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Part I

Songs and Performance



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

Chapter 1

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

Introduction

Edûlê¹⁰⁵ dibê: Genc Xelîlo heyrana te me
Dilê min liyan e
Îro cewabeka nexêr hatiye dibê:
Pismamê te li welatê xerîb nexweş e
Nexweşekî wayê gelo dîsa pir bê hal e
Li welatê xerîb kesekî xudanê xêra tunene
Xwe jê re bike balîv û berpâl e
Ez ê rabim vê sibê
zêrê serê xwe biqetînim
Ji ciwanîkê delalê dilê xwe re
Bikim cotek nal e
Ez ê xizêma pozê xwe derxim
Ji ciwanîkê delalê dilê xwe re
Bikim gelo hûrbizmar e
Ez ê serkezîkê xwe evdalê biqûsînim
Ji ciwanîkê delalê dilê xwe re
Bikim ser kelek û dor hev sar e
Maye li welatê xerîb bila xelqê nebêje:
Gelo çi siwarekî Kurd ê çendî
Bê kar û bar e
Nemaê nemaê nemaê
Ez ê piştî Genc Xelîl
kuramê xwe nemînim
Dilo li dinyayê

Edûlê says: oh Genc Xelîl, I would die for you
My heart is on fire
Today a dark message came, saying:
'Your cousin¹⁰⁶ is ill in a foreign land
He is a desperate patient without strength
In that foreign land no one is caring
To be his support and comfort'
This morning I will stand up
I will break the golden coins from my head
And for the young beloved of my heart
Make a pair of horseshoes out of them
I will take off my nose piercing
And for the young beloved of my heart
Make a little nail from it. Me unfortunate,
I will smash my buckle and hairclip
And for the young beloved of my heart
Make a rein and bridle out of them
He stayed behind in foreign land; let no one say:
'What a useless weak person
is that Kurdish rider'
[Oh God] let me not stay here without him
I will not continue
without my cousin Genc Xelîl
to live my life on earth, oh my heart¹⁰⁷

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

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

106 Who is at the same time her husband

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

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

The well-known story '*Genc Xelîl*', from which the above lyrics are taken, provides a good starting point for introducing the main concerns of the chapter. It also immediately immerses the reader into the colorful world of the kilams. The dengbêj who told this story¹⁰⁸ first introduced it in prose, followed by a long kilam. He told about the days of the Ottoman Empire, when the Padishah and his Sublime Porte reigned over a vast territory, stretching from Greece in the west to the Persians in the east, from the Balkans in the north to Egypt in the south. The kilam does not give an exact timing, but at least the listener knows that it takes place before the foundation of the Turkish Republic in 1923, and thus in a quite distant past. The Empire is at war with one of its neighbors when one night the Padishah sees in a dream how a young man from Diyarbakır, with the name Genc Xelîl (Young Xelîl), conquers seven cities¹⁰⁹. The Padishah sends his vizier to Diyarbakır to find this young man and talk with him. When he finds Genc Xelîl, he tells him the dream of the Padishah, and asks him to go and fight. But Genc Xelîl, realizing he is in a position to make demands, replies that he is only willing to go to war on one important condition: he loves, the daughter of his uncle, who is the pasha of Diyarbakır. The latter has refused to give him her hand. If the vizier will go to her father and arrange a marriage, then he will go to war and fight. The vizier manages to persuade the pasha and the wedding is

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

1.1 Time, place and perspective offered in the kilams

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

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

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

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

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

The basis for this chapter are hundred and twenty kilams of my own recordings (see appendix);¹¹⁴ three books¹¹⁵ written by Kurdish folklore collectors; the three kilams presented in the dissertation of Metin Yüksel (2011), and a number of CDs with transcribed song lyrics. Although I did not study all these kilams in detail, and can only present a small part of them, I did use the here mentioned

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

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

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

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

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

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

116 Currently Hanifi Bariş is a PhD student in political philosophy at the Centre for Citizenship, Civil Society and Rule of Law at the University of Aberdeen, Scotland.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

1.2 Women and men

In this section I discuss the manner in which men and women emerge in the kilams of dengbêjs. The gender aspect of the kilams is a complex topic which needs some elaboration, and more research than possible in the scope of this dissertation. The material I collected is a male repertoire¹²⁰ in which men generally are much more present than women. In battle and rebel songs men play a larger role: they are more often the main protagonists, they are more often described in detail, and whereas men are often mentioned with their full names and origin, this does not happen often for women. Still, women are very often presented as the voice of the kilam, for example a woman explains the course of a battle, and mourns its often fatal outcome. In love songs the voices of women are heard even stronger. These kilams often take the form of a dialogue in which two lovers praise each other and lament the fact that they cannot be together. Although the female perspective is strongly present in love songs, this is also the song type that pays the least attention to details such as place names, proper names and timing. The female song figures remain much more elusive than the more concrete and elaborate male figures.

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

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

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

The unhappy lovers

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Oh, you time
Oh dear Dewrê, I said:
I am a crane standing up
I will build my nest at the abyss, at the wall,
At the *zozan* of Şêx Elî in the Medo area
At the snowy field my dear, woe us.
Across your father's house at the spring
May all I possess be sacrificed for your sake
This morning, again 24 tresses¹²⁶
She hung in front of her headgear
Oh God, me, the admirer of tall posture
The sadness of my sweetheart is heavy
Woe to me, sadness of time, ugly time, oh
Oh the time, oh Dewrê, the wound, I am dying oh

124 Meaning: do not be so dreamy, do not go so fast in dreaming and expecting something nice.

125 Personal communication with Hanîfî Barîş.

126 This refers to female headgear. One or several large pieces of cloth were wound around the head, and from under this headgear coins, gold pieces, tresses, or other decorations, hang down on the forehead.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Lê Kinê¹²⁹

Ax lê Kinê li minê
 gelîw biraw erqedaşa dibêjin
 Sing û memkê delalya dilê min
 Têne ser dikanê Midyad û Batmanê
 Hesenkêfê li firotinê
 Herçî erqedeşê ku nezewicîne
 rabin kar û bara xwe bikin
 Em ê herinê li mine lê li ber girtinê

Hey Shorty

Oh Kinê woe to me
 dear brothers and friends, they say
 The chest and breasts of the darling of my heart
 Came to the markets of Midyad¹³⁰ and Batman
 And Hasankeyf, to be sold
 Those friends who are not married yet
 Stand up and get prepared
 We will go, woe to me, to prevent this

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

Kinê digo; lawik êtîm evdala Xwedê ye
 Kalekî minî baba ye
 emrê wî sed û çil salî da
 ye dayê reben li ber mirinê
 Dêkî min ê ixtiyar heye
 reqêna tevrên û bêran
 dayê li mine lê li ber veşartinê
 Kinê digo; di biray min hene
 Berê xwe dane Qesra Huseynê Qenco
 Li biniya Dêrikê li Seqatîyê
 Lê lê dayê rebenê lê li ber girtinê
 Kinê digo: pênc şeş pismamê min
 Di gund da hene
 Deyndar deynê xwe ji wan dixwazin
 hatinê wele vayê li ber hînkirinê
 Lawik êtîm û evdala Xwedê di gund da
 Ye heft sal e tevî şêx û melew
 seyda xwe davên deryê
 Mala bavê min rebenê mi nadinê
 Wele w'ez ê bêm
 mala lawkê mi li cehnemê ye
 Boy Xwedê hûn ê min ê
 bi ser û piya da bavêjinê
 bê wey lê Kinê
 Ax weylê Kinê li minê li mine
 Kinê digo: dayê ji bona xatirê Xwedê
 Çima mi nadinê

Kinê said: oh orphaned boy, poor me
 I have an old father
 He is 140 years old
 And poor me¹³¹, he is just about to die
 I have an old mother
 soon the sound of digger and shovel will be heard
 woe to me, my mother is about to be buried
 Kinê said: I have two brothers
 They went to the castle of Huseyn son of Qenco
 Below Dêrik at Seqatî
 Oh poor mother, they are about to prevent it
 Kinê said: I have five or six (male) cousins
 in the village
 The creditors wanted their debt from them
 They came, by God, and were about to learn about me
 Orphaned boy, poor you, in the village
 Since seven years all sheikhs and mullahs¹³²
 and teachers come to the door of
 My father's house, poor me, he does not give me
 By God, I will come
 To the house of my boy even in hell
 For God's sake, you grab me
 from my head and feet, throw me there [in hell]
 and say "woe to you Kinê"
 Oh Kinê, woe to me, woe to me
 Kinê said: oh mother, for God's sake
 Why do you not you give me [to him]?

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

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

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

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

Wele Kinê digo: lawiko rebeno
 Delaliyê dilê mino li dinyayê
 Mî go: mî dilketê feyde nekîr

By God, Kinê said: oh poor boy
 Darling of my heart in this world
 I said: I fall in love but for no use

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

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

Hingî gundiyan û cînara
 henekê xwe bi min û te kir
 W'ez rabûme ser xwe
 Çûme Cizîrê cem mala şêx Mheme Qedri
 Dayê rebenê mi tobe kir
 Min ê destekî tizbiyê wayê sed û yeka
 Tevî gopalekî sofiya şî
 Xwe ra peyde kir
 Di salî mi li wê qediya sala sisiya
 Mî çî qa bêriya wî kambaxê gundê
 Mala lê bavê xwe kir

Then, villagers and neighbors
 Were laughing about you and me
 I stood up by myself
 And went to Cizîrê to the house of Sheikh Mheme Qedri
 Poor mother I gave my vows
 I took a strand with 101 prayer beads in my hand
 And I found for myself
 a stick for a religious man
 I stayed there for two years, in the third year
 I realized I missed the ruin too much, the village,
 the place of the house of my father

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

Part I. Songs and performance

Ez ê çûme ser devê kaniyê binya mala mi
Desmêj girt û karê cemaetê xwe kir
Kina mine delal bi meşekî kubar hat
Û ber mi da derbas bû dayê rebenê
Mi silava li ser milê raste neda
Mi xwe ji bîr kir yadê rebenê, silav nekir

I went to the spring down our house
I did my ablutions and prepared for the group prayers
I saw my beautiful Kinê approached with her polite walk
And passed by me, oh poor mother
I did not even greet over my right shoulder¹³³
I forgot, poor mother, to finish my prayer

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

Herçî derdê mehbêtê dila
Li sere wan da
Hatine gazin û loma mekin
Mi taxima sing û bera
Ji delaliyê dilê xwe ra vekir
Yadê wele
Mi soft mirîdê dinyayê zêde kir
Ay weylê Kinê, li minê li mine

Those who have experienced
The hardship of falling in love
Do not complain about me and do not criticize me
I opened my chest and presented my breasts
For the darling of my heart
Oh by God, mother, I have increased the number
Of disciples and religious people in the world
Oh Kinê, woe to me woe to me

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

Bê Kinê digo:
Dayê ji bona xatirê Xwedê be
De dayê çima mi nadinê?
Kinê digo:
Lawiko rebeno delaliyê dilê mino
Li dinyayê w'ez î kin im
Ji wayê zef dirêj im
Weka tayê gul û rihan û nefelê
Li devê mêrg û kaniya
pelê xwe davêjim
Lawiko rebeno delaliyê dilê mino
Mi ji te ra nego:
Were mala bave mi keçikê,
Li kêleka mi rune
Ez ê derdê muhbêtê dila
Ji delaliyê dilê xwe ra bêjim
Îsal bû çendik
Û çend salê mi qediya
Sedem xatirê bejna lawikê xwe rebenê
Wele di mala bavê da w'ez ax dikim
Ji kezebê xûna reş dirêjim
Ay gidî li minê lê

Kinê said:
Mother for the sake of God
Mother why do you not you give me [to him]?
Kinê said:
Oh poor boy, darling of my heart
I am short in the world
But I am quite tall in having sorrows
Like the branch of a rose, of basil, of clover
Grows at the side of streams and springs
I throw my leaves
Oh poor boy, oh darling of my heart
Didn't I say to you:
Come to the house of my father
Sit at my side
So that I can tell the sorrows of the love of my heart
To the darling of my heart
How much time and how many years
Did go by until this year?
For the sake of the nice looks of my beloved boy
By God, I have been crying in the house of my father
I have been dripping black blood from my lungs
Oh, woe to me

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The woman in mourning

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

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

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

mourning¹⁴⁰ who voices the kilam is the wife, lover, daughter, mother or sister of the hero and mourns his death, often alone, sometimes together with other women who were closely related to the deceased. In retrospect they describe the battle and the role of the heroes and the enemy combatants. This is often not done in much detail (see also Allison 2001); the emphasis lies on lamenting the hero and voicing his role in the fight. The kilams often start with the woman in mourning expressing her sorrow, then return to consider the events that led to the untimely death of the deceased and speak then of how the deceased was killed, and finally return to the beginning in a repetition of the experienced sorrow. Women are presented as if standing at the side of the battle field, encouraging their heroes to be brave and to continue fighting, or urging them to quit fighting and escape. According to the dengbêjs, these kilams were originally sung as lamentations immediately following the death of the deceased, as is common in Kurdish (and surrounding) cultures.¹⁴¹ Subsequently, they were adopted by dengbêjs who heard of these laments, and who turned them into a kilam.¹⁴² The lamenting woman, the act of lamentation, and the laments itself have a low status, and lamentations are usually not memorized by other people than those who sing them. But the kilams which dengbêjs produced from such laments are regarded as important and in need of preservation because of the details they contain about the combatants, the battle, and the places where the battle took place. As we will see in chapter 2, these kilams are often controversial today due to their 'tribal' character.

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

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

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

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

Gozê bang li kurê xwe dike:¹⁴³
De lêxe Emê Gozê de lêxe
Enîgîçiyoyozberano de lêxe
Le bavê min o şer girane îro
Hûnê bi hev re lêxin
Le navê nam û namûsê
lawo bi dine xin
Navê revê pîs e giran e
Li pey malbata mala bavê min û xwe nêxin
Dibê: de lêxe Emê Gozê de lêxe

Gozê shouts to her son:
shoot Emê Gozê,
shoot my lion, my ram!
By my father, today the battle is heavy
You should shoot all together
Become famous in the world,
make your name heard my son
Escaping makes a name dirty and heavy
Let the house of my father not be embarrassed
She says: shoot Emê Gozê, shoot!

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

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

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

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

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

1.3 Elite and commoners

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

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

Qîza tuccar axa

The trader's daughter

Emerkê digo qîza tuccar axa¹⁴⁵
wez ê çûme rêka Halebê bişewite dar û bine
Keçê malxerabê
min rêka Halebê nivî kiriya
Wez ê vergiriya
me nexweşim halê min tunîne

Emerko said oh trader's daughter
I went the burned road of Aleppo full of willows
Girl from a destroyed house
I was halfway the road to Aleppo
When I returned [home]
because I was sick and in a bad situation

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

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

Part I. Songs and performance

Tu rabe cîhê Emokê xwe raxe
li ewliya jorîn e
Welle cotê desmala bigire
li ser çavên Emokê xwe bike ba û baweşîn e
Hoy hoy li min Seyranî

Stand up and prepare the bed for Emo
on the upper patio
By god, take a pair of handkerchiefs
and wave them on Emo's face to cool him down
Poor me, Seyran

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

Qîza tucçar axa mal mîratê
wez ê rêka Halebê ketime îro li serê çiyê
Welle min ê kerwanê xwe girt
û berê xwe da rêka Halebê
ji xwe re çûme karwaniyê
Keçê pêhesandina pêhesiya me
Te lê bi du min re li xwe kiriye
qatekî çekê bûkiyê
Welle te lê li dosto kiriye
qatekî çekê min î zavatiyê
Keçê malxerabê welle ez ne nexweşim
Ez ê ji xwe re hatime casusiyê
Hoy hoy li min Seyranî

Oh daughter of the trader from a cursed house
today I took the road to Aleppo over the mountains
I had built up my own caravan
I headed to the Aleppo road
I became a caravan man
But oh girl I discovered
that you had dressed yourself
in your wedding dress
And you had dressed your lover
in my wedding suit
Oh girl from a destroyed house, I am not ill
but I came back to spy on you
Poor me, Seyran

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

Qîza tucçar axa digo
lo lo Emerko ez bi qurban
Li me hilatî histêrka sibê
lo histêrka zêr e
Şewq û şemalê xwe daye
qesr û qonaxê bavê min Kiçûk Iskender
Kuro mal mîrato
malê bavê min pir e
Bibe çarşiya Halebê
ji min û xwe re bike zêr û pere
Hoy hoy li min Seyranî

The daughter of the trader said
oh Emo may I be your sacrifice
The morning star is rising over us
the yellow morning star
It spreads its shiny glow over
the palaces and mansions of my father, Kiçûk Iskender
Oh boy from a cursed house
my father has many possessions
Take them to the market of Aleppo
and turn them into gold for you and for me
Poor me, Seyran

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The story ends with Emer killing her and her lover:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

1.4 Armenians

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

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

Prior to 1915,¹⁴⁸ Van was inhabited by a majority of Armenians,¹⁴⁹ and until today the Armenian past of Van is prominently present through the Axtamar Church¹⁵⁰ on a small island in the Van lake. Meryem is the daughter of a wealthy church minister living in the city Van, and was promised to become the wife of Sarkis. The latter does not play any role in the story, but his Armenian name underlines the conflict present in the story. Meryem's beauty was famous in the region, and one day the local governor of Van, the *Vali*, caught sight of her and fell in love. He immediately had a message sent to her parents, warning anyone interested to stay out of her way. However, as time passed by the governor did not undertake any action to arrange the wedding. Out of fear Sarkis' family also gave up on arranging the wedding for their son. Finally, when Meryem got tired of the deadlock, she sent a message to the governor, saying: 'You are not taking me as your wife, nor giving me the chance to be with someone else. Either give up on blocking my destiny, or send someone to bring me to you'.

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

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

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

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



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

Meyremê dibê: Eliyo sibê ye¹⁵¹
 Gelo min go:
 wa ye çî sibeka bi xêr û bêr e
 Rabe qeyîk û gemiyê Metran Îsa
 gelo li hev girêde
 Emê îro xwe bavêjin
 tor û bextê Metran Îsa lo di dêrê de

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

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

Part I. Songs and performance

Eliyê Qolaxasî
rabû bi destê Meyrema File
le qîza keşe, bûka Sarkîs,
dostika Waliyê Wanê
girtî lo mîro ji xwe re lo revandiye
Minê xwe li Xwedê û li nav û dengê
Metranê dêra Axtermanê
Qesta dêra Axtermanê kiriye

Elî the commander
took the hand of the Christian girl Meryem
the daughter of the minister, the bride of Sarkîs
the favorite of the governor of Wan
He took her for himself oh king and escaped with her
They took shelter both with Allah
and with the famous Bishop of the Axtamar Church
They took the road to the Axtamar Church

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

Eger îro tuyê Meyrema File
li min mar bikî li ser dîne Muhammed e
Sed aferîn dîsa ji nav û dengê te re
Heger tu mar nekî ezê qebûl bikim
Dîne lo Metran îsa
Heyla defil defil lo li vî Metranî
Metran Îsa ji wî zemanî heta vî zemanî
Nav û dengê lo xwe deranî

If you today, with the Christian Meryem
marry me in the religion of Muhamed
May hundred blessings be added to your fame
If you do not marry us, I will accept
the faith of Bishop Îsa
Look how great this Bishop is
Metran Îsa is famous from this era to the next
He made quite a reputation

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

Erê, Metran îsa dibê:
Eliyo lo wez wiha nakim
Ez vê yekê li dinyayê qebûl nakim
Wele nav û dengê Dêra Axtermanê
kevin e, mezin e, ez xirab nakim
Ez vê serêe di nava dîne Muhammed de
qet rast nakim
Ez ji boyî xatirê kevnajinekê,
dîne Muhammed li ber tu dîna
zelûl nakim
Lawo, ezê îro gazî
meleyek û du heb feqiya kim
Ezê bi qewlê Xwedê,
bi hedîsa Resûlallah
bînim Meyrema File li te mar kim
Metran Îsa ji wî zemanî heta vî zemanî
Nav û dengê lo xwe deranî

Yes, Metran Îsa says:
oh Elî, I cannot do it this way
I will never accept this in the world
By God, the reputation of the Axtamar Church
is ancient and widespread, I will not destroy it
I will never let this issue
interfere with Muhammad' s religion
For the sake of a woman
I won't degrade Muhammeds religion
against any other religion
My son, today I will call
An Imam and two of his students
I will, under the word of Allah,
and the hadith of the Prophet of God,
marry the Christian Meryem and you
And from this era to the next
Metran Isa made a great reputation

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Ez kekê Bedran, Henan û Yewnan im
Ezê bi kumê metraniyê bigirim li erdê xim
Ezê laşa sawî Dêra Axtermanê rakim
Lawo sibê lad e, wê file bikevin
Bikişin sûkan û çarçiyên e
Wele sibe vî çaxî
Elî zava ye lo ax Meyrem bûk e
Ji diya Metranê Dêra Axtermanê pêştir
Bila nebêje min çok da erdê
Ji xwe re kurek anî
Metran Îsa ji wî zemanî heya vî zemanî
Nav û dengê xwe deranî
Metran Îsa qarşiyê Waliyê Wanê
Dî binê Dêra Axtermanê hêja şerek danî

I am the brother of Bedran, Henan and Yewnan
I will take the Bishop cap and throw it on the floor
I will blow the roof of the church of Axtamar
Son, tomorrow is Sunday, the Christians
will fill the markets and bazaars
I swear by God that tomorrow this time
Elî will be groom and Meryem bride
Apart from the mother of the Bishop of the Axt.Church
No one shall say: 'I kneeled on the floor
and gave birth to a son'¹⁵³
From that time until today
Metran Isa made a great reputation
Metran Isa stood up against the governer of Wan
He fought a good fight below the precious Axt.Church

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

1.5 Local leaders in battle songs

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Eyşan Xanimê digo Memed Paşa¹⁵⁸
 min ji te ra nego
 tu berê xwe nede Xozanê
 Ji sere sibê hetanî nîvro
 sêsid xortê eşîrê
 li ser piştê hespa rih û can da

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The kilam *Filîtê Quto* is about the argument and battle that follows between the leader of the Reşkotan tribe Filîtê Quto and the leader of the Etmank tribe Mamê Emê. The event probably took place in the first decades of the twentieth century.¹⁵⁹ The latter was on his way from Bitlis to Diyarbakir with his caravan. The Etmank were a settled tribe with grazing lands, but no farm fields. Therefore once a year¹⁶⁰ they set up a caravan and moved from the Bitlis valley, via Baykan, to the Xerzan valley, a 140 km distance. They brought salt from Bitlis, and exchanged it for farm products such as wheat, barley, lentils and chickpeas in Xerzan. In the year of the event of this kilam, there was a shortage of food and the Etmank decide to travel to Diyarbakir hoping they will be able to buy supplies there. During their journey they pass through the area of the Reşkotan tribe, of which Filîtê Quto was the leader. The Etmank set up their tents, and by horse Mamê Emê and his nephew go to the nearby Reşkotan to ask for some water. During this visit an Armenian girl staying with the Reşkotan shows interest in Mamê Emê's nephew. Mamê Emê feels insulted by her revealing behavior, shouts at her, and by his shouting wakes up Filît who was sleeping. Mamê Emê and Filît quarrel, and finally Mamê Emê says before he leaves: if you are a man, challenge me when I return from Diyarbakir.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Another kilam that was very popular among the dengbêjs during my research was *Silêmanê Mistê*, about a young hero from the House of Dîbo of the Elikan tribe who was killed after he looted farms of the House of Faro of the Pencînarînan tribe. The kilam takes place in the early decades of the twentieth century¹⁶³ in the Xerzan region. Silêman's mother Xatê is the one who mourns his death in the kilam and sings about the battle and its fatal outcome. The information Kevirbirî (2001) gives as an introduction to the kilam tells that the pillage was an answer to an earlier pillage carried out by the House of Faro to his own clan, the House of Dîbo. The kilam itself does not speak about such an event. Xatê starts with introducing her son:

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

162 From Kevirbirî 2001: 63-67. Translation: Hanîfî Barîş and myself.

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

164 From Kevirbirî 2001: 11-16. Translated by Hanîfî Barîş and myself.

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

le Gula mala Dîbo
Kum û kolozê xwe girêda lawo bi romanî
Lawo kum û kolozê xwe girêda bi romanî

you are the Rose of the House of Dîbo
He wore his turban and cap in the Turkish way
Oh son, he wore his turban and cap as a Turk

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

Destekî cilê şevê li xwe kir,
wê rojê hilanî
Rext û qatiya girê dabû
Destê xwe avête qayîşa Tivinga Elemanî
Xwe berdaye Sîxûra
Malê binyê mîrata Mizareşê
Birek devrûtê Mala Dîbo
Ji kezebşewitya Reysê Derwêş
Cindiye Hacî, Biraîmê Mamûd
Lawo van şevgeran
dayê bi xwe re hilanîn

He had dressed in a set of clothes for the night,
which he had picked up that very day
He had taken on his arms and amours
And reached for the strap of the German Rifle
He descended to Sîxûra,
down to the damned houses in Mizareşê
He then fetched some devotees of the House of Dîbo
who had no moustaches, they were Reysê Derwêş
Cindiye Hacî and Biraîmê Mamûd
My son, he had those night-riders,
oh mother, as his company

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

Xwe berdaye Pîra Memikan,
li Borê Qumaro de derbas bûn,
Li warê gundir de hevraz bûn, derketine
Gaza Çiyayê Kolik, Zengayê Mamo
Li hafâ Deşta Xerzan
di warê Simê de rûniştin
Şêwr û mişewireteka giran danîn
Sê heb şade şûtên Silêmanê Mistê
Bavê Xelîl, Gula mala Dîbo hene
xwe berdaye Deşta Xerzan
Peşiya terş û talanê Xatimiyan
Peşiya terş û talanê Mala Keran
Peşiya terş û talanê Mala Faro
Ga û gamêşê nozde cotan ji Gola Modê
Ji xata diya xwe re lawo
vê sibê diyarî anî

Then they descended to the bridge at Memikan
They passed through Borê Qumaro
They went up to the Gundir terrain, and climbed
Upon the Hills of the Kolik Mountain, at Zengayê Mamo
And sat down across the Plain of Xerzan
On the terrain of Simê
Then they engaged in tough bargains and discussions
The three hot-shot gunmen of Silêmanê Mistê
Father of Xelîl, Rose of the House of Dîbo
They descended to the Plain of Xerzan
And they looted the Xatimis
They looted the House of Keran
They looted the House of Faro
Oxes and bulls of nineteen farms of the Lake Modê
And they presented the pillage, oh son,
This morning to Xato his mother as gifts

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

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

Were ha weylê ha weylê
Xatê dibê Silêmano lawo
Carê bi nezani terş û talanê Xatma neynin
Talanê Mala Faro ye
Herçi Mala Faro ne mêrî ne, mêrkuj in
Terş û talanan tînin
Hûn xweyê bavê min bûyo
Terş û talanên xwe vegeînin

Come, oh my! [expression of deep grief]
Xatê says: Silêman, my son
Never again loot the Xatma, it is ignorance
Because it is the looting of the House of Faro
The men of Faro are no gentlemen, but murderers
They, too, loot and pillage
You, my dearest
Return the booty you have taken

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

Lê Xatê dibê Silêmano lawo memanî
Ji kula dilê mino te re berxê
lawo xweş memanî
Vê sibê peyakî derketî ji Xopana Xatma
Lawo ji xwe re bi hewar û gazî
Hewar daye Gozelderê, Marîbê, Eynqesrê
Cemîlê Çeto Bavê Feremez
Di Qesra Eynqesrê de rûniştin
û şêwr û mişewireteke giran danîn
Le qîrara kuştina Silêmanê Mistê
Bavê Xelîl Gula Mala Dîbo lawo
Bi xwe re hilanîn
Xwe berdaye Deşta Xerzan dayê bi giranî
Lawo xwe berdabû Deşta Xerzan
dayê bi giranî
Ewî qiirekî dabû
Li Mûsikan, li Welîyan,
Lli Kejikan, li Ferxikan,
Li Terxaniyan, li Miradan, li Mala Şemdîn
Li heft bavên Pencînarînan
Xwe berdane Deşta Xerzan
Bîra Kurêdiya, girtine Pozê Xatma
Rêçîyan rêç û dewş û çepera
Silêmanê min deranî

Xatê says Silêman my son
You my son, the lamb,
My wonderful son
A man has come from that damned Xatma this morning
My son, he was calling for help
He called upon Gozelder, Marîb, and Eynqasr
And Cemîl Çeto, father of Feremez
Set a meeting at the Eynqesr Palace
And consulted the matter (with his court)
The decision to kill Silêmanê Mistê
Father of Xelîl, Rose of the House of Dîbo
was taken by them
He then, heavily armed, oh mother
descended to the Plain of Xerzan, my son
heavily armed, oh mother
He had called upon
the Musikan, the Welîyan
the Kejikan, the Ferxikan
the Terxaniyan, the Miradan, the House of Şemdîn
Upon the seven families of the Pencînarînan tribe
And they came down to the Plain of Xerzan
to the well of Kurediya, took hold of the Xatma hill
The trackers then tracked down my Silêman,
And uncovered his post and position

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

Were ha weylê	Oh my!
Xatê digo Silêmano lawo	Xatê said Silêman my son
Wezê diyarê Çiyayê Kolik	I took off to the Kolik Mountain
bi Zengayê Mamo	and [the place] Zengayê Mamo
Ketim lawo li vî banî	I came to these heights
Bala xwe bidê Cemîlê Çeto	Look how Cemîlê Çeto
bavê Feremez	Father of Felemez
Bi siwariyên hespê li xulaman	Ordered his servants
lawo dikir gazî	while leading his cavalry
Bavî mino hûnê mêr in mêrê çê ne,	[He said:] My men, you are the greatest of men,
çê bixebitin	do well
Bi sê denga li Silêmanê Mistê Bavê Xelîl	Then he shouted to Silêmanê Mistê, Father of Xelîl
Gula Mala Dîbo dikir gazî	Rose of the House of Dîbo
Dibê, lawo ezê îro	He says: my son today
wê yekê bi serê we de bînim	I will hit you so hard
Tu rojeka wekî roja îro	that no other day
Li terş û talanê camêra nedî	You may dare to loot and pillage anyone
Ji xwe re nebî lawo bi mêranî	And take the booty with you
Îro giran e dengê têtêz tivinga	Today the sound of heavy gunfire
ketine Çiyayê Kolik	filled the Mountain Kolik
Zengayê Mamo li ser serê Silêmanê Mistê	And at Zengayê Mamo, guns fire on Silemanê Mistê
Bavê Xelîl Gula Mala Dîbo	The father of Xelîl, Rose of the House of Dîbo
lawo îro kirine kafirstanî	My son today, he found himself in a dire situation

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

Le Xatê dibê: Silêmano lawo	Xatê says: Silêman my son
Carê te digo, hevza xwe bike	You used to say, my son
lawo ji hemî hevzî	That one should beware of,
Hevza xwe bike ji kozikên	Beware of the trenches
serê Çiyayê Kolik	on the Kolik Mountain
Lawo kozikê Mala Faro ne	They are the trenches of the House of Faro
Lawo nîşanê Mala Faro zehf in pir gelek in	There are many sharp-shooters among the men of
Temamî bi kimkevej in	the House of Faro, they hold the rifles
Destê wana bi sustem in	They have the 'sustem' rifles ¹⁶⁶ in their hands

166 A rifle type that also appears in other songs.

Part I. Songs and performance

Dê rebeno nişançî ne
Serê kewa berenadin

Your poor mother, they are good marksmen
They hit birds on the head

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

Xatê dibê Silêmano lawo
Dêhn û bala min lê ye min dît
çend peyayê Mala Dîbo
Li serê Çiyayê Kolik lawo dageriyan
Ezê rabim cerê xwe hildim
Li pêşiya van xweşmêrên
Mala Dîbo bisekinim
Ezê dibêm, di bextê we û Xwedê me
Silêman û Ebê, Reysê Derwêş,
Cindiyê Hacî Birahîmê Mamûd
kane lawo ne xwiya ne
De lê Xatê rebenê Silêman û Ebê,
Reysê Derwêş, Cindiyê Hacî,
And Birahîmê Mamûd
Li serê Çiyayê Kolik
ji xwe re kemîn vedane

Xatê says, oh my son
My attention was drawn and I saw
that some men from the House of Dîbo
returned from the Kolik Mountain,
I will go and fetch my waterjar
and wait for the heroes
of the house of Dîbo to come
I say, for the sake of you and God
Silêman û Ebê, Reysê Derwêş,
Cindiyê Hacî and Birahîmê Mamûd
they cannot be seen anymore, my son
Oh mother, my poor mother, Silêman and Ebê,
Reysê Derwêş, Cindiyê Hacî
and Birahîmê Mamûd
On the mountain Kolik
They have layed an ambush

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

Lê Xatê dibê, Silêmano lawo
Ezê bi Çiyayê Kolik, bi Zengayê Mamo
Hafa Deştê Xerzan ketim
Qasê Koro, pismamê xayîn
heyra min go ha hewar e
Emê va ye Silêmanê minê
lawo ne xwiya ye
Tivinga Emê li mila ye
Tivinga Silêmanê minê reben
Ezê bi kewkî lawo bi desta ye
Xatê dibê, Emê di bextê te û Xwedê me
Silêmanê min ka ye lawo, ne xwiya ye

And Xate says, Silêman my son
I came to the mountain Kolik, at Zengayê Mamo
across the plain of Xerzan
to Qasê Koro, and I said: treacherous cousin,
I said to him: help!
Emê, from here I cannot see
my Silêman anymore, my son
Emê has his rifle on his shoulder
I see my poor Silêman's rifle in the hands of Emê
I wish I were a partridge [to see what happened]
Xatê says, Emê, for the sake of you and God
Where is my son Silêman, I cannot see him anymore

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

Dibê: Xatê rebenê, termê Silêmanê Mistê
Bavê Xelîl Gula Mala Dîbo

Emê says: you poor Xatê, the corpse of Silêmanê Mistê
Father of Xelîl, Rose of the House of Dîbo

Li serê Çiyayê Kolik
 li Mexera Bênderokê mayê
 Were ha weylê
 Xatê dibê, Emê lawo memanî
 Ji kula dilê te re bexêm
 lawo xweş memanî
 Tu bala xwe bide Cemilê Çeto
 Bavê Feremez bi tan û niça îro
 çi bi serê kekê te ve anî
 Tu bavê diya xwe bûyo lawo
 Şerê xwe bikin îro bi giranî
 Belgî Xwedê Teala siûd û îqbalê
 ji te re li hev dû anî
 Te heyfa Silêmanê Mistê Bavê Xelîl
 Gula Mala Dîbo bi destê xwe hilanî

Has remained on the Kolik mountain
 In the small forest of Bênderokê
 Oh my!
 Xatê says, Emê, my son
 My heart's desire, my dearest lamb,
 my beautiful son
 See what Cemilê Çeto,
 father of Feremez, today
 has done to your brother
 You became the father of your mother, my son
 Fight bravely and tough today
 May God bring the oaths and chances
 on your side
 You may revenge Silêmanê Mistê, father of Xelîl
 Rose of the House of Dîbo, with your own hands

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

Belê tana Emê hilanî
 Li serê xwe li serê kevirê kozikê de deranî
 Derbekî daye bejn û bala Gêncoyê Çeto
 Zavê destbihene termê Gêncoyê Çeto
 Bi ser termê Silêmanê Mistê ve danî
 Le bi sê denga li Ehmedê Îskan
 Li peyayê Mala Faro
 li Bavê Misto dikir gazî
 Dibê: Bavê Misto, tu dagere
 Heyra nizanîm tu çewanî

Yes Emê picked up the turban
 Tied it around his own head and got out of his trench
 and he hits Gêncoyê Çeto with a shot of his rifle. He lays
 the corpse of the newly-wed groom Gêncoyê Çeto
 Just next to that of Silêmanê Mistê
 Then he shouts to Ehmedê Iskan
 The man of the house of Faro,
 the father of Misto
 And says: father of Misto, come back!
 I dont know what kind of man are you?

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

Te digo, ezê herim
 di Qesra Eynqesrê de rûnim
 Pesn û wesiyetê xwe bidim
 lawo bi mêranî
 Te digot, ezê bêjim
 Li terş û talanê xwe da
 li pêşiya heval û xweşmêrên
 Mala Dîbo deranî û anî
 Yekî weka Silêmanê Mistê Bavê Xelîl
 Gula Mala Dîbo serekvanê nijdevanan
 Lawo îro di gerewa talan te danî

You said: I will go
 to the Eynqesrê palace, I will sit down
 And boast about myself
 and my manly deeds
 You said that you would say afterwards:
 I got back this booty that was taken
 Before any of my friends or brave men
 You wanted to say that you took it back from Mala Dîbo
 From someone like Silêmanê Mistê Bavê Xelîl
 Rose of the house of Dîbo, leader of the fighters
 My son, today you did this as an answer to the plunder

Part I. Songs and performance

Tu nabêjî
min xortekî weka Gêncoyê Çeto
Zavê destbihene¹⁶⁷
îro di gereva Silêmanê Mistê de danî
Tê dagere sed carî
bi serê bavê te kim
Derbeka daye li bejn û bala Gêncoyê Çeto
Zavê destbihene le zavekî bîst û çar roja ye
Hêja hena zavatiyê li desta ye
Îro min heyfa kekê xwe bi destê xwe hilanî

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

167 Lit.: his hands freshly dyed in henna

Wê xelq bêje:
 Silêmanê Mistê bi çopikê çolê ye
 Bi çarox û bi gore ye
 Pirs bike wê êşîra bi xwe re
 Roja şerê Çiyayê Kolik Zengayê Mamo
 Silêmanê Mistê
 beramberî Gêncoyê birayê te ye

These people will say:
 Silêmanê Mistê had trash on his feet
 He has these old shoes¹⁶⁸ and [old] socks
 Ask your own tribe: on the day of the battle
 on the mountain Kolik at Zengayê Mamo
 Wasn't Silêmanê Mistê
 an equally good man as your brother Gêncô?

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

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

168 Simple shoes made of cattle leather

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

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

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

1.6 A Kurdish geography: place names and landscape marks

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

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

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

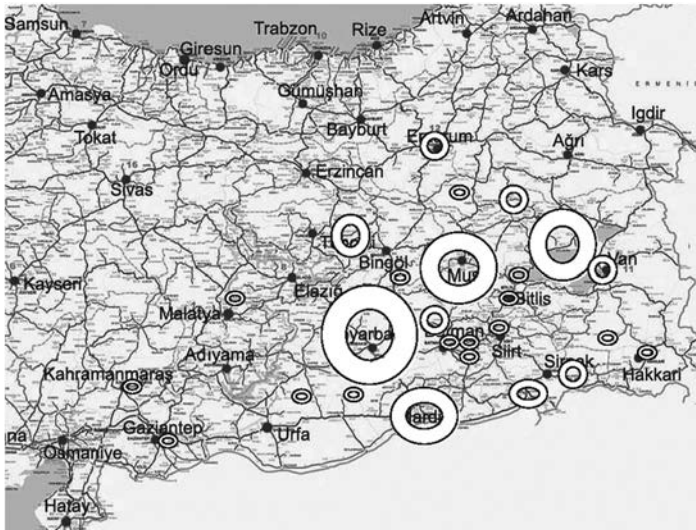
Starting in Bitlis the Etmank tribe needs to pass Baykan and Xerzan in order to arrive in Diyarbakır. One night they set up their tents at the Badareşê spring, which is on the road to the village Tapiyê close to Beşîrî. They are now in the area of the nomadic Reşkotan tribe which possesses larger and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

Hearing the kilam with all its details, (past) listeners¹⁶⁹ from the Xerzan region would have been able to follow the journey in their imagination. They could visualize the settled Etmank tribe with their salt caravan coming from Bitlis, a famous old settlement with rocks and castles which they may have never seen and only heard about. They could see them travel to Baykan and from there to their own region, imagining the stone road through the dry mountainous landscape. Here the story nears the region where they lived, Xerzan, of which they knew every village, river, spring and mountain. At this point the kilam gives more specific place names: names of villages, a river, a spring and a mountain. They could visualize how the Etmank leader goes on horseback to the Reşkotan, their large dark brown tents of goat hair grouped together in a valley. After the disagreement they saw how the next morning the Etmank caravan continues its journey to Diyarbakır, the famous old city that some of the listeners may sometimes have visited. Either from hearsay or from experience, they could see the Sûka Şewitî market in their imagination with the traders, the goods, the colors, and the basalt (often Armenian) houses around. This is how the kilam created a map of the local environment with the villages and landscape marks the listeners knew, and some towns and cities further away they may have only heard off. Especially from the book of Kevirbirî, in which most kilams are taken from dengbêj Salihê Qubînî, it becomes clear that kilams about the region the dengbêj comes from are filled with detailed place names and landscape marks, whereas in kilams about places further away only place names of larger towns and cities are mentioned. The centre of his kilams is the nearby local environment. Kilams about distant places are more imaginary and less detailed. Dengbêjs sometimes pointed to mistakes they heard in kilams sung by others. Coming from the region the kilam was telling about, they immediately heard the mistakes in village names or landscape marks. Singing about their own region they could better remember the exact locations, whereas singing kilams about other regions made them less accurate.

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

Figure 5. Place names mentioned in 84 kilams

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



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

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

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

1.7 Kurdish rebels and the Turkish state

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

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

State borders and the fugitive

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

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

Lo Mîro¹⁷²

Hayde bavo, axayo de sîyar be
Mîrê min sîyar be
Ji siyara siyarekî rindî karîbar be
Di ser dêlbujiyê Erebi hur da xar be
Bavo bajo! Axayê min bajo!
Mîrê min bajo!
Konaxa kekê min Iran e bajo!

Oh King

Hey father, mount your horse, oh agha
My mîr, mount your horse, mount mount
Be the most handsome and ready riders of the riders
Lean down on your horse crazy Erebi's neck (..)
My father, ride! My agha, ride!
My mîr, ride!
Your destination is Iran, ride!

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

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

Part I. Songs and performance

Binê bavê Evla Begê Mîrê Zirav da
Şev-xûn lêketye
Zîn û pûsata weldigerîne
Dikim-nakim teng û bera qe nagire
Evla Begê bi sê denga kire gazî
Go: Surmeli Memed Paşa bavo!
Wê ji hal û hewalê me çawa be?
Li kêleka me ya rastê esker Romê ye
Li paşya me eskerê Hecî Usiv Paşa
yê Sipikî
Sofi Paşayê Hesênî, Temo yê Cibrî ye
Wê ji hal û hewalê me çawa be?

Surmeli Memed Paşa digo:
Evla Beg lawo tu bajo!
Bavê te me, kilê çavê Eysan Xanimê me
Ez xwedanê şanzde agirê me, lawo tu bajo!
Bavê teyê Şev-xûne li Ereba xê
Di ware Husên Begê ra lêxe
Di Sînega Êzdiya û Çemçê ra derbas be
Bi sibê ra konaxa bavê te Pîrkend e

Axayê min sîyar be! Mîrê min sîyar be!
Ji bo malê dunê ne sefil
Ne jî tengezar be
Bira felek bi t era yar be
Nebû bira çend saleka li erdê Iranê
Kafirê Ecem bi te ra neyar be bajo!

Under Evla Beg's father, the tall king,
[the horse] became sick of exhaustion
He is anxiously shaking his harness and weapons
No matter how hard I try, I cannot get the saddle steady
Evla Beg called over and over:
Surmeli Memed Pasha, father!
What is going to happen to us?
On our right side are Turkish soldiers
On our back there are the soldiers of Hecî Usiv Pasha
from the Sipikî tribe
And Sofi Pasha from the Hesênî, Temo from the Cibran
What is going to happen to us?

Surmeli Memed Pasha told Evla Beg:
Son, just ride,
I am your father, the coal of Eysan Xanim's eyes
I am the owner of the 16-shot. Son ride!
Your father will make Ereba sick of exhaustion
He will enter through the lands of Hesen Beg
Pass through Sinega of the Yezidi, and through Çemçe
At sunrise your father will have arrived at Pirkend

Mount your horse my Agha! Mount your horse my Mîr!
Don't be miserable, and don't feel stressed
about the properties of this world
May fortune be your friend
In Iran they have not been brothers for many years now
May these infidel Persians be your enemies. Ride!

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

The fugitive plays also an important role in kilams of the beginning of the Turkish Republic. After the Kurdish rebellions¹⁷³ taking place in those years, people tried to escape from the hands of the Turkish government by fleeing across the border. Most fugitives fled to *binxetê*, a synonym for Syria meaning ‘below the line’,¹⁷⁴ the railway, which is much more often used in the kilams than the name Syria. This is an interesting detail demonstrating that the state borders as they were drawn in 1923 were not immediately perceived as social realities by many Kurds. A very well-known kilam, which was sung by many dengbêjs during my research, is *Bavê Fexriya*, ‘Fexriya’s father’. The kilam’s main protagonist is Sabrî, the son of Hecî Mihemed, who was again the son of Mistê Quto. Sabrî was the leader of the Reşkotan tribe, a descendent of Filîtê Quto (see previous sections), and is known as ‘father of Fexriya’, his daughter, and ‘rider of Gêjo’, his horse¹⁷⁵. According to Kevirbirî’s research, he had taken part in battles with the government, and had for that reason lived as a fugitive in the mountains for many years. At a certain point, together with other Reşkotan people, he crossed the border to Syria to stay safe of government persecution. Years later, after a general amnesty, he returned to Turkey with his family.

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

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

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

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

Part I. Songs and performance

Bavê Fexriya ew bihar e wextê cota¹⁷⁶
Ji xêra mala xweziyê Xwedê re
Min sere xwe daniya
li sere çokê Bavê Fexriya
Min kil û derdê rezîl têr jê re bigote
Bavê Fexriya ew bihar e
Ji kula dilê min re xweş bihar e

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

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

Min dî bavê Fexriya, Kekê Yaho,
Torinê Mala Ezo¹⁷⁷
Ji mal derket li Gêjo siwar e
Gêjo di bin Bavê Fexriya de dîn û har e
Derket Kavanê Qîre
bi sê dengan kir hewar e
Min nizanibû Bavê Fexriya,
Kekê Yaho, Torinê Mala Ezo
Bi sê gulê Romiyan birîndar e

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Bavê Fexriya, beloved one,
it is my turn at the spring,
May seven fathers be taken away from me
Or my arms full with bracelets¹⁷⁸
What can I do, I have the pot of water on my shoulders,
Fexriya’s father, Yahoo’s brother
grandchild of Ezo’s house
Is below the spring
thirstily waiting for me
Only there is this fear inside me,
That someone will shoot the nice figure
Of Fexriya’s father, Yahoo’s brother
grandchild of Ezo’s house
And that this will be counted
as a crime on my father’s shoulders

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

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

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

Bavê Fexriya, heyra	Bavê Fexriya, beloved one
çem û çemê Omeriya	oh river, oh river Omeriya
Binêre ji xwe re li Sûriyê	Look to the side of Syria,
li keriyê berx û miya	look at the herds of lambs and sheep
Min dî şeva nivê şevê	I felt how in the darkness of the night
destekî sar ê cemidî	an icy cold hand
Li bava taxima sing û berê min geriya	Was wandering over my breasts
Min got, qê Bavê Fexriya	I thought that it was Bavê Fexriya
bi xêr û silamet	in good health and with peace,
Ji Xeta Sûrî	Who came from cross the Syrian border
ji mekûmiyê ji firariyê	from conviction, from escape,
Li ser çavên min ve dageriya	And returned with my great happiness
Min nizanibû 'Keçika Şevê'	I did not expect that the night's devil [a dream]
bû bi min keniya	Would become my delight

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

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

The (un)successful rebel

Naturally, not all rebels¹⁷⁹ managed to escape. Some were caught, and many were executed or forcibly exiled. A hero one often hears about in the kilams is Bişarê Çeto, the leader of the Pencîran tribe, and for some time on the run for the Ottoman government. After his first arrest he finds a way to escape prison, but he is arrested again. This kilam takes place after the second arrest and is a good example of how a hero is criticized for being caught, and challenged to do better. Bişar, son of Çeto¹⁸⁰, is in the prison of Bitlis and his father comes to see him.

Çeto dibê: Bişaro lawo ¹⁸¹	Çeto says: hey Bişar my son!
Bejna Bişarê Çeto, Bişarî Axê	The tall figure of Bişarê Çeto, the Agha of Bişarî
Kulîlka di nava kûnciya	Is a flower among seeds
Hêşîn dike li Gozelderê, li Marîbê,	He makes fertile Gozelderê, Marîbê,
Li ‘Eynqesrê, li Kêşa Xerzan, li Birincîyan	‘Eynqesrê, the Xerzan plain, and the Birincî
Dema ku Bişarê Çeto, Bişarî Axê	When Bişarê Çeto the Agha of Bişarî
Dibû mehkumê sere çiya	Became a fugitive ¹⁸² of the mountains
Gelekî dilê min bi rehma Xwedê xweş bû	I felt good in my heart about God’s blessing
Min digo qê wê bigîje eskerê Eliyê Ünîs	I thought that he would surely join Eliyê Ünîs’ soldiers
Bibe qewmê Çiya	And become a part of the mountain people

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

Min nizanibû ji axe û axelera	I did not know that from all possible aghas
Xwe girtiye Hesoyê Birahîm	He would hide at Heso of Birahîm,
Axayê Bişêriya	the agha of Bişêrî
Roj li nîvro du heb cendirmê Romê	At noon two Turkish soldiers

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Gulê dibê Bişaro heyla malxirabê¹⁸³
Tu tim û dayîm li kêleka min rûdiniştî
Te halana li xwe dida
Te ji min ra digot ez mêrxasê mala Dîbo me
Te digot ez ribazê mala Faro me
Te digot ez peyayê mala Quto me
Te tim û dayîm ji min re digot
Ez mêriki ji mêranî dîn im
Te digot
li dinyayê mere fena min tu nîn in

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

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

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

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

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

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

Min dît Gula Bişar şar û xêliyê xwe¹⁸⁴
 Li xwe kir ji mal derketo
 Berê xwe daye Hepixana Belîsê
 Li qarşî Seraya Hikûmatê
 Roj li nîvro demançe da
 Destê Bişarê Çeto

I saw how Gulê of Bişar wrapped a shawl
 Around her head, left the house
 and set off to the prison of Belis
 Across the government buildings
 Today at noon she gave the gun
 in the hands of Bişarê Çeto

Hepsa Belîsê têt î tijî ye
 Xilas nabe ji tirka, ji kurmanca,
 Ji axe û axalera
 Ji teketûkê qizilbaş
 Bişar di ‘eynî deqê de
 Gazî dikir li topa erqedaşa
 Temamî destê xwe li hev didan
 Digotin: yaşa ji te re Bişar Axao, yaşa
 Ji wê rojê hetakî weak îro
 Yazmiş bûye li paytextê tirkî
 Li Xopana Enqerê
 Li qapiyê Hepsa Belîsê qeyd bûye
 Li kitûkê Mistefa Kemal Paşa

The prison of Belis is overfull
 It never ends: the Turks, the Kurmanc,
 the agha's and landlords,
 and a few Qizilbash
 At that same moment Bişar
 called all the *arkadaş* (friends)
 All of them clapped their hands
 They said: *yaşa* Bişar Axa, *yaşa!* (live long)
 From that day until today [this event] was written down
 [In the documents of] the Turkish capital,
 In that ruin Ankara
 It is registered at the door of Belis prison
 And in the logbooks of Mustafa Kemal Pasha

In the story of Bişarê Çeto, the criticism of his father and wife made him so angry that he regained his strength, and became again the hero they wanted him to be. The last stanza sketches the relationship with various others. The prison of Bitlis was filled not only with Kurds, but also with Turks and some Qizilbash¹⁸⁵ (who did not live in near proximity and may therefore have not been many). The mentioning of imprisoned aghas points to the harsh measurement of the government towards the ruling class many of whom were killed, forcibly resettled, or imprisoned. The kilam turns Bişarê Çeto in a hero not only for the Kurds but also for the other prisoners, who did not speak Kurdish and congratulate him in Turkish. The kilam says his rebellion was noted in the government registration, and ridicules the new capital Ankara ('that ruin'), and the leader of the Republic.

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

184 From Kevirbirî (2001: 89). Translation: Hanifi Barış and myself.

185 Qizilbaş, lit. redheads, were adherants of a Shiite sect, today known as Alevi, see glossary.

The traitor

Another regularly recurring figure in kilams about clashes with the government is the figure of the ‘traitor’.¹⁸⁶ This figure betrayed his own people (often relatives or members of the same tribe) to the government. The topic of betrayal points on the one hand to frequent collaboration with the government, and on the other to the fact that this is judged negatively, and often strongly condemned. A famous example is that of Emînê Pêrixanê, also known as Emînê Ehmed. Emîn and Evdile are two of the six sons of Pêrixane¹⁸⁷ who competed for succession. The two have the same mother but different fathers due to the early death of Pêrixane’s first husband. Evdile is portrayed as a good and popular man who is expected to become the leader of their tribe, the Reman. Emîn is jealous as he himself wants to be the leader of the Reman tribe. For long he has collaborated with the government, and it is said that because of his collaboration with the cruel Turkish commander Samir Bey, hundreds of houses were burnt and destroyed by soldiers in the villages of the Reşkotan and Sînikan tribes. Samir Bey came to this region after he played a role in suppressing the Zilan rebellion which caused many people to flee to Syria. Evdile joined them to bring his mother Pêrixane to a safe place, but returned to take revenge. Another kilam is about his revenge on Samir Bey, whom he killed and whose head he brought to his mother. However, unfortunately he also falls into the hands of Turkish soldiers, after his own brother Emîn betrays him. The kilam I present here is the lament of Pêrixane about her son Evdile.

Perixane dibê: wey li mine axao¹⁸⁸
 Kula li ser kula derda li ser derdao
 De rabe kuştiyo bê heyf mao
 Kula Emînê Ehmed birayê xayîn
 di dil de mao
 Perixane dibê:
 Evdile ter e bab û bira bi min ter e
 Min ji te re nego

Perixane says: woe me oh agha
 Sorrow is added upon sorrow and pain upon pain
 You murdered but not avenged
 You who went with the grief inflicted by Emînê Ehmed,
 That treacherous brother, in your heart¹⁸⁹
 Perixane says:
 Evdile is young, my father and brother, he is young
 Didn't I tell you

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

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

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

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

gava tu coyî xopana Elihayê
Çend peyayê kezebşewitî bibe bi xwe re
Tu nizanî Emînê Ehmed xayîn e
Bi Qereqola Elihayê li sere Samîr Begê
Li ewraqê kevn û nû tev digere

when you went to doomed Eliha
To bring with you some brave men
Don't you know that Emîn of Ehmed is treacherous
At the military post of Eliha with Samîr Beg
Is he all the time searching in old and new documents

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

Perîxanê dibe: Evdile lawo esker rabû
Ji xopana Girîdaxê bi giranî
Min dî Emînê Ehmed derketî
Ji Qereqola Elihayê
Bi sê tîpa bi xwe re esker anî
Hate Barisla Evdilê Birahîm
Bavê Ehmed beranê keję zêrî
Bi sê ciya çadir kuta
Ji xwe re êwir danî

Perîxane says: Evdile my son, the soldiers stood up
And were nearing slowly from doomed Girîdax
I saw how Emîn son of Ehmed left
from the military post of Eliha
He brought with him three squads of soldiers
Up to Barislê, the village of Evdil son of Birahîm
Father of the heroic ram Ehmed,
Set up tents at three places
to host them by himself

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

Heyfa min li kuştina Evdilê Birahîm
Babê Ehmed beranî keję zêrî nayê
Heyfa min tê li wê heyfê
Min dî bi qeflê xulaman girtin
Laşê vî xweşmêrî kişandin bi erdê re
Ji devê Evdilê Birahîm Bavê Ehmed
Dexistin cotek diranê zêr e
Serê Evdilê Birahîm jê kirin
Birine şarê Diyarbekir
Bi xwe re birin bajêr e

My heart does not burn for the killing of Evdil of Birahîm
Father of Ehmed, blond ram
But my heart does burn for this:
I saw how a group of servants carried his corpse
How they dragged the body of this hero over the floor
How they from Evdil's mouth, son of Birahîm, father of E
Hit out a pair of golden teeth
How they cut off the head of Evdil, son of Birahîm
And brought it to the city Diyarbekir
They brought him to the city by themselves

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

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

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

1.8 Evdalê Zeynikê: the dengbêj as a figure

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

The dengbêjs call him the great master, and all of them know at least several kilams ascribed to him. The Evdalê Zeynikê kilams discuss his position and fame as a dengbêj, his life story, and the adventures of his patron, Surmeli Memed Pasha, and give therefore a better impression of the personality and activities of a dengbêj than is known of other dengbêjs. His fame made him the topic of several books¹⁹⁰ on the dengbêj art, and he is well-known among many Kurds. A film was made about him and released in 2010, winning several international rewards.¹⁹¹ In the 1930s some Kurdish intellectuals living in Armenia collected Kurdish folk songs which they published in the anthology *Folkloro Kurmanca*. The anthology contains many kilams about Evdalê Zeynikê, showing that he was a well-known dengbêj also in those years. The kilams have many of the same topics and speak in the same way about Evdalê Zeynikê as the kilams the dengbêjs sing today.

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

190 Aras 1996, Uzun 2005.

191 Film: “Evdale Zeynike”, director: Bülent Gündüz, production: cinepotamya, year: 2010.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Gulê:¹⁹⁴

Evdal merûmo, cavê mine reş in, reş-bela ne
Minê rojê sê cara bi kilê Subhanê kilda ne
Gelle dengbêjê mîna te,
ji bo mi jinê xwe berdane
Wey can Evdal, wey can Evdal
Heyla kirîbê Evdal ez heyîrî te mam

Oh Evdal, deprived man, my eyes are deep black
I paint them three times a day with Subhan coal
Would a dengbêj like you
Leave his wife for me
Oh dear Evdal, oh dear Evdal
Dear *kirve*¹⁹⁵ Evdal, I am your admirer

Evdal:

Heyla Gulê ez hatim Xamûrê, lê ha li hember e
Minê bala xwe dayê,
Gulê yeke bejn-zirav e, garden zer e
Minê sond xwarye bi încîla Îsa
Bi Qurana pêxember e
Bi sere sibê ra Gulê wê boxçê xwe
Hilde bi mi ra were

Oh Gulê I came from Xamûr to compete with u
I looked well and saw
That Gulê is tall and smart, with a golden neck
I swore by the book of Jesus
and by the Qur'an and the prophet
Against the morning Gulê will have
surrendered herself, come with me

194 Aras (1996: 44), my translation.

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

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

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

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

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

Evdal spreads the fame of his pasha, but the latter also brings fame to Evdal’s name. This becomes especially clear after the untimely death of the Pasha and his son. When the Pasha dies, Evdal remains serving his son Evla Beg, but when he dies as well, Evdal loses his support network and returns to his home village. Around this time a war¹⁹⁷ was raging the country, forcing him and his fellow villagers to leave the village. On the run Evdal finds an orphan whom he adopts and gives the name Temo. When Temo is seven years old Evdal falls blind, and from this time onwards

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

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

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

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

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

Conclusion

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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