformed their daily

activities and locations into a sphere of the dengbêj art. To illustrate, all the women interviewees in this research indicate that they transform all the spaces where they spend their time into a stage of performance. The tenûr where they make bread, the plateau where they go milking or grazing animals turn into spaces where women sing and create their narratives. The kilams sung by women create an imaginary world for women to express their feelings composed of love, happiness, sexual desires, and sorrows.

All of this shows that women dengbêjs are not passive individuals who obey the patriarchal rules. On the contrary, they are creative agents challenging the patriarchal public spheres by providing their unique public spheres where they empower each other by encouraging to express themselves. As we have seen in the third chapter, dengbêj Henîfa and Kurdê made a call and response duet while kneading the dough. The tenûr where they meet one another transforms into a public sphere. Additionally, dengbêj Henîfa says “When I was ten years old, I was singing kilams. I used to go milking, the field, harvesting the wheat. I was singing strans such as bêrîte, lawik (İstanbul, December 24, 2018).”⁷⁴ Despite the gendered division of labour pushing the women to the margins of the public sphere, dengbêj Henîfa relocates her voice by producing alternative public spheres where she can raise her voice and narratives. The places from which singing female voices arise can be seen as isolated, private spheres; however, women’s interaction with each other transforms these places into alternative public realms. On the one hand, singing female voice spreads all around the women’s workplaces in which men also work.

⁷⁴ “Ez deh salî bî, min dengbêjî dikir, ez çû beriye, ez çû paleyê, bi dayîka xwe re çû dirûna dextlê. Min stran digo, min berîte digo, min lawik digo.”

The singing female voice reconceptualizes the fixed binaries of public and private realms.

Women's daily activities were limited to domestic and agricultural works; however, they managed to relocate their voices and organize the reciprocal communication of different voices. Especially the call and response duets encourage women to sing kilams, laments and lullabies, expressing their feelings, expectations, and regrets. For example, dengbêj Kurdê expresses:

We were going to the waterway; we were singing there. My brother-in-law's wife was making the churn, I was singing the stran with the rhythm of it. I was carrying the tin filled with water; I was bringing the tin next to my mouth and singing the kilam. I was wondering whether my voice is beautiful or not. We used to sing while we were going to milking, making the churn; we were singing at weddings⁷⁵ (İstanbul, December 24, 2018).⁷⁶

Even if it is commonly agreed that the plateaus are the isolated spheres where women cannot be publicly visible and audible, these spaces can be considered as a liberated sphere where women reciprocally communicate by transforming themselves into political beings. In a documentary directed for dengbêj Gazîn, dengbêj Gazîn says "When we went to the plateaus, we were getting liberated (Sophie-Persson, 2017)."⁷⁷ In the light of these statements, in living spaces, women create solidarity by reciprocally communicating with their unique voices. When singing, a woman differentiates herself from the other women by the sonorous uniqueness of her timbre. Therefore, each woman's voice embodies a singularity that what makes each woman a unique being. On the other hand, the solidarity and collective existence of these voices establish a plurality that is manifested in the

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⁷⁵ Even if singing was forbidden for the women in a public sphere, in some Kurdish regions women rarely were let to sing in weddings while bringing the bride to the wedding place.

⁷⁶ "Em jî diçûn ser borê, me ser borê digot. Jin tiya min, meşke dikir, min stran digotin. Ez diçûm avê min tanake dibir, min tenake holê dida ber deve xwe, vî mile, min deve xwe pê xist tenake, denge min min zivîrî. Wel hasil, min welê dikir, min digot ka denge min xweş e an ne. Welê stran digotin, me li ber beriyê digotin, ber meşke digotin, me li dawetê digotin."

⁷⁷ "Wextê ku em diçûn zozanê, em rizgar dibûn."

coexistence of singular female singing voices. Whereas they are singular beings who know certain truths beyond speech, they turn into political beings by transforming their singular experiences into a plural language in the form of singing kilam.

Similarly, Hannah Arendt's *The Human Condition* explicates that it is the speech what transforms the uniqueness of each being into a political being by shifting singular experiences to plural interactions:

And whatever men do or know or experience can make sense only to the extent that it can be spoken about. There may be truths beyond speech, and they may be of great relevance to man in the singular, that is, to man in so far as he is not a political being, whatever else he may be. Men in the plural, that is, men in so far as they live and move and act in this world, can experience meaningfulness only because they can talk with and make sense to each other and to themselves (1998, p. 4).

Thinking in line with Arendt, Cavarero also says: "Although it already appears "in the unique shape of the body and sound of the voice," uniqueness assumes a political status only through the words and deeds of those who, in this way, actively show their uniqueness to one another. The political sphere is generated precisely by this sharing of words and deeds that Arendt puts under the name of action. This sharing is the political form of a bond that is inscribed in the ontological condition that makes human beings a "paradoxical plurality of unique beings" (2015, p. 189). Following Cavarero, we can suggest that women dengbêjs reshape the binaries of public and private realms, and they relocate themselves as "political beings" who create their system of speech by singing kilams.

Furthermore, funerals have been considered as female spaces of performance which are dominated by the mourning female voice by not letting the male intervene in the performance (Aras, 2014, pp. 118). The women and men's spaces are separated from each other in funerals; however, women's mourning voices in the form of laments are heard by men. Women's sonorous and affective interpretations

of the pain transgress the patriarchal binaries. As the act of mourning and lamenting is usually associated with women in different societies (Abu-Lughod, 2016; Seremetakis, 1991), it is identified with women in Kurdish society (Amy de la Bretèque, 2012; Schäfers, 2015; Hamelink, 2016). Lamentation enables women to occupy a public sphere in which there are also men. While arguing the Maniat women's lament sessions, Seremetakis says "The gender dichotomies of the lament session, in which women are vocal, emotionally demonstrative in public, and the men are silent, inhibited, and spatially separate, can also be understood as a further antiphonic dynamic (Seremetakis, 1991, p. 100)." In a similar vein, men keep their silence in funerals and lose their dominance by leaving the stage for the women dengbêjs' voice. Women use their voices with a very high pitch and sometimes they don't even vocalize semantically meaningful phrases. Instead, they use a sort of non-language or non-music that is based on groans and screams. They usually collectively perform the laments like a chorus. Their voices transform the feeling of pain into a material pain that enchants the listener. Dengbêj Kurdê comments on this by saying:

I love the women dengbêjs. Their voice burns people's heart. For example, we sing in funerals, we lament over the death of a person. Men can't lament over the dead. When I begin to lament, another woman keeps going. And lamenting spreads among women. When we lament, all women cry since our strans are 'burning' people's hearts (Istanbul, December 24, 2018).⁷⁸

These words demonstrate that a singing female voice invokes a reciprocal communication of different voices. Lamenting creates solidarity among women and enables them to share their pain through a sonorous interpretation (Aras, 2014, p. 119). However, a lack of control can be threatening since a mourning voice can have

⁷⁸ "Ez, gelek jinên dengbêj dikim. Dengê wan dile mirov deşewite. Mesela em tazîyê da) dibêjin, ser miriya dibêjin. Zalam nika bêjin ser miriyan. Wextê ez dibêjim, yeke dî jî dewam dike, holê holê holê vedigere. Wextê em dibêjin hemû jin digirîn ji ber ku stranên me dilşewat in."

a fatal effect upon the listeners (Amy de la Bretéque, 2012, p. 143). In line with Talal Asad (2003, p. 81) and Veena Das's (1996, p. 196) expression of pain as a communicative and collective experience, women dengbêjs' lamenting the pain creates a sonorous communication in the funerals. Solo improvisation of a woman dengbêj and antiphonic interplay creates a sonorous collective performance sphere where different women voices show solidarity with one another. They share the feeling of pain collectively and they cope with the pain by lamenting their feelings. Hence, funerals become spaces where men lose their control upon the female voices.

The emergence of Kurdish radio broadcasting enabled women to take place in dîwans and make their voice more hearable in public spheres (Yaş, 2015; Hamelink, 2016). Until women's participation in Kurdish radio broadcasting, the dengbêj tradition has been usually associated with some well-known male dengbêjs such as Evdalê Zeynikê (19th century), Karapetê Xaço (1990-2005), Miradê Kinê (1943-1984) and Şakiro (1939-1996). With the Kurdish radio broadcasting, women dengbêjs became more audible in the public sphere and spread their voice among the Kurdish community (Yüksel, 2011; Hamelink, 2016). Their voices transgressed the patriarchal social limits that had stigmatized women's voice as shameful. For example, dengbêj Meryem Xan, Elmas Xan, Sûsika Simo, Asliqa Qadir, and Fatma Îsa's names spread all around the Kurdish regions that were under the pressure of different states as I have discussed in the second chapter.

Most of the dengbêjs whom I interviewed for this research state that they have grown up by listening to the radio of Bagdad or Yerevan, and they especially point to women dengbêjs' voices as a source of pride instead of a shameful act. While singing female voices on radio invoked solidarity among different women dengbêjs whose voices were silenced by the patriarchal pressures, they can lead the

male dengbêjs to provide a self-critical approach by facing the patriarchal oppression. Dengbêj Îsmâil states:

There have always been barriers to women. One of the dengbêjs who has encountered difficulties is Meryem Xan. To pursue her dengbêj art, she settled down in Iraq and then Baghdad and recorded her cassettes. Unfortunately, her life was fraught with difficulties, and she couldn't live long. As for me, women dengbêjs should have been liberated (Hakkari, January 16, 2017).⁷⁹

He points to Meryem Xan as a significant agent who has struggled for her art.

Cemalê Mihê also references Meryem Xan as a fundamental symbol that inspires him. He says:

We learned the dengbêjî from the radio. (...) There was dengbêj Mihemed who was from Şîrnak. He was one of my father's friends and was saying 'I must go to Radio Baghdad. He was singing stran such as *Mala Min Mala Mêran e, Lê Lê Dînê*. I was learning what he said. (...) Meryem Xan was an Armenian⁸⁰ who was from Dêrgûlê (one of the villages in Şîrnak). She was singing multiple kilams; I learned the dengbêjî from her (Şîrnak, July 23, 2017).⁸¹

These interviews show that women dengbêjs have managed to redefine their position in Kurdish society. They were the pioneers in the radio of Baghdad and Yerevan contributing to the representation of Kurdish culture and memory. Women's voice used to be considered as a source of shame; however, most of the interviewees including men proudly reference the women dengbêjs such as Meryem Xan, Ayşe Şan, Sûsika Simo, Asliqa Qadir, and Nesrîn Şêrwan.

⁷⁹ "Hertim asteng dane pêşiya jinên dengbêj. Dengbêjekî ji wan jî Meryem Xan e. Heta ku ez dengbêjiya xwe nahêlim, rabû eee çû Başûr, vê derê, Bexda yê, heta ku êdî ew qaset tomar kir. Lê mixabin gelek nejiya, jigana wê jî piçek dijwar derbas bûye. Rastî, ji bo min dengbêjên jin azad bibûn."

⁸⁰ Although Cemalê Mihê asserts that Meryem Xan is an Armenian, neither academic research nor the other interviewees' statements support this argument.

⁸¹ "Me dengbêjî yê xwe jê radyo girtine. (...) Dengbêj Mihemed hebû, ji Şîrnaxê bû, hevalê babê min bû. Digo 'divêt ez îeh biçime radyo Begdayê.' Berê stran digot, digot Mala Min Mala Mêran e, min jî girt. Lê Lê Dînê got min jî girt. Hinkî dîlan, hinkî bêrite min digirt. (...) Meryemxan file ye, Fileya Dêrgûlê ye. Gelek strand gotin, qîr dikir, me ji wê girtiye."

4.4 Dengbêj houses as a space where the patriarchal social structures and women's voices conflict

Women dengbêjs have been pursuing their performances by creating alternative public spheres, by transforming the spaces that were not normally regarded as public such as agricultural fields and gardens into a stage of performance. They also took a significant part in Kurdish radio broadcasting. However, this doesn't mean that women can now sing kilams without patriarchal limitations. The interviews clearly reveal the difficulties experienced recently by women dengbêjs, which show similarity with the ones before, i.e. Meryem Xan, Ayşe Şan and Nesrîn Şêrwan. Dengbêj Henîfa's following expression on Nesrîn Şêrwan briefly stresses this similarity "She was a mother, a woman, a dengbêj of Kurdistan; however, unfortunately, she experienced various difficulties. We also confronted with sorrow, we experienced poverty and difficulties (İstanbul, December 24, 2018)."⁸² While revealing the ongoing patriarchal pressure on the women dengbêjs, dengbêj Kurdê also stresses her voice as a grain that signifies the Kurdish region. So, women dengbêjs don't regard themselves as passive subjects. Instead, they embrace their voice as a signifier of the Kurdish region. Women dengbêjs assert that they can sing kilams now in public spheres despite the ongoing patriarchal pressure. Dengbêj Rehîma says: "It used to be commonly agreed that telling the lawje is a shameful act for women. They used to say 'Women don't tell the lawjes. It is a shame.' However, today women can tell kilams at weddings, in the public (Hakkari, July 25, 2017)."⁸³ Weddings have carnivalesque characteristics especially in Hakkari where women and men have been singing through call and response duets and where women and men

⁸² "Dayîk bû, jin bû, dengbêja Kurdistanê bû ema mixabin gelek pirsgirek kêşa. Me jî gelek pirsgirek kêşa feqîriya, reziliya dît."

⁸³ "Berê bo jinan digotin şerm e, digotin 'şerm e jin lawjeyan nabêjin!' Bes evro jin jî dibêjîtin nav daweta, nav miletê".

are equally participating in public. Therefore, in a Bakhtinian account (1982), weddings are just like carnivals where different hierarchies are removed from the realm of the society. On the one hand, Dengbêj Henîfa associates the women's recent visibility with the development of Kurdish political movement. She says "The Kurds won the election of the municipality. The Kurdish party was well organized in society. One day, someone said: 'There is a festival in the foothills of çiyayê Cudî, dengbêjs take the stage. Women will sing, as well. (İstanbul, December 24, 2018)."⁸⁴

However, although the Kurdish political movement encourages women to take place in the public, the traditional patriarchal understanding continues to hinder women's rights. For example, on the one hand, women dengbêjs' efforts to transgress the patriarchal oppressions were encouraged by the Kurdish political movement which mobilized them to participate in dengbêjs houses. But on the other hand, women have been prevented from participation in dengbêj houses or public spheres by their families. For example, dengbêj Miqades states that she is pressured by both her family and her husband's family:

"I have my family and my husband's family, both of them are against me. My husband's family and my family say 'Don't go to the dengbêj house. Why do you go?' I say, 'I desire to tell my feelings coming from the heart.' Until now, I haven't been free. I haven't able to tell the things that I want to tell. I didn't commit any guilt or a shameful act. I made the kilam out of my sorrow until now we can't tell freely (Van, August 1, 2017)."⁸⁵

After this statement, she expresses the meaning of the dengbêj house as follows "The dengbêj house was a national and institutionalized space. According to me, the foundation of the dengbêj house was the existence of Kurds, the knowledge of

⁸⁴ "Belediye ketin desta Kurda da. Partî pêş vê çûy filan û bêvan. Rojek, hevaleyê got "Willa li ber çiyayê Cudî festîvalek heye, dengbêjan derkevin. Pîrek jî derkevin"

⁸⁵ "Mesela du heb ayîlê min hene, her du jî li hemberê min in. Ayîleyê mal mêrê min jî, ayîleyê mal baba min jî, dibêjin "neçe vê derê (mala dengbêjan), tu çima çûy?" Yaw tiştana ez dixwazim ji dilê min tê, ez ji hez dikim. Yanî çima heta aniha jî, hê niha jî ez serbest nînim. Tiştên ku ez dixwazim bêjim ez nikarim. Her tiştê ku ez dixwazim bêjim, ez nikarim, kulê dilê xwe derixim bêjim. Min tiştêk xirab nekiriye, sêcek nekiriye. Min kulê dilê xwe kiriye stran, heta niha jî em bi rehetî nikarin bêjin."

Kurds, the development of women's rights, our lives, our self-recognition and our identity (D. Miqades, Van August 1, 2017).⁸⁶ Similar to what other interviewees have said, she links women's participation in the public sphere with the foundation of certain institutions encouraged by the Kurdish political movement. Therefore, one of the significant aspects of the recent developments is that women get politicized in these institutions and use their voice as an active tool to create some political narratives. Dengbêj Miqades says: "After I came here, I sang about my childhood, about the homeland, about the people who fought for freedom. I made a kilam about Demirtaş, about the earthquake, about Sur, about the international women's day (Van, August 1, 2017)."⁸⁷ When I was interviewing her, she sang one of her kilams that she composed in the memory of Van earthquake:

The earthquake happened on Sunday
 Oh! it destroyed my house and all the villages in Wan, Erciş.
 Everything was destroyed
 Everything was razed to the ground
 What will we do in the snow?
 In these shelters until the spring?
 An earthquake destroyed everything and stopped
 Sorrow and pain instead of happiness
 The sorrow of Wan and Erciş is unbearable this year.⁸⁸

—

⁸⁶ "Mala Dengbêjan malekî netewî bû, malekî fermî bû. Vekirina mala dengbêjan bo min, hebûna gele Kurdê, zanîstiya gele Kurdê, pêş ve çûna jinan e, jiyana me ye, xwe naskirina me ye, nasnameya me ye."

⁸⁷ "Piştî ez hatime ve derê min li ser zaroktiya xwe got, li ser welat, li ser însanên ku di nav kurdan de berxwedana xwe kir... Min li ser Demirtaş çêkir, li ser depremê çêkir, li ser Surê çêkir, li ser 8ê Adarê çêkir."

⁸⁸ Zelzelê lêde ji hemû rojan, roja vê bazarê
 Wey lê mala minê lêda li Wan û Ercîşê tevê gundan xirakirin
 Kevir li ser kevîrê nema
 Hemû jor da hate xwarê
 Em ê çî biken nava berfê da

In a similar vein, dengbêj Henîfa says: “We used to sing about the martyrs, about the homeland, about difficulties, we used to sing about our culture, about the lands of our ancestors (İstanbul, December 24, 2018).”⁸⁹ When I request Henîfa to sing one of her kilams. She sang the one that is about two brothers. One of them was killed due to the blood feud and the other one was guerrilla who was killed during a conflict:

This eagle is an eagle of Bîryan
 He knew nothing about the fight, he ruined his life
 That eagle is in the valley, his mare is still alive, and the sun beats down on her.
 I did not know my son’s head ‘fell down on the ground’ in the middle of the night⁹⁰

So, women create their interpretations of the homeland, the struggles, and political discourses. Women sing and perform their kilams in the dengbêj houses freely where they produce certain political discourses as masters of voice, words, and memory.

The Kurdish political movement supports women’s equal participation in the public spheres; however, the dengbêj tradition fails to liberate itself from the patriarchal roots. In this respect, there is an ongoing tension between the women and male dengbêjs in the public spheres such as festivals, dengbêj houses, and TV programs. Dengbêj Miqades raises an important issue that male dengbêjs have been performing various kilams told from the subject position of women without referencing their origins. She says:

The male dengbêjs come together and begin to sing. All the stran they sing are told from the subject position of women. However, they don’t say that the

—

Binê wan çadîran, heta mehê vî biharê
 Zelzele lêda, xirakir, çû
 Li şûna keyfxweşî êş û elem e
 Dêrdê Wanê, Ercîşê îsal vêda pir e

⁸⁹ “Me ser şehîda, ser welatê, ser zehmekêşa, me ser çandê xwe digotin, ser warê bab û kalê xwe digotin.”

⁹⁰ Teyrik, teyrikê vî Bîryanê

Tu car bo sevaş vê dinyayê da nezani, mala xwe xira kir
 Vê Bîryanê wan kortê de mehîna Mehmîdê min canî ye tav lê det
 Ku min nezani sere sihurê Mehmîdê min ketiye li ber heyfê

origin of these strans belongs to women. They don't specify what women had made, or how they inherited strans from women (Van, August 1, 2017).⁹¹

Dengbêj Miqades' statement puts forward that patriarchal dominance is still at work in the dengbêj tradition. On the one hand, she expresses that male dengbêjs intervene in her performance by putting a time limitation. She says:

I sing alone at every gathering. When we gather and sing in the dengbêj house, I used to sing solo. Some of the dengbêjs were complaining about that. I was insisting that I sing only one stran and complete it. (...) I said, 'You sing a stran, I will let you sing the whole stran.' Mr. Şakir and Mamoste Yisif, each of them sang a verse. I said, 'If you sing at least two verses, the listener could taste the beauty of your voice (Van, August 1, 2017).'⁹²

As we can understand from Miqades' statement, kilams used to be sung for hours and even days. However, today kilams are readapted to the modern music industry. Dengbêjs are requested to sing short kilams with a strict time limitation. Indeed, dengbêj Miqades challenges this limitation by insisting on her expectations and desires. As a woman, she intends to perform the tradition as it used to be. However, the male dengbêjs want to shorten the kilams. The male dengbêjs' intervention can be seen as the continuation of past patriarchal domination upon the female voice. The tension between the male and women dengbêjs is explicated further in the following quote from an interview:

The male dengbêj assumes that men should be more successful than women. They think that women should not be let to improve more than men. War is a war in which both women and men take place. We were just two women and they were 15. When we sang stran, they used to get angry. The listeners love the women's voice rather than the males' voice. (...) For example, we sang Salihê Şirnexî's bêrite in the last night, I said to Cemalê Mihê that he doesn't

⁹¹ "Dengbêj cihekê rûnin, strana bêjin, hemû stran. Navaroka vî ji devoka jinê ye, gelean wan ji devoka jinê ye. Ema nabêjin ew devoka jinê ye, ji jinan mîrasede ji me ra maye. Ewa gotine, çêkirine, yanî jin çêker e. Û me jî ji devê wan girtiye."

⁹² "Ez di her programê da stranekî cuda bêjim. Me program çêkir, di mala dengbêjan de, min cuda cuda got, hindek jî dilê xwe jî li min hişt. Min got ez ê strana xwe xilas bikem, ez ê duduya nabêjim, ez ê yekî xilas bikim. (...) Min got tu jî stranekî bêje ez ê bihêlîm. Birez Şakir û mamoste Yusif, her yekî kitayekî got. Min got hema te du kita, stranek jî gotibûya, mirov tehmekek didaye."

sing according to the miqam of the kilam. He got angry (D. Henîfa, İstanbul, December 24, 2018).⁹³

Furthermore, the male dengbêjs prevent the women dengbêjs from engaging with the oral traditions and try to keep them out of the public spheres, especially by putting forward tribal justifications. The tension between different tribes has negatively influenced the women dengbêjs' participation in the public. The male dengbêj emphasizes the women dengbêjs' tribal roots rather than their talent in dengbêjî. For example, dengbêj Kurdê tells what she has experienced in the following way:

“Cemalê Mihê said about me ‘She is a member of a conceited family!’ One day someone asked him to invite me to sing kilam; however, he didn’t let. I said to myself, I would improve my talent even if I die (İstanbul, December 24, 2018).”⁹⁴ As can be seen in this quote, the male dengbêjs attempt to hinder women from engaging with the dengbêj tradition. However, women dengbêjs are in solidarity with each other. Especially dengbêj Kurdê and Henîfa’s master and apprentice relationship is a significant example to demonstrate the reciprocal communication of different women’s voices. So, we see that, while the male dengbêjs continue insisting on their patriarchal manners, women suggest their alternative public performances and empower each other by influencing each other to struggle for their voice. Dengbêj Kurdê highlights the solidarity among women as follows:

Even if Cemalê Mihê sings for three days, I can’t learn anything. When Henîf sings, I learn at once. Cemalê Mihê doesn’t clarify the intonation and the pitch in his voice. He thrills his voice. Yesterday, both Cemalê Mihê and Celalê Cemîl thrilled their pitches and it was quite hard to follow the rhythm. Even if dengbêj Henîf requested him to clarify his pitch, he refused the

⁹³ “Wa digot, ji ber ku em mêt in, bila em ser va bikevin, bila em ser jina bikevin. Bes em nahêlin çî zalam ser jinan nakevin. Şer şer e çî jin e çî mêt e. Em du hevalên jin bûn, ew panzdeh hevalên zalam bûn. Wextê me stran digot, li me diqehirî. Pitir millet hêj me dikirin. (...) Mesela şevê dî, me berîteyê Salîhê Şîrnexî got, min got mamoste (Cemalê Mihê) tu vê stranê ne gor miqama wê dibêjî, xwe qaherand.”

⁹⁴ “Cemalê Mihê got “Ho ho ho ew ji mala kihêlan e!” Yekî pirs kiriye, wî jî nehêlaye. Min jî got ez bimirim jî xwe bigihînim.”

request. Well, we experienced various difficulties up to now. My father didn't support me. Except for my son and daughter, nobody supported me. My relatives complained, but I didn't pay attention to these complaints. I sang... Şehrîbanê Kurdê was singing, Meryem Xan was singing, Eyşe Şan was singing. Unfortunately, how many women's voices have disappeared. We promise that we continue to sing as soon as we live (İstanbul, December 24, 2018).⁹⁵

As it stated in the quotes, women provide their acoustic language by training each other; and they encourage each other by spreading their female singing voices. They even founded their own institutions. For example, *Komela Jinên Dengbêj* (The Association of Women Dengbêjs) was founded under Dengbêj Gazîn's leadership in 2010 (Çakır, 2011, pp. 51-2). Until her death, Dengbêj Gazîn organized various interactions between different communities. Especially in September 2014, she as a Kurdish bard organized some concerts with Aşık Leyli who is one of the well-known Armenian minstrels. Dengbêj Kurdê and Henîfa are still called from different Kurdish regions to participate in weddings, funerals and TV broadcastings.

4.5 The influence of the closure of dengbêj houses on women dengbêjs

Even if women have experienced obstacles in the dengbêj houses, they also consider this sphere as a zone of struggle where they can raise their voice and insist on their demands. Dengbêj Kurdê expresses her initial experience of raising her voice in the dengbêj house as follows:

A commemoration was held for the Halabja, I thought that we and mothers should join, and we should tell with our aura. I must be at the front and raise my voice. I was overflowed with sorrow and was exposed to family pressure.

⁹⁵ "Sê rojan Cemalê Mihê bêjî ez çî tişt nagirim, carina Henîf bêjî ez hema, digirim. Cemalê Mihê denge xwe safî nake, perde xwe safî nake. Çimkî dengê xwe dipêçe. Wê rojê Cemalê Mihê Celalê Cemîl got pêça û pêça mirov nizane çawa gire de. Wê rojê hevala Henîf got perde xwe piçek dirust bike ca millet rast bibihîze. Got hûn xelet dikin. Wel hasil heta îro me pir zehmet kişand. Babê min jî destek nedida min. Keça min û kurê min destek da bo min. Digo yadê guyê xwe nede kes, kî çî bêje bila bêje. Ema ji malbatê hemû kes got û got û got, her tişt gotin. Me guyê xwe neda kesî. Min got Şehrîbana Kurdê jî digot, Meryem Xan digot, Eyşe Şan digot. Xwedê mixabinê, çend reng û deng wenda bin. Em jî dibêjin em soz didin heta em sax bin, em berxwe bidin, em bêjin."

I desired to flee and make a room for myself. Until that day, I was under pressure (İstanbul, December 24, 2018).⁹⁶

Indeed, Dengbêj Kurdê makes a room for herself by participating in the dengbêj house and gathering with other dengbêjs. As she puts forward the patriarchal pressure is one of the fundamental obstacles to women, she desires to overcome this pressure by raising her voice in public. But she also repositions herself as an active agent producing certain political discourses by singing about the massacre of the Kurds in Halabja in 1988 by Saddam Huseein. Thus, despite all the tensions, the foundation of the dengbêj houses encouraged women to participate in the public as active agents. Women vocalize their sonorous uniqueness by raising female voices in the dengbêjs tradition while they produce political narratives as political beings.

The dengbêj houses were run by the local municipalities in places such as Diyarbakır, Cizre, and Van. After the appointment of trustees to the municipalities of Kurdish regions in Turkey in 2016, the dengbêj houses started to experience many difficulties. For example, the dengbêj house of Van was closed and put in the service of the fire department. In addition to that, the dengbêj house of Cizre marginalized the dengbêjs by using the house for rehearsals of different institutions. Dengbêj Henîfa says:

Recently, the dengbêj house has been occupied by the TRT 6. I haven't visited the place for a long time. However, it was very good for organizing any activity. We used to organize gatherings, we used to hold various activities. We used to be 20 people including women and men. Except for me and Kurdê, all of them were male dengbêjs. We used to gather and sing strans, organize weddings, used to sing bêrîte. However, all of these activities were crushed. It is run by TRT 6 now. Dengbêjs don't visit there anymore (İstanbul, December 24, 2018).⁹⁷

⁹⁶ “Rojê Helebçe hebû, min got ez û dayîkek dî bila hebin, em bi rengêd xwe bêjin. Min diviya ez pêş bûm, min diviya ez bejim. Min hindî qehr dîtibûn ji mile malbatê dîtibûn. Min digot hema ez birevim, ez derekî bibinim. Heta vê demê bin zilmê da bûn.

⁹⁷ “Nuho cihê mala Dengbêjan TRT 6 rûniştîye tê da. (...) Ez mêj ve neçû. Ema gelek xweş bû me vekirina wê kir, em diçûn, civat dikir. Me bernamê tê da çêdikir. Em bist insan hebûn, jin û mêr. Bes

The recent situation and the new political tensions have influenced the dengbêjs negatively, especially women dengbêjs were excluded from their zone of struggle. Dengbêj houses are a plural realm where singular or unique voices, narratives, and understandings coexist. Therefore, the occupation of the dengbêjs' public performance spheres by TRT Kurdi can be considered as the erasure of the collective identity, memory of the dengbêjs. Although the dengbêj house of Cizre is called as a dengbêj house, as Dengbêj Henîfa mentioned, there is no dengbêj voice rising from the dengbêj house. Especially women dengbêjs are deprived of one of the fundamental public spheres where they struggled for their voice. Considering this, women have experienced double oppression, both by the patriarchal social structures and the state.

Thus, women dengbêjs experience different forms of silencing by being exposed to double oppression by the patriarchal social structure and the state. The male dengbêjs' voices dominated my fieldwork, as well. I confronted with various difficulties in approaching women dengbêjs since most of the male dengbêjs tried to convince me that women cannot sing the kilam as they used to tell in the past. On the one hand, the male dengbêjs accept that women dengbêjs have been suffering from the patriarchal society. But on the other, they reproduce the patriarchal ideology by assuming that women dengbêjs can't sing in the way they used to. This statement addresses a problem but distorts it due to gender ideology. Because it does not show how the forceful displacement in the Kurdish regions tore women dengbêjs' away from their alternative public spheres such as zom, bêrî, tenûr, houses and so forth. The closure or the occupation of dengbêj houses have also limited women's

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ez û hevala Kurdê tenê jin tê da bin. (...) Em diçûn tê da me stran digot, me dawet dikir, bêrîte digot, ema nuho hemû hatiye perçiqandin. Ketiye destê TRT 6ê de. Edî çi dengbêj naçin.”

performance spaces. However, the existence of these obstacles does not mean that there are no women dengbêjs left. The interviews I have conducted with women dengbêjs provide a counter-voice challenging the patriarchal social structures and state's oppressive politics. This is in a way to give a stage to women to express their unique experiences as dengbêjs. Their effective voices 'burning the listener's hearts' are the fundamental manifestations of a continuing struggle against a patriarchal society and the oppressive state.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

The official history narratives are full of ruptures and voids in Turkey. Approaching historical archives is quite problematical since the archives are routinely destroyed in Turkey (Ahıska, 2006, p. 11). Therefore, the reliability of these archives is another controversial issue. In this respect, oral memory narratives provide alternative memory narratives that fill in the ruptures and voids in official archives and historical narratives in Turkey. Considering this, I have argued that the dengbêj tradition is an alternative source providing different narratives of the past. Especially geographical remapping of Turkey as a foreign country and representation of Kurds as captives under the rule of the Turkish nation-state put forward that the dengbêj tradition provides an alternative world where the politics of denial, assimilation, and oppression is challenged. I have tried to provide a theoretical framework by reflecting on different theories of memory, nationalism, and testimony.

It is commonly agreed that stories and memories have been transmitted by the dengbêj tradition. On the one hand, voice as a sonorous object has been conveyed to the future by transmitting different acoustic forms of kilams. Dengbêjs learn various miqams from each other's singing style and genre. Besides the stories and memories, voice as a sonorous object circulates from generation to generation. However, the acoustic quality of voice as a sonorous and affective object has been overshadowed in various studies. Even if the dengbêj tradition is very much connected with the semantic structure of language to transmit a meaningful narrative, it is also at a tension with the system of language. The acoustic quality of voice sometimes comes before the semantic structure of the kilam since the dengbêj tradition is based on

recitative singing style and melodized tone of voice. In most of the studies mentioned in the literature review, dengbêjs' voices have not been researched as sonorous and affective objects. Considering this in the second chapter, I have tried to focus on sonorous and affective quality of dengbêjs' voices arguing that this is what distinguishes dengbêjs sonorously from each other as unique beings. The interviews made in three different Kurdish regions provide a rich scope to the second chapter. However, studying on sonorous and affective quality of voice creates certain limitations. Dengbêjs are also surrounded by the semantic order of language; therefore, I have experienced certain difficulties while posing certain questions on the sonorous and affective quality of voice.

Another scope that directed my attention to the women dengbêjs is that most of the studies lack women's voices and perspectives. The absence of women has been justified with the ongoing patriarchal pressure upon the women dengbêjs, as a woman, I tried to go beyond this pretention that reproduces the patriarchal ideology in a different way by interviewing women dengbêjs. I think their narratives provide counter voices to the male dengbêjs' narratives that dominate my fieldwork. I was informed by the male dengbêjs that there are few women dengbêjs today. However, women dengbêjs narratives reveal that they still sing kilams by showing solidarity with one another. Dengbêj Gazîn founded an association for women dengbêj in order to perform their unique voices and narratives in a liberated way. Also, dengbêj Kurdê and Henîfa have shown solidarity with one another in the dengbêj houses and different public activities. Dengbêj Rehîme stated that she learnt singing kilams from her mother who was with us during the interview. In the light of these, women still raise their voice in dengbêj houses, weddings, funerals, festivals and so forth. Especially at weddings and funerals their voices harmoniously communicate with

each other while singing kilams or lamenting. Their unique voices materialize the feelings of enthusiasm or sorrow.

To conclude, the scope of this thesis is limited to Şırnak, Van, and Hakkari. This study basically suggests that dengbêjs' melodized tone of voice provides two types of memory. One is dengbêjs' voices as a vehicle of meaning transmitting different narratives of the past or present. The other one is a voice as a sonorous and affective object that materializes certain miqams or styles of singing. Dengbêjs' unique use of timbre is what introduces dengbêjs as unique beings. Their voice as a sonorous and affective object materializes particular feelings such as enthusiasm invoked by a kilama govendê or pain created by the sorrowful tone of voice in a lament. Each dengbêj reidentifies herself/himself as a unique being in Cavarero's account or as a political being in Arendt's words by embodying a plurality manifested in reciprocal communication of different voices. Even if this study only includes particular interviews with dengbêjs, it suggests that dengbêjs' voices should be explicated as sonorous objects that manifest a sonorous memory and acoustic communication between dengbêjs and listeners. This study is limited to dengbêjs' own interpretations of the dengbêj art; however, it has also tried to shift the main focus from the semiotic structure of kilams to dengbêjs' voices as unique sonorous objects especially in chapter three. In a nutshell, dengbêjs' voices reveal an acoustic language and memory that cannot be limited to an ordinary language system based on semiotics. Even if this thesis does not include listeners' experiences of hearing dengbêjs' voices, this thesis can be seen as a prelude to discuss the acoustic and affective quality of dengbêjs' voices by including dengbêjs' point of views about their dengbêj art. Considering this, this study can encourage new researches that

include listeners' experiences of hearing dengbêjs' voices by focusing on acoustic and affective quality of dengbêjs' voices.

APPENDIX A

SAMPLES OF SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS

1. Nave te çi ye? (*What is your name?*)
2. Tu çend salî yî? (*How old are you?*)
3. Tu ji kî derê yî? (*Where are you from?*)
4. Te çawa dest bi dengbêjiyê kir? (*How did you start singing kilam?*)
5. Tu bo çi bûyî dengbêj, çi kes an çi tişt li ser te bandor kir?
(*Who or What did you lead to become a dengbêj?*)
6. Di malbatê de dengbêjek hebû? (*Was there another dengbêj in your family?*)
7. Kê/kî dengbêjiyê li te hîn kir? (*Were you trained by another dengbêj?*)
8. Li gel kê/kî û kî derê te kilam digot?
(*Where did you sing your kilams with whom?*)
9. Jin û zilam gelek kilam digot?
(*Did male and women dengbêjs sing together?*)
10. Te dengbêjiyê xwe çawa pêş ve kir? Tu çi astengiyê rastî hev hatî? Heke tu rastî hev hatî, astengiyên çawa bûn?
(*How did you improve your dengbêj art? Have you ever confronted with difficulties? If you have, what sorts of difficulties are these?*)
11. Nehe çi cih heye ku dengbêj bicivîn û gelek kilaman bêjin? Tu li civînên taybet an li navênda çandê an jî li mihîrcanên heremî kilam dibêjî?
(*Is there any specific space where dengbêjs gather and sing together? Do you sing kilams in special organizations, cultural centres or festivals?*)
12. (Ji bo gotibêjkerên jin) Wextê ku tu diçî civatekê, tu wek jinek çi zehmetî dikêşî?

(For women interviewees) When you participate to a dengbêj meeting, do you face any difficulties or obstacles as a woman dengbêj?

13. Wextê ku tu li hember civatê kilamê dibêjî, tu tiştek hîs dikî? Heke erê, tu çi hîs dikî?

(When you sing a kilam in front of a community, do you feel something, I you do, what do you feel?)

14. Dengê dengbêjan ji bo te çi îfade dike? Li gorî te taybetmendiya dengê ji bo dengbêjan çi ye?

(What dengbêjs' voices represent for you? What is the importance of acoustic quality of dengbêjs' voices?)

15. Tu dixwazî tiştek din jî bêjî? *(Do you have any question or more comment?)*

APPENDIX B

LIST OF INTERVIEWEES

<u>Dêngbêj</u>	<u>Date</u>	<u>Place</u>
Dêngbêj Îsmâîl	January 16, 2017	Colemerg (<i>Hakkari</i>)
Dêngbêj Newzat	January 17, 2017	Gever (<i>Yüksekova</i>)
Dêngbêj Fîkrî	January 20, 2017	Gever
Îhsan Colemerîklî	January 27, 2017	Wan (<i>Van</i>)
Îkram Îşler	January 28, 2017	Wan
Cemalê Mihê	July 23, 2017	Şîrnex (<i>Şırnak</i>)
Dêngbêj Measer	July 23, 2017	Şîrnex
Dêngbêj Hecî Ehmed	July 23, 2017	Şîrnex
Dêngbêj Evdulrehman	July 25, 2017	Cizîr (<i>Cizre</i>)
Dêngbêj Sileyman	July 28, 2017	Qileban (<i>Uludere</i>)
Xalît Goyan	July 29, 2017	Qileban
Dêngbêj Evdulrehman	July 30, 2017	Qileban
Dêngbêj Miqades	August 1, 2017	Wan
Dêngbêj Bedîr	August 1, 2017	Wan
Dêngbêj Yisîf	August 1, 2017	Wan
Mecit Kul	August 3, 2017	Erdîş (<i>Erciş</i>)
Dêngbêj Îsmet	August 23, 2017	Colemerg
Dêngbêj Necatî	August 23, 2017	Colemerg
Dêngbêj Heybet	August 23, 2017	Colemerg
Dêngbêj Ebo	August 24, 2017	Colemerg
Dêngbêj Tahir	August 24, 2017	Colemerg

Dengbêj Rehîma	August 25, 2017	Colemerg
Dengbêj Henîfa	December 24, 2018	Îstanbul
Dengbêj Kurdê	December 24, 2018	Îstanbul

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