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The Sung Home

Narrative, morality, and the Kurdish nation

Wendelmoet Hamelink

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The Sung Home

Narrative, morality, and the Kurdish nation

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I dedicate this dissertation

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

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

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Glossary

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

Notes on language use and translation

Kurmanji Kurdish

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

Place names

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

Person names

In this dissertation I use pseudonyms for all people I interviewed, for three reasons. First, because of the politicized character of the topic I did not want to cause any risk for people involved. Second, my interpretation and analysis of the interviews was not chosen by the people involved. Third, the analysis of my dissertation is based on all interviews and recorded songs, also if I did not quote from them directly. If I would have mentioned real names, people who are not mentioned could feel excluded from my dissertation, even though they were of great help for the overall analysis.

In the appendix I give a list with the real names of all performers who I interviewed, apart from those who wanted to remain anonymous. Also, I use people's real names under pictures and when I refer to specific kilams and their performers.

Translation and transcription

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

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

Transliteration

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

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

Kurdish pronunciation different from English

Alphabet	Sounds like	IPA
Ç/ç	Church	/tʃ/
C/c	Judge	/dʒ/
Ê/ê	May	/e/
G/g	Gamble	/g/
Î/î	Meet	/i:/
I/i	Bit	/ɪ/
J/j	Pleasure	/ʒ/
Ş/ş	Shoe	/ʃ/
Û/û	Choose	/u:/
U/u	Bull	/u/
X/x	[Scottish:] loch	/x/
Q/q	[Arabic Qaf]	/q/

Turkish pronunciation different from English

Alphabet	Sounds like	IPA
Ç/ç	Church	/tʃ/
C/c	Judge	/dʒ/
Ğ/ğ	[often not pronounced]	/:/
İ/i	Feet	/i/
I/ı	Open	/ɯ/
J/j	Pleasure	/ʒ/
Ö/ö	Set , but rounded lips	/ø/
Ü/ü	Flute	/y/
Ş/ş	Shoe	/ʃ/

Table of contents

Acknowledgements

Glossary

Notes on language use and translation

Introduction	19
i.1 The Sung Home	20
i.2 Some notes on the dengbêj art	34
i.3 Folklore, nationalism, and (self-)Orientalism in Turkey	49
i.4 Narrative and morality	67
i.5 Engaged writing	76
i.6 Chapter outline	77
Part I Songs and Performance	81
Chapter 1. ‘My heart is on fire.’ Singing a Kurdish past.	83
Introduction	84
1.1 Time, place and perspective offered in the kilams	90
1.2 Women and men	95
1.3 Elite and commoners	109
1.4 Armenians	113
1.5 Local leaders in battle songs	120
1.6 A Kurdish geography: place names and landscape marks	132
1.7 Kurdish rebels and the Turkish state	136
1.8 Evdalê Zeynikê: the dengbêj as a figure	148
Conclusion	153
Chapter 2. ‘It would disappear in a moment.’ Performing tradition.	159
Introduction	160
2.1 The empowerment of Kurdishness	163
2.2 The Diyarbakır Dengbêj House and its dengbêjs	166

2.3	Performing the village	174
2.4	Tribes and battles	183
2.5	Rebellions and tribes in performance	190
	Conclusion	210
Part II	Life stories	217
Chapter 3.	'A language is a life, and art is a bracelet.'	
	A landscape of silence.	219
	Introduction	220
	Life story 1: Politicization of Kurdish language and culture	226
	Life story 2: A female dengbêj	238
	Life story 3: Landlords and support	252
	Life story 4: Armenian voices	262
	Life story 5: The religious class	278
	Life story 6: Turkish experiences	288
	Life story 7: The prohibition on musical instruments	294
	Conclusion	304
Part III	Conflict and Activism	309
Chapter 4.	'Decorate your heart with the voice of the dengbêjs.'	
	Cultural activism.	311
	Introduction	312
4.1	Kurdish television in Europe	323
4.2	Zana Güneş and TV activism	331
4.3	The Dengbêj House in Diyarbakır	337
4.4	Zeki Barış and activism in the House	344
4.5	Individual dengbêjs referring to political narratives	349
4.6	Istanbul, a market for dengbêjs	359
	Conclusion	368

Chapter 5. Songs crossing borders: musical memories of a family on the run.	373
Introduction	374
5.1 Life in Germany	380
5.2 Some historical notes on the village	382
5.3 ‘Walls were built at the front and rear.’ Life in the village Zeban	384
5.4 Experiencing borders	396
5.5 Speaking of songs and village life	410
5.6 The embodied experience of singing songs	419
5.7 Resignifying cultural memory and redefining the position of women	421
Conclusion	433
 Conclusion	 437
Appendix 1. List of kilams	449
Appendix 2. Video archive	455
References	461
Nederlandse samenvatting	475
Curriculum Vitae	481