

Connecting Through Dance:

The Multiplicity of Meanings of Kurdish Folk Dances in Turkey



Mona Maria Nyberg

Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the M.A. degree
Department of Social Anthropology, University of Bergen

Spring 2012



The front page photograph is taken by Mona Maria Nyberg at a Kurdish wedding celebration. The women who are dancing in the picture are not informants.

Acknowledgements

While studying for an exam during my time as a bachelor student, I read a work by Professor Bruce Kapferer which made me reconsider my decision of not applying for the master program; I could write about dance, I realized. And now I have! The process has been challenging and intense, but well worth it. Throughout this journey I have been anything but alone on this, and the list of persons who have contributed is too long to mention.

First of all I need to thank my informants. Without you this thesis could not have been written.

Thank you for your help and generosity! Especially I want to thank everyone at the culture centers for allowing me do fieldwork and participate in activities. My inmost gratitude goes to two of my informants, whose names I cannot write out of reasons of anonymity - but you know who you are. I want to thank you for allowing me into your lives and making me part of your family. You have contributing to my fieldwork by helping me in in innumerable ways, being my translators – both in terms of language and culture. You have become two of my closest friends.

I have been privileged with having an adviser who has taken interest in and believed in my project from beginning to end. Dr. Kjetil Knaus Fosshagen has with his understanding and patient advice encouraged me to see my material more clearly and make it into an anthropological text.

Special thanks go to Ingvild Skodvin Prestegård for helpful academic advice and feedback. For proofreading, I would like to thank Signe Wiger, Astrid Elisabeth Guåker, and Sheri Homayoon. My appreciation also goes to Haci Akman for encouraging me to do fieldwork in ‘Kurdistan’.

I want to thank my master class of 2011, whose social environment has become renowned for its fellowship. Your support, advice, and always creative lunch time conversations have made this journey far more enjoyable than I had imagined it would be.

Having gone through the writing process with my health intact is in large part due to the catering services of Mari Lilja Svarva and the inspiration from the instructors at the SIB gym.

Finally, I want to thank my family for your love and support.

*In loving memory of my grandparents
who passed away during the writing of this thesis.*

Table of Contents

Maps and Figures	VIII
Language and orthography	IX
Maps over Turkey, Kurdish areas, and Diyarbakır	X
Vignette: An experience from the field	XI

Chapter 1: Introduction..... 1

Method, field location and ethnographic context

Kurds	3
The Turkish Republic	3
Central Themes.....	3
Symbols and Politics	3
Kurdish Dance as “Embodied Communities”	5
Defining the object of study	6
Different types of Kurdish dances	6
The problem with concepts of ‘dance’	7
Categories: ‘Participatory’ and ‘presentational’ dance	8
Earlier Research and Literature	9
Methodology	9
Entering the field.....	11
Diyarbakır.....	11
Informants	12
Anonymization and ethical considerations	13
Chapter Outline	13

Chapter 2: Ceremonial Contexts: 14

Kurdish dances as embodied ‘connectivity’

Vignette	14
The Dance as reality, not representations	16
The importance of social exchange	17
The importance of kinship.....	20
Connectivity and Patriarchy	21
Patriarchy in wedding ceremonies	22

Contemporary Urban Weddings	24
Patriarchy expressed in dances.....	25
Children.....	25
“Heavy” and “Light” Men.....	26
Women.....	29
“Hot” or “Cold” Connectivity	29
Obligation to dance	31
Status and portraying wealth and prestige in ceremonial contexts	33
Türkü Barı an opposition of ceremonial contexts?	34
Elements of Egalitarianism	34
Conclusion.....	35

Chapter 3: Kurdish Dance as National Symbols..... 37

Folk Dance as representation of national identities

Understanding Turkish Nationalism and High Culture.....	37
Ziya Gökalp and the Turkist Theory of Culture and Civilization	39
Folk dances part of Construction of Turkish National Identity.....	40
Uneven Assimilation of Kurds in the Republic of Turkey	42
Interaction revealing the conflicting ethnic boundaries	43
Nascent Kurdish Nationalism (prior to the PKK)	45
The Kurdish resistance and PKK	46
Narratives about assimilation and Kurdish resistance.....	47
Promoting Kurdish culture	48
Claims about Kurdish authentic past.....	50
Claims of Kurdish culture as egalitarian	52
Conclusion.....	53

Chapter 4: Teaching Kurdish ‘Presentational’ Dances: 54

Empersonment and hierarchies of taste

From rural to urban contexts: From field to stage.....	54
Non-Governmental Kurdish Culture Centers.....	55
‘Empersonment’: learning to become a Kurdish folk dancer	56
Learning and teaching – children’s classes	57

The culture center’s dance ensemble and its performances	59
BDP Municipality Culture Centers	61
Performances and political involvement	62
Promoting knowledge of Kurdish culture and professionalism	62
Different ways of judging the dances	64
Conclusion.....	69
Chapter 5: Kurdish Dances in Political Contexts	71
<i>Kurdish dances as embodied protest</i>	
Political Meetings and Demonstrations.....	73
Concerts.....	73
Newroz	74
Ceremonial Events	74
Self-Sacrifice	75
Self-Sacrifice and Communitas in the PKK.....	76
Guerrilla life as utopian life	78
Communitas for “Regular People”	80
Demonstrations and protesting – Risks involved.....	81
“Hiding” protests in dance	85
Polyvalence and changing meanings.....	87
Conclusion.....	88
Concluding Remarks.....	90
Bibliography.....	93

Maps and Figures

All maps and figures by Mona Maria Nyberg, except the following:

Figure 1: Map over the Republic of Turkey from the World Security Network's homepage
<http://www.worldsecuritynetwork.com/articleImages/turkey-map.gif> [cited 09.05.2012]

Figure 2: Map over area where the majority of the population is Kurdish from Efrin.net
http://www.efrin.net/cms/deutsch/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=250&Itemid=26
[cited 09.05.2012]

Figure 3: Map showing Eastern Turkey and Diyarbakir from BBC News' homepage
<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/1172692.stm> [cited 09.05.2012]

Figure 7: Photograph of a Kurdish folk dance ensemble from the homepage of Diyarinsesi
<http://www.diyarinsesi.org/haber/diyarbakir-halk-oyunlari-yine-1.-oldu-8851.htm> [cited 08.05. 2012]

Figure 9: Photograph of a female PKK fighter collected from Rojpress homepage
<http://rojpress.wordpress.com/tag/%D9%82%DB%95%D9%86%D8%AF%DB%8C%D9%84/>

No informants are portrayed in any of the figures.

Language and orthography

During my field work I used English, Turkish and Kurdish, and even German and Norwegian a few times. Being a beginner in Turkish with almost no Kurdish skills I many times faced difficulties understanding conversations, gaining information, and communicating with informants. (Many of my informants do not speak the Kurdish language, but all of them speak Turkish.) However, most of my informants were patient. A few times I used interpreters, and my main informants it was a huge help for me that my main informants were fluent in English. English is my second language, but I have chosen to write in English so that those of my informants who know English may have the opportunity to read and comment on it. When I write Turkish or Kurdish names or words, I use letters from the Turkish and Kurdish alphabet that do not exist in English. With the exception of proper names, I have chosen to mark indigenous words in italic. I also use italics on book titles and when I introduce a concept for the first time.

Maps over Turkey, Kurdish areas, and Diyarbakır



Figure 1: Map over the Republic of Turkey

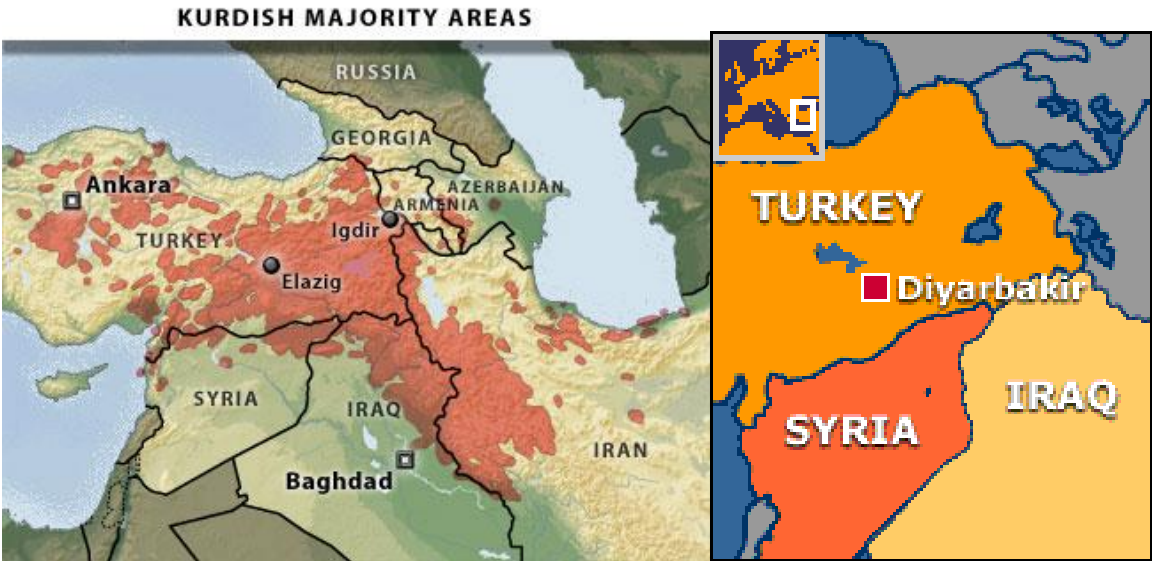


Figure 2: Map showing with red color the areas where the majority of the population is Kurdish.

Figure 3: Map showing Eastern Turkey and Diyarbakır.

Vignette: An experience from the field

In December, towards the end of my field work, I was invited along with a friend from one of the culture centres to a *kına gecesi* (henna night party).

I did not know it was a *mahalle* (neighbourhood) *kına gecesi* before going there, but the surprise was welcomed. When we came, the *kına* had already started. We could hear the music some blocks away. It was past seven in the evening, so it was already dark. The area was lit by street lights and light bulbs hung up on the concrete wall behind the musicians. It was too dark for filming, but light enough to see the dancers. Being outside, the music sounded better in my ears, not as loud and noisy as in the salons, and the darkness softened the atmosphere. I recognized some of the musicians from one of the culture centres and I admired the mellifluous yet powerful tones coming out of the tiny, beautiful girl singing calm songs in Kurmanji and Zazaki. Someone gave me a red plastic chair, and the singer's mother welcomed me affectionately.

Most of the guests were informally dressed or wore traditional clothing. A few young girls wore shalwar¹ and the groom was dressed in a traditional green costume with a *puşî*² around his waist. I was told that he was a folklore teacher and an excellent dancer. The dimness of the light made me less self-conscious, and before long I became engaged and comfortable in the games. At times I danced with boys and other times with girls. There was no clear separation of the sexes. The participants were of all ages, but the majority were young adults. It would have been more people had it not been for the cool weather, I was told.

After a while they performed the *kına* ritual. The groom was placed in a chair in the middle of men circling around him with trays with henna and candles held above their heads. An old woman put the henna into his hands. When asking about the bride, I was informed that she had her separate henna with her own family.

Several dancers stepped out of the circle and danced solo (*orta çıkmak*). For the first time I could also see girls dance in the middle. One of them wore shalwar, a sweater and had a shawl tied around the top of her head, down her forehead with a not in the back. The rest of the shawl and her hair hang freely down and whirled when she shook her head and body. She played like a boy, squatting down, shaking her arms, head and shoulders. Many of the songs had political content like “*Ez Apocime*”³, “*Ez Kurdistanım*”⁴ and guerrilla songs. I played quite

¹ Loose, pajamalike trousers. In Turkish = *şalvar*

² A traditional headdress fashioned from a square scarf, which is usually worn by Arabs and Kurds. In Arabic = *Keffiyeh*. In Norway it is more commonly known as *Palestinaskjerf*.

³ “I am supporter of Apo (Abdullah Öcalan)”

⁴ “I am a Kurd”

a bit and in addition to learning new dances, I also learned to incorporate extra steps into the routine, by watching other dancers do it. At first I was confused by the extra steps and asked the girl next to me about it. She replied, “*Artist*”⁵. Among the dances we danced were *Delilo*, *Şemmame*, *Amed Halay*, *Esmere*, *Mardin Halay* and several others. The dancing was versatile, the participants, young as well as old, and they danced with great passion.

5 The way understood the meaning of this expression is that it says that someone is “showing off”, a performer.

1

Introduction

Method, field location and ethnographic context

What makes a Norwegian anthropology student write a thesis about Kurdish dance? I have had a personal interest in dance for a long time and after working with asylum seekers in Norway my interest in Kurds was lit; I put the two interests together and hoped for the best. My object of study is also one that has not been studied much, and most of the literature about Kurds revolves around political questions. I wanted to take a different approach and luckily I found that dance turned out to be a very fruitful intake to many aspects of Kurdish sociality. The practice of these dances is such a widespread mass phenomenon that takes part in both traditional and popular culture, and all members of society are expected to take part in it. The Kurdish folk dances are important to the Kurds in a number of ways, they are found in many different social contexts, and they have a multiplicity of social meanings – although many Kurds cannot explicate them. I feel that I have unraveled a wealth of meanings, structures, expressions, movements, experiences and ways of learning, living and being together. The main claim of this thesis is;

Kurdish Dance is an important intake to understanding social processes in the intersection between the ideological and the bodily – the representational and the embodied, the utopian and the ‘traditional’.

Since I have carried out fieldwork in Turkey, I will focus on Kurds in a Turkish context and take into account consequences of Turkish national policies. The Kurds in Turkey have Turkish citizenship and the question of defining them as Turkish or Kurdish is not unproblematic. The Kurds have no nation-state of their own, but perceive themselves as an ethnic group distinct from Turks, Arabs and Persians. In Turkey, however, the Kurds have not always been recognized as being a separate ethnic group. This has led to a struggle for acknowledgment and identity in which folk dances play an important part. The folk dances function as representations of national identity and as political protest.

Kurdish folk dances also play important roles in Kurdish society and culture outside of nationalist struggles as well. Traditionally the dances were part of village life, making

communal work enjoyable. Today, the most common context for Kurdish folk dance is in ceremonial celebrations such as weddings and circumcisions. In addition the dances are danced in bars and sometimes on impulse among friends or relatives. In these contexts the dances function as a way of expressing and embodying relationships and statuses, as well an important way of being together.

Thus, the social meaning of the dances is polysemic; rooted in historical memory, politics and everyday life of its practitioners. It is danced for fun and in all seriousness of politics. The dances bring people together in some contexts, at the same time as individuals' performances classify and distinguish them from one another. It is an icon of the Kurdish nation, and through movement people unite in the dance. Relations between persons in a society are embodied in and expressed through the dances. The dances bring individuals physically together and make them experience unity. This goes for friendship and family relationships, to embodiment of 'imagined' societies like the Kurdish nation. Introducing his *World History of Dance*, Curt Sachs says:

If the dance, inherited from brutish ancestors, lives in all mankind as a necessary motor-rhythm expression of excess energy and of the joy of living, then it is only of slight importance for anthropologists and social historians. If it is established, however, that an inherited predisposition develops in many ways in the different groups of man and in its force and direction is related to other phenomena of civilization, the history of the dance will then be of great importance for the study of mankind. (Sachs 1963:12)

Kurdish folk dances have a significant role in Kurdish sociality and that Kurdish sociality shapes the form and function of the dances. The dances need to be understood in the context of the culture, history and societies which give the dances its specific and unique meanings. I claim that the folk dances are such a big part of Kurdish society, that they should not be overlooked in studies about Kurdish culture. Although almost identical dances – with similar social functions – are found among neighboring ethnic groups I claim that the inherited dispositions of the Kurdish dances have developed a specific way according to the political and historical context of Kurds in Turkey. This is in line with Bruce Kapferer's claim that "their meaning, the kind of power, and force of human agency that the symbolic types represent, is formed through and reproduced in the social and political contexts of their use" (Kapferer 1997:35). Keeping in mind Richard Handler's (1986:4) claim that anthropologists construct the 'cultures' they study by describing its cultural substance or the social facts that establish their existence, I want to emphasize that the specificity of Kurdish dances to Kurds is not its substance but in fact the way it is used in its struggle to prove the existence of a delineated and distinctive nation; the force and direction of its inherited predispositions is

related to the specific claims and denials to recognition as a Kurdish ethnicity.

Kurds

Since the Kurds constitute a very heterogeneous group, it is difficult to define them as an entity, but they form a people which is spread across the borders of Iran, Iraq, Syria, as well as widespread diaspora. In addition to that there are variations between Kurds in the different countries; there are also regional, class and life style differences. The majority of Kurds are Sunni Muslims of the Shaf'i school of thought, but there are also a few that belong to other religions, for instance Alevi and Yezidi. The Kurds speak different variation of Kurdish, where Kurmanji and Sorani are most widespread. The majority of the Kurds in Turkey speak Kurmanji, whereas a minority speaks Zazaki⁶ (Bruinessen 1992). There are at least 25 million Kurds worldwide (McDowall 2007: xi). In Turkey, the Kurdish population comprises between 9 and 13 million, meaning between 12% and 17% of the total population (Saraçoğlu 2011). I will focus on Kurds in Turkey, as it is the country where I conducted my fieldwork.

The Turkish Republic

Turkey, which means 'land of the Turks', is situated from the Thrace in the Balkan region of southeastern Europe, across the Anatolian Peninsula in western Asia, and borders to the countries Greece, Bulgaria, Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Iran, Iraq and Syria. After the devastating defeat in the Balkan Wars of 1912-1913 and World War I, The Ottoman Empire officially dissolved with the Treaty of Lausanne of 2 November 1922 and the Republic of Turkey was established in 1923. Mustafa Kemal, also known as *Atatürk* (father of Turks), became the first President of Turkey and his precedent is still prevalent in today's Turkey. Although the state is secular, the majority of the population is Muslim. Turkish is the only official language, even though 18% of the population speaks Kurdish, and Zazaki languages. The importance put on homogeneity of the Turkish people has resulted in discrimination against Kurdish and other non-Turkish minorities.

Central Themes

Symbols and Politics

Since the establishment of the Turkish Republic in 1923, Turkish Kurds' cultural rights and possibilities of expression of a separate Kurdish identity have been suppressed. Turkey's

⁶ Zazaki is so different from the other dialects that some academics claim that it is a separate language.

‘father’ and founder, Mustafa Kemal (Atatürk), led a nationalistic campaign where the goal was that Turkey should consist of Turks with one shared language (Turkish), one history, and wish for a common future. All of Turkey’s ethnic groups were attempted integrated into this ‘imagined’ Turkish nation, and expressions of non-Turkish ethnic affiliation were put down by the state. For instance it was illegal to talk Kurdish in public, teach Kurdish languages, and historians were ordered to prove that the Kurds and Turks belonged to the same ethnic group. (Bruinessen 1992). The dances danced by Kurds were by the Turkish government categorized as ‘Turkish’ and used as part of the creation and representation of Turkish national identity. Kurdish culture centers are today working to have the dances from the South-East recognized as ‘Kurdish’, and they use the dances to represent Kurdish national identity.

Anthropologist Fredrik Barth (1994:17) suggests that in order to understand cultural differences and interaction between ethnic groups, anthropologists should ask what causes ethnic distinctions to emerge instead of investigating the cultural ‘contents’ which are ‘random’. In contrast I claim that it is not a coincidence that the dance is used in political and social protest. Neither is it a coincidence that folk dances are being used as cultural markers for Kurdish identity. The dances play important parts in Kurdish everyday life, sociality and culture; hence their function as political symbols and icons is powerful. As it is my opinion that the meanings and functions of the dances should not be dismissed as arbitrary ‘stuff’ or ‘invented traditions’, I have tried to take into account both the ‘cultural stuff’ (i.e. the dance) and the causes of emergence of ethnic distinctions. I agree with Abner Cohen in that “The challenge to social anthropology today is the analysis of this dynamic involvement of symbols, or of custom, in the changing relationships of power between individuals and groups” (Cohen 1974:29). According to Cohen (1974:13-14) there are two sources of the nature of the obligatory in symbolic action: “

The first is the continuous struggle of man to achieve personal identity, or selfhood. The second is his concern with the perennial problems of human existence, like life and death, fortune and misfortune. On both fronts man resorts to symbolic action, in the course of which he continuously creates and recreates his oneness, and also develops solutions to the big, essentially irresolvable, questions of existence. Man is thus impelled to create symbols and to engage continuously in symbolic activities. (Cohen 1974:13-14)

The Kurdish dances are correlated to concerns of perennial problems of human existence, as they are vital forms of expressing fortune in ceremonial celebrations. The dances are also symbolic action resorted to in creation, recreation, and confirmation of social statuses, relationships, national and personal identities. As “Man the Symbolist and Man the Political act on one another” (Cohen 1974:14), the dances have gained different organizational

functions and forms of symbols as they have been exploited to articulate both Turkish and Kurdish claims for recognition as separate autonomous national identities.

Kurdish Dance as “Embodied Communities”

The Turkish or Kurdish national communities are, as all national communities, *imagined*⁷, but I claim that the dances makes Kurdish *imagined* communities into *embodied* communities and are organic parts of the participants’ experience of ‘being-in-the-world’. I want to show that the Kurdish dances reflect, embody, symbolize, and reinforce Kurdish *connectivity*, a concept used by anthropologist Suad Joseph (1993)⁸. I am especially interested in the ‘embodying’ of connectivity. By embodiment I refer to phenomenological thoughts about ‘being-in-the-world’ as opposed to subjects in a world of objects. The body is more than an object representing an underlying referential textual meaning, and should not be abstracted from ourselves in a dualistic manner. While we in contemporary western societies look at ourselves as individually autonomous, in many Middle Eastern societies identity is more tightly connected with relations. They identify themselves as a part of their family (‘connectivity’) – and family is the basis of society, having higher priority than nationalism. Nationalism offers an ‘imagined society’ for all Kurds. The nationalism of PKK tries to move away from the family and tribal loyalties, putting national loyalties at top priority – claiming that the family, tribal and religious loyalties make the Kurds weak and emasculated, not able to defend their own territories and people. This is reflected in the differences in dance practices and symbolism of the dances in ceremonial (non-political) contexts, and in political contexts (demonstrations and political meetings). In ceremonial contexts, the dance participation emphasize, reinforce, symbolize and embody family relationships, while in political contexts there is a focus on ethnic and political fellowship, where every individual is perceived and presented as equal. There is an aspect of ‘*communitas*’ in the political contexts, since the status differentiations of everyday life is temporary erased in the dance.

Although the dances can function as representation, this is not always – or often not – the way they function. Because it is polysemic and connected to the sociality and emotions of ceremonial life, the dances give associations of closeness and relations, and take these embodied meanings of the dance into a political context of nationalism. The dancers are being

⁷ ‘Imagined communities’ is a concept coined by Benedict Anderson (2006)

⁸ The concept has also been used by Catherine Keller (Keller 1986:9, 114), but I will use Joseph’s definition of the concept: “By connectivity I mean relationships in which a person’s boundaries are relatively fluid so that persons feel a part of significant others. Persons in Camp Trad did not experience themselves as bounded, separate, or autonomous.” (Joseph 1993:452-453)

moved from its ‘normal’ social structures – the ‘patriarchal connectivity’ – to a ‘national connectivity’.

In his book *The ritual process: structure and anti-structure* (1969) Victor Turner explains two models for interrelatedness: *structure* and *communitas*. *Structure* is a model where human interrelatedness is organized by “structured, differentiated, and often hierarchical system of politico-legal-economic positions with many types of evaluation, separating men in terms of “more” or “less”” (Turner 1969:96). *Communitas* or ‘anti-structure’ is the model where the everyday structure is replaced by “unstructured or rudimentarily structured and relatively undifferentiated *comitatus*, community, or even communion of equal individuals who submit together to the general authority of the ritual elders” (Turner 1969:96). Although I do not subscribe to Turner’s structural functionalism, but takes a more processual and experiential approach, this thesis will look at how Kurdish dances are part of both structure, as normal everyday life, and *communitas*. The more political engagement there is in the dance, the more likely is it to constitute a *communitas*.

Defining the object of study

The Kurdish folk dances in question are round dances, similar to dances of other places in the Middle East, the Balkans or Eastern European countries. For an outsider it may be difficult to distinguish these dances from one another, but there are differences in the step combinations and variation of movements. However, there is also great variation within the range of what are defined Kurdish folk dances, where each region has their own specific variations. I am not investigating the difference between the Kurdish dances and dances of neighboring ethnic groups, as I am concerned with meaning-making and not choreography.

Different types of Kurdish dances

Delilo is the most common dance. This unisex dance consists of four steps forward diagonally to the right, followed by four steps straight backwards. In wedding ceremonies the dancing of *Delilo* usually begins with a few guests who start dancing in line, holding on to their neighbors’ little fingers. As other guests join the dance, the line becomes a wide circle, until the circle opens up and gets a spiral-like form. Usually adult males are at the beginning at the chain, followed by women, younger men and children at the end. *Mardin Halay* is a much faster and more difficult dance which is traditionally a dance for women. The dancers stand on a tight line, shoulder to shoulder holding hands in a firm grip. The steps are quick and

subtle, leaving most of the movements to bending knees, hips and shaking the shoulders. As the rhythm of the music plays faster and faster, the movements gets more intense, sometimes reaching a trance-like feel to it, as the dancers seem to be immersed in the activity on an ecstatic level. At the same time as *Mardin Halay* is performed, you often find a group of men dancing *Diyarbakır Halay*, which is dance for men with clear cut step routines with sharp leg movements, performed with a still and forward bent upper body. *Ortaya çıkmak* is solo dancing in the middle of the dance floor, usually performed by young males.

The dances mentioned above are the dances I will focus on. There are also other Kurdish folk dances, but they were not practiced frequently and will thus not be the main focus of in my discussion. Examples of other dances are the sword dance, *dîlana sûr û mertal*, which is a masculine dance consisting of a series of exercises of agility. *Cirît* is a different war dance, where one imitates fight situations from the horseback – traditionally performed in wedding celebrations. *Bêlûtê* is a dance of theology students which probably has a religious origin (Nezan 1985).

The problem with concepts of ‘dance’

As I am primarily concerned with the dances that are danced today, the way today urban people in Diyarbakir experience and the meanings they have – I will not go into details about the history of the dances. My informants use a mixture of Kurdish and Turkish vocabulary to describe the dances, and their use of words were often used differently by my informants. Since my quest is not to find the ‘real’ or ‘original’ meaning of the dances, but rather to see how my informants give meaning to the dances and experience through them the ‘lived world’, I hope the reader will understand my eventual erroneous way of speaking of the dances. Some of my informants say that the Kurdish word ‘*gowend/govend*’ is equivalent to the English word ‘dance’, while most of my informants said that *gowend* is the name of a particular kind of Kurdish dance⁹. According to the dictionary *Norsk-Kurdisk Mini-ordbok* the Norwegian noun for ‘dance’ (*dans*) can in Kurmanji be translated as ‘*Govend, dîlan, listik, dans*’.

In Turkish there is no word equivalent of the English word ‘dance’. The word used to describe the folk dances practiced in Turkey is ‘*oyun*’, which can be translated into ‘play’ or ‘game’. The more modern concept ‘*dans*’, which is a loan word from English is used to describe ‘Western’ dances, like ballet or ballroom dances (Öztürkmen 2001:139). Many of my

⁹ According to Kendal Nezan (1985), *govend* is a hand-holding round dance where women and men perform quite complicated step combinations.

informants did not consider the Kurdish folk dances as ‘*dans*’, but categorized it as a different phenomenon. Even though this shows that the English word ‘dance’ is problematic, I have nevertheless chosen to call my subject of study ‘dance’.

Categories: ‘Participatory’ and ‘presentational’ dance

In his book *Choreographic Politics* (2002), choreographer, dance historian and anthropologist Anthony Shay analyzes national folk dance ensembles around the world. In order to avoid the question of authenticity, Shay categorizes the dances into separate genres and uses the concept of *parallel traditions* to distinguish dance ‘in the field’ – where the dance is part of a larger event – as *folk dance in its first existence*, and *folk dance in its second existence* when referring to dance ensembles perform dances which are taken out of its original context and made into the main object of event (Shay 2002:18). Shay describes folk dance in its first existence, folk dance ‘in the field’, as “the traditional dances performed as an organic aspect of social life among people in both cities and rural areas,” (Shay 2002:214) and as performed spontaneously and unrehearsed in informal or socially public events. The biggest difference between dance in the first and second existence is that while the first is usually performed in a more spontaneous and unrehearsed manner, the second is choreographed down to the smallest detail. In addition, the dance on stage is usually a formalized and ‘improved’ version, suited for the urban middle-class audiences. It is distanced from its original village settings and the dancers have usually little knowledge of the background of the dances. The performances of the national folk dance ensembles “form the intersection between popular culture in regard to their sources and high art in their formal choreographic formats” (Shay 2002:224).

I prefer to follow dance scholar Andriy Nahachewsky’s (1995) use of the categories *participatory* and *presentational* to describe Kurdish dances in the first and second existence. In participatory dances the focus is on the dancers themselves, where a “good dance differs from a less successful performance based on how it feels” (Nahachewsky’s (1995:1). The presentational dances, on the other hand, are perceived as standardized objects which are judged by its visual aesthetics and individual technical skills. I use the expression genre ‘presentational’, because there is a difference in the directionality of the performance towards an audience from a performance on a stage – directed towards a separate audience – and the dancing ‘in the field’, where the dancers direct their attention towards each other. The purpose of using this distinction is that the two genres’ different uses of aesthetics and ways of learning result in different experiences for dancers and audience, and it gives the dances different functions.

I will make a further sub-division of the Kurdish participatory genre into the categories of 1) ‘Ceremonial contexts’ and 2) ‘Political contexts’. These categories are of course theoretical idealizations, for the purpose of analysis only; while in practice they are not so easily separated. I will return to points where elements from each category intertwine.

Earlier Research and Literature

Little is done on Kurds in Turkey, because the area has been closed for research. There has been one M.A. thesis written about Kurdish dances, by Fethi Karakeçili, which I use to support my empirical material and for purposes of discussion. Research about Kurdish culture is welcomed by the Kurdish movement, as they want to document their culture. Dance scholars have written about Turkish folk dances, with Kurdish dances included as Turkish folk dances from the South Eastern region. As these are mostly written in Turkish, their availability has been limited to me.¹⁰ In the final process of writing my thesis I found that anthropologist Mauro Van Aken has analyzed the Arabic folk dance *Dabkeh* in Lebanon. His description of *Dabkeh* in his article “Dancing Belonging: Contesting Dabkeh in the Jordan Valley” (2006) is strikingly similar of my impression of Kurdish participatory dances, and so is his analysis of the dances. Both Van Aken and I speak of how the dances function as vehicles of expression of statuses, but in my thesis I also focus on how these expressions are not necessarily intentional but part of the individual and collective habitus.

Methodology

“Writing ethnography is a kind of standing in the middle. It is not the actual event but an expression of it. Similarly, it depicts a reality that is merely one of many possibilities. My experience of the Tumbuka had much to do with their experience of me” (Friedson 1996:8).

I include myself in the text, both in the discussion and in the empirical cases, because at times there might be necessary to pay attention to my presence. I assume that the ideal ethnographer should never influence their informants’ actions, but that is – I believe – an ideal. As a foreigner I often got a lot of attention, and I believe that the way I conducted myself made a difference in how my informants reacted to me. I include myself in the text to describe how this interaction unfolded. I also describe it because the link between the theory, methodology and my analysis is very much interrelated.

¹⁰ For discussions on the use of Turkish dance in nation-building, I use the work of Arzu Özturkmen and Anthony Shay.

My own learning (and experiences) of the dances is directly relevant to my understanding of the dances and the way they are practiced and learned by my informants. It was crucial for me to participate in the dance. Otherwise I could not have reached the level of understanding the dances or the joy of it. By observing some of the dances I was not at all able to understand why the participants seemed to enjoy it so much. Watching the *Mardin Halay* dance, it looked to me as if they were just standing straight up and down, bending their knees quickly while shaking their breasts. When learning the dance myself, I understood that it was actually quite complicated to learn because of the small steps and movements. More importantly, when learning to do the movements quickly to music, I could feel the exhilarating effect and thrill of the dance myself. My informants learn the dances in different ways in the different contexts. As this is part of the analysis, and as it is important to also consider how I have gained my understanding of the dances and of my informants' ways of learning them, I have included my own method and learning experiences.

During my field work, I did participant observation at three henna nights and two engagement celebrations, and a dozen urban salon weddings in the cities of Diyarbakır, Elazığ, and Tunceli (Dersim). The wedding celebrations I attended in Diyarbakır were generally held in the evening in a wedding salon, and the dance floor was usually occupied by dancing guests most of the evening. I experienced the same type of challenges as anthropologist Michael Jackson (1983), as we both found that our informants did not answer our questions in a manner that satisfied our search for an anthropological understanding of the object of study. My informants most often told me that they did not have any knowledge about the dances; I would have to ask someone else. Others gave me the explanations that the dances were just for enjoyment. Because I wanted to find a deeper meaning to the dances, this last was an explanation that did not satisfy me. Especially since my main informants did not seem to enjoy attending wedding celebrations and dancing. I did not insist on asking a lot of questions to find an answer, as I had learned from articles written by anthropologists who had “failed to accept that human beings do not necessarily act from opinions or employ epistemological criteria in findings for their actions” (Jackson 1983:331-332). Instead I tried to gain an understanding through observing, participating in the dances, as well as getting as much information about other cultural practices and social or moral structures. Not surprisingly, as I attended different wedding celebrations, I observed that the participants had varying ways of participating, experiencing and talking about the celebrations.

My main challenge has been to give a satisfying anthropological analysis of a phenomenon which has barely been described to me by my informants, without reifying it

into mere representations of something outside itself. I decided to start by taking my informants' explanations at face value and accepting that they do in fact dance "just for fun" and "because we like to be together". As a starting point, I will follow the method Jackson describes in his article "Knowledge of the body" (1983); of starting "from an account of *how* these mimetic performances arise towards an account of *what* they mean and *why* they occur, without any a priori references to precepts, rules or symbols"¹¹ (Jackson 1983:333).

Entering the field

I conducted fieldwork from July through December 2010 in the city of Diyarbakır. Since I had never before been to Turkey this, I chose to spend three months (from February to May) taking a Turkish language course in Istanbul and travelling around the South East to prepare for my fieldwork. During this time in Istanbul, I frequently visited a Kurdish culture center and established contacts who introduced me to people in Diyarbakır and other provinces in the South East. I travelled to Diyarbakır and other cities for nearly two months to establish contacts and in order to find the most suited location for my fieldwork. I also got the opportunity to attend concerts, the celebration of Newroz in Diyarbakır, and the opening of a culture center in Diyarbakır. I decided that Diyarbakır would be the most suited place, since there were several culture centers which offered classes in Kurdish folk dances, and because I had established contacts there through the 'snowball effect'. In June 2011 I returned to Diyarbakır to for a few weeks to visit friends and to observe the Turkish general election.

Diyarbakır

My focus is mainly on Kurdish folk dances practiced in the city of Diyarbakır, where I did most of my fieldwork. Diyarbakır is the largest city in the Diyarbakır Province¹² in the region of South Eastern Turkey. It has approximately 843,460 inhabitants. Diyarbakır is by many Kurds considered the unofficial capital of '*Kurdistan*', and undoubtedly an important political center for the Kurdish movement in Turkey. Diyarbakır Metropolitan Municipality¹³ is now – along with most of the municipalities and metropolitan municipalities in South Eastern Turkey – run by elected officials from the pro-Kurdish 'Peace and Democracy Party'¹⁴, henceforth referred to as BDP.

¹¹ Italics made by Jackson.

¹² *Diyarbakır ili*

¹³ *Diyarbakır Büyükşehir Belediye*

¹⁴ Turkish: *Barış ve Demokrasi Partisi*, Kurdish: *Partiya Aştî û Demokrasiyê*

Informants

I did participant observations at wedding celebrations and henna nights, participated and observed dance classes and socialized with people in the culture centers, went to public events such as concerts, political meeting and demonstrations, took a few Kurdish classes, and participated in social settings at people's houses, in cafés, bars etc. During my field work I met and interacted with well over 200 persons with different social backgrounds. Especially since the dances are practiced by all Kurds, it is difficult to focus on only one group. In combination with this and the fact that the dances are so polysemic, the result is that my thesis has a wide scope.

I got to know a great number of people from the different culture centers: teachers, artists, and students – and students' families etc., but my main informants are the married couple I lived with. They are university educated, state employees in their late twenties and fluent in English. In addition to letting me stay with them, they invited me into all the aspects of their lives and made me part of their family. They took me almost anywhere they went. I got to know their families, their friends and even their work place. As they took great interest in my project, they were my translators in language and in culture. They were not actively involved in any of the culture centers, but they had many acquaintances in the artistic milieu. I found this helpful as I found that they gave me valuable 'outside' information. We talked about everything from politics, history, dances, culture, religion, gender, class differences, food, friendship, social rules, and private matters. When I came home from the culture centers, I would ask them to help me understand what I had experienced. They gave me advice in how to behave in different situations, how to expect others to behave and how to interpret their behaviors towards me. One of the many times I had come home asking the informants I lived with if what I had experienced was normal behavior, I got the answer: "No, it's not normal. People don't know how to behave around you."

Throughout my fieldwork, and after, I did many reflections about my role in the field, how my informants could perceive me and my behavior, being a foreign non-Muslim woman. I have found that although this might have affected the way my informants acted towards me, I have not found it relevant for the subjects discussed in my thesis. I believe that being a young woman with limited language skills and a humble attitude did not limit my access to the field. If anything, it might have caused some of my informants to want to protect, help and feed me.

Anonymization and ethical considerations

Apart from the participant observation, these individuals became my most important source of information. As they confided in me to share with me their private world and opinion, it is important for me that I have not in any way misused the information they have given me. Also their anonymity is important for me. Some of the information in the thesis is given by these informants and their friends and family, but far from all of it. I choose not to mention when the information is given by my main informants or other informants I met during my field work, since it is no secret for my friends and informants in the field whom I stayed with.

I have anonymized all my informants by giving them random Turkish and Kurdish names, and I have chosen not to introduce my informants any further. I have chosen to split up the informants I have used most frequently, by given them several names. Where the informant's social background or political standing is important, I will mention this before each case instead of listing all my informants in the beginning of the thesis. This is also done because I have an enormous amount of informants.

Chapter Outline

I will start by I looking at Kurdish dancing in ceremonial contexts, and see how the dances can be connected to Kurdish sociality, in Chapter 2. In Chapter 3 I will examine at how the Turkish state has used both Turkish and Kurdish folk dances as a means of creating a visual image of the Turkish identity, and how Kurdish politicians and artists are using Kurdish as a national symbol. Chapter 4 follows with my discussion of how Kurdish dances are being taught in Kurdish culture centers and how the teachers emphasize the importance of learning the cultural background of the dances. Finally, in Chapter 5 I discuss how Kurdish folk dances are being used in political demonstrations as a unifying symbol of a Kurdish national identity.

2

Ceremonial Contexts:

Kurdish dances as embodied ‘connectivity’



Figure 4: Dancing at Kurdish wedding in Diyarbakir

Vignette

The wedding was typical for Diyarbakir weddings I had attended. It was held in the evening, about seven o'clock in a wedding salon in the city. The big rectangular room probably accommodated 600 chairs surrounding round tables along three of the walls. At the middle of the fourth wall stood a platform for the band, and next to it was the canopy podium where the bride and groom were seated. In the centre of the room, between the tables and the platforms was a big open space for dancing. A combination of consistently light colour choices, tile flooring, and fluorescent lamps gave the room a bright pale illumination and, in my opinion, its somewhat clinical atmosphere.

The dancing started out with *Delilo*, followed by *Mardin Halay*. When the bride and groom arrived, they danced a slow dance to a recording of a slow Ahmet Kaya song. In addition to the band that worked for the salon, a professional albeit not very famous singer was a guest in the wedding and sang a few songs. The *Çalgıcı*¹⁵ asked the groom and his family and friends to dance. My friend Zeki explained that they do this because

¹⁵ *Çalgıcı* is Turkish for musician or instrumentalist. In this context it is the vocalist who supervises and entertains the crowd.

they want people to throw money at the groom, and this money is in turn picked up and given to the musicians. First, all of us danced Delilo then I danced *Mardin Halay* with Zeki and his older brother. While dancing Delilo, Zeki informed me that they were playing a political song. This was confirmed by a number of V sign hand gestures made by the participants. “Everyone here is supporters of BDP,” Zeki said.

Back at the table, I asked Nezaket for her opinion of the music. “As always,” she replied. Thus, taken her general opinion on wedding music in Diyarbakır, she did not find it particularly pleasant. Later I found her leaning on her elbow over the table with her eyes closed, given in to weariness and headache caused by the loud music. Around us ran naughty boys on sugar high, infants slept on the tables, and waiters served the wedding cake.

The vignette above is a description of my observations one of the weddings I attended with my informants in Diyarbakır. The description of Nezaket’s behavior contrasts with most common explanation of the objective of participation in the dances: “to have a good time” (*eğlenmek*) and “we like to be together”

“Human movement does not symbolise reality, it is reality” (Best 1978:137).

As discussed in chapter 1, Anthony Shay (2002) divides folk dance in two parallel traditions where one is folk dance ‘in the field’ – where folk dance performed as organic aspects of social life – and folk dance ‘on stage’. I will discuss folk dance ‘in the field’ – or ‘participatory’ dance to use Andriy Nahachewsky’s concept – in two different contextual settings, a political and a ceremonial, and this chapter is devoted to the ceremonial contexts.

For the participants of the Kurdish dances ‘participatory’ genre, the focus is not so much on presenting a representation of an abstracted aesthetic ‘object’, but rather on their own experience of or participation in the dance and fulfillment of obligations to participate. I will focus on wedding celebrations, which belong to public or informal social contexts where everyone can participate in improvised dances. Individuals and skills may be put forward and exhibited, but the dances can be better understood as a playful way of ‘being together’ than as a rehearsed objectified performance in its own right. The function of the Kurdish dances in wedding ceremonies is a ritualized way of being together, partly structured by kinship and other social statuses. My claim is that ‘Patriarchal connectivity’, as described by Suad Joseph, is a part of the individual, collective, and societal habitus of these Turkish Kurds, which I in

this chapter attempt to present by analyzing Kurdish ceremonial dances. In the ceremonial contexts, the Kurdish dances are embodied social practices. While the dances reify ‘patriarchal connectivity’ by being a vehicle of expressions of social status and relationships, they are also part of the participants’ experience of ‘being-in-the-world’. It can perhaps be seen as the ultimate way of being together.

The Dance as reality, not representations

I want to go beyond semiotic or ‘symbolic’ explanations of the dances as mere representations of something outside of itself¹⁶, and look to Merleau-Ponty’s (1999:154-157) concept of the ‘lived body’. I will attempt to move away from the notion of culture as something ‘superorganic’¹⁷, which in anthropologist Michael Jackson’s opinion serves as a “denial of the somatic, a turning of blind eyes on the physical aspects of Being where our sense of separateness and distinctiveness is most readily blurred” (Jackson 1983:238).

In so far as the body tends to be defined as a medium of expression or communication, it is not only reduced to the status of a sign; it is also made into an object of purely mental operations, a ‘thing’ onto which social patterns are projected... In this view the human body is simply an object of understanding, or an instrument of the rational mind, a kind of vehicle for the expression of a reified social rationality. (Jackson 1983:329)

To some extent (in this chapter), I want to take Jackson’s advice, in order to avoid that my analysis of embodied experience is being vitiated by efforts to understand the dance only “in terms of cognitive and linguistic models of meaning” (Jackson 1983:238). I will look at the dances in correlation with linguistic and cognitive models of meaning, but my argument is that the dances can often not be understood as ‘the canvas of’ or as representations of these models. It is necessary to consider the understandings, form and experiences of the dances from a starting point where the dance activity is considered a part of the participants’ *habitus* of social, bodily gestures, and contact correlated to morality and obligations of relations and exchanges. My aim is thus to use Bourdieu’s definition of ‘Habitus’ in order to show that the Kurdish dances form – in one way or another – part of the social habitus of most Kurds in Diyarbakır. Habitus is part of gestures specific to sociality, it is the embodied part of sociality; the knowledge and experience that we have learned and internalized – but which we have

¹⁶ “...as Binswanger and Merleau-Ponty have argued, meaning should not be reduced to a sign which, as it were, lies on a separate plane outside the immediate domain of an act.” (Jackson 1983:238) “To paraphrase John Blacking (1973: 28), trance is not a flight from reality but a journey into it.” (Friedson 1996:123-124)

¹⁷ A term by Alfred Kroeber in his 1917 paper, *The superorganic*.

forgotten that we once learned (Bourdieu 1990).

Social bonds are not abstract entities outside of the organic mundane world, but they are grounded in the bodies of individuals. However, there are differences in the way we conceptualize and direct ourselves towards others, and most relevant for the current analysis: we habituate our social bonds in our bodies in different ways. Bruce Kapferer (1997:186) defines sociality as “the capacity to form and participate in the processes of world construction and even against the forces that are integral to such processes but may blast apart both the constructions of the world and the human beings within it,” and that sociality “is immanent in human existence or in the fact that one human being always presupposes the existence of others and in one way or another is already oriented to them and vice versa” (Kapferer 1997:185). An analysis of Kurdish folk dances cannot and should not be isolated from other aspects of Kurdish sociality.

I will ask the same question as Franciska Boas: “What is the relationship between the movements characteristically of a given dance, and the typical gestures and postures in daily life of the very people who perform it?” (Boas 1994:55 cited in Jackson 1983:333). I will look at how the dances can be correlated to other social fields, moral qualities or ethical ideas, but without saying that the dances and movements are representations of these or that it all constitutes an unchangeable cultural totality.

The importance of social exchange

Could there be a correlation between Kurdish sociality and the way in which Kurds dance their folk dances? The somatic experiences which are the basis of the possibility of social relationships and social structures are emphasized with a necessity of physical closeness between people. In my quest of understanding more of how the dance has gained its meanings, I will look at the correlation between my observations of physical closeness, social presence and systems that valorize close relationships and sociability.

Most of my informants are used to spending more time together than what I am used to from my own society. It is more common to eat their meals together, sleep in the same room together¹⁸, work together, call and visit each other frequently. When living with a family for a month, they would worry that I was upset about something if I retreated into my room without explaining to them that I was studying. If I were home alone for a while and someone came to visit, they would ask me pityingly if I was OK being on my own, or if I

¹⁸ Often gender segregated, depending on the relation.

wanted to come with them instead of being alone in the apartment. When I was invited for dinner I was often caught by surprise that they expected me to stay the night. A Kurdish student I got to know in Istanbul explained to me that he considers spending time with his friends so important that even though he has been to school and worked in his part time job until the evening, he still spends time with them until late at night. This resulted in his having to do homework and studying at night, giving him no time to sleep or rest. He explained to me that he values his friends a lot, and that is why he wants to spend time with them. There is a valorisation on cultivation of social bonds by maintenance of ongoing social exchange, where sharing (information, troubles, experiences and resources) is a main principle of close social relations. Thus I will use Suad Joseph's theory about *connectivity* to describe this relationality. In her article "Connectivity and Patriarchy among Urban Working-Class Arab Families in Lebanon" (1993), Joseph explains connectivity as "relationships in which a person's boundaries are relatively fluid so that persons feel a part of significant others" (Joseph 1993:452). In Joseph's usage of the term, connectivity is a kind of relationality which is "a *description* of a process by which persons are socialized into systems that valorize linkage, bonding, and sociability" (Joseph 1993:456). Participating in weddings and in the Kurdish dances is part of social exchange.

Even if a person does not feel the want or need to be together with another person at a certain moment, there is an expectation that she or he is (always) open to social exchange, and there is a danger of insulting individuals if one is not open for social exchange. Closure can be socially dangerous. For instance, if my friends were tired, they would sometimes make up fake excuses for not meeting their friends rather than telling them straight forwardly. As I was not used to this sociability I once talked to one of my informants about how I sometimes found it hard to adjust and she agreed with me.

I told my friend Selda how I found it difficult to understand all the social rules. She agreed with me that it was different in Diyarbakır. I said that it was difficult for me to understand what people wanted, and how I should behave, since people were so polite. "Polite?" Selda asked surprised. I explained that I meant that I felt that people couldn't say no, and if you say "No, I don't want to come" they might think that you are upset with them. Selda agreed and told me a story: A friend had called her to ask if she wanted to meet her that day. As Selda had been at home enjoying a book she told her friend that today was not a good time. A few hours later her friend called her again and asked if they had a problem. Selda went on to explain how at work people all day comes and goes to chat with each other. She said that she often does not pay attention to them but concentrate about her

work, which make people perceive her as arrogant. “I don’t understand people in Diyarbakır,” she said and explained that when she lived in İstanbul she could tell people “no”, or that she didn’t have time etc. I said that people here always want to be together with someone. Selda replied that she liked to be alone sometimes. “Where are you from?” I asked. “I don’t know. I’m from Mars,” she joked.

Thus, there is an obligation to maintain social exchange, as opposed to an obligation among Northern Europeans to be respectful of other persons’ privacy. Northern Europeans also often tend to shun physical closeness. In his analysis of courtly mannerism in Europe in *The civilizing process, Vol.I. The history of Manners* (1978), Norbert Elias (1978:69) describes how an “invisible wall of affects...between one human body and another, repelling and separating” came to affect a sociality of Northern Europeans. Europeans in the Middle Ages had a different kind of relationality where they would be eating together from the same plate and touching the food with their fingers, whereas now in modern times the touch of someone else’s hands or mouth “manifests itself as embarrassment at the mere sight of many bodily functions of others, and often at their mere mention, or as a feeling of shame when one’s own functions are exposed to the gaze of others, and by no means only then” (Elias 1978:69-70). These feelings of shame were in the beginning not connected to hygienic reasons, but of fear of embarrassing others, and as different social group interacted with each other, there was an increased pressure for acting appropriate, self-moulding and self-restraint (Elias 1978). It seems as if it is not common for my Kurdish informants to have the same aversions against physical closeness as many Europeans have.

When people were not together, they would express that they missed them, and if they did not hear from a person they would often complain that he or she had not called them. Expressions of detachment from people as something problematic and painful seemed to be common.¹⁹

One the day of departure from a visit of a friend’s family in their village, I observed expressions of grievance. I found my friend sitting on the floor with her mother holding her hands, lamenting and crying because she was about to leave and she would not see her for another month. The women were crying more or less openly, while the men stayed calm. However, my friend observed from the back seat that also her father shed a silent tear while he was driving us to the bus station.

¹⁹ Space consideration limits me from discussing the different expectations on women and men in relation to expressions of pain. Connectivity and attachment is probably more accepted and expected among women than men.

For my Kurdish friends and informants it almost seemed as if expressions of feelings of attachment not only were accepted, but often even expected. If a person is not able to maintain constant social exchange with a close friend or relative, it is appropriate to express lament – otherwise it seems as if the person does not care about the other. Persons that care about each other are expected to want to spend time with each other. Among Northern Europeans, on the other hand, feelings of detachment or dependency is often perceived as a sign of weakness; an inability to be mature or/and independent. Northern Europeans think about human individuals as bounded separate entities, and think about society and culture as something detached from nature may impact our sociality and the way we experience the world. Suad Joseph criticizes this view and proposes instead “a notion of relational selfhood that, takes different forms under various political economies and allows a new view of the interaction of relationality and patriarchy” (Joseph 1993:459).²⁰

The importance of kinship

In order to understand Kurdish sociality it is necessary to consider the importance of kinship. In Turkey it was common for people to ask me about my family in our very first conversation. “How many brothers and sisters do you have? What do your parents do for a living? How old are they? How old are your brothers? What do they do? Do they live with your parents? Did you get permission from your parents to travel alone to Turkey? Do you miss them? Do they miss you?” were frequently asked questions. The father of one of my informants wanted to call my father and talk to him, even though he did not know English and my father does not know Turkish or Kurdish. It almost seemed as if he was more interested in whom my parents were, than in who I was. Probably this is because in order for him to make an opinion about me, he needed to know my relations. Mehmed S. Kaya, who has written about conservative Zaza Kurds in his monograph *Zazakurdere i en ny tid* (2007), claim that his informants define each other according to relations.

²¹People in the Zaza society are fundamentally socially created, and individuals perceive themselves in the light of, and as a product of, their social relations, because the need for community and belonging seems to be far more important and a more deep-seated urge in them. This brings them together and shapes their society. The experience of closeness and recognition from the environment, both good and bad, gives life meaning for them. There is thus no room for personal identity. (Kaya 2007:142)

²⁰ Joseph writes that maturity in Camp Trad “was signaled in part by the successful enactment of a myriad of connective relationships. In a culture in which the family was valued over and above the person, identity was defined in familiar terms, and kin idioms and relationships pervaded public and private spheres, connective relationships were not only functional but necessary for successful social existence.” (Joseph 1993:452-453)

²¹ This is my translation from Norwegian to English.

This supports Joseph's point, but I do not share his conclusion in the last sentence. When asked about the meanings of the Kurdish dances, many of my informants referred to the collective character of the Kurds: We are collective, we do everything together, and hence we like to dance together as well. I will however not explain the collective character of the dances by referring to Kurds as 'collective'. I will move away from the question of corporatist versus individualist identity; thus I disagree with Kaya.

Connectivity and Patriarchy

While eating breakfast, a university sociology student and I talked about Kurdish dance and its meanings.

I told her about my fieldwork and she began to talk about dance. She said that in contrast to the West, where men and women dance two-and-two, toward each other, the men and women in 'Kurdistan' dance side by side, on a line. She thought that this could have something to do with society in general being more group-oriented than western societies. To explain what she meant, she said: "In Europe, if people want to make a decision, they can do it, but here me for example, I have to ask my father, my mother, my sister, and my brother for permission etc."

Here, the student made a parallel between the dance and the society in general as group oriented. When referring to being obliged to ask for permission to do something, she was explaining how patriarchy limits individual autonomy (cf. Joseph 1993:478). To proceed from her line of thought, I will use '*patriarchal connectivity*', which is an analytical tool I have borrowed from Suad Joseph. According to Joseph (1993:453) the forms connectivity takes varies according to different political and economic systems, and the connectivity among Arab families in Camp Trad (in Lebanon) should be seen in relation to local patriarchy²².

Connectivity entails cultural constructs and structural relations in which persons invite, require, and initiate involvement with others in shaping the self. In patriarchal societies, then, connectivity can support patriarchal power by crafting selves responding to, requiring, and socialized to initiate involvement with others in shaping the self; and patriarchy can help to re-produce connectivity by crafting males and seniors prepared to direct the lives of females and juniors, and females and juniors prepared to respond to the direction of males and seniors. (Joseph 1993:453)

²² "Patriarchy entails cultural constructs and structural relations that privilege the initiative of males and elders in directing the lives of others." (Joseph 1993:453)

I will use the concept of ‘patriarchal connectivity’ when analyzing the Kurdish folk dances. Instead of looking at the folk dances reflecting a corporative or collective nature of Kurds, I claim that the dances reflect their ‘patriarchal connectivity’.

Patriarchy in wedding ceremonies

To explain the structural function of traditional Kurdish weddings between two families is perhaps the best example for showing how Kurdish society is traditionally based on a patriarchal system. Fethi Karakeçili (currently PhD candidate in ethnomusicology) has described traditional Kurdish weddings in his MA thesis in Dance Studies, *Kurdish Dance Identity In Contemporary Turkey: The Examples of Delio and Galuc* (2008): First of all, in the traditional model or in rural areas, engagements are arranged by the mothers of the bride and groom. Even though the mothers act as go-betweens, it is the fathers who make the final decision. The celebrations last for three days; usually from Friday to Sunday. There can be up to thousand guests, as entire villages and out-of-town guests attend. Thus weddings are expensive affairs where all the members of the family are given responsibility. Alcohol is officially forbidden, and if a death occurs, the grieving family must give their permission in order for the wedding to take place (Karakeçili 2008). Otherwise the wedding is cancelled.

On Friday an animal is slaughtered and prepared in an outdoor open-fire kitchen. Four musicians are employed to accompany the dancers with the traditional instruments *davul* and *zurna*²³. The guests are expected to wear new outfits, and to participate in the dancing. According to Karakeçili (2008), *Simsimi, Delilo, Gowendi, Siviki, Duzo, Giraniye, Xwarkusta* and *Cepki* are the most common dances, and they are “combined gender, celebratory dances; they tend to have basic steps thus allowing everyone to become involved” (Karakeçili 2008:26). “The eldest member of the groom’s family is given a ‘security’ role to maintain proper decorum” (Karakeçili 2008:26).

On Saturday both families meet at the Henna Night, where the bride’s hands and feet are decorated with henna. It is held indoors at the bride’s family’s house, and only women can attend. Common women’s dances like *Lorke, Gowendejina, Delilo, Mim, Sirwaniyejina* – accompanied by handclapping and ululations²⁴ – are performed to cheer up the bride. The bride is expected to be sad because it is her last night with her family. There can be a parallel – but less festive – henna night for the groom, where strong sharp men’s dances like *Keşeo, Çaçani, Delilo, Çepik and Xwarzani* are performed. On Sunday the groom’s family brings the

²³ *Davul* is a traditional percussion instrument. *Zurna* is a traditional flute/wind instrument.

²⁴ Ululation is a vocal sound produced by emitting a loud high pitched voice accompanied with rapid tongue movements.

bride to the wedding. At several occasions the groom's family must ritually pay the bride and her family members in order to bring her with them. At this time the bride's family is expected to be grieving the loss of their daughter or sister. While the bride's grieving father is absent, the bride's brother or other close male relative is responsible of giving the bride to the jubilant family of the groom. After the couple has been bestowed with gifts, and the dinner has been served, the couple is wed by an Imam. At last the marriage is consummated (Karakeçili 2008).



Figure 5: Female friends and relatives walk around the bride and groom with the henna, before it is used to decorate their hands.

Joseph claims that males and elders in patriarchal societies “are likely to have more relationships in which they see and act toward others as extensions of themselves, rather than seeing themselves as extensions of others” (Joseph 1993:461) such as that “the patriarch sees his wife (wives), sisters, junior siblings, and children as extensions of himself” (Joseph 1993:461). Women and juniors are thus more likely to see themselves as extensions of their patriarchs, and hence take on the identity of their seniors. Karakeçili's description of traditional Kurdish wedding ceremonies shows how the bride takes on the identity of her father until she marries, and after the wedding she might be expected to choose to take on the identity of her husband instead. Insofar as the bride's father sees his daughter as an extension of himself, it is possible that her marrying will affect the sense of identity of her father (and thus also of the rest of the family). Undoubtedly the family's grief is also related to the future (physical) absence of their daughter. The importance of the proximity for individuals in connective relationships, as explained earlier, should be considering in efforts of understanding their grief. Below I will explain how the Kurdish dances express these relational structures.

Contemporary Urban Weddings

Kurdish wedding ceremonies – like all cultural forms – are always subject to change. Due to urbanization, political, cultural, and socio-economic changes, the urban weddings I attended had a different form than Kurdish weddings in the past or in some villages. Not only the dances, but also their settings, like the wedding ceremonies, are changing. Especially in urban areas wedding celebrations are modernized, and “singing, national colours and music have to be altered to meet the legal demands of Turkish society” (Karakeçili 2008:29). I never attended a traditional rural wedding as described by Karakeçili, but I have been shown videos and been told narratives that confirm Karakeçili’s descriptions. The following descriptions and analysis is built on my own participant of three henna nights and two engagement celebrations, and (a dozen) urban salon weddings in the cities of Diyarbakır, Elazığ, and Tunceli, supplemented with explanations and statements from my informants.

There are socio-economic reasons for the decline in practice of ‘traditional’ village weddings and the increase in urban salon wedding ceremonies. Because of the enormous expenses on providing all guests (usually many hundred) with food and drinks, and the hard work and effort needed to arrange the three long wedding celebrations, more and more families chose to celebrate their weddings in modern (urban) wedding salons. The salon company takes care of all arrangements; serving of snacks and cakes, music, place and decorations. Still the henna night is held at the home of the family of bride or/and groom. Urban weddings usually last for two days. The first day is the Henna Night, which can either be celebrated with the couple together at the bride’s family’s house, or separate. The Henna Night is usually smaller in scale, as only close friends and relatives participate. The following day, there is a wedding celebration held in a rented wedding salon. The wedding celebration can be held at any day of the week, and it is not uncommon that the actual wedding ceremony has taken place before the festivities. In today’s urban weddings, it is common for both families to join the wedding and participate in the dancing. In the weddings I attended, the invited guests started dancing before the arrival of the bride and groom. As the couple arrives, they enter the dance floor for a slow couple dance, surrounded by fireworks, confetti and friends and relatives video taping and taking pictures of them. This is a modern tradition, and the music accompanying this dance is often a slow Turkish pop song, as opposed to the traditional Kurdish songs accompanying the Kurdish (traditional) dances. In some weddings the bride and groom also dance the traditional Turkish dance *Çifte Telli*. The bride usually

wears a white bridal gown and the groom wears a dark suit²⁵, and they are seated on a separate table on a podium, separated from the wedding guests. Many of the modern elements incorporated, started in Western bourgeois families in Istanbul.

It is not uncommon that the bride refrains from dancing most of the time. This might be an expression of sadness, as the dancing is an expression of joy. But sometimes this is simply a result of exhaustion/weariness. It is still common for the bride and her (female) family members to weep at the end of the wedding when it is time for the groom to take the bride home. The groom however, does not easily escape the obligations of participating in the dances as he is often called by the *Çalgıcı*²⁶ to join family and friends in the dance. He is given great attention as he is often expected to perform solo dances.

Patriarchy expressed in dances

I now turn to the relationship between positioning of bodies and bodily movement in Kurdish weddings and gestures and postures correlated to status and patriarchy in daily life. I claim that the dance and positioning of bodies in wedding celebrations are structured by the system of patriarchal connectivity. The most obvious is the order of the participants in the line or circle. The most common is to see that senior men take the lead at the beginning of the chain. As in patriarchy, senior men take responsibility of their family members and make decisions. Following in line are younger men, women, and children at the end. Some of the dances are reserved for men, while others are for women. However, in weddings of today it is more common for men and women to mix. *Halay* for women is often played by males (usually young men) and also in company with females. It is less common to see girls doing solo dancing (*ortaya çıkmak*) or to participate in the men's *Amed/Diyarbakır Halay*. *Delilo* is unisex, and it is common for everyone to participate, together at the same time. Still there might be tendencies for men to hold hands with men and women with women.

Children

Below are two cases from different weddings;

(Case 1) In a salon wedding in Diyarbakir, I accepted a girl's hand when she wanted to join the game. Zeki told me that "you shouldn't hold children's hands". "Why", I asked, and he replied, "Because they ruin the game".

²⁵ Once I observed the groom wearing traditional clothing.

²⁶ *Çalgıcı* is Turkish for musician or instrumentalist. In this context it is the vocalist who also supervises and entertains the crowd

(Case 2) In a village *kına* I noticed some young boys running around “being naughty”. When they insisted on me taking a picture of them, I asked if they knew how to play dancing games, and why they did not participate. One of them answered that they could play, but that they were not allowed to participate.

I cannot verify the truth in this boy’s claim in Case 2 and I have observed various practices when it comes to dealing with children’s participation in dances. I’ve observed both that children have been invited to play (most of the times young girls), and also that they have been denied participation. Even if they might not always be invited to participate in the dancing, they are active playing and running errands for adults. Often I saw children at the end of the dance chain, holding hands but unable to do the correct steps. What does it have to do with the patriarchy of the dance? They have to learn how to behave properly, and are socialized through the dance.

“Heavy” and “Light” Men

Even though an individual has the sufficient skills to participate in the game, there are other criteria for when, where and how to participate in a socially accepted manner. I will look closer at the possibility for differences in expression of status and hierarchy being revealed in participation of dances, and if this is related to everyday postures and movements.

Zeki and I observed some men participating in the dancing game, *Diyarbakır Halay/Amed Govend* in his friend’s wedding. *Amed Govend* is a quick dance with advanced steps where the participators hands are interlocked tightly in a strong grip, shoulder to shoulder. Traditionally it is a game reserved for men, and the leading dancer (*baş*)²⁷ often steps out of the line to do a solo (*ortaya çıkmak*)²⁸. I noticed that one of the solo dancers played for a long time – until the music ended. Zeki commented that the man had danced longer than what was appropriate, “It is bad custom to dance so long. Look, the other men are bored. Men over 25 shouldn't dance solo unless they are special”. He explained that unless they know the bride or groom very well, older men should not dance solo.

The case above indicate that young individuals or persons of inferior status seem to be more active dancers than higher-status males, and there are differences in the ways in which men with different statuses are expected to participate in the dances. A dance teacher in one of the

²⁷ ‘*Baş*’ is Turkish for ‘head, leader, chief, beginning, and end’.

²⁸ ‘*Ortaya çıkmak*’ is a Turkish expression which means ‘to appear, come on the scene’.

Kurdish culture centers explained how respectable men should move while dancing the dances *Delilo* and *Halay*:

Ergin: *Keşe*; the figures same with *Delilo* but in *Keşe* are slow, because once they were lots of Kurdish tribes...Each tribe has a leader, *agha*²⁹, and when the *aghas* come together they play *Keşe*. As they are noble men they can't play like public (*halk*), they must play in a different style...They must show their nobility. When they play they must stand very straight and they play very slowly. This game is only for *aghas*, public can't play it. Now all the public play it, but they shouldn't. And also *aghas* while playing, they don't smile. They are very serious while playing. *Bariş* [peace]; after fight they make peace when, after two tribes make peace many *aghas* come together and make peace.³⁰

According to this dance teacher, an individual of high status – such as an *agah* – should express nobility and superior status through the dances; playing slowly with a straight posture. This description is not congruous with the solo dancing (*ortaya çıkmak*) I referred to in the case above; In *ortaya çıkmak* the performer leans forward with his arms held in front or above his head, waving a handkerchief, shaking his shoulders, walking on his toes with bent knees, and squatting quickly.

When asking for an explanation for why some individuals choose not to dance, I was once referred to the characterization of *ağır adamlar*³¹ (heavy men) and *hafif adamlar*³² (light men). “They are ashamed to dance because they have status in society,” the informant told me. I asked my friends to explain the concepts *ağır adamlar* and *hafif adamlar* for me, and this is what they said;

Zeki: *Ağır adamlar* are «heavy headed». It means someone who does not make jokes all the time. He is serious all the time.

Nezaket: Someone who knows to behave according to the circumstances...

Zeki: Proper place, proper behavior.

Mona: Is it a good thing?

Zeki: Yes. Sometimes they are boring, but they are better accepted than *hafif adamlar*.

Mona: Why?

Zeki: Why? Sometimes people are ashamed of them. If a woman's husband is *hafif* she can be ashamed sometimes, but no one is ashamed of an *ağır* man. Light people are very

²⁹ A title of honor, usually implying respect for age, in this case referring to a tribal leader; ““aga”: elder brother (an appellation that, as we shall see, reflects a distinctive Turkic kinship structure).”(Lindholm 2002:12)

³⁰ The dance teacher spoke in Turkish while my friend, Zeki, translated into English for me.

³¹ According to Turkishdictionary.net, an *ağır adam* is “1. man who acts slowly. 2. man who is slow to respond, lazy man. 3. serious-minded man.”

³² According to Turkishdictionary.net, “*Hafif*” means “light, mild, not heavy or strong, light. relaxed, at ease, free from trouble. slang penniless, broke. 2. to regard (someone, something) as unimportant.”

talkative and sometimes they talk nonsense. *Ağır* people don't talk too much; they talk when it's necessary.

Mona: And do *hafif* and *ağır adamlar* dance?

Zeki: Yes, but for sure *hafif adamlar* dance more.

Zeki: (while smiling) Actually I think I am *ağır adam*. I am perfect, I am something in between. I'm not boring, but... (Nezaket had characterized him as a *hafif adam*)

That my informant said that *ağır adamlar* are 'ashamed to dance' should be translated as that they avoid doing anything that they could be ashamed about, because they are concerned with their own social standing. *Ağır adamlar* are described as serious and respectable individuals that act slowly and controlled, and in my understanding, they are individuals that often have – or want to express – a relative high status and authority, and the ability to behave accordingly.



Figure 6: Two generations of solo dancers in a Kurdish wedding.

I believe that there is a 'social heaviness' to the *ağır adam*, since a central trait of their authority seems to be that they should not be moved easily, becoming the 'unmoved mover'. Thus they dance less frequently and with slower movements. On the other hand, *Hafif* (light) men or women have greater possibilities of creativity in the dance since they are 'easy movers'. Here I follow Jackson's claim about gives Kuranko initiation rituals: "...what is done with the body is the ground of what is thought and said. From an existential point of

view we could say that the bodily practices mediate a personal realisation of social values, an immediate grasp of general precepts as sensible truths.” (Jackson 1983:337)

Women

Gender is also a determining marker for how to dance in a socially accepted manner. First of all, it is not common to see girls or women dancing solo (*ortaya çıkmak*). However, there are regional differences and I observed girls doing solo in a *mahalle kınası* (henna night). In the last case, it was a more informal setting, and the guests and groom were engaged in Kurdish politics, where there is a tendency to promote gender equality. Women’s movements in ceremonial contexts have often to do with religious and political positioning. I have also been told that in earlier times, it was common for men and women to dance in separate places, but this claim has been refuted by others.

There are different ways for women to participate in the dancing. From my observation it has a lot to do with what they wear, which again may indicate something about their life styles. Women in high heels usually dance upright with small steps. If they have a more casual outfit like sneakers and jeans, they are more likely to take longer steps and bigger movements. It is more common for young women to wear casual outfits in henna nights, and as the setting is less formal, it is also more likely that they get more involved in the dances. Political and religious affiliations may influence the style of dancing as well as dress. Women from conservative religious families may be more likely to cover themselves, dance less and with less intensity.

“Hot” or “Cold” Connectivity

In *Language, State and Power in Iran* (1986), linguistic anthropologist William Beeman analyzes Iranian society by exploring arenas of “symbolic cultural contrast”; *hierarchy* and *equality*. When other perceives someone as having high status or being superior, there will be expectations put on this individual about dealing with behavior. One expectation has to do with separation and mobility;

Thus the person perceived to be superior is removed from other persons and not allowed to be as mobile as others. An ever-widening circle of greater and greater activity thus centers on the persons perceived as most superior by others in any social gathering, with the persons perceived as most inferior – often servants, young males, and woman – engaging in the greatest activity on behalf of the older, higher-status males. (Beeman 1986:52)

As for mobility in Kurdish weddings, high status individuals are most of the time seated at tables with either their families or male friends or relatives of similar status. In contrast, children are undoubtedly the individuals with most mobility; 'easy movers' who are often observed running around, sometimes being an annoyance because of "being in the way" of waiters and the dance participators. While Beeman gives examples showing how persons perceived to have superior status are physically separated by seating positions from the rest of the group in traditional Iranian wedding, I have not observed exactly similar practice in South-Eastern Turkey. The guests are normally welcomed by the parents of bride and groom, acquaintances of the bride's family are welcomed by family members of the bride and they are shown seats in one side of the room, while acquaintances of the groom is welcomed by the groom's family and shown seats on the other side of the room. The closer the relation to bride or groom, the closer one is expected to be seated to the podium or dance floor. Distant acquaintances keep their distance by being seated in the fringes of the room, and they might not stay for too long, or participate much in the dancing.

Instead of explaining the seating positions in Kurdish weddings from an understanding of status and hierarchy, I will return to the concept of 'connectivity': "Connectivity may be "cold" or "hot." Cold connectivity entails a pattern of distance and aloofness while hot connectivity entails greater proximity and communication" (Joseph 1993:461). To a certain extent it can also be possible to notice who have a close relation to the bride or groom, by observing attire and participation in the dances, although this also depend on socio-economic factors. Once I went to a wedding with my friend, Zeki, who explained to me that there is an obligation to dance if you are close acquaintances of the couple.

Mona: How many people do you think there is here?

Zeki: showed me 5 fingers, saying it was 500.

Mona: How many people do you think are dancing during the night?

Zeki: Almost half.

Mona: And the other half?

Zeki: They are either old or very religious... They are not so close to the bride and groom. If you are a close relative to the bride or groom you have to dance. Do you see those people? They are old. They can say that "we are tired, we want to sit," but we have to dance, we are young. If you don't dance they will ask, 'Why did you come? You have to dance!'

This last comment points again to the obligation to dance and open to social exchange.

Obligation to dance

Beeman (1986) argues that there are two types of social relationships which depend on obligations of mutual exchange; “status-differentiated” (*hierarchy*) and “status-undifferentiated” (*equality*) relationships. According to Beeman (1986:39), individuals in both types of relationships should provide actions, material goods, and encourage contribution of goods or actions from others to one’s alter in the relationship. During my fieldwork, similar ideals were disclosed in observations of my informants’ interactions, in my own interactions with my closest friends, and their explanations.

A Kurdish university student in Istanbul explained to me that it is normal for people in Turkey to ask for favors and tell each other that they will help each other, but a lot of the time they never do what they promise. The persons he considered to be his real friends, were his friends because he knew that if he asked them to do something for him, he knows that they will do it. He also told me that in Turkey things work like that. People are dependent on contacts to get ahead. Knowing people in many places is an advantage, he said.

This friend of mine clearly emphasized the importance of good friends helping each other, being dependable, and prioritizing socializing with them over other activities. According to Beeman (1986), the individuals in Iranian status-undifferentiated relationships are usually of the same age and perceive themselves as equals, similar, or intimate on the basis of shared feeling of cooperation and belonging arising from common life-experience. Beeman (1986:13) claims that the ideal situation in status-undifferentiated relationships is that the persons involved should unselfishly provide everything for each other. In status-differentiated relationships, persons in superior positions take part in exchange by doing favors, giving rewards and order others to contribute goods or actions. Persons of inferior status should reciprocate by providing services and tribute, and petition others to contribute goods or actions. It can be seen as a kind of *symbiosis*, where the part that takes the superior role is expected to take on the duties of *noblesse oblige*³³, and the part that takes the inferior role is expected to take on the duties of “*gratitude, submission, obedience, and respect*” (Beeman 1986:40). Beeman (1986:51-52) claims that, “The actual material, action or request could be identical in content...; what counts in social interaction is not what these activities *are*, but what they are conceived to be.”

³³ Dictionary.com defines *noblesse oblige* as “the moral obligation of those of high birth, powerful social position, etc., to act with honor, kindness, generosity, etc.”

Moreover, obligations in both kinds of relationships are absolute, the ultimate fulfillment coming from a willingness to enter into total self-sacrifice in meeting the needs of the other person. This is true of the superior, who must care for dependents, even if ruinations results; the inferior, who follows a leader in all respects, even to death, and the comrade, who gives all for the sake of an intimate companion. (Beeman 1986:13)

There is a moral obligation to dance in Kurdish weddings. Both individuals with and without established relationships can attend each other's weddings. However, the obligation to participate in the dances depends on three things: age and whether the 'connectivity' is "hot" or "cold"; and social status. The dances are to an extent reserved for them those with close relations to bride and/or groom. This is exemplified by that the *Çalgıcı* (singer and supervisor) often petitions the close relatives of the wedded couple to dance, and that solo dancing (*ortaya çıkmak*) is most commonly performed by close male relatives of all ages and young males with sufficient skills to entertain.

If we are talking about a status-differentiated relationship, there might be an obligation for both parties to attend, however, not within the same ethic pertaining to equal relationship. In status-undifferentiated relationships the obligation rest upon the perception that the relationship is funded on the basis of "intimacy, equality, and friendship" (Beeman 1986:61). In intimate status-differentiated relationships, the obligation rest upon the perception of the moral obligations inherent to the symbiosis/relationship; the superior's duties to show generosity and kindness (*noblesse oblige*), and inferior's duties to show gratitude and respect.

Beeman (1986:42) emphasizes that while intimacy between perceptual equals and intimacy between perceptual non equals are built on different ethics. The spiritual attraction between individuals in a status-undifferentiated relationship is built on an idea of fellowship in a common quest and where love is more important than social differences. In status-differentiated relationships, however, the ideal of spiritual attraction and merging is supposed to be just that – an ideal. Thus is it likely to conclude that a distance is necessary in order to maintain social differences and social organization. I believe that since intimacy is an ideal, it is not expected the same manifestations of intimacy in status-differentiated relationships as in status-undifferentiated relationships. This quote from Beeman might help to illustrate my point;

...in an Iranian office persons are not invited to socialize in the homes of subordinates, or decline if they are invited. One may accept an invitation from a superior, however, and is under pressure to socialize with one's equals on both an invitational and an informal basis. One who traffics with everyone or will accept any kind of accommodations is labeled colloquially *darviş*, likening him to the holy mendicants who traditionally operate outside the confines of the normal system of social relations. (Beeman 1986:41)

With this in mind, I believe that having high status individuals attending a wedding can be prestigious. An empirical example from my fieldwork may serve to illustrate my point;

My friend, Zeki, told me that this wedding would be a very good and interesting one, because bride and groom were ‘political’ and he knew that several highly esteemed politicians would attend the wedding. During the wedding, the arrival of the politician – belonging to the political party *Barış ve Demokrasi Partisi*³⁴ (BDP) was announced by the *çalgıcı* (singer and supervisor) that a the politician had arrived. Walking to his seat, he passed by our table and Zeki pointed him out for me, telling me who he was. According to Zeki, this politician also participated in the dancing. He did however not stay the whole night.

Because of the prestige/high social status of this individual, I believe that the attendance of the politician was perceived as a generous gesture. Many individuals would probably wish to have him at their wedding ceremonies, so I interpret his actual presence in this case as indicating that he has some kind of exchange relationship with the wedded couple or their family. An individual in his position cannot be expected to attend every ceremonial event he is invited to. Why high status individual chooses to socialize with affects his or hers reputation (as for all of us), so he/she cannot – or should not – accept any kind of invitation.

Not attending a ceremonial celebration can be interpreted as an act of expressing indifference or superiority. Such expressions of status (although not necessarily with this intention) are not always acknowledged by other individuals, hence the risk inherent in ‘social closure’ of being labeled as arrogant and uncaring. My informant Zeki talked about Kurds and Turks who want to be perceived as ‘civilized’. Zeki claims that these people do not dance folk dances, but prefer western dances like tango.

Status and portraying wealth and prestige in ceremonial contexts

Prestige can be portrayed in ceremonial contexts; Economical wealth, religious piety, political bravery, intellectual capacity, honor, generosity, having an important network of social connections, and knowing how to act appropriate according to situations and relative status. Wealth can be showed by having the wedding celebration in an exclusive salon, many singers, special musicians, expensive clothing etc. In addition to that the groom’s family pays for the wedding they also give gifts – usually gold – to the bride. Guests with a close relation to bride

³⁴ Peace and Democracy Party.

or groom, give gold or money to the couple. The amount differs according to how intimate the relation is, and the economical capital of the giver. In the weddings I attended in Elazığ and Tunceli (Dersim), the name of the givers, amount of money or gold was announced. In Diyarbakır weddings there were no such announcement, and everyone gave their gift when they preferred to (often before leaving the wedding). The wedding itself might be considered a gift. But most importantly – I believe – wedding ceremonies and other ceremonial contexts as are arenas for public display of relations and connections.

Türkü Barı an opposition of ceremonial contexts?

Once I asked my friends if there were other places to go and dance Kurdish folk dances I was told that there are bars or cafés – *türkü barı*, *türkü kafesi* – where traditional Turkish and Kurdish songs are performed and people can play folk dances. In contrast to the weddings, it is not a ceremonial context and status is not important in the same way. It is a context where friends can get together, or to meet new people and making new acquaintances, unsupervised by relatives. It is regarded as an inappropriate place to go by many people. This has to do with the use of alcohol and prostitutes which may occur, or even dating and unsupervised meetings across genders. It is not a place for children or old people, while weddings are for absolutely everyone. The *türkü bar* is not by everyone considered as “good taste”. Many of my friends claimed that they knew no one that went to these places and that they did not consider it good places to go. My guess is that the dances serve much of the same purpose as in wedding ceremonies – it strengthens ‘connectivity’. The difference is that we are here dealing with friends, not with family members. It is thus not reinforcing the ‘patriarchal connectivity’.

Elements of Egalitarianism

So far, I have focused on dance according to status and patriarchy. However, patriarchal hierarchy in the Middle East is often coupled with values of egalitarianism. This paradox is explained by anthropologist Charles Lindholm discusses in his book *The Islamic Middle East: tradition and change* (2002). Lindholm argues that “egalitarianism, competitive individualism, and the quest for personal autonomy” (Lindholm 2002:10) are central values, and that “moral equality is taken for granted as an essential human characteristic; rank is to be achieved by competition among equals, not awarded at birth to members of an aristocratic social stratum” (Lindholm 2002:11). When people conceptualize their understanding of the meaning of the Kurdish dances, they often refer to values of egalitarianism, and that in village

traditions the dances were used to when kin and neighbors got together and helped each other building houses or during harvest. I will return to questions of egalitarianism in the following chapters, but in relevance to the current chapter I wonder if it is possible to interpret the traditional Kurdish dances as a way of reintegrating bride and groom into the society with new statuses with an egalitarian twist: When the couple dance together it is a confirmation of their status as a married couple; when the groom dances with other men with equal status, his status as a mature married man – equal among other men – is confirmed; and when the bride dances with other women her status as a mature married woman her status as a married woman – equal among other woman her age – is confirmed. That the dances are confirming the participants' statuses and relations is not to say that the dances symbolize or are simply intentional representations of 'patriarchal connectivity', but rather that they are embedded in the bodies as part of the participants' habitus. However, as I will show in following chapters, certain values of egalitarianism connected to the dances seem to be more clearly conceptualized by my informants.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have begun exploring how participation in Kurdish dances in ceremonial 'in the field' contexts plays an important role in Kurdish sociality. The dances are in some senses grounded in structure of sociality and habitus. Along with being appreciated joyful activities, the ceremonial contexts – and especially wedding celebrations – can be seen as a public display of expressing relations and connections. I have tried to use the dances as an intake to an understanding of social persons and their surroundings (world construction), and to understand their identity connected to connective patriarchy and negotiations and expressions of statuses. I claim that the dances are ritualized forms of expressing social status (of kin, groom and bride, exchange of bonds through marriage). By analyzing the dances one can gain a certain level of understanding of how their orientation toward each other and toward the rest of the society includes an emphasis on openness to social exchange.

According to Jackson, bodily movements, music and dance say more than words because they “move us to participate in a world beyond our accustomed roles, and to recognize ourselves as members of a community, common body” Jackson (1983:338). The Kuranko case Jackson describes is a case of rupture of the habitus, as the women in the initiation ritual are acting like men. Jackson explains that “within the context of communal rites, music and movement often take the form of oppositional practices which eclipse speech

and nullify the divisions which dominate everyday life” (Jackson 1983:338). In the case of the Kurdish wedding celebrations, the bodily movement is not taking the form of oppositional practices, but rather serves to confirm the hierarchy of the patriarchy and strengthen normal behavior. Even though the Kurdish dances do not give the same opportunity for empathetic understanding as the Kuranko ritual, I believe that a different feeling of fellowship can be achieved through participation in the dances. This is because patriarchal connectivity entails not only hierarchy, but a notion of interrelated identities. Could the dance in fact contribute to connectivity by physically connecting bodies, and thus “experienced bodily before it is apprehended in the mind” (Jackson 1983:338)?

3

Kurdish Dance as National Symbols

Folk Dance as representation of national identities

The power of these performances does not lie in their specific content, but rather in their potential capacity to represent, describe, and embody the essentialized identities of millions of inhabitants of a specific nation-state in the course of an evening performance.(Shay 2002:227-228)

In order to understand the political importance of the Kurdish dances I will devote this chapter to Kurdish dances in the ‘presentational category’ (cf. Nahachewsky 1995:1) and their function as a political symbol, used in the efforts to create Kurdish national feelings. The different ways of relating to the dance needs to be seen in a context of the relationship of power between individuals, groups and state. With the westernization reform program that began with the formation of the Turkish Republic, leaving the Ottoman traditions behind, new symbols³⁵ were chosen to fit the image of the new modern nation (Öztürkmen 2001, 2003). Local folk dances from all over Turkey, including the South East, were among the traditions used for this purpose. There was a selective creation of a new Turkish high culture where folk traditions were mixed with ‘European’ artistic techniques. I briefly explain Turkish state’s assimilation policies and the Kurdish (cultural) revival. Today, many Kurds demand that these dances should be called *Kurdish*. I will not go into the question of validating either of these claims although I refer to the dances of the South East as *Kurdish*.

Understanding Turkish Nationalism and High Culture

In order to discuss Kurdish Nationalism and élites in Turkey, I will begin with an explanation of the founders of Turkish Nationalism and its roots. Until the Balkan Wars of 1912-1913, the Ottoman Empire possessed territories in the Balkan areas, and large parts of the Turkish élite were situated in these areas. In his article "Islam and Modernity in Turkey: Power, Tradition and Historicity in the European Provinces of the Muslim World" (2003), Brian Silverstein tries to move away from the notion of Turkey as a Middle Eastern country, set apart from

³⁵Symbols are, according to Abner Cohen (1974:23-24), “objects, acts, relationships or linguistic formations that stand *ambiguously* for a multiplicity of meanings, evoke emotions, and impel men to action.”

Europe. Instead Silverstein re-situates Turkey in the Balkans. There are several reasons why the re-situating of the Ottoman Empire in the Balkan and the loss of the Balkan areas had great impact on Turkish nationalism. Firstly, the leading officers of the Turkish nationalist resistance movement and founders of the Turkish Republic came mainly from the Balkan area, and the Turkish politicians and élite admired and sought after so-called “Western”³⁶ technologies and knowledge (Stokes 1992, Silverstein 2003).

This resituating of the Turkish present in a Balkan Islamic context aids in understanding the genealogy of late Ottoman and early Republican political elites and their rationalities; the structure and status of discourse and practice in Turkey; intellectual and social movements like religious revivalism and nationalism; and popular tastes, architecture, spatial sensibilities and lifestyles” (Silverstein 2003:504).

Understanding the background of Turkish élite of the beginning of the Republic is necessary in order to understand Turkish Orientalism and stigmatization of Kurds.

Secondly, fear of losing more territories made it more pressing than ever to catch up with the technological developments (of warfare) which the Empire had been struggling with since the 15th century. Thirdly, since nationalist ideas had effectively stimulated the subject populations in Balkans to rebel against the empire, it clearly demonstrated the necessity to take nationalist ideology seriously in order to prevent further losses. Nationalism was thus adopted as the Turkish Republic’s model of political sovereignty, and between 1915 and 1924 homogenization of the population was by far accomplished through exchanges of Muslim and Christian populations, expulsions, forced migrations, and pressure of assimilation on remaining minorities (Silverstein 2003). Islam became the main cultural marker to set the new national Turkish identity apart from European identity. While non-Muslim inhabitants were expelled or massacred, the Muslim Kurdish population, was included and expected to be assimilated in the Turkish nation. Kurdish or other non-Turkish identities were denied so that they would pose no threat to the Turkish identity and loyalty to the state (Shay 2002). Thus, in the nationalist state discourse any mentioning of ‘Kurds’, ‘Kurdish’ or ‘Kurdistan’ was taboo. Kurds were referred to as ‘Mountain Turks’, a group of Turks that had been isolated from other Turkish groups for so long that they had forgotten their culture and language. According to historians appointed by the state to write Turkish history, the so-called ‘Mountain Turks’ did not have their own language, but spoke a mixture of Turkish and Farsi (Bruinessen 1992; McDowall 2007).

³⁶ Silverstein (2003) adds that we should not simplify it as ‘Westernization’, since the Ottoman Empire and the Turkish Republic was, like many European states, pursuing technological advances from a few leading technological countries in Europe.

Ziya Gökalp and the Turkist Theory of Culture and Civilization

Ethnomusicologists Martin Stokes explains in his book *The Arabesk Debate* (Stokes 1992) that a modified version of the ideology Turkism³⁷, which prioritized the founding of the modern Turkish state, emerged after the Ottoman defeat and the rise of Mustafa Kemal. Instead of focusing on pan-Turkism and pan-Islamism, the new Turkism “stressed the affinity of the Turks of Anatolia with the Turks of Central and Eastern Asia and made much of the essential alienness of their Islamic cultural heritage” (Stokes 1992:24). Turkism is now generally used to describe Turkishness relating to the notion of a linguistic and ethnic group establishment of a secular nation-state with one predominantly linguistic and ethnic group which inhabits Turkey (Stokes 1992).

The formation of the modern Turkish Republic and its cultural revolution was heavily influenced by Turkists, and Mustafa Kemal was especially influenced by Ziya Gökalp’s writings in *The Principles of Turkism* of 1923. According to Gökalp, every society needs balance between its ‘Culture’ (*Hars*) and its ‘Civilization’ (*Medeniyet*) in order to be a strong and productive state. In Gökalp’s definition, Culture is the glue of nations, namely language and education, while Civilization is international, changeable, and “what we might describe as ‘high culture’, the artificial product of the individual will, consisting of theology, philosophy, science, and technology” (Stokes 1992:26). For Gökalp, the urban Ottoman élite, which used cultural symbols from a Middle Eastern and Islamized past, could be identified as the ‘civilization of Turkey’, while the Turkish peasantry of Anatolia, which was inspired by Central Asian origins, was to be identified as the ‘culture of Turkey’. In Gökalp’s opinion, the Turkish culture and civilization were not in balance because the Turks had surpassed the Arab civilization that Ottoman high culture rested upon. The pan-Islamic Ottoman cultural heritage represented, according to Stokes (1992:25), “a web of social relationships which had to be transformed on the road to a modern and secular nationalism” and “a web of superstition, magic, backwardness, and resistance to the possibility of change that had completely immobilized the Turkish people” (Stokes 1992:25). In order to reconcile Turkish culture and civilization, it was necessary for Turkish high culture to leave the Arabic civilization behind and look to the West (Stokes 1992).

To achieve this synchronization, a homogenization process was seen as necessary, and Mustafa Kemal started a cultural ‘revolution’. The cultural reforms were not about socio-economic structures, but focused on ideology, discourse, and the personal spaces of almost

³⁷ (Previous to the establishment of the republic,) Turkism referred to Turks of Turkey or speakers belonging to the Oghuz branch of the Turkic languages. The Turks of Central and Eastern Asia were defined as ‘Turanism’.

every socio-cultural aspect of people's lives: everything from language reforms, hat laws, to obligatory last names was implemented. Art forms, such as music and dance, were no exceptions to state interference. Since 1923, the Turkish state engineered and used folk dance, music, and costumes in the promotion of a unified Turkish identity. In the case of music, Gökalp' claimed that the 'irrational and morbid' music of the Ottoman élite and the 'natural' music of the rural population (*halk*) reflected the gap between culture and civilization. Hence a synthesis of 'western' musical techniques and Turkish rural folk music was needed in order to create a true, national Turkish music. Turkish folklore became influenced by nineteenth century European nationalism, and more recently by Eastern European and Middle Eastern nation-states (Stokes 1992). However, Stokes (1992:36) claims that the language and music reforms created new forms and representations which did not replace the old ones, but came to coexist with them. A genre of new 'classical' art music had been created.

Folk dances part of Construction of Turkish National Identity

“The picture of culture and society upon which Atatürk was acting was that of the Turkish body, from which the clothing of the pan-Islamic Ottoman cultural heritage could simply be removed, more or less at will, and replaced,” Stokes (1992:25) claims. To achieve such a thing, what could be more useful than dance? Anthony Shay (2002) has analyzed how national folk dance ensembles around the world “accrued valued symbolic and cultural capital for their respective nation-states” (Shay 2002:3) and he argues that “these companies are a reflection of the political and social realities and national discourses of the nation that is on display and fulfill a crucial role in a nation's strategies of representation”. (Shay 2002:225). In the case of Turkey, the folk dances have been used as representation of a bounded distinctive Turkish nation in an international 'multicultural' world where each nation is perceived as a distinct 'individual' with a distinctive 'culture' (cf. Handler 1986). In addition, the folk dances have also functioned as means of construction of an essentialized united Turkish national identity for all Turkish citizens (Shay 2002).

In the beginning of the 20th century researchers became interested in collecting traditional dances in Turkey, and researchers started to collect folk dances in Turkey for a research program for the revival of Central Asian and Anatolian cultural heritage after the establishment of the Turkish Republic in 1923 (Öztürkmen 2001). On the bases of being practiced by the rural Turkish population considered to represent the 'real' Turkish identity, traditional local dances from all over Turkey, including the South East, were among the traditions used in the efforts of forming a Turkish national identity. According to the Turkish

anthropologist Arzu Öztürkmen (2001:142), “Through the stylisation of the dances, costumes and musical accompaniment, the staged folk dance performances functioned as a modern display of the visual memory of the past. The public display of men and women, dancing together on stage, also reflected the secularist and modernist policies of the Republic's modernisation program.”

The Turkish state is funding folk dance activities; both amateur and professional. A national network of competing amateur ensembles – with first local then regional and finally national competitions – is organized by the Ministry of Culture. The winners get to travel abroad to represent Turkey in international competitions (Shay 2002:214). The selection is based on what is thought of as a best possible representation of the country and the nation, hence the state executes control and gives support to these dance ensembles (Shay 2002:215). According to Anthony Shay (2002:215) the folk dance competitions' official goal is to ensure that dance ensembles represent the nation appropriately. The same government policy is found in public educational institutions – from kindergartens to university education – and in non-formal educational institutions. Dance scholar Melissa Cefkin states that:

The State Folk Dance Ensemble, thus, embodies and enacts the disciplining agency of the state in many ways. For one, it acts as an official representative of the state when outside the country. Secondly, it operates through the promotion of training and competence, sanctioning its “professional” status and thus advancing Turkey's claims to being a fully modern nation-state. Moreover, it is based on homogenizing principles of organization in that the folk dances it represents are equally weighted in their ability to stand for Turkishness while at the same time it is only the ensemble of them that signifies the nation (Cefkin 1993:106-07 in Shay 2002:218)

Also the dances from the Kurdish areas became also part of this project, because Turkish *halk oyunları* (folk dances) are divided into regional categories. In the east of Turkey, the dances are known as *Yalli*, *Barlar* and *Halaylar*, and the dances of the South Eastern region are known as (*Doğu*) *Halaylar*. The dances are often referred to by the name of the town or region where it is perceived to have originated and/or is most often performed. In his thesis, *Kurdish Dance Identity In Contemporary Turkey: The Examples of Delio and Galuc* (2008), Fethi Karakeçili explains how not a single one of the many books on folk dances in Turkey mention Kurdish dances, but instead describes dances played by Kurds as Turkish dances. Karakeçili grew up learning Kurdish folk dances and found the same dances being taught at Universities with Turkish names and re-invented histories about their origin. Later, as a dance teacher himself, he was prohibited from categorizing dances he taught, performed or recorded as Kurdish. Most of the dance ensembles which represent Turkey abroad use dances from the South-East, but they are always labeled as “Turkish”. Because of the prohibitions on using

the Kurdish language – especially words containing letters which do not appear in the Turkish alphabet, like x, w, and q – Kurdish names for dances like *Gowend* is known as *Güvend*.



Figure 7: Kurdish folk dances performed with Turkish flags and a picture of Atatürk in the background.

Shay (2002) compares the Turkish National Folk Dance Ensemble to the national folk dance ensemble in Iran. In Iran they have what Shay calls ‘rainbow ethnicity’ where every dance is presented with information about from which ethnic group it belongs, though still belonging to the Iranian nation/nationality. In Turkey on the other hand, all the dances are meant to represent a united Turkish identity and no signs or mentioning of other ethnicities are allowed. This shows how representation is a kind of power, achieved either by inclusion and exclusion, or by negative presentation (Shay 2002:224-225).

Uneven Assimilation of Kurds in the Republic of Turkey

Eidheim claims in his anthropological discussion of the articulation of Sami and Norwegian ethnic dichotomy that “The organizational potential of ethnic identities is conditioned by local circumstances” (Eidheim 1994:56). When taking a closer look at Kurdish and Turkish identity in practice – not just according to state narratives – this becomes obvious. Thus it is necessary to take into account both national policies and local circumstances, and how national policies can be unevenly implemented. Despite the aim to assimilate the Kurds into the national Turkish ethnic identity, the state did in practice not put in a great effort to assimilate the Kurds during the first period of the Turkish Republic. First of all, the Turkish governments did not succeed in closing the economic gap between the eastern and western parts of Turkey. As the state focused first and foremost on developing the agrarian economy in the east, the result gap between the eastern and western citizens’ living standards and levels of education was

allowed to grow. Secondly, a distinction/bifurcation emerged between the rural and urban populations in the south east. While the reforms of the Turkish revolution interfered in most parts of the inhabitants of urban eastern cities and, there was to a large extent a continuation of the Ottoman State's policy of ruling rural peasants indirectly through Kurdish *aghas* and *shaiks* of the rural (south) eastern population (McDowall 2007).

Urban Kurds in the South Eastern Anatolia were assimilated and had begun to think of themselves as Turkish citizens. Rural Kurds did not assimilate, as the tribal system was allowed to maintain power over the poor peasant class. Thus a class separation and cultural separation developed between urban and rural Kurds was created. Most of the urban Kurds spoke Turkish, perceived themselves as Turks, adopted Turkish behavior and looked down on rural Kurds. Turkishness was perceived as a sign of modernism. However, when urban Kurds migrated to western Turkish cities, they were met with prejudice and stigmatization from the Turkish inhabitants.

In the 1950s there were no signs of Kurdish national agitation amongst the Kurds in south eastern Turkey. 80% of the population lived in rural areas, under the power of religious *shaiks* and *aghas*. The population was illiterate and unaware of nationalist ideas. Their identity was primarily based on their family, tribe and religion. Individuals from the *agha* class were often educated, and they were the binding link between the villagers and the outer world. Most of them had been exiled after the revolts in the 1920s and 1930s, but they kept their land titles, and many of them were allowed to move back to their villages since the political parties depended on co-operating with them in order to gain votes (McDowall 2007). Thus I agree with Garthwaite who claims that the analytical category "National minorities" "is reductionist and ignores the complexity of Middle Eastern society, where people identify themselves contextually" (Garthwaite 1993:133). This is true, as many Kurds do prefer to identify themselves rather as Turks, or out of religious affiliation, like for instance Alevi. Historical, social and cultural contexts need to be taken into consideration when discussing Kurdish identity.

Interaction revealing the conflicting ethnic boundaries

The few Kurdish migrants who settled in western cities from the 1930s to the 1950s could encounter the use of pejorative labels like the *kuyruklu Kürt* ('Kurd with a tail') (McDowall 2004), and perceptions of the south east as "a backward and exotic orient existing as a revealing anomaly in a Westernized and secular state" (Stokes 1992:8). Some students went to school in Turkish cities, where they were often met with mockery because of their supposedly

backward Kurdishness, and their fellow students would ask them “Where is your tail” (McDowall 2004). I join Saraçoğlu (2011:66) in his assumption that such derogatory labels were ways of mystifying and dehumanizing Kurds in an Orientalist manner. My assumption is that in the creation of a modern ‘westernized’ Turkish identity the dichotomizing from an imagined ‘oriental other’ was an element. The western Turks defined Kurds as oriental others, while urban Kurds defined the rural Kurds as oriental others. Both western Turks and urban Kurds were raised with an image of themselves as ‘modern Turks’, as opposed to ‘backward oriental others’. Their self-ascription, which was based on a paradigm of western modernity, depended on the boundary with an ‘other’, but they did not agree on who ‘the other’ was. Without interaction, these contradicting ethnic boundaries could persist.

The Kurds’ imagination of their selves living in a community with the rest of the population of Turkey, as full participants in the Turkish society, fell to pieces as soon as they interacted with western Turks. Through experience based on interaction they realized that many were forced to reconsider their ‘worldview’, as a new ‘ethnic boundary’ was uncovered. Their previous self-image and public image – as it had been in the south east – no longer fitted with the public image of the western urban population. For some, this meant reconsidering their identity, while for others it meant working extra hard to become accepted as Turks and not Kurds. My informant Zeki, who grew up in Diyarbakır, gave me a narrative about how urban Kurds would reconsider their self-perception after interacting with Turks in western cities, and about his own experiences:

Zeki: Most people, for example I had a lot of friends who lives in Diyarbakır, my high school friends, their families were very apolitical. They were afraid of politics. They didn't let them learn Kurdish. They say “Oh, don't think about PKK, just go to your school and be a good man.” But when you go to a Turkish city like Istanbul, we feel, we felt that we are different from that people. In Diyarbakır you watch TV and you can't understand the difference from our culture and their culture, but when you go to a Turkish city you see that they are very different from us, and they don't like us. I have witnessed hundreds of times: we meet someone and after a while they ask “Where are you from” and I say “I am from Diyarbakır” and they begin to talk about politics. Until you say “I'm from Diyarbakır,” they didn't talk about any politics, but now they say “PKK is a terrorist organization,” and I have to say “Yeah, it must be. Atatürk is a wonderful hero.” And then the Kurdish people who are not supporter of PKK or who are not supporting their own language recognize that Turkish people don't accept them. He is a kind of Negro, but he has no mirror. Until he goes to a Turkish city, he hasn't seen a mirror and he thinks that he is white. When he talks to the white people and the white people takes a mirror and say “You are a negro. Do you see yourself?”

However, many of the Kurds who migrated to the cities – mainly from the 1980s onward – came directly from the villages, with a clear image of themselves as Kurds. Many of them

were evicted from their villages, and the only reason for their eviction that they knew of was that they were Kurds. As many had no education and there were no jobs available for them, they had no way of integrating into the urban population already living there. They settled in *gecekondu*³⁸ (shantytowns), physically separated from the rest of the population. In the process, the Turks already living in the city made up a new experience-based opinion about what it meant to be Kurds – out of how they perceived the Kurdish migrants in their everyday interaction with them in public spaces like shops and on public transportation. Saraçoğlu (2011) defines this as ‘exclusive recognition’. The ‘exclusive recognition’ was according to Saraçoğlu (2011:67) different from the earlier Orientalist dehumanization of Kurds. Saraçoğlu, who did fieldwork in İzmir, explains these anti-Kurdish sentiments – where the Kurdish migrants were perceived as ‘ignorant and cultureless’, ‘benefit Scroungers’, ‘disrupters of urban life’, ‘invaders’, and ‘Separatists’ – as a result of *İzmirlis* interaction with the vast amount of migrants settled in separate *gecekondu* (shantytowns) (Saraçoğlu 2011:20-24).

Nascent Kurdish Nationalism (prior to the PKK)

The state had been largely successful in its assimilation politics when it came to urban Kurds. However, as long as the Turkish population did not accept this idea, the imagined nation was doomed to fail as soon as interaction between Kurds and Turks happened in the west. Through interaction with groups different from themselves – or at least perceiving themselves as different – a basis for a Kurdish nationalism was created. In discovering that they did not live up to the standards necessary to be a complete Turks, they instead started to dichotomize themselves from the Turks – claiming their own identity as Kurds instead of living as not full participants or ‘handicapped’ citizens in the Turkish society.

Also, the Kurdish migrants could now see how the state had neglected their region and their people. The standard of living was, and is, still much higher in the west. Industry and investments have all been made in the west, so when Kurds realized these differences, the road to revolutionary action was not far away. As the Kurdish migrants who settled in western cities from the 1930s to the 1950s encountered the use Orientalist attitudes and discovered the conflicting ethnic boundaries, many of them began to make reflection about their ethnic identity. At the same time some of them became familiar with nationalist ideas. There were several different Kurdish organizations, and most of them worked first and formerly to

³⁸ Shantytowns where the houses are built on illegal occupied state owned property.

improve elementary socio-cultural and socio-economic conditions in the south east. But in the 1970s separatist ideas began to assert themselves (McDowall 2004). McDowall (2004:404) claims that “the burgeoning national movement in the 1980s...was born by economic deprivation, social injustice and physical displacement as well as ideas of ethnic identity, all of which combined in the late 1970s to create the conditions for revolt.”

The Kurdish resistance and PKK

As indicated above, Kurdish migrants were the first to promote Kurdish national revival. One of these migrants was Abdullah Öcalan, the leader of the Marxist-Leninist organization *Partiya Karkari Kurdistan* (PKK – the Kurdistan Workers’ Party). As opposed to earlier nationalist movements, PKK recruited most of its supporters from the growing proletariat who were “filled with anger at the exploitation of both the rural and urban proletariat at the hands of *aghas*, merchants and the ruling establishment” (McDowall 2004:420). Fascists, state agents, the Turkish Left, and the Kurdish *gha* class were named the enemies of the PKK in 1977, and in 1984 the organization started to shoot landlords and attack Turkish forces (in the area). McDowall describes the ‘climate of fear’ which the PKK created:

It [the PKK] struck ruthlessly in the heartlands of conservatism in Kurdistan, and seemed to preach an irreligious creed of atheism and social revolution. It created great ambivalence among ordinary Kurds. Most feared it, some loathed it for it threatened their secure position within the system or within their traditional world view, others secretly (or not so secretly) admired its daring. These feelings, fear, loathing and admiration began to have serious impact during the years of 1987-99 when the PKK began to strike against those villagers armed by the state to resist its progress. (McDowall 2004:423)

³⁹In the 1980s and 1990s thousands of Kurdish villages were destroyed and millions of villagers forced to resettle in cities. This was done in order to hinder PKK guerrilla soldiers from receiving aid and shelter from the villagers, or because villagers would not join the village guard system to fight against the PKK. It was common for villagers to be tortured to confess their co-operation with the PKK. The prison of Diyarbakır was in 2008 listed by *The Times* among “The ten most notorious jails in the world” (Hines 2008), because of the frequency of torture and killings of prisoners. The brutal methods of the state contributed to the recruitment of PKK members, and the conflict made the Kurdish population more radical. By 1990 the growing civil resistance became apparent, when 10,000 Kurds showed their support for the PKK by attending the burials of guerilla ‘martyrs’ and protested against the

³⁹ “The Turkish military had already in 1980 put a harder pressure on Kurdish culture: in 1983 they officially prohibited all use of Kurdish in Law 2932, and Kurdish names and place names were replaced by Turkish names. Hence it became clear that the state was trying to obliterate all traces of Kurdish identity.” (McDowall 2004)

state (McDowall 2004).

Öcalan and the PKK diagnosed that the Kurds had no base of ethnic nationalism, but were instead ‘nationally emasculated’. The Kurds were according to Öcalan ‘degenerated’ and ‘debased’, which could be seen in two ways: The first was that Kurds “imitate the image and complexion of sovereign nations, for it is not ‘feasible’ to live as a Kurd” (Özcan 2006:154-155), and that “Kurds are limitlessly brave, resistant and pitiless against themselves and, in consequence, treason has ‘infiltrated the genes’ of the people to the extent that treason is *appreciated* in Kurdistan” (Özcan 2006:154-155). Hence it was the endeavor of the PKK to re-humanize the community by ridding the ‘Kurdish personality’ of *tribe* and *treason* (Özcan 2006:169).

Narratives about assimilation and Kurdish resistance

The PKK is by many of its supporters given the credit for that Kurds again taking pride in their Kurdish identity. It is not my endeavor to refute or confirm such claims. My intent is to give an account of these claims as they are relevant to my analysis of the social and political meaning and functions of Kurdish dances. Many of my informants claimed that even though the PKK spoke about the Kurds as ‘debased’, this did not mean that their ‘cultural contents’ were not valuable. My informant Zeki claimed that PKK complained about the Kurds not valuing their own culture, and thus they were weak. They needed to embrace a Kurdish national identity in order to stand up against their oppressors. Zeki explains:

Zeki: PKK forced people to be proud of their Kurdishness. They said that “You shouldn't look up to Turkish people. They are not superior to you. Yes, they have a lot of opportunities, but they are not superior to us. We are same. They are human beings and we are human beings. They have a rich language, but we also have a rich language. Instead of trying to imitate them it is better to be proud of your own language. You should insist on talking your own language. And first of all you have to show respect to your people. Villagers are your ancestors.” Until the 90s, PKK wasn't successful about this subject. Young people, especially girls were ashamed of their cultures. Still they were thinking that talking poor Turkish is a better quality, so they insisted on imitating Turkish people...And then, after the PKK became powerful they have a lot of sympathizers in the city centers.

Mona: In what time?

Zeki: Beginning of 90s, they were extremely powerful. There were some funerals where more than ten thousand people gathered together. Until that time it was an imaginative thing, because they were afraid of government. They would only say that “I am Kurdish” in hidden ways. But in the 90s they were very proud of the party. They thought that they should do it. After that time PKK began to force people to take care of their own language. When the PKK became very strong, people thought that they could protect them, so they trusted them and began to speak in Kurdish.

Most of my informants who supported the Kurdish movement, agreed with Zeki in giving PKK the credit for having restored Kurdish people's pride in their culture. During a conversation with two of the dance teachers in the non-governmental culture center in Diyarbakır, they explained to me the difficulties of working at the Kurdish culture centers in the past, and how the practice of dancing games has changed.

Dance Teacher: Because of this political and cultural starvation, Abdullah Öcalan and the PKK started their struggle to defend their culture. Some places the state arrested and tortured people for dancing. MKM/The Kurdish culture centers administered dance practice. Some of them were tortured and accused of being guerilla. *Çünkü kürt dansını yapmak bir politik düşünce* (Because the practicing of Kurdish dances is a politic thought). The state said that the dances were Turkish, and the problem arose when the dancers at the culture centers argued that they were in fact Kurdish. But the situation is much better now.

An old woman joined the conversation: Yes, the situation is better because of the guerillas. The guerilla brought the people together.

Promoting Kurdish culture

Presentations of Kurdish arts and language had been illegal until the late 1990s. Every reference to Kurdish culture was illegal; hence Kurdish culture centers were impossibilities. The Kurdish guerilla organization PKK started to encourage Kurds to embrace the Kurdish language and culture in the 1980s; there was a need for essentialization and standardization of Kurdish cultural elements in order to substantiate a cultural identity. The first pro-Kurdish Culture Center was established in Diyarbakır in the 1990s. The police closed down this culture center, but in 1991 the culture center *Navenda Çanda Mezopotamya*⁴⁰ was opened in Istanbul. In 2003 the culture center in Diyarbakır reopened, and has been open since then (Yücel 2009). One informant told me about the difficulties of working in the Istanbul culture center 15 years ago.

In a lecture he had held at the culture center he had criticized those who worked there now for being lazy, and that they had it easier now than before. After the lecture, he told me that when he worked for the Kurdish culture center in Istanbul in the 1990s the police would frequently interrogate them and take their books.

Promoting Kurdish art and music as 'Kurdish' would get people arrested; so many Kurdish artists fled to countries (mostly European) where they could express themselves freely.

40 Mesopotamia Culture Center. Turkish: *Mezopotamya Kültür Merkezi*

However, the Kurdish dances the exception. Since the dances were accepted as Turkish, they were allowed to dance them, however, the problem arose when someone claimed that they were Kurdish – and that is what the Kurdish culture centers did. Karakeçili (2008:39) claims that university graduates are misinformed about the real origin of many folk dances, which ought to be changed due to the importance of recognizing the meanings and histories of the dances. According to Karakeçili (2002:7), the dances “lack the context of their specific ethnic backgrounds. What becomes clear is that dance, however culturally specific, becomes standardized (regionally) under the banner of Turkish dance.” Karakeçili reifies Kurdish identity in his accusation of Turkish assimilation politics:

This is the tip of the cultural policy of assimilation. Most Kurdish dances have lost their unique identity because performances have been forbidden, especially if they feature original music, costumes or steps. They have been reconstructed and renamed as dances with Turkish identities by dance instructors or state conservatories. (Karakeçili 2008:1)

In his article, “Authenticity” Richard Handler (1986:2, 4) advises anthropologists to be critical of the concept of ‘authenticity’ since it deeply integrated into anthropological theory and in the self-conscious ethnic ideologies of the groups we study. Authenticity is a complex cultural idea from the modern western word, and it says more about our own notions about the individual than about others. Handler addresses the connections between the western ideas about the individual, culture, sincerity, authenticity and ‘possessive individualism’, and in this view both individuals and cultures are perceived as discrete, bounded unique units. Handler (1986:3) claims that it is characteristic for modern people to worry about existence and reality, and he draws a parallel to national and ethnic groups that fight for recognitions, national sovereignty or rights. All rhetoric that seeks to prove the existence of a delimited/bounded and distinctive nation will, according to Handler (1986:3-4), continue to define what cultural and historical substance a national existence rests upon, and use socio-historical facts as proof of national existence. At last Handler (1986:4) claims that authenticity is a function of ‘possessive individualism’ – a variant of modern ideology that says that recognizing an individual’s existence is dependent of its possession of private property. In the ideology of possessive individualism the existence of national collectivity dependent of possession of an authentic culture, and an authentic culture is a culture that is original for its owners, and exists only with them; hence an independent of existent unities that assert itself against all other cultures.

Since the end of the 1980s there has been a gradual shift in the attitudes of Turkish governments towards the ‘Kurdish question’. Because the aspirations to make Turkey a part

of the European Union, and criticisms from journalists, lawyers, and politicians, Turkish authorities has gradually started to admit the existence of a ‘Kurdish problem’ (Bruinessen 1992). Still, until recent years, there were few changes that in practice improved the political and cultural rights of the Kurds. There have been improvements in the sphere of the cultural rights in the recent years and pro-Kurdish politicians have entered the parliament and municipalities. Today, most of the municipalities and metropolitan municipalities in the south eastern Turkey are governed by politicians from the pro-Kurdish party *Bariş ve Demokrasi Partisi* (Peace and Democracy Party) BDP. Although many of the politicians of BDP are getting prosecuted, imprisoned for accusations of supporting or/and making propaganda for an illegal terrorist organization (the PKK), they use their positions as ‘activists in office’ to promote Kurdish culture as part of their ‘symbolic politics’ to accrue cultural and symbolic capital for their ‘possessive individualism’. There have been great efforts to improve the situations for the Kurdish population and a will to invest in Kurdish culture and arts. Clemence Scalbert-Yücel, who holds a Ph.D. in geopolitics, writes in her article “The Invention of a Tradition: Diyarbakır’s Dengebêj Project” (2009) that art of their project is to promote Kurdish culture through festivals and municipality culture centers.

The declared aim of these festivals is to promote democracy and fraternity between people; art and culture are described as the main tools to develop mutual acquaintance and democratization. These festivals appeared as a place of promotion of multiculturalism and of rediscovery of the ancestral multiculturalism of the region. This rhetoric of multiculturalism, today legitimized by the EU and UNESCO, gives high visibility to local cultures, and mainly Kurdish culture. (Yücel 2009:10).

Claims about Kurdish authentic past

There are examples of dancing games being used to substantiate claims about progressive Kurdish culture in the past and the Kurdish politicians use cultural symbols to promote their cause. During my field work there was a conference called “1st Kurdish Culture – Art and Literature Conference” arranged by The Congress of Democratic Society, Diyarbakir Metropolitan Municipality and Mesopotamia Culture Centres. Below is an extract from the invitations:

⁴¹On the 11th and 12th of December in Amed, the 1st Kurdish Culture – Art and Literature Conference will be held. That will be a first in the history of our nation that historical sources of Kurdish culture, its current condition and future perspectives will be argued by Kurdish artists, intellectuals and authors at a national level. As the 1st Kurdish Culture – Art and Literature Conference will be an important historical step for Kurds; it also will be a moral, conscious and political responsibility for Middle Eastern Nations and General Humanity. Surely such a conference will have a big contribution to the struggle of our nations to reach human values and freedom.

⁴¹ This is the English translation of the invitation , translated by one of my informants, who e-mailed it to me.

The main aim of this conference is to protect and develop our material and moral cultural values which are created with great efforts during a period of thousands of years by our nation and bring them into the future. Cultural values express existence, life and freedom to every person and nation. For thousands of years our nation, depending on its own rich cultural values in Kurdistan lands, has been in resistance and maintained its existence and by insisting on obtaining its independence has never accepted slavery. The Kurdish Nation, as being one of the nations that completed its own Neolithic agriculture and village revolutions, has had great contributions to the improvement of holy cultural values of humanity such as democracy and independence cultures. In the lands of Mesopotamia, known as the cradle of humanity, main values of socialization has been created by Kurdish Nation. One of the basic features of socialization, the language revolution has been developed here and Kurdish Language has the quality of being one of the ancient languages. Building up the villages which were the first social life areas and developing the agricultural culture, the Kurds has created a productive and living culture which was one of basic qualities of life. All these features composed a strong life style and identity. Kurdish people; with their language, identity, life style, belief system and historical geography, have been the carrier of communal culture and also in our time they have the claim of being the dynamic power of democratic civilization.

Throughout the history ignoring the great contributions of Kurdish people to humanity, sovereign powers continually have been in a position of attacking the Kurdish cultural values. Kurdistan, as a basic civilization and life area, has testified the wars all the time.

(...)

The main target of 1st Kurdish Culture – Art and Literature Conference is to reinforce the cooperation and sharing among the Kurds by making national cultural discussions those strengths the democratic national unity. We can only overcome with cultural, spiritual and the unity that we will create from our public values, the realities of the Kurds and Kurdistan which have been tried to be divided, separated to borders, forced to live far away from each other throughout the history. The Kurds have to provide this national spirit and unity. Now there are the conditions of this for the Kurds and historical, social flow and developments force it. The Kurdish artists, intellectuals and authors are staying on the borders of four different countries and forced to live in different parts of the world in exile. Their gathering with sense of democratic conscience and spirit will not only cheer up our nation but also it will be the basic effort and labour of developing the national unity. This conference will be a very important step for historical and social future of the Kurds.

According to the invitation, the aim of the conference was to protect and develop cultural and material values which they claim have been created by their 'nation' over a period of several thousand years. Furthermore, they claim that Kurds in Mesopotamia has contributed to universal values like democracy, and are responsible for originary civilization. With it comes a demand for a place for the Kurds in human evolutionary history. I understand the conference as an invitation for Kurdish artists to contribute to strengthen what they call 'the democratic national unity' and overcome the imposed division of Kurds by creating a unity based on folk culture. The invitation hints to a Kurdish unity that may never have existed politically or cultural (it did as a group of related languages, and customs, but there were tribal and feudal structures that were not unified at all). It is also worth pointing out that their claim to a

Kurdish historical continuity goes back to pre-Islamic and pre-Kurdish times. This has probably relevance with the necessity to create a distance from Turkish culture, and the need to find a historical past that is suitable with ideal values of today's modern society. This can be compared with how Greek folklorists – according to Herzfeld (1982:5) – constructed a cultural continuity suitable to the ideas of an ancient “Hellas” as a “symbol of cultural superiority” (Herzfeld 1982:5).

Claims of Kurdish culture as egalitarian

Many of my informants used the dances as proofs of how Kurdish culture has a history in line with modern ideals of egalitarianism and democracy. The notion of equality is seen in the way my informants talk about Kurdish dances. Everyone is included in the dancing, children, elders, men and women. My informants often use the dances as examples of Kurdish culture is more collective, egalitarian, and have more gender equality than in any other Middle Eastern culture. Especially socialist informants would emphasize this point. Fethi Karakeçili describes the dance as democratic in his master thesis in Dance Studies.

The simplicity of the dance democratizes it – everyone, no matter what his or her dance skills may be, can perform it. Joining the circle is simple; however participants cannot join at the ends of the line as these places are ‘reserved’ for the leaders. When singing, men and women call and respond in an almost competitive way. The origins of the dance have become lost over time, but at its heart Delilo is a welcoming dance. Most often it is performed at weddings, which are large community gatherings. The steps of the dance – three steps forward, three steps back – represent someone stepping forward to welcome an outsider and then stepping back to invite them in. Even the positioning of the new dancers, always between two other dancers, never on the ends, seems to be a metaphor for this welcoming. Also the dance is a way for young men and women to meet in a conservative society. Despite the great numbers of people dancing, lovers will chastely flirt with each other across and within the circle. (Karakeçili 2008:88).

Karakeçili also uses dance as evidence in his argument of gender equality: “There is a long history of gender equality and representation, which is mirrored in the number of mixed gender dances” (Karakeçili 2008:23). One of the dance teachers at a Kurdish culture center used the dances as examples of how women had more authority in the past:

Mahir: In the Mesopotamian time the women were more importance than today. The dances show this. In war dances it is often one bad side and one good side. This is shown by the different costumes, where one of the part's costumes is uglier or has different colors on their head garments. Black is the bad side and white is the good, and in Kurdistan it was the women who in some dances stopped the fighting by taking off her shawl and throwing it on the ground.

Mona: Why did the women do this?

Mahir: Because the women's *namus*⁴² is more important than everything else. The shawl of the women is pure and white. That is how important the woman is. She is like the motherland and the earth; she is the one that gives life – birth. (*Kürtlerde kadınlar bir ülke toprak*)

A different dance teacher, who gave me private lessons, gave the same explanation and claimed that women had a lot more authority and power in Kurdish culture before Islam. That some people choose to emphasize the sameness, and claim that Kurdish men and women dancing together is a proof that they have more gender equality than other Muslim societies, is a modernist perspective, legitimated as expressing values in like with modern egalitarianism; that Kurds are more authentically modern than for instance Turks or other Muslims. It appears that this is hence a claim that folk culture is genuinely of more European “civilized” type (mirroring the Turkish cultural nation-building).

Conclusion

Kurdish folk dances, like music, are part of the discourse of Kurdish nationalism as ‘central cultural expressions’ used to emphasize an own distinct cultural heritage, separate from Turkish culture. The actors connected to the centers promoted preservation, development and elevation of the status of their cultural heritage through research, teaching and performances. As opposed to Kurdish music, which is perceived as qualitatively different from Turkish music, the Kurdish folk dances were absorbed into the spectrum of Turkish regional folk dances. The Kurdish movement are claiming cultural ‘property rights’ on the dances of the South-Eastern regions to be recognized as Kurdish, as opposed to Turkish. Although the Kurdish dances have been absorbed into the official reforms of the Turkish revolution, they are today also used by the Kurds as a symbol of Kurdish nationalism and in social protest. I will go further into these claims in chapter 4 and 5.

With the political struggle, the dances have gained a new meaning. They can function as symbol – expressing the ‘true’, original culture and society of the Kurds, as well as encapsulating the Kurdish struggle against Turkish government’s assimilation processes and the ‘denial’ and ‘theft’ of their culture.

⁴² ‘Sexual honor’

4

Teaching Kurdish ‘Presentational’ Dances:

Empersonment and hierarchies of taste

How is an nchimi’s dancing different from mine? The answer is obvious, for we are worlds apart. More importantly, from a Tumbuka viewpoint, how is the dancing of a healer different from the dancing of ordinary Tumbuka who are afflicted by the vimbuza spirits? (Friedson 1996:28)

This chapter deals with different ways of teaching Kurdish presentational dances in Kurdish culture centers. In this way I explore how promotion of Kurdish ‘culture’ takes form in practice. Students learn the dances by taking classes in educational institutions like public or private educational institutions⁴³ or culture centers. During my fieldwork I did participant observation in four different Kurdish culture centers in Turkey; one in Istanbul and three in Diyarbakır. The way of learning and teaching the dances are qualitatively different from how they are learned and taught in other contexts in Kurdish society. In this part of my analysis I examine how the Kurdish culture centers work to preserve and fixate Kurdish dances, whether they incorporate ‘high culture’ elements to the dances, and whether they are succeeding in elevating the status of their cultural heritage through research, teaching and performances. I also explore organizational differences between non-governmental culture centers and culture centers run by pro-Kurdish elected officials. The pro-Kurdish municipality culture center focuses on professionalizing the education, while the non-governmental culture center focuses more on making the dancers represent and embody an ideal Kurdish identity. Kurdish folk dancers should possess knowledge about the dances and their culture, and also live their lives as moral role models. Finally I will discuss differences in how people perceive and judge the dances, stemming from class, assimilation, and ideas of civilization and degeneration. Questions of class, modernity and orientalism will also be taken into consideration, as these affect the ways people evaluate and conceptualize the dances.

From rural to urban contexts: From field to stage

Arzu Öztürkmen (2001) writes that in the beginning when the dances were performed in *halk*

⁴³ *dershane*

*evleri*⁴⁴, people performed their own local dances. When the folk dance activities became an urban phenomenon, their relationship to the original setting of the dances was more or less erased. According to Öztürkmen (2001:141), the urban dancers did not know the referential meanings of the dances. Rather, they made their own interpretations of the movements, and as the dances were adjusted to the urban middle classes they were systematically refined, so that choreographed ‘floor patterns’ were more important than the aesthetic regional differences in the dances. The costumes became uniform, as opposed to the varied composition of clothes and clothing styles of participants in events where folk dances are performed ‘in the field’. This process can be seen as part of a ‘civilizing’ policy, as in the field of music, mentioned in chapter 3. Professional folklorists hold high status in society, and an indication of this is that the dancers in the Turkish State Folk Dance Ensemble (*Devlet Halk Dansları Topluluğu*) receives the same salary and benefits as state ballet dancers. Another indication is that the Turkish National Folk Dance Ensemble’s performances are popular among the Turkish population, and their performances are not regarded as suitable for tourists only (Shay 2002).

In 1982 a department of Folk Dance was added to the Turkish State Music Conservatory at Istanbul Technical University, with the purpose of researching and archiving folk dance in Turkey. The students in the four-year program are taught a wide scope of folk dances, music and costuming, which they will use when leading national dance programs (Karakeçili 2008:2). At least fifty groups get to represent Turkey abroad each year, sponsored by the government or Ministry of Culture. This is for many person their only opportunity to travel abroad (Karakeçili 2008). According to Shay (2002:214), most people do not associate folk dances with anything political, but rather see it as a healthy social activity for Turkish youth⁴⁵. It is one of few social activities where it is accepted that boys and girls interact (Shay 2002:214).

Non-Governmental Kurdish Culture Centers

The non-governmental Kurdish culture center in Diyarbakır, where I did my fieldwork, is run on a voluntary basis. The income from the café and performances held in concerts and at weddings goes to cover the cost of electricity, equipment, and maintenance. It is situated in

44 People’s houses

45“For Young Turks like Tarcan and Rıza Tevfik, interest in the study of folk dance was accompanied by study of the human body, focusing on the body as an expression of "health" and "strength" as well as a way to build a "healthy nation." Other writers also published articles and books on the issues of dance and sports. Among them, one should mention Mehmet Fetgeri Şuenu, who wanted to teach Ottoman women how to exercise to keep a healthy body (Fig. 7).¹⁶ In the Young Turk ideology, women's emancipation and education had a central place in promoting the idea of a strong and healthy nation” Öztürkmen, A. (2003).

the middle of the old town of Diyarbakır. There is a small library with a collection of books on Kurdish culture, a dancing room with mirrors, offices for administration, and a traditionally decorated room for special occasions. The culture center is an important arena for Kurdish artists, both as a social arena and as a rehearsing space. The center gives classes in folk dances for children and for the center's dance group. Classes are also given in a variety of musical instruments, choir and for the culture center's youth musical group. Both children and adults can take classes. Some of the teachers are educated at university conservatories while others are self taught. What are the goals of the dance teachers in the Kurdish culture centers I visited, and how do they teach the dances?

'Empersonment': learning to become a Kurdish folk dancer

I went to the culture center almost every weekend as these were the days when the dance classes were given to the children. A few times I observed classes for the youth music group and in the center's cafeteria and 'backyard' I observed social interaction, and socialized with people. Both people who were active and people who were not active in 'cultural activities' spent time in the café area. Often there were individuals playing instruments, while a group sat around listening and watching. I did not understand the reason for this, as I assumed they were just admiring the person's musical abilities and enjoying listening to the music. After reading anthropologist Rebecca Bryant's article "The soul danced into the body: Nation and improvisation in Istanbul" (2005), it became clear to me that what I had observed was more likely a way of learning and teaching music. As individuals observed the player, they absorbed knowledge in order to learn how to play themselves.

I borrow the concept 'empersonment' from Bryant, who examines the apprenticeship⁴⁶ of traditional musical instruments in Turkey. Bryant (2005:223) argues that the apprentices learned not only to play the *saz*⁴⁷, but also to become a specific type of person through a process which she calls 'empersonment'; "a process that is realized through a discipline by which one consciously and consistently imprints a practice on the body" (Bryant 2005:223). Bryant prefers 'empersonment' over 'embodiment' because it is not a matter of unconscious learning, but rather of "a technique of learning that entails a self-conscious molding of the self" (Bryant 2005:224). This process molds the selves into emblems of national tradition and how to become a good Turk, Bryant (2005:224) claims. I claim that dance teachers of the

46 "Apprenticeship, as I use the term here, is that technique that teaches one how to become the type of person who can do X. Someone who is apprenticed as a carpenter does not simply learn the skills of carpentry; he or she learns how to become a carpenter, that is, how to become the type of person who is good at carpentry" (Bryant 2005:224).

47 The *saz* is a traditional string instrument similar to the lute. In Turkish it is often called *Bağlama*.

independent Kurdish culture centers also use ‘empersonment’ in their teaching of their students to become good Kurds.

With the help of a friend who translated, I interviewed Ergin, one of the dance teachers at the culture center:

Mona: In your opinion, what is the most important thing to know about folk dance?

Translation of Ergin’s answer: First of all it is not easy to be a folk dancer. First of all, if you say that “I am a folklore dancer,” you have to have good moral, cultural background, and then you have to be a noble man. You have to know about your culture, your tradition. If you combine all these qualities you see a representative of a nation; must have all the qualities of this nation in him. Most of the time it is a folk dancer, [he] must give help to his population. After this, after you create this personality it is time for clothes and music union with personality. And also if you can't feel yourself as a part of a nation you can't be a folk dancer, a real folk dancer. He means that it is not just playing. He must have soul. He says if you want to be a successful dancer you must feel the grief, the happiness, sadness, all the feelings. If you don't, you will be a puppet. Now we have seen major games, plays [dances] and all of them have different aspects. None of the dancers can be seen as individual, they are part of a team. They are a team and they are responsible to their team. They have to act according to the team and also they are responsible to the team and the audience.

According to Ergin, there is a moral responsibility⁴⁸ on the part of the folk dancer. It is not just a question of dance technique, but of creating a personality of a particular type of Kurd who possesses the right kind of (cultural) knowledge and feelings. It is a specific kind of symbolic capital⁴⁹. Anyone able to master the techniques of the dance can function as a symbol or an iconic figure of Kurdish identity, but ‘being’ a Kurdish folk dancer needs apprenticeship. According to Ergin, it is not simply a question of knowing how to dance, but a question of knowing how to become a type of person that dances Kurdish dance.

Learning and teaching – children’s classes

Ergin taught classes for children, and I observed his classes throughout my fieldwork. The classes were held in the culture center’s dance room Saturday and Sunday mornings, usually from 10-12 a.m. Although I took notes while observing the lessons, the children did not seem to be affected by my presence in the classes. There were often parents, siblings or others watching the rehearsals as well. The children were aged between 8 and 12. There were both girls and boys, but the majority was girls. The dance they were learning was the

48 This is similar to ‘the Turkish teacher’ in Turkish discourse, where the Turkish teacher is a pedagogic role model through all of his or hers person.

49 “...the accumulation of economic capital merges with the accumulation of symbolic capital, that is, with the acquisition of a reputation for competence and an image of respectability and honourability that are easily converted into political positions as a local or national *notable*” (Bourdieu 1989:291).

Amed/Diyarbakır Halay,⁵⁰ which is originally a men's dance. Both girls and boys played it, however, and (for aesthetic reasons) height seemed to be more important than gender. As opposed to Bryant's (2005:225) observations about Turkish 'empersonment' when learning to play the saz, I did not notice that such apprenticeship was gendered. Women and men, girls and boys played traditional instruments and danced folk dances. This might have to do with the fact that the PKK puts a strong emphasis on gender equality, and that the Kurdish movement in general is promoting positive images of Kurdish female artists. I will return to this in chapter 5.

As with Bryant learning to play *saz*, and the 'students' in the culture center learning instruments in the cafeteria, observation seemed to be a pedagogical principle. There were always two groups of students; one that watched the other group practice. I was told that when these children are good at dancing they are moved up to the other group. I also noticed that the students themselves were frequently instructing, correcting and teaching their classmates – sometimes at their own initiative, and other times when being told to do so by the dance teacher. If Ergin was not present, the children often practiced by themselves. It seemed like Ergin expected them to take responsibility for their own and each other's learning, because if he came in while they were not practicing he would make complaints about it. At the end of almost all classes, the teacher would gather the children to sit in a ring on the floor, and have them sing songs. He also gave them educational talks about the meanings of the dances or moral lectures.

Ergin asked the children "why do you go to school? Is it allowed to make noise in class?" "No," the children replied. "Why do they come to the dance classes? Here we work, we should not talk or read books," Ergin said and went on talking about what the parents do what they can so that they can grow up to be good adults. "When they punish you, when they pay for your classes (*dershane*), everything is for your own good. So then what if the children don't pay attention in class?"

On a different occasion, Ergin used the end of the class to talk about what it meant to be a team:

The teacher asked the children if they knew what a team was. He explained: "if you let go of each other's hands, you ruin the game when you do. *Halay'da tam barış var*. (There is complete peace in *Halay*.)"

50 This version played by folk dance ensembles is a mixture of different dances put together in a specific order.

Regarding the choreography and performance of the dances, the synchronizing of the movement was important to enhance the image of them as being one united group and not many separate individuals. From my observations, it seems like the teacher Ergin took his responsibility to teach not only the dance techniques, but he also used the classes as an opportunity to contribute to the children's (moral) cultivation⁵¹ and 'empersonment' necessary for them to create the personality of a Kurdish folk dancer – and by extension, a Kurdish person.

The culture center's dance ensemble and its performances

I also did participant observation in classes given to the center's adult dance ensemble. I was told that in total there were 50 students, but in the classes there would be far less individuals present. There were at least three different dance instructors. My impression of the dance education given to the members of the dance ensemble – compared with the children's classes – is that there was a stronger emphasis on the precision of the performance. The dance is taken out of its original context, it is dissected and taken apart – each part taught meticulously with a focus on choreography and synchronization of movement. Like in 'Western' art dance teaching, the movements are stripped down to clean presentable movements before they are put back together to a whole choreography, and then there has to be added and also rehearsed a level of immersion. The impersonal technicality has to be covered by a reintroduction of emoting feelings to the movements.

The culture center's folk dance ensemble gives performances in concerts, weddings or other public events. When performing, they wear traditional uniform costumes and are usually accompanied by the traditional instruments, *Zurna* and *Davul*. The culture center's dance ensemble have travelled abroad to perform on several occasions. I observed a few rehearsals for a selected group that was going abroad to perform. Of the eight that went abroad there were four men and four women, and all but three were dance teachers.

I went to attend a rehearsal and found some of the group members sitting on a bench outside waiting. Two of them were talking about their experiences on the performance tour to Iraq. They had had a great trip, and one of the girls said she had spoken Kurdish almost the whole time, hence her Kurdish had improved. The impression she gave was that it was better to be Kurdish in Iraqi Kurdistan [because they get to speak Kurdish and practice

51 Cultivation is here used in the sense of the German concept *bildung*, and the Norwegian concept *dannelsse*. Kjetil: out of context. Parallell to Turkish modern education.

their culture freely], but all the signs of the war had also left an impression on her. When she was talking, the dance teacher Mahir came and told us that the concert they were going to hold was cancelled because they had not been able to rent the concert hall from the Diyarbakır provincial directorate of youth and sport⁵². One of the girls explained to me that this was a sports arena which the state owns, and they had not been allowed to rent it because “they don’t like our culture”.

I was told that the culture centers are used to state interference in their performances. Either they are denied access to performance venues – as the case above exemplifies – or they are denied permission to perform publicly. They might also interfere in performances already granted access, by sending the police to supervise and sometimes provoke fighting. On some occasions the police interfere in performances where the dancers from these culture centers perform, and where dancers from this culture center also perform in political meetings, to show their support and to encourage the crowd.

This private voluntary culture center uses artistic performances to support political causes and give support to politicians and political parties – mainly the pro-Kurdish party BDP. On one occasion during my field work, the dance group and a music group from the culture center performed at a concert held by and for support of the BDP youth organization.

On our way to the concert with two of my informants, Çeko and Kibar, my friend Zeki called me and said that maybe there was no point in coming. He said that there was a lot of police, so they did not want to go inside. As we arrived, we could see a large armored police/riot vehicle, and outside the concert hall entrance stood about 40 shielded police officers. Zeki and his friends did not want to go inside, but, Çeko, Kibar and I decided to attend the concert. There were several musical groups and bands, as well as the Kurdish culture center’s dance group also had a performance. Before the show started someone took down a Kurdish flag that was hanging on the wall behind the stage. The first performance was given by eight of the culture center’s dance group’s boys. Wearing traditional identical costumes, they performed *Diyarbakır Halay* accompanied by two musicians playing *zurna* and *davul*. Kibar, who also is a dance teacher, thought they did a good performance, but she prefers it when there are men and women together, because it looks better that way. After the dance group’s performance, musical groups started to play, and the audience started to dance. The audience consisted mainly of young adults, and the attire was informal. Kibar and I started to dance, while Çeko held my camera bag. He

⁵² *Diyarbakır Gençlik ve Spor İl Müdürlüğü*

videotaped us and the dancing, until someone warned him that the police might take his camera and use it as evidence for arresting people. He came and told us this and we decided that we had stayed long enough. I deleted the video clips and Çeko put his jacket over my camera bag in order to avoid drawing the police's attention to us. We left the concert without experiencing any problems. The next time I went to the culture center, I asked whether there had been any problems with the police. I was told that there had only been one person arrested, and it was a person standing in the door who did not want to let the police enter the concert. They had been told by the police to remove the flag, because they had no permission to put it there. But luckily that was the only interference.

There is usually a possibility of violence when these culture centers perform. The Turkish state uses violence, or the threat of violence to repress Kurdish cultural expressions. My impression is that this infuses individuals and culture centers to more state resistance, and it is perceived to be the work of a 'true folk dancer that he performs his or her dance despite the threat of violence.

BDP Municipality Culture Centers

Because the municipality and metropolitan municipality culture centers (in Diyarbakır) are funded by the municipalities, they have more resources than the non-governmental that are based on voluntary work culture centers. One of the municipality culture centers I conducted fieldwork at was nicely situated in a new building in a park, with classrooms, offices, media-labs, library, a dance room, auditorium, conference-room, and cafeteria. The two dance teachers had university conservatory background: Murat was a university folk dance teacher, and Azime was an achieved folk dance student at the same university. This culture center offers courses in musical instruments and folk dance. Its biggest priority, however, seemed to be the conservatory. When I was in the field, two of the municipality culture centers were starting up a two year part time conservatory. In addition to folk dances, they would have study specializations for visual arts, photography, cinematography, music, theatre, and literature. Classes in Kurdish or Zazaki languages, Kurdish history and literature would be mandatory for all students, and all classes would be held in Kurdish. I got to participate in the process of auditioning in one of the centers and some of the first conservatory's dance classes ever given in a different center.

Performances and political involvement

By the end of dance courses or conservatory semesters, the groups would have public performances to show what they have learned. My impression is that the culture center's dance students will perform first and foremost within the arena of the culture center, and will not perform at political meetings or demonstrations, like the independent Kurdish culture centers. The teachers and students seemed to have a different way of interacting, compared to the non-governmental culture center. Here the teachers had their own offices and the classes were always in classrooms and not while socializing in the cafeteria etc. They focus more on professionalizing the dance and the dancers.

I believe that the institutions are trying to 'normalize' the Kurdish dances and culture. Instead of protesting in the streets and proclaiming their rights, the actors in these culture centers are taking and using their rights to perform and practice Kurdish culture. These culture centers operate more 'on contract' than out of 'obligation', and to put it in Abner Cohen's words: "A group organised rationally and bureaucratically which operates as part of the legal structure of society will need little of the totality of man" (Cohen 1974:60). This is similar to the norm in Norwegian 'culture schools', where technical universalized skills are taught without any regards to politics or 'empersonment', but with an emphasis on cultural continuity and values. Instead, the culture centers are part of what political scientist Nicole Watts explains as pro-Kurdish elected officials' attempts "to construct a competing "governmentality" (Foucault 1991) and a new collective Kurdish "subject" in cities and towns in the southeast" (Watts 2010:12), "who might legitimize and demand a new, specifically Kurdish representation" (Watts 2010:25).

Promoting knowledge of Kurdish culture and professionalism

According to the information given on one of the municipality's Internet pages, its purpose is to "work for installing an existing culture and developing it and the cultural values about to disappear would be rebrightened".

Murat: They [the students] don't know the real names, but I teach them the names and tell them that they should know the Kurdish names...It is important not just to know the steps, but also where the dance comes from...It is not like ballet and cha cha. Folklore is different.

Murat also explained that because there were so many students who wanted to join the conservatory, everyone had to fill out a form and take part in an auditioning process. According to Murat, they would be looking for students who were healthy and clever. As I

have mentioned, I got to observe and participate in the audition workshops for the conservatory student selection. In addition to being tested on their skills in dancing games, they also attended audition classes where the applicants/candidates were tested in rhythm, music and physical abilities in gymnastics. Below are my observations from the first workshop session:

The workshop session was held in the theater hall of the culture center at 18.00. Both of the dance teachers, Murat and Azime, were present. They did a roll call, and I counted 22 attendees. Then the candidates were informed about what they would be evaluated on: the speed and quality of their learning, flexibility, sense of rhythm, musical ear, discipline etc. Those accepted to the academy would receive classes in addition to folk dance classes: costuming, *davol*⁵³, modern dance (for the sake of aesthetics and technique), stage techniques, choreography, and in the end they will write a research essay or thesis. They would also have joint classes (*ortak dersleri*): mythology, Kurdish language and literature, rhythm etc. Murat spoke about the necessity of learning Kurdish. “It is shameful to not learn Kurdish when you have the opportunity to do so,” he said. He explained how he had made an effort to improve his Kurdish vocabulary, and the joy he found in learning. Then he spoke about how people can never answer anything about Kurdish culture: People don’t know anything about the dances, so it is necessary to do research about the whole culture, both in Diyarbakır and the rest of the region. Until then I had I been sitting discreetly in the audience taking notes. Azime pointed at me and said in Turkish: “A friend, Mona, has come from Norway. She is doing research on our culture and is very interested in our culture. If she interviews you, can you answer anything? I don’t think so.” It seemed like some of the candidates agreed to her last statement. Those were the last words of information; they were invited onto the stage to begin the dance audition/session.

The teachers of the municipality culture center seemed to talk about the importance of learning Kurdish culture in a different way than the teachers of the independent Kurdish culture centers. The dance teachers view the students that are not familiar with the origin of the dances as so-called naïve⁵⁴ performers because they are not able to put the dances into its historical context and see its meanings (meanings that are being fixated and essentialized by the culture centers). They did not emphasize the student creating a (moral) personality as a

53 *Davol* = a traditional percussion instrument/drum used to accompaniment for folk dances.

54 “Like the so-called naïve painter who, operating outside the field and its specific traditions, remains external to the history of the art, the ‘naïve’ spectator cannot attain a specific grasp of works of art which only have meaning – or value – in relation to the specific history of an artistic tradition. The aesthetic disposition demanded by the products of highly autonomous field of production is inseparable from a specific cultural competence” (Bourdieu 1989:3-4).

folk dancer, but rather the importance of possessing knowledge and technical skills about the dance and their culture; being a professional. Presentational Kurdish dance in the municipality culture centers – to put it in Anthony Shay’s words – “form the intersection between popular culture in regard to their sources and high art in their formal choreographic formats” (Shay 2002:224). This practice mirrors Turkish practices of making a synthesis of ‘folk culture’ and ‘western’ ‘civilization’, technologies and high culture. There is an effort to make the dance into a high culture object by theorizing, fixing, professionalizing and putting more emphasize on developing individual skills. In this way, the pro-Kurdish municipality culture centers continue the tradition of the Turkish dance ensembles. The biggest difference from the Turkish presentational dance practices – where the dances are distanced from its original village settings and the dancers have usually little knowledge of the background of the dances (Shay 2002) – the Kurdish municipality culture centers emphasize the knowledge about the dances’ origins; they almost equate the origin with ‘the meaning of’ the dances.

Making the dances into high culture and art?

Although there is a focus on making the dance high culture, this is also an effort to make it available to everyone. The education given in the culture centers are free – funded by the municipality. Its goal is to give everyone a chance to learn the dances and its cultural background. The goal seems to be both to professionalize the dances, and make them suitable for urban middle and high class. This may indicate that they have no wish to make it exclusive for high classes only. But can this mean that they are trying to educate all groups? Do they want to educate the urban high classes into valuing their Kurdish culture, and at the same time educate the lower classes in high class culture – by making the Kurdish culture into a high class form and available for all?

Different ways of judging the dances

My informant Barış suggested that some people who want to be perceived as ‘civilized’ and ‘intellectual’ would rather dance ‘western’ dances like waltz or tango than Kurdish dances because they want to distinguish themselves from the rest, and he agreed with Anthony Shay in his following claim and that it applies to many urban middle and upper class individuals in Turkey as well:⁵⁵

⁵⁵Result of cultural politics also.

Sophisticated inhabitants of Tehran, Cairo, and Athens are often more interested in attempting to lead lives that parallel those of cities in Western Europe and the United States and do not wish to be reminded of the large, and in their eyes, backward peasantry that makes up the majority of the population of their respective nation-states. They feel that this parallel existence, and their status as sophisticated, urban individuals is better fulfilled attending avant-garde performances of modern dance or ballet and symphony concerts as they imagine that their opposites in London and New York do. (Shay 2002:230).

Although there might be some truth to this, I find it to be a simplification to label/diagnose it as ‘orientalism’ without further investigation. Taste, according to Bourdieu (1989:5-6) “classifies, and it classifies the classifier. Social subjects, classified by their classifications, distinguish themselves by the distinctions they make...” My informant Selda⁵⁶, who had lived and studied several years in Istanbul, might be classified by Barış as ‘civilized’ and by Shay as ‘orientalist’ because of her taste. Selda told me that she did not enjoy the Kurdish dances.

Selda told me that she did not like to dance Kurdish dances even though she was good at it. She had learned to dance at school, but had never enjoyed dancing or attending weddings. Not even when she was a child. When I asked her if she liked other types of dances, she answered that she liked tango, salsa, couple’s dances, and dances when you dance alone – not many people together as the dances here [in Diyarbakır]. But those kind of dances is not danced in Diyarbakır, so she danced folk dances at school, as elective classes. I asked her if there are many people in Diyarbakır who do not like to dance. “No, very few,” she answered. She said that her mother loved to dance, but was no good at it, while her father never attended weddings.

Selda enjoys ‘art’ – she does not appreciate the experience of connectivity that is the function of the participatory dances. She does not appreciate fully the aesthetics of the ‘presentational’ Kurdish dances. She judges dance by its aesthetics – not by what it is supposed to represent – so she cannot fully enjoy the presentational dances either. This does not necessarily mean that she prefers ‘Western’ dances over Kurdish dancing games because she thinks of Kurdish folk dances as inferior and are related to ‘oriental backward peasantry’. In judging the Kurdish ‘presentational’ dances in the way one judges ‘high culture art’, Selda compares the dances with western dance forms – past and present works of art – and takes it out of its context. As Selda has adjusted her likes to the lifestyle normally associated to urban ‘Western’ lifestyle, she has trained her ‘eye’ at seeing ‘autonomous art’⁵⁷ and ‘individuality’. If Selda

⁵⁶ Who in Chapter 2 talked about that she sometimes enjoyed spending time alone.

⁵⁷ “The pure intention of the artist is that of a producer who aims to be autonomous, that is, entirely the master of his product, who tends to reject not only the ‘programmes’ imposed a priori by scholars and scribes, but also – following the old hierarchy

would compare the Kurdish presentational dances to Bourdieu's description of how art is defined by French 'high class' standards - "it asks to be referred not to an external referent, the represented or designated 'reality', but to the universe of past and present works of art" (Bourdieu 1989:3-4) - she would probably not find it suitable for the Kurdish 'presentational' dances since many of the dance teachers do research where they travel around collecting dance choreographies in the field. Seen in this way, one can say that the dances have *not* gone from "an art which imitates nature to an art which imitates art" (Bourdieu 1989:3). If it is the case that Selda sees the Kurdish dances from a perspective of 'western art', she is judging it by a different standard.

The conscious or unconscious implementation of explicit or implicit schemes of perception and appreciation which constitutes pictorial or musical culture is the hidden condition for recognizing the styles characteristic of a period, a school or an author, and, more generally, for the familiarity with the internal logic of works that aesthetic enjoyment presupposes. A beholder who lacks the specific code feels lost in a chaos of sounds and rhythms, colours and lines, without rhyme or reason. (Bourdieu 1989:2)

Perhaps Selda cannot enjoy the dances because she lacks the specific code that is necessary. Although Selda grew up attending weddings, she did not 'naturally' fall in love with the participatory games. She told me that when she was young, she was very good at school and proudly recited poems about Atatürk. She said that she was not at all proud of it today, but when she was a child she did not understand the meaning of what she was doing.

However, even though Selda or the French élite might not judge the Kurdish 'presentational' dances as 'high class art', I believe that the dances are being lifted up to a high class art/artistic standard by virtue of its performance genre (place, style, professionalism, audience etcetera). Some of the dance students at the conservatory auditions seemed to find it problematic to place Kurdish dances in a category of 'high culture art'. During one of the workshop classes at the conservatory, there was a discussion about whether or not there is dance in Kurdish culture:

One of the students discussed the concept of dance with Murat. The student argued it was impossible to talk about '*dans*' (dance) because he claimed that the Kurds did not have their own dance, they had '*halk oyunlari*' (folk 'games'). Murat and Azime explained that '*dans*' was not only waltz or that kind of dance, but whenever you combine movements to music, thus Kurdish '*halk oyunlari*' should also be considered as '*dans*'.

of doing and saying – the interpretations superimposed a posteriori on his work. The production of an 'open work', intrinsically and deliberately polysemic, can thus be understood as the final stage in the conquest of artistic autonomy by poets and, following in their footsteps, by painters, who had long been reliant on writers and their work of 'showing' and 'illustrating'." (Bourdieu 1989:3)

As mentioned in the first chapter, in Turkish and Kurdish the word *oyun* (game/play) is used instead of ‘dance’ when it comes to Turkish and Kurdish traditional dances (what I would call dances). The word ‘dance’, on the other hand, is used for western dances like ballet, tango and salsa. The informant who said that Kurds do not have ‘*dans*’ in their culture probably sees Kurdish folk dances or ‘*halk oyunlari*’ as belonging to a qualitatively different category than ‘western art dances’. For the student referred to above, Kurdish ‘*halk oyunlari*’ is not ‘dance’ but ‘play’ – a way of being together. That the dance teachers choose to call it ‘dance’ may contribute to the possibility that Kurdish ‘presentational’ dances will be accepted as a ‘high culture art form’ by urban middle and upper class people. Bourdieu claims that “To the socially recognized hierarchy of the arts, and within each of them, of genres, schools or periods, corresponds a social hierarchy of the consumers” (Bourdieu 1989:1). With the urban middle class Kurds of Diyarbakır taking more pride in their cultural heritage, a change in hierarchy of taste may come about.

Opinions on learning in culture centers

Bariş was of the opinion that those who learn the dances in culture centers cannot learn to dance as well as those who learn to dance in weddings. He judges the dance in the context of its culture, not in the context of art styles – thus it is necessary for the dancer to know the cultural ‘meaning’ of the dance – knowing how to behave according to circumstances. For Bariş, this is something that cannot be taught in class. Maybe ironically, this can be compared to how the French élite according to Bourdieu (1989:2), think that art is something that should be learned implicitly and ‘naturally’ in its right element instead of being taught in school.

Even in the classroom, the dominant definition of the legitimate way of appropriating culture and works of art favours those who have had early access to legitimate culture, in a cultured household, outside it devalues scholarly knowledge and interpretation as ‘scholastic’ or even ‘pedantic’ in favour of direct experience and simple delight. (Bourdieu 1989:2)

Bariş did not believe that Selda was a good folk dancer, because his standards were based on how you evaluate someone dancing ‘participatory’ Kurdish dance in ‘the field’. While the dance teachers of the municipality culture centers expect precision and technique, those learning the dances ‘the traditional way’ do not need to fulfill the same expectations of professionalism. Unless they are high status and *ağır*⁵⁸ – expected to be socially ‘heavy’ and ‘unmovable’ – a skillful and entertaining ‘participatory’ solo dancer has the ability to on get

⁵⁸ Heavy

completely immersed in the dance without inhibitions. As for being a skillful dancer in the dance line, one has to be able to forget about oneself and instead get immersed in the ‘connectivity’ of the dance.

The municipality dance teacher Murat suggested that nowadays you could best learn by taking dance courses, because few people knew how to dance well in weddings; Most of the time they dance *Delilo*, because it is the easiest game which everyone knows.

Murat: People come to the culture centers to learn dance in part because weddings are no more held out in the streets. In the past, one could stop by people’s weddings without being invited because they were free and open out in the streets. In this way people got to dance and learn a lot more. Nowadays one only goes to the wedding to which one is invited. You can learn a bit in weddings – simple dances – but in order to learn more, people come to the culture centers.

When asking one of my friends why he did not like to go to weddings or to dance Kurdish dances, he replied that he liked to dance, but not in salon weddings because the people just go around and around in circles. He preferred to dance in concerts or other types of events. In addition to being an arena for youth to get together without the supervision of their families, dance courses gives opportunities for more challenging dancing,

The dance teacher Mahir, who taught dance classes in both the non-governmental and a municipality culture center, used socio-economic reasons for explaining the changing practices in performances and learning the dancing games. The influence of modernity and capitalism has affected the practices of Kurdish dancing games, he claimed.

Mahir began telling me about the richness of the Kurdish culture: How it is one of the oldest civilizations, and that this richness also can be found in the stories and dance figures. They used to play dancing games in festivals and special occasions. Now there is money involved. The moral aspect was stronger 30 years ago, when people lived more together in fellowship. It used to be the families that taught the next generation about their culture, but now it is different; money, jobs and systems. Now everything has become economic; materialism. Dance teachers earn money on teaching. Capitalism and modernism affect everything, including folk dances, so people give up their traditional culture, he said. [My translation from Turkish to English]

Mahir gives a narrative of a cultural fall from grace. In his explanation we can sense a structural nostalgia where he romanticizes a rich Kurdish cultural past that has been lost due to modernism and capitalism. Mahir sees the culture centers and the decrease of dancing as a

part of social structural changes. He claims that the dancing has become affected by capitalist morals which are influencing people to move away from fellowship and passing on their cultural traditions, and that the culture centers are results of this development. I somewhat agree with this statement; the wedding salons are largely taking over the organization of wedding celebrations, they also have the power of deciding what music is being played and thus also what dances are being danced. According to Zeki, the wedding salon musical groups most often play music to accompany *Delilo*, so that as many as possible people will join the dance. This is also the impression I have been left with from my observations at weddings. However, I believe that there are other contexts where the dances are being renewed and creative skills developed; concerts and demonstrations.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have explained the goals of and ways of teaching Kurdish ‘presentational’ dances in the pro-Kurdish municipality culture centers and the non-governmental Kurdish culture center where I conducted my field work. At the non-governmental culture center I visited there was an emphasis on the importance of creating a personality of a particular type of Kurd through a process of ‘empersonment’. The municipality culture center teachers emphasized instead professionalism, technical skills and professionalized knowledge in their aim of making Kurdish folk dances into ‘high art dance’. Although the independent Kurdish culture centers and the municipality Kurdish culture centers have different ways of teaching, some goals are still the same: to promote Kurdish culture, claim the right to call the dances ‘Kurdish’, and teach their students about their culture and the Kurdish origin of the dances.

While the independent culture centers use the Kurdish dance and music as direct political statements, as they perform in political protests and in concerts supporting the BDP party, it is my impression that the municipality culture centers focus more on the Kurdish art itself. Instead of using the art to draw attention to different cases and politicians, they are fixating and professionalizing Kurdish art as part of creating a Kurdish ‘subject’, in order to legitimize Kurdish representation (cf. Watts 2010:12) and to create a new hierarchy of taste.

The Kurdish culture centers continue the Turkish tradition of synthesizing western ‘civilization’ with the ‘folk’, and the use of a utopian high culture civilized past; Kurdish ‘culture’ has gained more acceptance because it is no longer associated with an ‘oriental backward Kurdish culture’ but with the ‘advanced ancient civilization of Mesopotamia’. For some, the so-called ‘authentic’ Kurdish culture has the highest possible value, as it in its

purest form, representing Kurdish national soul. This also entails claims that the best ways of learning the culture is in weddings – the authentic arenas of the dances – while learning in culture centers is perceived as pedantic and does not give the same skills or ‘soul’ to the performances, and hence does not give the right kind of knowledge.

5

Kurdish Dances in Political Contexts

Kurdish dances as embodied protest

Baler: I think, considering the Kurdish people and their life under the political pressure and the problem of freedom of speech...This is something very problematic in this country, so there is only one area where they can express themselves: it is the dance. Through the dance they are showing their ideology, they are talking about what they want and what's their thought about the political problems. If you go to Newroz you can see a bunch of people are dancing, and through the dance they try to give a message to the society.

Mona: How do they do that?

Baler: The symbolic, you know; clothes they wear, and of course some figures of the dance. Actually for me it's not so simple to talk about.

Zeki: We can say this; Kurdish songs are also a kind of politic, they have political messages and when you are at Newroz or in a regular wedding, when the band is singing a political song, people are more excited. For example when they sing "Oramar", people shout and they are more excited. But if they sing a regular traditional song, people just goes and comes. In Newroz it is the same. When there is a very political song they shout.

Mona: It's more feeling to their dance?

Zeki: Yeah, feeling. In my opinion, they unite dance and protest in one thing, in their body, and it's a kind of protest, as Baler said.

Baler: Yeah, really when they are dancing and they show their performance in a high level, they are screaming somehow. Through their bodies, their body movements, they are shouting to the society somehow.

Mona: It's not necessarily the dance and the movement itself, it's more about where it is, and when and who?

Baler: Yeah, of course. When we are going to dance at home with Zeki it is probably not going to have any meaning.

In the conversation above, Zeki and Baler explains the political element of the Kurdish dances.



Figure 8: Dancing at an election campaign meeting in Diyarbakir in 2011.

In this chapter I will discuss the role of Kurdish folk dances in political contexts like concerts, the calendrical celebration Newroz, and political meetings and demonstrations. I will look at how the body is used in protest, and how the ideal of self-sacrifice and commitment is embodied through dance, and how the dancing games provide the experience of *communitas*. While the dancing games in ceremonial contexts emphasize status and social relations, the dancing games in political contexts trivializes such social relations for the benefit of Kurdish union; the only relation that matters in this context is the belonging to or sympathy towards the Kurdish struggle.

As part of individuals' habitus and as a way of togetherness, the dances reflect 'connectivity' and are often not an intentional "device" for protesting. Again there is an interesting ambivalence, which makes the dances even more powerful. The Kurdish dancing games have become more than a part of sociality. The action of dancing is a way of protesting, and the dance itself is a symbol of Kurdish nationalism and unity. The dances are ways of expressing commitment to the Kurdish struggle, and it is a protest against the Turkish state. When analyzing how Kurdish dancing games are used as social protests, I will keep in mind George H. Lewis' analysis of the function of music as social protest in Hawaii: "Da Kine Sounds; the Function of Music as Social Protest in the New Hawaiian Renaissance" (1984). Lewis (1984:41) explains how music can be effective as social protest through five factors: 1. it can define clearly the condition of social discontent and develop elements of social ideology by enhancing and rationalizing the social movement. 2. it has less chance to be taken seriously as

opposed to more rational forms of social movement. 3. it can with great power connect social protest to the group's traditional values and symbols through the use of traditional forms of music, instruments, costumes and forms of presentation. 4. it can project a strong message, which can be more efficient than more rational ways of communicating promotions of solidarity. 5. it can in this emotional communication form fuel the group's interest, and in this way lift them up to the intensity of moral rights.

Political Meetings and Demonstrations

Political meetings where Kurdish dancing games are performed are usually for support of pro-Kurdish political parties or politicians, like the BDP (*Barış ve Demokrasi Partisi*), or to demonstrate against the Turkish government or other opponents of the Kurdish movement. Such demonstrations are typically organized against court decisions or arrest of Kurdish persons, and/or governmental policies not supported by the Kurdish population, attacks on the PKK and/or Kurdish villages, police use of violence towards demonstrations, detainees or workers. Or there can be demonstrations against violence towards women, appeals for freedom of speech etc. The police often times interfere in demonstrations by using tear gas and other forms of direct violence towards demonstrators. Demonstrators (usually young men) retaliate by then throwing rocks against the police.

Concerts

Concerts held in the South Eastern part of Turkey by the pro-Kurdish cultural milieu I am addressing in this thesis usually contain an element of politics. I emphasize that I am here referring to concerts related to the artistic milieu connected to the Kurdish political movement. In this milieu most of the Kurdish music addresses political questions and questions of identity etc. Even songs not referring to politics to a certain degree become political if it is performed in Kurdish or Zazaki languages. The artists often address the crowd with references to politics – making complaints about the Turkish government, paying tribute to fallen PKK guerillas or other Kurds who have suffered under the pressure of the Turkish state. Artists often encourage their audiences to be proud of their Kurdish identity. It is also common to see posters or banners with the PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan, Kurdish flags or banners in the three colors associated with the Kurdish nation: yellow, red and green. There are often held support concerts to gain attention around a specific cause or to support persons or election candidates.

Newroz

Newroz is traditionally a celebration of the coming of the New Year, celebrated both among Kurds, Iranians and Afghans. For the Kurds, the event is connected to the myth of Kawa, who liberated the Kurdish people from a Persian tyrant long time ago. According to one of my informants, the myth says that Kawa used a bonfire to signal that he had managed to kill the tyrant king; so to this day the bonfire symbolizes victory and freedom for the Kurdish people. “Apart from being a celebration of the New Year it is also a display of peace, nationalistic pride and demand for identity from the Turkish government” (Karakeçili 2008:96). According to Turkish political scientist Lerna K. Yanık (2006:285), the Turkish state has since the 1990s tried to turn the Newroz celebration into a Turkish tradition, in order to diminish its importance as a Kurdish national symbol. The state organized and allowed for state celebrations of ‘Nevruz’⁵⁹, but put down many celebrations that could be interpreted to containing references to Kurdish nationalism and support for the PKK. In recent years, however, some Turkish journalists are writing about the event – calling it a Kurdish tradition. There is much more openness to the event and expression of Kurdish culture and nationalism; However, any attempt to mention separatism or support to the PKK is illegal and can lead to imprisonment. In 2012 there were again clashes between celebrating crowds and the police since the government did not give permission for the celebration to be held at Sunday 18th, instead of on the 21st.

Ceremonial Events

There are often political elements in other non-political events and occasions as well. Weddings are good examples in this respect, because, as their original purpose is the celebration of the marriage etc, they often hold political dimensions as well. The music played is Kurdish traditional music, and in weddings of politically engaged families there will be many songs with political content or associations as well. While it is common for the bride and groom to wear a modern gown and suit, at some weddings they wear traditional Kurdish costumes, and are adorned in the Kurdish colors, red, green and red. Another action that can emphasize Kurdish political affiliation is the use of the v-sign while dancing – to show their sympathy for BDP and/or PKK.

⁵⁹ Because the letter ‘w’ is not in the Turkish alphabet and is thus not considered as Turkish, the Kurdish spelling ‘Newroz’ was not accepted. The celebration had to be referred to as ‘Nevruz’ (Yanık

Self-Sacrifice

In the previous chapter I mentioned the importance of personal self-sacrifice in close social relationships. As Beeman claimed about Iranian relationships, “The ultimate fulfillment of duty in *both* kinds of relationships is total self-sacrifice – the sacrifice of one’s life” (Beeman 1986:41), the same applies in Kurdish relationships. In addition, self-sacrifice is often a reality for the individuals involved in the Kurdish struggle, and it is often a theme in the arts and literature of the Kurdish movement. While on a day-to-day basis, close relationships are built on the notion of putting the other’s interests before one’s own, this idea is extended into the realm of the political Kurdish movement.

Self-sacrifice and courage are closely connected. Courage is a highly valued quality, and refraining from protesting against state authority is often a result of fear. Kurds often have to balance their lives and actions between being loyal to their belief in the Kurdish question, loyal to the state, and thinking about their own safety or socio-economical needs. In making an effort for the Kurdish movement, there are often risks involved.

Kurdish politicians are sometimes idealized by their supporters for serving their cause unselfishly. For instance, my informant Zeki once claimed that you always know that the politicians for Kurdish parties don't join politics in order to gain personal benefits because there is no personal gain in supporting Kurds. “There is no money, only prison sentences,” he claimed. He also claimed that it is so important for Kurdish institutions to employ loyal and brave workers; the workers’ competence comes second, especially since they keep being arrested. When asked if self-sacrifice is important, this was his reply:

Zeki: The answer of your question is: OF COURSE! Now think about the Guerillas. Their number is around 5.000 and they fight against Turkish Army, at least 800.000 soldiers! Turkish army isn't only superior in number but also in equipments; planes, tanks, weapons. Thinking about all these, one can easily say that their life is in REAL DANGER, and they know it, and still they choose being a guerilla! That is a perfect self-sacrifice. Another example is the suicide bombers. They also know that for sure they will die, and still they sacrifice themselves. Another and popular example is Leyla Zana⁶⁰. She was elected a parliamentarian in 1990s but arrested and put in jail for almost 11 years. In Turkey a parliamentarian earns a lot of money. She didn't choose money or any other wealth. She knew that she could be imprisoned and she sacrificed. Now she is a parliamentarian again, and they want to put her into prison for another 50 years! Don't you think that she is a self-sacrificer?

⁶⁰ In 1994 Leyla Zana was the first Kurdish woman to be elected into the parliament. She was imprisoned for speaking in Kurdish in her inauguration speech. She is a member of the BDP party and on June 12th 2011 she was re-elected to parliament.

As my informant explains, the guerillas soldiers of the outlawed militant organization PKK (*Partiya Karkerên Kurdistan*) are perceived as the perfect example of self-sacrifice. They are voluntarily risking their lives for a struggle they have minimal chances of surviving and no chances at winning their war. In addition, the PKK guerrillas are ideological role models and important symbols for many Kurds in Turkey. There are numerous videos on the internet showing propaganda videos for the PKK, Abdülla Öcalan and the PKK guerrilla. Several guerrillas are or were also artists singing and playing songs about their lives as guerrillas, their dreams about a free Kurdistan, or honouring fallen guerrilla soldiers. Many of these videos feature guerrilla soldiers playing Kurdish dancing games. In order to understand the idea of self-sacrifice and commitment among Kurds, I will begin by explaining the importance of self-sacrifice and *communitas* in the PKK.

Self-Sacrifice and Communitas in the PKK

The PKK guerilla soldiers live in camps in the mountains of the borders between Turkey, and Iraq, and Turkey and Iran. The PKK's headquarters in Iraqi Kurdistan is in the Mount Qandil, which is located 50 km Turkey-Iran-Iraq tripoint. In 2007 there were an estimated 4000 troops in Mount Qandil. (Brandon 2007). According to Ali Kemal Özcan (2006:169), the PKK party education is built on "the personality and lifestyle of the militant, and the intrinsic treason of Kurdishness that is believed to stem from *tribality* and *family*" and that the endeavor is to re-humanize the community and the 'Kurdish personality'. The PKK education thus aims to deconstruct Kurdish individuals and reconstruct them as pure, unadulterated ethnic specimen. A highly modernistic strategy, which is in a sense 'against' the social world most Kurds live in. Özcan also describes the requirement of self-sacrifice when becoming a professional member of the PKK (*Partiya Karkerên Kurdistan*). A party member is expected to leave behind all aspects of his or her life private time or life. A member should not have permanent address, not be a practical part of a family, but he or she should withdraw from all relations, belongings and institutions he/she normally would be a part of (Özcan 2006). The PKK described their requirements in their party program of 1995⁶¹:

A party member is one who acknowledges the programme of the party and is responsible for its implementation; who takes the will of the party as fundamental and gradually *attaches themselves to the party's will*; who joins party life and tactical application [daily practical activities] *all day* in an organ of the party; who exuberantly works for the party's fundamental aims in the manner of not making concessions, of not following self-advantages and of unlimited self-sacrifice by embracing the party's demeanor, tempo, and

⁶¹ The reader should note that these are the requirements from 1995, and the PKK might have altered their requirements since then.

style through *undoing* oneself [analyzing-remoulding one's personality]; and who devotes his/her life to the cause of the party. (*Programme* 1995:80 cited in Özcan 2006:157) [Highlights and brackets by Özcan.]

According to Özcan, membership approval in the PKK “is perceived as an introduction into a novel *way of living* rather than being a member of a political organization” (Özcan 2006:158) and that “it is the member’s complete deprivation of ‘personal will’ and of ‘private life’ that is the most distinguishing feature of the PKK” (Özcan 2006:157). Since the organization is illegal, it is logical (cf. Abner Cohen 1974:59) that they are trying to capture as much of their members’ personalities as possible. “A monolithic political party will try to absorb the thinking, feeling and action of their members,” Cohen (1974:59) claims. I see a link to the description of the folk dancer given by the independent culture center dance teacher mentioned in the last chapter. Ergin described the necessity of the individual folk dancers to undo their selves for the team; they “must have all the qualities of this nation in him” and “give help to his population.” The PKK guerilla soldiers might be seen as having made the most complete ‘empersoment’ of the ideal folk dancer. As demonstrated in Chapter 2, identity is in most Kurdish societies relational. Your relations constitute yourself. You cannot see a person without seeing him or her in relation to their relations. In the community of the guerillas of PKK, the guerilla relationship priority comes before all other relations and becomes the structure of everyday life. Their loyalty towards their comrades, their leader, and their people, and their cause comes before all other loyalties towards other relations. In other words, the PKK wants their members to replace their ‘patriarchal connectivity’ with a ‘political connectivity’ where their loyalty and connection is revolving around the organization, its ideology, members, and leader.

The PKK can also be compared to what Victor Turner (1969:111) calls *millenarian movements*, and I will use his description as I find that the properties used to describe millenarian movements basically fit the properties of the PKK:

...homogeneity, equality, anonymity, absence of property, reduction of all to the same status level, the wearing of uniform apparel (sometimes for both sexes), sexual continence (...), minimization of sex distinctions (...), abolition of rank, humility, disregard for personal appearance, unselfishness, total obedience to the prophet or leader, sacred instruction, the maximization of religious, as opposed to secular, attitudes and behavior, suspension of kinship rights and obligations (all are sibling or comrades of one another regardless of previous secular ties), simplicity of speech and manners, sacred folly, acceptance of pain and suffering (even to the point of undergoing martyrdom), and so forth. (Turner 1969:111-112)

Turner’s description fits well. The ideal of homogeneity and equality seem to be reflected in that all the guerillas wear almost identical uniforms. There is ideology gender equality with

minimization of gender distinctions⁶², and sexual continence. Still, as Turner (1969:112) explains, these movements usually become institutions with its own structures:

Communitas, or the “open society,” differs in this form structure, or the “closed society,” in that it is potentially or ideally extensible to the limits of humanity. In practice, of course, the impetus soon becomes exhausted, and the “movement” becomes itself an institution among other institutions – often one more fanatical and militant than the rest, for the reason that it feels itself to be the unique bearer of universal-human truths. (Turner 1969:112)

The PKK organization cannot be defined as an ‘open society’ since it is extremely closed and the members have no personal freedom but are tied to the strict rules of the organization. In practice there is a system of rank, and the uniforms may symbol the rank difference, although not very strong as in an army. The point is however that their emphasis on self-sacrifice is taken out of the context of sacrificing one self for the sake of close friends of family members, but it is a sacrifice made for the more abstract Kurdish nation’. Self-sacrifice for the nation becomes the structure. This type of connection, which I chose to call ‘political connectivity’, is radically different from ‘patriarchal connectivity’ in that it is based on individual’s becoming de-socialized and individualized, acting together as one body. It is a highly modernist construction.

Guerrilla life as utopian life

Usually when people describe guerilla life they emphasize the hardship, but the organization’s lifestyle is also perceived by many Kurds as a more free way of life. A student who worked as a volunteer at a BDP youth center told me that she would have liked to go to the mountains to be a guerrilla soldier because of the community they have there. According to her, the guerrillas do not go to the mountains only to fight, but in order to live a different life, a “free” life. In the mountains they make music, and they live communally and ecologically. They are not invoked in capitalist structures. She said that in Turkey it impossible to live this kind of lifestyle other places than in the ‘PKK Mountains’ because the Turkish government prohibits it. Another informant also said that people perceive guerrillas life style to be an ideal one.

Mehmet: A lot has changed since the 1980s. Women and men used to dance separately, at separate places. Now they dance together. Kurdish men watch music videos of guerillas that are dancing – and they imitate them. They think that the guerillas live ideal lives, away from all this. [He pointed around]

Mona: All this: Capitalism?

⁶² The only visible distinction might be the cultural adjustment of long (unveiled) hair of the female guerillas compared to the men’s shorter haircuts.

Mehmet: Yes. They live together, both women and men, and dance together and have equality. In the videos the guerillas dance close to each other.

Being a socialist militant organization, the PKK appeals to socialist adherents and promote thoughts of egalitarian individualism. The organization is also promoted for its feminist ideals, and the existence of feminist guerillas is often used as an argument. Anthropologist Oliver Grojean (2007:113) writes in his article “Violence Against the Self: The Case of a Kurdish non-Islamist Group” that the organization advocates women’s ‘emancipation’ as well as it claims to take over the responsibility of her *namûs*⁶³. Since the PKK emphasizes the importance of the protection of the female guerillas’ *namûs*, any forms of sexual relations between PKK members is forbidden.⁶⁴ Considering the organization’s modernist and anti-patriarchal ideology, this may appear as rather paradoxical use of patriarchal idiom and logic.

Below is a depiction of female PKK guerillas, written in a motivation letter of a proposal for the documentary “Rebellious by Nature? Narratives by Kurdish Women” a project by Shenah Abdullah:

Figure 9: Female PKK fighter

Now, they have become part of a larger group that works and fights under one banner. Here they are equal with men and are taught to express their femininity to its full potential. These women are stripped of their previous masks and labels and are instead treated as humans. The women walk around in the vast nature of Kurdistan, climbing mountains, crossing rivers and jumping over harsh terrain. The wider view



shows these women with their male comrades in a long zigzag that reaches the bottom of the mountain wearing a tan fighting outfit and carrying heavy weapons. They are always on the lookout for planes and Turkish military force that can end their lives. They are gathered in their educating halls reading books about the East and West which focus on subjects ranging from feminism, philosophy, religion, politics, art, oppression and globalization. They sit with men and discuss the future of Kurdistan their own fate. What about home and greater Kurdistan? The women have to teach their male comrades about the importance of understanding women and how they should be treated. Issues of equality, justice, freedom and resistance are on the agenda. (Abdullah 2011)

Traditionally it has not been acceptable for women to expose themselves in artistic public

⁶³ *Namus* = “(A woman's) virtue, honor (in sexual matters)” Definition from www.turkishdictionary.net

⁶⁴ When the motion picture *Bahoz (The Storm)* (2008), by Kazım Öz was released, the PKK criticized the film because it contained a scene which implied sexual relations between two civilian PKK members.

performances in Kurdish or Turkish society (Allison 2009:47). In the Kurdish movement, female artists, guerrillas, and politicians are widely respected. In comparison to many artists in the Turkish pop industry, the female artists that can be said to be a part of the Kurdish movement do not include sexual connotations in their performances.

One of my informants showed me a video of a female guerilla soldier, Delila Zilan. When I commented “She’s beautiful,” my friend put on an annoyed face and said, “No. That’s not why we like her.” He explained how she is widely respected because of her music and because she is a martyr – she sacrificed her life.

For me to make a comment about her appearance was a mistake, considering that this was a person well respected for sacrificing her life for her cause. She was respected for her courageous actions and for her artistic abilities; she was not to be objectified in terms of visual appearance.

The guerillas dance after successful fighting, meaning that they have lost no one of their own. If a guerilla is killed there will be no dancing; it is time for sorrow while the dances are activities of joy. They cannot have a complete dance if someone is missing. If one person is hurt, everyone is hurt. It is a matter of ‘all for one and one for all’. The PKK guerrillas are role models and iconic signs for many Kurds because they sacrifice their lives for the cause, and because of their lifestyle. This idealization also influences the way people are dancing. The Kurdish dances are used in both traditional contexts like weddings, and in new contexts like the political one, where the dances have gained a new function. The Kurdish dances can perhaps be seen as a producer of a quasi-religious ritual space that replaces Islam; an ‘authentically Kurdish space’ where individuals are erased as the dance creates one body without distinctions, enhancing the ideology of no social entity but one (the PKK).

Communitas for “Regular People”

Most Kurds are of course not members of the PKK organization and do not live a “millenarian” lifestyle. However, I argue that “regular people” can also experience a communitas of self-sacrifice for the Kurdish cause – through participation in dances. I use Turner’s concept *communitas* to imply that the structures of everyday life becomes unimportant for the period of dancing, and replaced by a temporary anti-structure where the only thing important is what political stance you take in the Kurdish question. They step out of their daily routine life into a sphere where everyone is equal, where the only differentiation lies between those who support their case and those that do not. Their sympathy for the

political struggle is embodied in the dance (and in their bodies). The dances often function as mimicry of PKK's dance after 1980s and with its associations to a utopian PKK life and a utopian Kurdish past and future might follow.

The struggle of the Kurdish people in Turkey is a vivid part of their everyday lives. There is solidarity in the way Durkheim (1933) uses the word, which according to (Turner 1969:132) "depends upon an in-group/out-group contrast" and a structure with jural-political character. However, I believe there can be times where these structures temporarily disappear and become replaced by *communitas*. *Communitas* described by Turner:

The individuals are not segmentalized into roles and statuses but confront one another rather in the manner of Martin Buber's "I and Thou." Along with this direct, immediate, and total confrontation of human identities, there tends to go a model of society as a homogeneous, unstructured *communitas*, whose boundaries are ideally coterminous with those of the human species. (Turner 1969:132)

In the dance the only ones existing are "I and Thou". Also: "structure tends to be pragmatic and this-worldly; while *communitas* is often speculative and generates imagery and philosophical ideas" (Turner 1969:133). The everyday struggle of the Kurds is based on solidarity, but *communitas* does appear spontaneously in the dancing games.

Many support it and think of PKK as an ideal society without hierarchy and unjust stratifications – where one can live out one's imagined culture freely in pact with nature. When performing the dancing games in political contexts, the participants share their common empathy with the PKK and they live out the ideals of the movement for a brief period of time. They step out of their daily routine life into a sphere where everyone is equal, where the only separation of humans lies between those who support their case and those that do not. When *communitas* occurs, the most important relation for the individual is their relationship towards their fellow Kurdish 'comrades' – a relation which overshadows other relational bonds in the temporary *communitas*. PKK's emblematic use of the dance has added another layer of meaning to Kurdish dances. Now dancing can iconically refer to the dancing PKK and evoke associations of both authenticity of tradition and a utopian political future.

Demonstrations and protesting – Risks involved

Because of the risks involved in protesting, there are elements of self-sacrifice for anyone involved. Although most Kurds do not sacrifice their lives for the Kurdish struggle, they have had to cope with limited freedom of speech, and the risks involved with breaking these limits. In September 2010 there was a referendum about whether or not to accept the new

constitution to replace the constitution of the 1980 military coup. The pro-Kurdish party BDP (*Bariş ve Demokrasi Partisi*) encouraged their voters to boycott the referendum because the constitution still gave no increased rights to Kurds. Neither the old nor the new constitution were to be accepted. On September 5th BDP organized a boycott meeting and encouraged their followers to show their support by attending the meeting, which was held in the streets of the modern center of Diyarbakır. Prior to the event someone had told me that it was a concert. I went to the meeting with five of my informants. It turned out it was a political appeal meeting, where the politicians spoke to an audience of more than 100 000 supporters⁶⁵.

In spite of the heat and the lack fluid intake due to the *Ramadan*, people attended in large numbers and listened attentively to the politicians' appeals. When the politicians were finished speaking, a rock band started playing slow rock songs in Kurdish. As my informants started walking home I exclaimed, "I came to see the concert!" They answered that it was it was a political meeting, not a concert, but they stayed for my sake. Most of the audience had started to leave, which made it possible to come closer to the stage. The first song was a slow song called 'Silah'⁶⁶ and was about a guerrilla soldier who had lost his life. The next song had a catchy melody, and lyrics that accused the Turkish prime minister of being a liar. Then people started moving to the rhythm.

My informant, Mehmet, pointed at a helicopter and told me it was police. I could see that all my informants were uncomfortable. "It is a danger. Do you see that there are few people? Almost everybody has gone home" he said. He explained that as long as the crowd is big, the police can do nothing, but when there are few people; "This is the time when the police attack." He then pointed to the video cameras above us and whispered, "We are civil servants"⁶⁷ and looked over to his friends, "they are worried". I signaled that we could leave. On our way from the meeting area, Mehmet explained that the police wait for youth to come and shout slogans like "*Biji serok Apo*"⁶⁸ so that they can attack them, and then the youth will fight back. I asked if those who come to shout slogans want to fight. Mehmet smiled and answered, "I should say no..." "But they do, don't they?" I insisted. He nodded. I then asked if he himself did not shout because he did not want to fight. He said that people do not do it only to fight, but because they should do it. He meant that people should be brave, not cowards like himself.

We sat down in a cafe and my informants explained that no one came to hear the music or to dance. They came to listen to the politicians. I asked "Why would some people

⁶⁵ The number of people attending is an important way for the politicians to show that they and their cases are supported by the population.

⁶⁶ Turkish for 'weapon'.

⁶⁷ This informant had earlier informed me that civil servants in Turkey are not allowed to be involved in politics.

⁶⁸ "Long live leader Abdullah Öcalan!"

stay and dance when you were too afraid to stay there? And if they only wanted to dance, why would the police attack them?” Mehmet's explanation was that everyone that holds a political meeting has to apply to the police, and they get this and that much time. When the time is out, the police come and urge the people to leave the area, but then some people want to continue dancing. That's when the fights occur.

Later that evening we watched the news to see how many they estimated had attended the meeting. My informant estimated 100 000. No reports about fighting. On the television we could see a group playing Kurdish dancing games in traditional costumes. I asked if the police could be provoked by music and song, like they could be provoked by slogans and Kurdish flags. Mehmet answered that “They only attack if they want to. Usually they do not get provoked by songs unless they are political, but if they want a reason to attack they can take your cell phone and make trouble about you having Kurdish music on it.”

They were first and foremost afraid of the police. In many occasions there is a risk of being attacked or/and detained by the police, or being put on trial because of attending to a demonstration. According to media sources and my informants, there are many examples of individuals being arrested and imprisoned for several years simply because they were present in a demonstration. As a foreigner, I had no idea about when it might or might not be dangerous to attend such events. My informants, however, knew by experience how to interpret the situation and its potential to turn dangerous. There is always uncertainty about clashes occurring. Even though they cannot totally predict the outcome of the event, individuals learn how to interpret these situations by recognizing regularities for reasons why violent situations might occur. The informants I went with to this event were very cautious and feared the consequences of a clash with the police. Other informants have not focused much on the dangers by such events. This does not necessarily mean that the event has been less dangerous, but that they have been more inclined to accept the consequences.

The situation keeps changing, so people constantly have to interpret or rearrange their expectations of risk of clashes. There is a routine and a kind of ritualized way in how demonstrators act according to the situation and to the police. They know that the police most likely will respond with violence towards people shouting slogans in support of Abdullah Öcalan and the PKK, and some young men and women might provoke the police intentionally. Other times the police might strike ‘out of the blue’. On the evening of the Turkish general election day June 12th 2011, many thousand⁶⁹ people celebrated the BDP-

⁶⁹ Perhaps about 50 000 people.

backed Labor, Democracy and Freedom Bloc's successful election results with 35 elected candidates.

I went with my informants to the streets surrounding the BDP party's main office, where the crowded celebration took place out in the streets. Maybe as many as 100 000 people had come to celebrate and pay homage to the politicians. Car tires were used to make bon fires, the Kurdish colors red, green and yellow were everywhere and where there was room someone would be dancing. My informant Zeki walked around with me so I could see observe and take pictures. It was so crowded that I had to hold on to his hand in order not to lose the sight of him. Everywhere people were smiling and the atmosphere felt carefree. Suddenly there we heard a sharp bang and shortly after we could smell the tear gas. The only thing we could do was to flee the scene. Safely in front of the television at home we could see people running from the police in front of the BDP office we had just left. As no one had seen any form of provocations from the crowd, my informants' only explanation of the police action was: "They are jealous and angry because we did a good election." Although they had not seen the police action coming, they were not surprised; only disappointed.

The dancing should here be interpreted as a joyful celebration, and not as any kind of provocation. My informants, who had been more relaxed during my 2011 stay than during my fieldwork had to readjust their expectations of police interaction again as the political situation had become tenuous.



Figure 10: Crowd of BDP-supporters celebrating around the BDP's main office

“Hiding” protests in dance

Being a non-verbal form of expression, the dances have had the opportunity to provide for safer forms of protests. Music has also been used as political protest and for expressing political statements and affiliation, but it has been under a lot more pressure by Turkish government than dancing games. All use of the Kurdish language was illegal between 1980 and 1991, so any lyrics in Kurdish were forbidden. Also melodies associated with political themes or lyrics were banned by Kurdish government. Certain songs are still banned, and playing them might lead to prosecution under the accusation of doing propaganda for the PKK. Some of the political songs that were used to accompany dancing games were forbidden, but the dancing games associated with it were not. Thus, even though they did not play the song, the dancing game itself contained a reference to the symbolic meaning of the song (as a meta-sign).

It is however no secret that dancing games are being used in political protests. Olivier Grojean writes in his article “Violence Against the Self: The Case of a Kurdish Non-Islamist Group” that the when persons have limited ways to express themselves, they use their bodies as a media of expression. While images of mutilated bodies shows suffering, and bodies fighting with the police shows resistance, the dancing has a potential to show the protest in a more subtle and positive way, which is less likely to be put down. The dances, however, are meant to express positive images of Kurds bodies as healthy strong subjects who are uniting peacefully to defy suppression. Karakeçili, who claims that the well-known dance *Delilo* is of Kurdish origin (Karakeçili 2008:89), discusses this dance’s impact as a “symbol of Kurdish nationalism” (ibid. 12): “Delilo as the most common dance among all Kurds serves to unify the people. Performing the dance became a symbol of passive protest against the government’s policy of assimilation and the assaults upon the Kurdish people” (ibid. 2008:95). At times there could be more than thousand individuals dancing together in peaceful protest, making it difficult for the police to disperse them in order to stop displays of Kurdish national colors and illegal posters in support of the PKK. According to Karakeçili, the dance “represents a gathering of people who, in assembling and performing the dance, represent resistance to the government’s laws” (Karakeçili 2008:89), and it is common to discuss politics while dancing. The dance function as a successful representation of the protesters as united, because it may be seen as one big body. It is an efficient mass movement, able to mobilize many people because of its seemingly harmless and apolitical form. The dancing is a positive and peaceful alternative to a way of expressing something that otherwise has had few other options than violence. It presents authenticity, unification, determination

defiance etc. However, in recent years several persons have been prosecuted and imprisoned for dancing “*ideolojik halay*” as propaganda for an illegal terrorist organization – the PKK. My informant Mehmet told me about an article⁷⁰ that referred to ‘*ideolojik halay*’ and that several students had been prosecuted and sentenced to jail because they were dancing ideological *halay*. This shows that the use of dance as means of peaceful protest is not necessarily safe anymore.

Protesting through participation in dancing games might help avoid arrest, but there is no guarantee that it will work. The ambiguousness of the dancing games opens up for some way of maneuvering. The dances are first and foremost associated with non-political harmless fun and *play* of the ceremonial contexts, as opposed to the seriousness of politics. “Perhaps I am demonstrating. Perhaps I am not.” In these situations the dancing games are gambling games, where the stakes are freedom, imprisonment, or violence of one’s own body. It is of course impossible to see the difference between the intentions of participants in dancing games, whether they are dancing to openly show their protest, whether they are dancing to protest in a more subtle way, or whether they are actually just dancing for fun. Probably, all three might be the case in the same time, and also this might of course not be something that demonstrators reflect on at all.

According to my informants, it is also common to participate in dancing games during demonstrations in order to avoid being associated or accused of being a part of the demonstration in case of police involvement, and I have chosen to end this discussion with their statements about the ambiguity dancing in demonstration of the dance and that it depends on the circumstances.

Zeki: They know that the police is watching them. For example if people are shouting “We don’t like the rector!” nobody will join them. But if the same people dance, they join them.

Mona: Is it because they want to have fun [that they join the dance], or because it’s safer? It’s like a protest, but it’s safer?

Zeki: Safer, yeah. They need a lie. “No, I was here just for fun. Don’t blame me, police!”

Mona: And it works?

Zeki: No. (Laughing)

(They talked about student demonstrations and about illegal celebrations of Newroz, before returning to the subject)

Zeki: If the police catch you, the police cannot do anything to you. You say, “Fuck, I’m

⁷⁰ Öğünç (2011)

just dancing! It's a free country.”

Baler: No, no, no. Of course you cannot say “I'm just dancing”. You are showing that you are celebrating the Newroz, which...

Zeki: No, no, if the police catch you, you can tell them a lie, but if you have a Molotov cocktail in your hand, you can't say “I was just dancing when you caught me”

Polyvalence and changing meanings

Of course not all Kurds are supporters of the PKK, even though they support the Kurdish cause and pro-Kurdish politicians. For them the dances might be a peaceful way of symbolizing resistance against state discrimination, and also a way of showing that they do not want to turn violent in order to expressing their opinions. A Kurdish university student claimed that those who dance want to signal that they can live and have fun despite those they demonstrate against, and that they do not care about the police. Here, the Kurdish dances are used in order to express that they defy the state and police. They insist on expressing enjoyment, fun, fellowship and closeness to their fellows. In the dancing games, they focus on each other and turn their backs on their opponent, expressing that they ignore the efforts of demonstration of power from their opponents. All these different opinions about why people dance in demonstrations show the polyvalence of the Kurdish folk dances, and remind us of the importance of trying not to impose monolithic meanings upon it.

There is a difference between the dancing as representation or symbol of fellowship and oneness and of experiencing the fellowship and the sharing of experience. When the culture center's dancers put on costumes to dance they are clearly a representation of something, and a presentation of their view. When non-professional dancers join in the dance it is sometimes with an intentional meaning that the dance is a protest, while at other times it is a way of being together while protesting. The connectivity of the dance is similar to that of wedding celebrations, but with different relations in focus: the relations between fellow Kurds supporting a common cause. In this way the dance is both a representation and experience, it is both a representation of unity, but it is also unity in 'reality'.

In addition to this, the political contexts are important scenes for renewal and development of new forms and functions of the Kurdish dances. My impression is that most young Kurds in Diyarbakır do not express any ethnic ambivalence, but clearly emphasize that they are Kurdish. Still there are times where they have to negotiate their identity. Looking at Kurdish music and folk dances can illustrate of how ethnic identity is successfully negotiated by incorporating aesthetic elements from other cultures, and making them into their own.

Expressing Kurdish identity does not mean to be stuck in a static mold of tradition. For me it is not easy to differentiate tradition and popular music. Traditional music is popular music, and pop-music is incorporated and mixed with traditional elements. It is a kind of syncretism of old and new. Especially hip hop music and dance style is mixed with traditional Kurdish dancing games. The genius of the Kurdish folk dances is that they give room for innovation, expression of personal identity, and it has room for many different dance styles and bodily *habitus*. One can dance the games traditional styles, a ‘modern female version’ with small movements suited for miniskirts and high heels, ‘*ağır adamlar* dancing’ which is heavy and grounded with slow movement and an upright position, a style where young women and men dancing in jeans and sneakers with bent knee, dancing with inspiration from hip hop style, and dancing inspired by guerilla dancing – which can be more vigorous with jumping and long steps.

In relation to the subject above it can be useful to keep in mind these words of Abner Cohen:

It is true that at any one time the patterns of symbolic activity which ensure the maintenance of our selfhood is given by the society. When society changes, men tend for some time to continue, (57) indeed to struggle hard to preserve their identity, their selfhood, in the old traditional ways. Social change is in a way always a threat to our selfhood, particularly if it involves changes in roles. We tenaciously try to maintain our selfhood by giving new interpretation to our patterns of symbolic action... Whenever possible, we try to adjust to the new politico-economic structure by reinterpreting our existing patterns of symbolic behaviour... This is why socio-cultural change proceeds dialectically, not mechanically. Selfhood is not a mechanical reflection of power relations, but is an autonomous entity, a system in its own right, which can react on the power order and modify it. (Cohen 1974:57-58)

Conclusion

Returning to George Lewis’ definition of music as protest, I claim that the Kurdish dances can be seen as defining social discontent, because in protests they function as iconic signs for Kurdish national unity in opposition to those they protest against, and they contribute to enhance the ideology of the Kurdish guerilla organization PKK. Any police intervention against dancing protesters will only emphasize their reasons for discontent in that they show how they are being suppressed and that their efforts in uniting and creating/appealing for a peaceful and tolerant dialog is not heard. Secondly, I claim that the chances of dances to be taken seriously in Turkey, as opposed to more rational forms of social movement, decreases accordingly with its efficiency as a means of expression and political symbol.⁷¹ Thirdly, I

⁷¹ In addition to this, the threshold for being arrested for illegal propaganda is extremely low in Turkey.

claim that the dances do not only connect social protest to the group's traditional values and symbols through the use of traditional forms of music, instruments, costumes and forms of presentation, they also have the capacity to incorporate new elements and thus being a useful tool in managing identity in times of social change.

Fourthly, the dances can project a strong message, which can be more efficient than more rational ways of communicating promotions of solidarity. Abner Cohen claims that "The more meanings a symbol signifies, the more ambiguous and flexible it becomes, the more intense the feelings that it evokes, the greater its potency, and the more functions it achieves" (Cohen 1974:32). The Kurdish dances are polysemic: they are both political and un-political, as they are used in political protests and for celebrations; they have the ability to express both hierarchy and egalitarianism; they express unity at the same time as they give room for personal identity. It is a highly effective means of expression. The meanings of the dances depend on the context, but also the context depends on the symbols. With political charged music, celebration dances turn from being non-political to political. Also, in the midst of a demonstration, dancers might just be having a 'jolly good time'. This polysemic nature makes the dances an icon and symbol with an including capacity to appeal to many different people. It is not excluding, only those wanting to exclude themselves are excluded from the dance. Since the dance is very much embedded in a non-politic sphere, they also appeal to those that are not generally very interested in politics, and its (seemingly) harmless nature makes it easier to participate.

Fifthly, I claim that the Kurdish dances can in its emotional communication form fuel the group's interest, and in this way lift them up to the intensity of moral rights. The folk dances are – as Victor Turner (1964:30) would say – gathered around two 'poles', an ideological and an emotional (sensory) pole. The ideological pole is very strong in some contexts, as the dances function are icons of the guerrilla soldiers. On the other side, the dances have a very strong sensory pole because they are grounded in individuals' entanglement in social relations and patterns of 'connectivity'. It is associated with joy, marriage, status, egalitarianism and fellowship, and grounded in important emotional, relational parts of the everyday life of Kurds. The dances are thus powerful in evoking feelings, because the dances can invoke what is perhaps most valuable for most Kurds; its close relations. In joining these associations with the bravery associated with the PKK guerrillas – and the fact that bravery is an important value in Kurdish cultural discourses – the dances have the potential of evoking not just feelings, but also actions.

Concluding Remarks

I was once told that “For the Kurds everything is political,” and most of the academic works about Kurds I have found are about the political struggle and the PKK. Although my thesis is also dwelling on political matters, I started out by looking for aspects beyond the political as well. I believe it is more appropriate to say that “Kurds can make everything political,” and I believe that the Kurdish folk dances are examples of this. On the one hand, the dances are as far away from war and politics as one can come; with its capacity to bring individuals together in a joyful connection that expresses, confirms, and reinforces social relations. On the other hand, the dances are perhaps most powerful in its ability to create the experience of connection and *communitas* amongst individuals when it is associated with political struggle and the utopian ideals of a better future with peace and equality. Then the dances can even be seen as a quasi-religious ritual space where political ideas are ritualized. I have claimed that the polyvalence and polysemic quality of the Kurdish dances makes them powerful as symbols and icons, and it makes the dances capable of surviving social change by incorporating new social meanings. The non-verbal and corporeal nature of dance makes it more polysemic than other ‘artistic’ ritualized activities.

I claim that as opposed to folk dances many other places, the Kurdish folk dances are very much alive. Kurdish folk dances are not simply put on a stage as representations of national identity, nor are they mere symbols in a museum; they are still used in everyday life and they are constantly renewed and given new meanings. As a fairly fixed ritual form, the dances are capable of addressing new things; it is adjustable to the constant changing realities people live in. Traditional values and symbols are constantly changing and new (modern) elements are integrated. I claim that Kurdish Dances are not invented, but what Kaeppler defines as *Tradition*: a “continuous process – constantly adding and subtracting ideas and practices, constantly changing, constantly recycling bits and pieces of ideas and practices into new traditions” (Kaeppler 2004:294).

What I believe distinguishes dance from other political or cultural symbols, is that it is less referential in meaning and has a more complex relation to sociality and cultural aspects. When the dancers are holding hands and moving closely together, they are not just imagining a connection, there is a ‘real’ physical connection. The body is the material of signification, and this is perhaps the most ‘natural’ vehicle, making many of its functions of signification or meaning-creation invisible to the performer. I claim that focusing on how the dances can be

both representations and a part of people's habitus, may give a more coherent understanding of how some cultural practice gain its meanings, and how what we may call ideological processes have a complex relation to and grounding in experiential aspects of social life.

Kurdish dances are popular in all parts of Turkey, though because of political reasons dance teachers who teach folk dances associated with the Eastern regions are often met with reluctance (Karakeçili 2008). Over the recent years the Turkish government has eased their restrictions on Kurdish cultural expressions – most likely because of the desire to join the European Union Today it seems less likely that the effort to conform to the demands of the EU will continue, because the will to join is decreasing. In addition there seem to be increasing tension between the government and the Kurdish guerrilla organisation PKK, and Kurdish political parties (BDP). This may affect future government policy on expression of Kurdish culture and how Kurdish folk dances are perceived and performed in different contexts. It will be interesting to see what new meanings and functions or forms the dances will gain in the future, as these will depend on the power relations and the struggles Kurds are fighting.

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