

**ISTANBUL TECHNICAL UNIVERSITY ★ GRADUATE SCHOOL OF ARTS AND  
SOCIAL SCIENCES**

**TRANSFORMATIONS OF KURDISH MUSIC IN SYRIA:  
SOCIAL AND POLITICAL FACTORS**



**M.A. THESIS**

**Hussain HAJJ**

**Department of Musicology and Music Theory**

**Musicology M.A. Programme**

**JUNE 2018**



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**Thesis Advisor: Assoc. Prof. Dr. F. Belma KURTİŞOĞLU**

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**İSTANBUL TEKNİK ÜNİVERSİTESİ ★ SOSYAL BİLİMLER ENSTİTÜSÜ**

**SURİYE'DE KÜRT MÜZİĞİNİN DÖNÜŞÜMÜ:  
SOSYAL VE POLİTİK ETKENLER**

**YÜKSEK LİSANS TEZİ**

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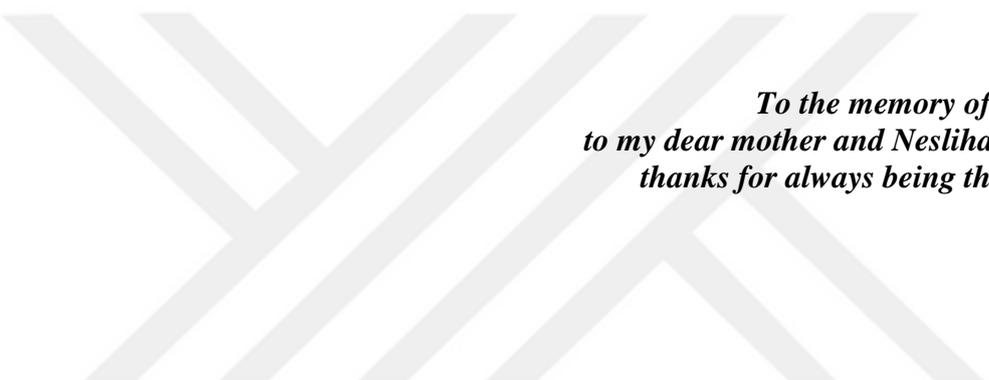


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*To the memory of my father,  
to my dear mother and Neslihan GÜngör;  
thanks for always being there for me.*



## **FOREWORD**

When I started studying Musicology, a musician friend from Syrian Kurds told me that I am leaving my seat as an active musician and starting a life of academic researches, and that he will make music and I will research the music he makes. It was really an interesting statement to me; it made me think of two things, the first one is the intention behind this statement, while the second was the attitude of Kurds, especially Kurd musicians, towards researchers and researching. As for the first thing, I felt that there was a problem, maybe a social or psychological, of the Kurdish people in general, and the musicians in particular. In other words, as if everyone wants to live under the spotlight and make others hear his voice or/and recognize his presence, the thing that can not take place by living in the books, institutes and universities, but must be on stages, in the streets or any platform in front of the masses. This, I believe, has national and political dimensions of the same psychological, social and educational ones. As for the second thing, I have always craved to see researches on Kurdish music from political, social or even psychological and historical aspects. I have always wondered why there are so many anthologies of Kurdish songs and stories, while research materials are rare. Perhaps this is also linked to the desire of all Kurdish musicians to prefer the life of musical work to the life of musical research.

Another issue that has always occupied me is that most Kurds, whether musicians or non-musicians, state that Kurdish music is rich and that most of the peoples who lived with and neighbored Kurds are influenced by Kurdish music. Let us take for granted that this is true, so what do other peoples know about Kurdish music? And if we see an openness to Kurdish culture in recent times, whether in the media or at the academic level, the predominant nature of this openness stems from political motives, contexts and backgrounds. Moreover, Kurdish music did not go through stages of harmony with time and keep pace with artistic developments, like that of Arabs, Turks or Persians. That is, regardless of the fact that the Kurds have not been able to govern themselves, and that the Kurdish culture in general has always been

associated with a political act rather than a cultural act from the perspective of the other, the Kurds themselves have contributed to strengthening this view. Therefore, in my view, Kurdish music occupies a very shy and humble place compared to the music of other peoples in the region. So, I had to look for the persistent obstacles that hindered the progress of Kurdish music, and since the obstacles are many, according to my conclusion, I preferred to choose two prominent ones which emanated from political and social factors, and I handled them within a historical frame as much as possible. And considering that the music of all Kurds is a difficult task for me to grip at the moment, I thought that I can deal with the music of the Syrian Kurds in general, and that of Kobani, in particular, because I benefited greatly from my personal experience as a musician who lived most cultural problems for nearly twenty years. And I wish that this effort, which I hope I have successfully put forward and addressed, is a modest introduction for a larger research project.

There is no doubt that any research has its impediments, especially the writing of a thesis for the first time in one's life. One of the main difficulties that I faced from time to time was psychological difficulties. Like any Syrian, I am concerned about the situation in Syria and my concern for my family, relatives and acquaintances who are scattered throughout the world. And other material and moral problems limited the freedom of my movement to access some sources and places. Regardless of the difficulty of writing in a language other than the mother language, and the great difference in the educational system between Syria and Turkey which made me very slow and lazy every once in a while. But all these things would not have been easier without the presence of all my teachers in the Department of Musicology who helped me very much since my first day at university, and I especially mention my thesis advisor Assoc. Prof. Dr. F. Belma KURTIŞOĞLU. I also do not forget the great support of my cousins Muhsin SEYDA and Xiyas SEYDA, my best friends and teachers Neslihan GÜNGÖR, Mehmet E. BİTMEZ, Selda ÖZTÜRK, Evrim Hikmet ÖĞÜT, Didem DANIŞ, Besime ŞEN, and every friend at school who added a different color to my academic tableau. Just as I do not forget my dear mother's prayers for me. I wish I had succeeded in what they supported me to achieve.

June 2018

Hussain HAJJ

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## ABBREVIATIONS

<b>ISIS</b>	: Islamic State in Iraq and Sham
<b>KDP</b>	: Kurdistan Democratic Party
<b>KDPS</b>	: Kurdistan Democratic Party in Syria
<b>KRG</b>	: Kurdistan Regional Government
<b>KTV</b>	: Kurdistan Television
<b>PDK</b>	: <i>Partiya Demoqrati Kurdistan</i> (Kurdistan Democratic Party)
<b>PDKS</b>	: <i>Partiya Demoqrati Kurdistan li Sûriyê</i> (Kurdistan Democratic Party in Syria)
<b>PKK</b>	: <i>Partiya Karkerên Kurdistan</i> (Kurdistan Workers' Party)
<b>PUK</b>	: Patriotic Union of Kurdistan
<b>PYD</b>	: <i>Partiya Yekîtiya Demoqrati</i> (Democratic Union Party)
<b>UAR</b>	: United Arab Republic
<b>YPG</b>	: <i>Yekîneyên Parastina Gel</i> (People's Protection Units)



# **TRANSFORMATIONS OF KURDISH MUSIC IN SYRIA: SOCIAL AND POLITICAL FACTORS**

## **SUMMARY**

This thesis presents a study on the social and political impediments to progress of Kurdish music in Syria and more in particular in Kobani. My arguments focus on two impediments. The first of my arguments which concerns the attitude of Kurdish society to music and musicians, while the second argument is the impact of politics on both the creativity and the musical quality that is presented. In order to deal with these issues, a fundamental point was taken: the question of identity. In other words, elements of the nature of the Kurdish identity, of which music is an important part, have been examined. Therefore, it is a historical study about the social and political distinction of the Kurdish people in order to present the musical distinction in light of it. My research is largely based on historical, political and sociological literature as well as personal knowledge based on personal experience and accumulation. In addition to all these, I have conducted in-dept interviews with Syrian Kurdish musicians which contributed significant knowledge and experiences to my research.

The study goes on to track music historically in an attempt to find the roots from which these obstacles emerged. The music styles of the Kurds are presented from ancient times to the present day. As singing is part and parcel of the identity of the Kurdish music that it takes center stage, a great part of the study is focused on the intimacy between Kurdish literature and Kurdish music. The literary output is the subject of Kurdish songs.

And after put forward the overview on distinction of Kurdish music and the musical output in general, the study goes on to modern history in the beginning of the twentieth century, sheds light on the social and political conditions of Syrian Kurds in general, and in particular on Kobani. This study researches the rationales that accompanied the formation of the Syrian Kurdish identity and the relationship of each the social and political elements which affect to the process of musical, bards, popular singers and bands are studied depending on the view of the Kurdish tribal community of music and the Syrian official position on Kurdish music. On the one hand and the Kurdish politics followed on the other hand and the effect of both on

the creative diversity in the Kurdish music work in Syria in general and in Kobani in particular.

The study ends up with examine the results of how affect the both Kurdish tribal and religious classes to Kurdish music. In other words, Syrian government have controlled and restricted the production of musical process. The lack of creativity and loss of identity sources were seen in music production after the world was opened up to Syrian Kurdish musicians who got rid of both the political and social authorities. Therefore, it is recommended in that thesis to research the origins of production of Kurdish music, performing and singing in accordance to modern visions and tastes.



## SURİYE'DE KÜRT MÜZİĞİNİN DÖNÜŞÜMÜ:

### SOSYAL VE POLİTİK ETKENLER

#### ÖZET

Bu tez, Suriye'de ve özellikle Kobani'de Kürt müziğinin gelişimine ilişkin sosyal ve politik engelleri ortaya koymaktadır. Tezin tartışması iki konuya odaklanmaktadır: Birinci tartışma, Kürt toplumunun müziğe ve müzisyene yönelik yaklaşımı iken; ikinci tartışma siyasetin müzikal nitelik ve yaratıcılık üzerindeki etkilerini ortaya koymaktır. Bu iki tartışma açısından “kimlik meselesi” temel bir konu olarak ele alınmıştır. Başka bir deyişle, Kürt kimliğini tanımlayan unsurlar, müziğin de önemli bir parçası olarak incelenmiştir. Bu nedenle tez, Kürt müziğinin ayrımlarını, Kürt halkının sosyal ve politik olarak ayrımları ışığında ele alan tarihsel bir çalışmadır. Tezin araştırması büyük oranda kişisel deneyim ve birikimlere dayalı bilgilerin yanı sıra tarihsel, politik ve sosyolojik kaynaklara dayanmaktadır. Bunlara ek olarak Suriyeli Kürt müzisyenler ile derinlemesine görüşmeler yaptım. Bu görüşmeler araştırmaya önemli bilgi ve deneyimleri katmıştır.

Bu çalışma, sosyal ve politik engelleri görmek için tarihsel olarak müziğin izinden gitmektedir. Kürtlerin müzik üslupları, eski zamanlardan günümüze olmak üzere, ortaya konulmaktadır. Kürt müziğinin ve kimliğinin bir parçası olan “şarkı söyleme” merkezi bir yere sahiptir. Bu çalışmanın büyük bölümü Kürt edebiyatı ve Kürt müziği arasındaki yakınlığa odaklanmaktadır. Edebi ürünler, Kürtçe şarkıların konusunu oluşturmaktadır.

Bu çalışma genel olarak, yirminci yüzyılın başlarına yani modern tarihe gitmekte ve Kürt müziği ve müzikal çıktılara dair ayrımları ortaya koyarak, Suriyeli Kürtlerin ve özelde Kobani'nin sosyal ve politik koşullarına ışık tutmaktadır. Çalışma, Suriye'de Kürt kimliğinin oluşumuna eşlik eden rasyonelleri ve müzikal süreçleri etkileyen yanı sıra ozan, popüler şarkıcılar, müzik grupların koşullarını Kürt aşiret toplumu ve Suriye resmi makamların Kürt müziği üzerindeki etkisini bağlı olarak ele almıştır. Bir yandan Kürt siyasetinin Suriye'deki ve özellikle Kobani'deki Kürt müziğindeki yaratıcı çeşitliliğe olan etkisi görülmeye çalışılmıştır.

Çalışma, Kürt aşiret ve dini sınıfın Suriye'deki Kürt müziğini nasıl etkilemekte olduğunu inceleyerek sona ermektedir. Suriye'deki iktidar üretim sürecini kontrol etti ve kısıtladı. Ve dünyanın, hem siyasi hem de sosyal baskılardan kurtulan Suriyeli Kürt müzisyenlere açılması, kimliğin kaybolmasına ve müzik üretiminde yaratıcılığın azalmasına neden oldu. Bu nedenle, bu tezde Kürt müziği üretimi, performansı ve icrasının kökenlerini araştırarak modern vizyonlara ve zevklere uygun olarak yeniden inşa edilmesi önerilmektedir.







## 1. INTRODUCTION

Among things that any human being does not choose and cannot change one can recognise three essential notions, at least for myself, that draw the life line I am leading regardless of my own free-will to choose my interest or to follow my own cherished dreams which themselves are doomed to be caged in the same frame of those non-changeable three notions. First of all, being a “Kurd” which is a very complicated thing; if we know that the Kurdish identity in the collective memory of all the surrounding peoples, even almost all over the world, gives a political impression not considering other impressions constructed by official media or social media in general. I didn’t choose to be a Kurd, but if I was granted to have the chance to choose my own ethnicity, I would choose to be a Kurd again. And I think this leads us to the second notion that I cannot change which emanates from the geographical factor. I was born and grown-up in *Kobani*<sup>1</sup>, among a Kurdish and complicatedly-tied tribal community. I suppose, if I was born in a big city like Damascus or Aleppo, instead, this idea of my willing to be a Kurd again would probably be able to change or maybe the nationalist feeling would be assimilated within the overwhelming Arab cultural stream. The third notion is being a Muslim, my being a musician in a Muslim family and community, and brought-up as a Muslim even if I am not that much sort of committed person to his religious rituals and commands. Most likely, if I was a Christian, it would be so much easier to me to be a musician. I can change my religion, but it will not work out the problem, because I have lived my formative age in that religious and clannish community. And to be precise, being a Muslim is not that much trouble if it is not melted with the tribal and clannish ideology. And at the same time it is not that much trouble, if the tribal and clannish ideology is not melted with religion. But when these two radical attitudes stand together, there is no outlet for opposing interests or hobbies.

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<sup>1</sup> A Kurdish region in north Syria on the border with Turkey affiliated to Aleppo. Officially known as “Ayn Al-Arab.” Except the Arab population in the two townships Shouyoukh and Sarrin which are affiliated to Kobani the majority of population which is about 300,000 are Kurds.

These three notions led me to re-estimate the cultural situation and connect it to problems emanated from them which I can sum up by political (being a Kurd) and social (religious and clannish community) effects and how they did get their enormous influence on the nature and status of music made under such circumstances.

To summarize these two effects, I would like to give an example of my own experience which gradually played a great role in shaping my point of view and made me choose to handle such subjects. In 1998-1999, when I went to Aleppo University for studying, two interests began to have urge on me; music and literature. But to be honest, I can tell, they were not new ones to me. I have always carried them in the bottom of my heart, so it would be better to call them postponed interests. So many reasons were behind this delay. One of them was the opposing attitude of my family and the community I live among towards music. Another was a political one and to explain that let me relate this real life story: In March 2000, my cousin made a mini studio to record his songs. In those days, my interest in music was beginning that I got myself an Oud and was looking for any chance to play it. Since playing music was not allowed in our house due to social and Islamic regulations, I sometimes went to play and listen to music in my cousin's mini studio. One evening, I asked him to give me the keys of the studio to practice playing the Oud there. Unfortunately, it was about one week before *Newroz*<sup>2</sup>. While I was sitting alone playing the Oud, I remembered a friend who has a good voice and thought it would be a good idea to call him and bring him to make music together. He will sing and I will play and since we have recording equipments we will record the songs together. So for that reason, I took my cousin's motorbike and went to pick up my friend. In the springtime of that year streets of Kobani used to be muddy and were silent at the evenings. I could only hear the sound of rain falling on the pieces of metal in front of the closed lathe workshops and sometimes the sound of those drops of rain falling on the bike were breaking the silence and telling me to get control on driving and not to make the bike slide on those waste streets. It was about ten minutes to arrive to my friend's house. He was waiting patiently. On the way back to the studio, I remembered another musician friend and I thought it would be a good idea to make

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<sup>2</sup> Every year in March 21st Kurds, like all Iranian peoples, celebrate this day as the beginning of springtime.

him join us too. He was not at home. So, we continued our way in the rain, darkness and silence. Suddenly, two big lights stopped in front of us. I stopped the motorbike fearfully. After a few seconds a white car stopped behind us. The car with big lights before us switched its lights off and our fear began to increase because we found out it was the car of the intelligence department, a big grey jeep. In those critical few seconds I prepared myself for answering the questions that will be asked: What are you doing? Where are you coming from? Where are you going? Who are you? While preparing answers for those questions, six machine guns surrounded us and in a very light and fluent way we saw ourselves inside the jeep. Both of us university students; the thing that may give prestige in that neglected poor town. We do not have drugs in our pockets and we do not even use drugs. We are not drunk. We do not belong to political parties and we have neither certain political views. The things that I was thinking about very quickly and in a harmonious way with my heart beats, as if I were composing a song that needs to stuff that much sentences in a consistent way with the circumstance and make it on as fast as tempo. Suddenly, I discovered that I have something in my pocket that is more dangerous than drugs, and it put me face to face with politics. It was a plectrum. A very good, slim and white plectrum. In that time of the year and a plectrum in my pocket? *Newroz* is coming and you will give them a very good reason for accusation to put you in prison<sup>3</sup>; that you play music, and so you have rehearsals, in March 21<sup>st</sup> you will be on the stage to sing “national Kurdish” songs in *Newroz*! How can I get rid of this curse! I thought to swallow it. But it was too long to be swallowed! No! I will put it in my shoe. No, they will take my shoes off! I thought it would be better if I threw it under the chair. The back side of the jeep consisted of two opposite long chairs. Me and my friend were opposite each other and four intelligence men were in both our sides. But in the mid of silence, when you throw something it will make a sound. So, I made a cough and threw it. Now, thank God! We do not have any guilt to be accused of. After three hours of waiting for nothing and asking their usual questions that I had already known, we were set free. But for three months, I was afraid of playing music and I didn't have a plectrum to play, as well.

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<sup>3</sup> In those times, in particular, the relationship between the regime and Kurds was very bad and especially with PKK Party (Kurdistan Workers Party) because a year before, the regime forced their leader Abdullah Ocalan to get out of Syria after about 25 years of a mutual good relationship between them (the regime and PKK)

So, sometimes small events and events you live, hear, experience or witness leave a very big influence on you and lead you to begin searching for answers to big questions and problems. I had always believed that there is no national identity for music, but friends and acquaintances' experiences from one side and moments like the one I experienced on the other side opened a new way or another perspective about music to me; it made me a "Kurdish" musician. It made me think how far politics can orientate someone's musical taste and production. Day by day, this question led me to think more thoroughly about politics and music, not just the political way the authorities handle Kurdish music and the repeatedly taken measures to fight it and get it muted. But the political elements that reside in the Kurdish music itself make an assertion for its existence and survival. In other words, it can be said that it is a matter of action and reaction.

The other question, that attracted my attention from a very young age, was the matter of music inside the ethnicity, the community itself. Again I would like to give another real life story. I was about fourteen years-old when one of my brothers, who is four years older than me, travelled to Aleppo to study scientific branch at a secondary school because that year they had not a complete quorum of scientific branch students in Kobani so they did not open a class for them. I still remember he was very smart and hard-working at school, besides he was fond of music and could play any musical instrument after spending few days of practicing. His passion of playing violin, which is considered to be such a sensitive instrument that needs guiding to play it, made him determined to save his daily expenses to pay money for a violin and take a few courses in Aleppo. This was achieved, of course, without my elder brothers and father's knowledge; because they would get angry if they had heard that he was interested in music and that he was taking music lessons instead of to studying in Aleppo. Once, my elder brother went to Aleppo for some business and wanted to see my student brother and give him some money for his expenses. My brother was not at home, and when my elder brother asked his roommates about him, they told him that his young brother was attending a violin course. The poor guy did not realise the consequences of the rules of our family. My elder brother got mad and told the roommates, "Tell my brother that your elder brother came and he says I hope that school does not affect your music!" He said that in a very sarcastic and upset way. Once my student brother got home and heard this from his roommates he

decided to be independent and work in order to pay for his music and school expenses. But when he started working, he abandoned both school and music. I still feel sorry about him. I have always dreamed about a brilliant future for him, unfortunately, he failed both at school and music career. So, why would my family oppose us being interested in music? Why would music be so unacceptable in my community? Everybody listens to music and loves it, and has a good musical taste and the ability to intuitively learn or appreciate music. Why this contradiction? For such inconsistency there is a Syrian proverb that says, “Every man wants his neighbour woman to get liberated.” That means, we teach our girls to stay at home and not to see men and make relationships with them, but at the same time we want to meet with other people’s girls and have relationships with them. We are a community that loves listening to music but do not want our children to learn and play music. And this very question was the intricately closed chest that I have been looking for its key.

When it comes to Kurds and music, I see it as a big title that should be specified or precised because we are talking about a people which is diverse inside itself. In other words, the most important remarks that I have noticed throughout my observations, readings, interviews, listening and watching sessions; was that we cannot talk about Kurdish music as one characteristically-united "Kurdish music". That we have to take into consideration matters of geography, linguistics, different political views, sectarian and religious components, and even inside the same religion and sect we have different cults and doctrines that each one of them has its own relation to music performance or its different attitude towards music. For example, the Alevi<sup>4</sup> Kurds and Yezidi<sup>5</sup> Kurds, as well, give music a great importance during religious rituals and practices, on the contrary of Kurds of other sects who are more austere about utilizing music in their daily life and if we look at *tariqats*<sup>6</sup> inside the Sunni<sup>7</sup> sect we

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<sup>4</sup>In Turkey. Alevi is the term used for a large number of heterodox Muslim Shi'a communities with different characteristics. Some care more about religious solidarity with Turkish Alevis more than ethnic solidarity with Kurds, particularly since many Sunni Kurds deplore them.

<sup>5</sup> Ezidis (also called Yezidis) adhere to a non-monotheist religion of ancient origin in the Middle East. While they are ethnic Kurds, Ezidis emphasize their distinct religious identity.

<sup>6</sup> Sufi or derwish/dervish mystical brotherhoods.

<sup>7</sup> Sunni/*Sunnah* and Shia are two sects (*Madhabs* in Arabic) in Islam. Sunni is the largest sect.

can see their different ways of employing rhythms and rituals. For Example, *Qadirîs*<sup>8</sup> use *Erbane*<sup>9</sup> instrument with their *Zikir*<sup>10</sup>, while *Naqşabandîs*<sup>11</sup> do not use instruments at all and their *Zikir* takes place in a silent atmosphere. Geographically speaking, if we take wedding dances and music played among Kurds in Syria as an example, Kurds in *Cizîrê*<sup>12</sup>, north-east of Syria, use a fast tempo of 6/8 signature and rarely dance on 4/4, as well. While in Kobani, only 4/4 signature is used in wedding dances. In *Efrîn*'s (Afrin) region, north-west of Syria, it is also 4/4 signature but in a slow tempo. In the case of songs and *meqams*<sup>13</sup> which are used, the north-east corner region on the borderline with Iraq and Turkey is more like that of *Herêma Botan* (in *Şîrnak* Region in the Turkish side). In Kobani, melodies and styles are similar to that of Urfa. In *Efrîn*, it is more like that of Antep in the Turkish side. And among Kurds of Iraq there is clear differences in music performances between Kurds who speak *Behdînanî* (Kurmanji) dialect in the north-west and Kurds who speak *Soranî* dialect in the north-east. In the east side, it sounds to be nearer to Kurds of Iran, while in the west side, it appears to resemble the Kurds of Turkey and Syria. And even among Kurds of Iran we can sense the differences between north-west and south-west.

Because one always prefers to start from the easiest, subjectively-important and more controllable point, I preferred to focus on the Kurdish music in Syria, in other words the music of Syrian Kurds. Of course the main reason is the significant remark that I have already mentioned earlier i.e. we cannot talk about a one characteristically-united Kurdish music. Once again, to be more specific, I would like to focus the light on the music made in my city, Kobani; clarifying the status of music and obstacles it had faced through historical, political and sociological perspectives which -in my opinion- paralysed the progress of the cultural movement in general and of music in

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<sup>8</sup> QADIRI. One of the two main **Sufi** orders in Kurdistan, the other being the **Naqshbandi**. The Qadiris take their name from Sheikh Abd al-Qadir (1077–1166)—a most revered Islamic saint whose tomb in Baghdad remains a well-known shrine—but he had nothing to do with establishing the order. It is not unusual for groups to later claim descent from famous reputed progenitors in order to gain legitimacy from the association. (Gunter, 2003 – Page 168)

<sup>9</sup> Daf in Persian. A large frame drum played by both hands.

<sup>10</sup> Or *Dhikr*. Can be translated as “mentioning/naming” in English. Connected to Sufism or mysticism. Praising the name of God throughout Suf ceremonies.

<sup>11</sup> NAQSHBANDI. Sufi order, or **Islamic** mystical brotherhood, that rapidly became the most influential throughout Kurdistan in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and still holds that distinction despite the inroads of modernization. The Naqshbandi and the rival **Qadiri** order are the only organizations in Kurdistan that cut through **tribal** boundaries and are independent of the state. (Gunter, 2003 – Page 141)

<sup>12</sup> Or Jazeera. An Arabic word means “island.” The region between Euphrates and Tigris.

<sup>13</sup> Or maqams/ makam. An Arabic word means status, seat r locality. Used or music as tune or melodic system.

particular. And I would, at some point, connect the issue to the general frame of the whole Kurdish situation and the national, political and social status that conclusively had an effect on the process of developing the musical picture in Kobani.

### **1.1 Purpose of Thesis**

Once, I read that Edward Said<sup>14</sup> stated that students from the East -when coming to West for studying- they choose subjects from their own countries to research on in the West. He sees that those students give free intelligence services to the West about their countries and societies. In his point of view, students should look for subjects in the places they study in (Hadidi, 1996). I would like to discuss this advice of Edward Said in order to give my subjective and objective reasons of choosing this matter of discussion. While the West represents the freedom of expressions to me, the East represents suppression. So, in this perspective, any student or researcher who comes from East to West gives subjects of the East the priority of his consideration; we gather and accumulate as much as subjects and topics for discussion and postpone discussing them waiting for the first chance to arrive in free milieus to handle them. Maybe some politics of some Western countries do not let that much space for free expression but in conclusion everything is controversial in the West, and you have the right to stand against some points and ideas, unlike a state like Syria that everything in it should be one-coloured and nothing is negotiable. Above all, as long as you explore and probe something related to your region i.e. the East, they i.e. the West do not spot you as a “national threat”. Going back to the first notion presented at the beginning; to consider anything related to Kurds as political which implies national factors, in this respect discussing anything related to Kurds, even in an academic work, is a kind of risk for the researcher on one hand and an unacceptable thing for the official politics of the state on the other. To be more specific, discussing Syrian official politics towards Kurds and Kurdish culture in Syria is an impossible work to do because it is a “national threat”. I still remember one friend of mine who was arrested because he published a poetry book. In one of the poems he blames the politics of the state for the social corruption. Another example, my uncle used to operate on a typewriter for his everyday notes and writings. He was arrested just

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<sup>14</sup> (1935-2003) A Palestinian Christian scholar and writer. Lived in USA, most of his works deals with Orientalism.

because he had a typewriter. So the typewriter was a “national threat”. Another friend had got arrested and imprisoned for two years just because he made a phone call with a Kurdish TV channel. A cousin of mine was went behind bars for six months just because he had celebrated the night of *Newroz*. And so many examples of such events.

Another thing, I cannot work on a research about peace of other peoples if all I witnessed was wars that have surrounded me. I cannot talk about happiness if I have always indulged myself in sadness and sorrow. And above all, I have problems in my own culture that, in addition to the politics of Syrian state, my own society is to blame for them. So, I cannot talk about Arabic, Turkish or Persian music if I have my own music that needs to be rediscovered, archived, reviewed, handled and tackled in an academic method. To be more subjective, to me, Kurdish music is a vast piece of land, a virgin one, and as an ambitious person, I will be satisfied and do better than working on other cultures on one hand. On the other hand, I see myself one of the people who are responsible for reclaiming this piece of land, looking for the best way of ploughing and seeding it and consequently someday it will be fruitful.

So, approaching these two factors and effects, political and social, and their influence on the creative process of music on one side and the obstacles they had put in the way of the progress of Kurdish music on the other side will always be my interest. So, maybe someday we can find the reason and then will be able to give the answer for the classical question of Kurds, “We have a beautiful music so why we cannot go beyond locality?”

## **1.2 Literature Review**

When I was a little boy in the elementary school, I had a strange feeling which I did not know its nature, about a girl who used to stay in Aleppo 160 km south-west of Kobani. In the evenings I was always asking myself the following question, “How did she spend her day? Was her day like mine or was it different?” When we were twelve years-old she went abroad with her family and with the passage of time I got to know my feelings about her which affected the nature of my usual questions which turned into, “Does she miss me like I miss her? Does she know about my feelings about her? Does she feel the same?” Then this habit of asking questions covered other spaces of my daily life and this kind of questions became more

comprehensive for instance, “I am here in this spot of the world looking at the sky sadly. Is there anyone in Spain, for example, who is looking at the sky and feel the same at this very moment?” Then my questions took the opposite dimension, “What if there are people who ask these exact questions to themselves wondering what other people, including me, are doing or feeling!” Then I started to feel afraid of myself and felt that I am obsessed and have a psychological problem and time by time I made myself quit of this habit. But later when I started school in the past three years, I discovered that these kind of questions and this feeling is a sort of door that leads to construct a thesis and its hypothesis in any research. I mean that I had to go back to my old habit with questions of other perspectives in order to know whether I am the only one who thinks about a specific thing or there are other people who had thought or are still thinking about the same things. So, to sum the previous personal experience up and connect it to my subject, I had to make a research about the following questions: Aren't there people who found out the same problems or researchers who asked those very questions about Kurdish music and the influence of society and/or politics on it? Answering or finding out about these questions is the hardest part of writing to me, especially when it comes to a matter related to Kurds and Kurdish culture. Most of works about Kurds are concentrating on historical and political issues. But since my subject is a part and parcel of history and politics, I make use of those information written by Westerners and Orientalists. At times I choose some points from Kurdish writers themselves, but those points I can trust because, it seems to me that, when a people suffers statelessness and at the same time witness suppressive acts by the opposite side which represents the official attitude of states in which Kurds live, this idea drives native intellectuals to exaggerate the information about history and politics of their own people. But I thought it would be useful to depend on some figures of those writings of official attitudes towards Kurds and history and culture in their viewpoints which I think have fallacies about Kurds in some issues. So, to avoid exaggeration and fallacies I am going to choose some different visions and theories next to each other and give my personal deductions and will mostly rely on independent information given by Western authors as an objective neutral third party. In the case of culture, most of the details are derived from the writings of Kurds themselves. But the noticeable thing I think is that most Kurds' publications about music did not go beyond documenting old songs and epics. As if to apply a general research about music and culture in a sociological,

historical, political or even psychological frame was not that much of priority to Kurds. So literarily speaking, we can say that Kurdish culture is still looking for a place for its feet to stand on, trying to survive and assert its existence. And according to my observations I think Kurds are still in the quagmire of converting orally transferred heritage into written materials.

Yet web search engines are not that much of a reliability for academic researches, but according to the Syrian researcher Ph.D. Saadalla Axa Al-Kalaa<sup>15</sup>, they show the engagement and relationship between a specific subject and a large number of people and can give us subtle statistics about any subject in parts of a second. To search for subjects related to what I discuss right here, we use one of the web search engines for this comprehensive sentence, “The Kurdish music.” So, in 0.55 of a second we reach to about 3.880.000 results. All on top results are videos and songs. Then comes some definitions of Kurdish music. Among them some books and essays that talk about music and Kurds, the role of politics and saving Kurdish nationalism and stories of censorships that I will make use of throughout this writing. But there is no specific subject which handles the role of society and politics in Kurdish music and especially in Syria. And more specifically in the city of Kobani.

If we try this precise question: “The problems of Kurdish music.” We find that in 0.58 of a second we can reach to about 499.000 results. The prominent titles of this research consequences, on-top ones, the matter of “...Kurdish music was banned...” and especially in Turkey that we see title like, “Turkey teacher reports students to police for listening to Kurdish music,” (Khalidi, 2017) “The Difficult Struggle of Kurdish Music” (ANFENGLISH, 2017) which is an interview with the owner of one of Kurdish music productions in Turkey. So, all results show political problems emanated from banning Kurdish music by authorities and especially in Turkey. Another result shows titles of books that talk about Kurds’ history with hints to my search keywords implied in the texts throughout those books. Moreover, by reading those positions in which music is mentioned, again we face politics of authorities against Kurdish identity in the cultural works.

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<sup>15</sup> Professor of engineering and computer programming at Damascus University. He held the position of Minister of Tourism in Syria for ten years. Qanoon player and has so many studies and researches in Arabic music. Recently active in social media preparing for an electronic Arabic music encyclopedia project.

Once again, why am I doing this? I am doing this in order to know whether I am the first one who talks about the role of political and social effects on Kurdish music in Syria and in Kobani, in particular, or not. So, in addition to this quick example of research, there are so many valuable political, historical and cultural works about Kurds. A good number of writings about Kurdish music are performed by Westerns. Even by Kurds in the Diasporas themselves, we could find good writings recently. But the problem here is that there are no specific and useful materials about Kurds of Syria. So, the piece of writing related to Kurds of Syria and Kobani, in particular, will be a kind of conclusion and approach of the whole frame of the Kurdish culture on one hand and my experience, the fieldworks and interviews I have made on the other.

### **1.3 Methods**

First of all, this material is based upon my own experience, observations and musical practice as an insider. From 1998 to 2010 I was an active song composer for so many local singers and even some Kurdish singers in the diasporas. In 2001, when my compositions got a chance to be recorded for the first time I had to look for a nickname for myself so I chose *Memo Seyda* instead of Hussain Hajj. This was my first tangible experience to start my musical fight with society and politics. Beginning with the name, it meant so much to me that time; I am hiding my real identity from my family, community and the intelligence services on one side and having an Arabic name and carrying an ideological Islamic meaning on the other side. But it was a big surprise when my friend *Serdar*, who sang my compositions, wanted the same thing for himself; he did not even want to put his photo on the cover and asked me for a nickname for himself. So our work was released by *Memo Seyda* and *Şad*. Then my journey of experiences began and I became in direct touch with other music makers and witnessed lively events and attitudes with listeners.

The first field work experience was in October 2010 (Küçük & Çakar, 2017). Where three friends came from Istanbul to Qamişlo<sup>16</sup> and wanted me with them to help with contacts and translations about dances and music of peoples who share the similar cultural legacy of the same region in both Syrian and Turkish sides. It was the first

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<sup>16</sup> Official name Al-Qamishli. A city north-east Syria on the border with Nusaybin/Mardin - Turkey.

time I started to believe that the best way to study a culture of a specific people begins with analyzing the sociological and psychological aspects of that people. Moreover, in a region like that of *Mardin*<sup>17</sup> and its neighbour on the Syrian side we find so many different ethnics and we cannot talk about Kurds if we ignore Assyrians, Arabs, Armenians or Turks. Middle East, and especially Mesopotamia, is a place that so many cultures have been living in and together co-created the cultural frame of the region. I remember when we were making an interview with an Assyrian man, he mentioned so many dances and music occasions that have similar characteristics in Kurdish music. At the same time I noticed common problems that has emerged from society, religions and politics.

“When our people suffer the social, economical, cultural and political situations in Syria they try hard to escape and go out. But when they stay abroad they start missing the homeland. Where is this feeling coming from? What is the problem?” A question that I have always asked myself. But when my absence from Syria exceeded months then years I started to find answers for it. That case reminded me of the story of Santiago’s dream in the Brazilian author Paulo Coelho’s novel *The Alchemist*. In an abandoned church in Spain Santiago dreams of a treasure buried in Egypt. When he gets to Egypt after a long journey, a man tells him that he, the man, has a similar dream that there is a treasure in an abandoned church in Spain. Santiago goes back to his church. Digs and finds the treasure. In my point of view, in order to evaluate details of your life in your homeland, you have to be converted from an insider into an outsider. After I left *Kobanî* and Syria for good in December 17th 2010, I started to think more objectively and thoroughly about Kurdish culture in general and that of *Kobanî* in particular. I started to get acquainted with the problems music faces in *Kobanî*. Then day by day a reconciliation took place in my heart and so many projects came to my mind and I hoped to go back to *Kobanî* for frequent visits to research, interview and record. But Syria was afflicted with the war and it was getting more difficult. The catastrophic incident came to existence on September 19th 2014 when ISIS attacked *Kobanî*. All people ran away and every recorded material and document got burnt with the collapse of buildings of the city. Here, I began to move to the method of going out to the field and interviewing everyone who

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<sup>17</sup> *Cizîrê* region in north-east Syria has a common cultural legacy to that of *Mardin* region which locates in south-east of Turkey.

has memories about Kobanî, contacting all musicians who were available. A great part of this writing is dependent on those memories and evaluations of interviews. In some points *Mihemed-ê Dûman*<sup>18</sup> will be relevantly discussed because, in my opinion, he sums up the whole situation of music and the attitude of people of Kobanî as a part of the Syrian Kurds, towards music, monitoring political and social effects contributed in putting obstacles in the way of this musician leaving him forsaken, forgotten and absolutely obscure.

*Dûman* was one of those musicians I liked to go back to Syria to see him. I remember, the first time I listened to him singing and playing violin was in 1998. It was a new recording of his own old songs and other songs he used to sing collected in a cassette. That time when I first listened, as any other normal listener who did not have the intent to make a thorough research about him and his performance, at that time I gave my definite opinion that he is “an old man singing very badly and his violin is detuned. And this is maybe because he is an old man”. And above all, the sound of the rhythms produced by the synthesizer made me completely bored of going on listening. Then I listened coincidentally to some old recordings of him playing violin with Baqî Xido, a *dengbêj*<sup>19</sup> from Kobani. In those old recordings I rediscovered him; I found some interesting instrumental pieces he played in the intervals. Then I started to research and collect his recordings from time to time. It was on September 9th 2016 that I had the chance to see him face to face, have the chance to video and interview him for two days. After that I started recollecting all information about old singers he met and played with. In addition, I contacted all people who worked in music from Kobanî, and interviewed people who have information, memories and recorded materials of *Dûman* and other musicians from Kobani.

#### 1.4 Hypothesis

So, once again I was coming across with the earlier question and problem; how can a musician like *Dûman* who played and sang for about sixty years to be such an

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<sup>18</sup> Or Mihemed Xelîl Xazî. Eighty-nine years-old violin player, composer and singer from Kobanî. He stays in Ankara/Turkey now.

<sup>19</sup> A bard or epic folk singer. *Dengbêjs* generally narrate historical stories about love and wars for hours in non-rhythmed free style as if you were listening to a storyteller but in a song form. Old *Dengbêjs* used to sing with no accompany for musical instruments.

obscure and forgotten person? How far can a community or society with its religious and tribal standards be an impediment in the way of a musician? How far did politics of Kurds themselves on one hand and that of the Syrian regime on the other hand affect the whole cultural activity, and especially of musicians like *Dûman*? Questions and problems I expose, state, report and try to handle and figure out depending on the methods and materials I mentioned above. In other words, Kurds are like Persians, Turks, Arabs and the other ethnics and peoples of the area. They have a great legacy of music. In some points of history social conditions and politics played a negative role that crippled Kurdish music. So, here in some point I find it useful to make some comparisons with surrounding peoples' music and find out what the condition of Kurdish music was like and compare it to its present situation. And other questions like; what kind of problems did society and politics make? How did these problems affect the music? I hope that history, politics and the social structure would give us answers about them all.

## 2. KURDISH IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION AND PRESENCE

Totten writes about the Kurds as having "no friends but the mountains," depending on an old saying. He also considers Westerners unable to comprehend just how isolated the Kurds feel. He confirms that nearly everyone in the region bear a kind of detestation towards the Kurds, and almost everyone else in the world pay no attention to or even do not know them (Totten, 2007, p.34).

Apart from our contact with our Arab teachers who were assigned to *Kobani* from different places of Syria, keeping in mind that we cannot call it a contact because our schools in Syria were like military barracks<sup>20</sup>, I can say that my first real contact with people from other cultures and ethnicities began when I went to Aleppo to study. In Aleppo University, among new friends that I made there was an Arab Christian friend called Stephan. Stephan was playing electric guitar. It was about the second month of school that we all were like babies and our brains were *tabula rasa*.<sup>21</sup> Stephan told me, "All I know about Kurdish music is either old men sing in free style with no rhythmic companion and mostly with no musical instruments, or wedding songs. Aren't there Kurdish music that I can listen and understand? I prefer something with western styles like slow, pop, jazz or rock." I brought him two cassettes. He listened to them and after two days brought them back to me. When he was giving them to me another friend called Tamara was with him. When she saw the cassettes in Stephen's hand she shouted at Stephan and said, "Oh my God, Stephan! You are listening to Kurdish music! Give them back to him and do not ever listen to this rubbish!" I got shocked. I did not even know what to say and why she is saying this. I asked Ahab, a *Mardalli*<sup>22</sup> friend,

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<sup>20</sup> Not just military in form like the olive drab uniform, black military boots and the short hair cut, but the language of communication between students and teachers should be strict and does not go beyond the subjects of curriculum.

<sup>21</sup> Or *blank slate*. The term stated by the English philosopher John Locke (1632-1704). He sees babies are born with blank mind, and that family and society play role in getting the mind experienced. Here I preferred to use it to show our thirst to know, to get acquainted with other cultures and peoples. And that the experiences we get throughout this beginning time would format our impressions.

<sup>22</sup> Or Mardanli. Arabs whose origins goes back to Mardin region of Turkey. They live in *Cizîrê* region in Syria.

why she acted like this and Ahab said, "Because she is Armenian."<sup>23</sup> So I spent the beginning of the second semester in February 1999 until 2004 the year I was graduated with no friends from other ethnicities or religions. Christian students were meeting and celebrating holidays at their churches. Arabs were celebrating at school halls freely. We, Kurds, were hiring wedding halls and choose two friends, male and female, to be bride and groom and act as if we were making a wedding for them. Or if we have the chance to make a concert at the school hall, we were allowed to playing instrumental music without singing. I remember once our musical group<sup>24</sup> was invited to play in a concert for Syrian Communists. My soloist friend insisted to sing in Kurdish. Once he began singing the first few words in Kurdish we saw ourselves out of the stage. And it could be a good example that singing in Kurdish, even a love song, is considered to be political demonstration which creates a *national threat*. So, our concerts were mostly among nature. We were taking our buses and travel for miles looking for places that no one can find us, neither intelligence services nor normal people. We were choosing places that are surrounded by mountains saying the famous saying, "We have no friends but the mountains!"<sup>25</sup>

So, are Kurds really unknown to other peoples? If they are not unknown, who are they? Who are Kurds historically?

The question of "Who are Kurds?" may be one of the most repeatedly raised questions related to Kurds in social media and the web in general recently. Once you write these three words in any search engine on the web you find so many results beginning with this very question. Not only in English but in Arabic, Turkish, Persian, German and even in Kurdish itself. I think the reason behind this interest in Kurds emanates from political and military events in the Middle East and especially with the emergence of Civil War in Syria and the

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<sup>23</sup> That most Armenians in Syria consider Kurds as responsible as Turks in killing Armenians in what is known as massacres against Armenians but Armenians prefer to call it genocide. It took place in the second decade of 20<sup>th</sup> century.

<sup>24</sup> We were three Kurdish friends playing Kurdish music and sometimes Arabic songs, as well. This concert was in 2003. We joined it thinking that communists are liberal on the contrary of Baathists (the ruler party in Syria) and will allow us sing in Kurdish.

<sup>25</sup> Usually, we used to go to *Efrîn* countryside, north-west of Aleppo. We preferred that destination for three reasons: The first reason, since it is near to Aleppo we could go and come back the same day. The second one, since it is a vast mountainous region with enormous olive tree forests it gave us a good shelter. The third one, since it is a Kurdish region, if the intelligence heard us singing in Kurdish, they would think it a Kurdish wedding.

appearance of ISIS<sup>26</sup> in 2013, consequently causing the military confrontation of Peshmerga<sup>27</sup> in Iraq and YPG<sup>28</sup> in Syria with ISIS militias in both countries. Both of them, Peshmerga and YPG, are Kurdish forces that were supported by Westerns and American forces to terminate ISIS. But we can say that the story of the interest of West in Kurds did not begin recently. It goes back to the first decade of the 19<sup>th</sup> century when Orientalists, missionaries, academicians and military officials started visiting the Middle East frequently till the 1970s (Sindi, 2002). For example, in 1857 *Adet û Rusûmetnameyên Ekradiye (Habits and Customs of Kurds)*<sup>29</sup> by M. Mehmûd Beyazîdî/Mahmud Bayazidi (1797-1863) is one of the most important books concerning Kurds anthropologically, sociologically, and culturally. It was published on behalf of Alexander Auguste Jaba (1801-1894) (Alakom, 2014, p.48).

Within Middle Eastern peoples, the interest in Kurds began when Kurds entered Islam in 637 A.D. (Abdulghafour, 2017). And as it is recorded in the Islamic history and religious scholars' books we witness many Kurdish figures contributing to the development of the Islamic world (Maree, 2017), for example; the revered religious figure of Jaban al-Kurdi "Jaban the Kurd" the only Kurdish man who was a disciple of the Prophet Mohammed, and his son Maymun ibn Jaban a narrator of the Hadiths which are the sayings of The Prophet (Aljazari, 2016, p.161). Then comes the most interesting and impressive Kurdish figure of Saladin "Salah ad-Din Yusuf ibn Ayoub." He was not just a remarkable historical character for Muslims only, but he had his effect on the western Christian world too. He is known as the leader who fought against the Crusaders and reigned a large area including what we know today as Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Palestine, Egypt, Libya, Arabia and Yemen establishing the Ayyubid dynasty that lasted for about a century 1169–1260 (Jwaideh, 2006, pp.13-15).

So, to know more about the Kurds before Islam, at the time of Islam and later before the emergence of national movements and formation of the states in the Middle East in late 1800s, it would be better to review different resources because history has always been

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<sup>26</sup> Islamic State in Iraq and Sham/Syria

<sup>27</sup> The Peshmerga, whose name translates as “those who face death” are the Kurdish fighters in northern Iraq.

<sup>28</sup> Yekîneyên Parastina Gel/People’s Protection Units: The military wing of PYD (Partiya Yekîtiye Demokrat/Democratic Union Party) which some consider it a branch of PKK (Partiya Karkerên Kurdistanê/Kurdistan Workers Party) in Syria.

<sup>29</sup> Most of Kurds’ intellectuals do not like this book. They see it carrying wrong information about Kurds. But in my opinion it is an austere and fanatic notion from their side, and any people or society have to admit the facts about them being awful or good.

politicized. Historians generally represent the official attitude and beliefs of their states, and write history according to their politics. This is well demonstrated in Islam, when history was written on the basis of religious debate and political direction (Al Heer, 2017). Or as Randal says, “It is said that history is always written by the victorious, and in the case of Kurds, it means that history was written by their **enemies**.” (Randal, 1997, p.16)

So, we can categorize history of Kurds under three perspectives. Muslim resources, Western resources and lately the Kurdish resources.

## 2.1 Muslim Resources

There were so many legends, myths and superstitions about the origin of Kurds. One of the most well-known resource of those superstitions was Al-Masudi (896-957) who was an Arab Muslim historian and geographer. In his book *Muruj Al-Dhahab* he reviewed three interesting theories about the origin of Kurds (Al-Masudi, 2005, pp. 96-97). One of his theories which some people still try to believe was that Kurds are the children of Jinns (goblins and fairies).<sup>30</sup> The second one in his book implies similar information told by Ferdowsi in his *Shahname*<sup>31</sup> which narrates the story of a brave ironsmith called *Kawa*, who saved a group of people from the tyrant king *Zahhak* in old Persian Empire era. Later then the rescued people by Kawa sought refuge in the mountains where they became a large number of people and was called by the name Kurd.<sup>32</sup> The third one told by Al-Masudi is that Kurds are from Arab origins. And this last one originated from two factors: A political factor; the matter of power that was in the hands of Arabs beginning with Islam and the Prophet Mohammed, later after that the Umayyad and Abbasid Caliphates, and the rule which stated that the political power was monarch and should be definitely held by Quraysh that was the tribe Prophet Mohammed belonged to. Here we can find historical Kurdish characters who played important roles in Islam, but described themselves as descendants of the Prophet's tribe like the worth-mentioning Kurdish figure Abu Muslim el-Khorasani, a Shiite military leader who helped establish the Abbasid Caliphate in the middle of 8<sup>th</sup> century which was the third of the Islamic

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<sup>30</sup> When I wrote the question *Who are Kurds* in Persian this theory popped up so frequently on the web.

<sup>31</sup> The *Shahnameh*, Book of Kings, is an epic composed by the Iranian poet Hakim Abul-Qasim Mansur (Later known as Ferdowsi Tusi), and was completed around 1010 CE.

<sup>32</sup> Keeping in mind that Ferdowsi tells the story without any hint to Kurds, he just tells this story as an ancient story from Persia.

caliphates to succeed the Prophet. Another example, Ibn Saif Al-Islam who was relative of Saladin. Both of Abu Muslim and Ibn Saif, in their attempts to assume that their origins went back to Quraysh, were aiming at political power (Seyda, 2013). Another factor is an economic factor; that non-Arab Muslims should give money as taxes to the Caliphate. For this reason some Kurd tribes in order to escape paying taxes were calling themselves Arabs. But the most important factor is the similarity between some Kurds' way of life and that of Arabs. Arab historians did not take into consideration the linguistic differences and the ethnic distinctions for Kurds as Arians and Arabs as Semitics (Dost, 2014). This last factor can be seen in some Western researches in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in north Syria, that Turkmens and Kurds have had the same characteristics related to the way of life (Great Britain, 1919).

## **2.2 Western Resources**

According to scholars there is a strong belief that Kurds in origin are the descendants of different Indo-European, meaning Aryan, tribal ancient groups that settled down in the mountainous terrains in northwestern Iran back to four thousand years ago. The Indo-European people of the Middle East, including the Sumerians, Elamites, Guteans, Kassites, Hurrians, Mittanis, Hittites, Lydians, Medes, Achaemenids, Parthians and Sassanids. On one hand, many scholars believe that the *Kardouchoi*, i.e. Carduchians (Kardukhs), were the ancestors of the Kurds. They were an independent people living in *Corduene* which is the ancient name of the region of *Bohtan* (now *Şırnak* Province). It is mentioned as *Beth Qardu* in Syriac sources (Frye, 1983, p.223) and described as a small subordinate state between Armenia and Persia in the mountainous area south of Lake Van in modern Turkey (Smith, 1858, p.285). *Kardouchoi* were mentioned in the book *Anabasis*, a memory book written by Xenophon who was Greek professional soldier and writer. According to him the *Kardouchoi* fought ten thousand Greek soldiers who were retreating from a mercenary war mission in 401 B.C.E., in support of Cyrus the Great, the Persian king. On the other hand, the Kurds themselves have a claim to consider the Medes to be their ancient ancestors. History tells us that the Medes lived in an area known as *Media* (northwestern Iran) and their people spoke the Median language (Rollin, 1851, pp.301-306).

### 2.3 Kurdish Resources

As far as I know, we can say that neither serious Kurdish nationalism nor Kurds' interest in writing in Kurdish language or about their history was found before 1514 A.D. And especially in 23<sup>rd</sup> August, the date of the Battle of Chaldiran between Ottoman and Safavid Empires. As an outcome of this famous battle Kurds got separated between two different political structures, Ottoman and Safavid. As a result of this separation and national feelings, the great Kurdish epic work of *Mem û Zîn* (The love story of Mem and Zin) in 1692 came into existence by the mystic poet *Ehmedê Xanê* (Ahmad Khani) (1651-1707). Khani's work is considered the first Kurdish written work that implies national and rebellious ideas. In his work, Khani mentions other poets and works like *Eliyê Herîrî*/Ali Hariri (1009-1080), *Melayê Cizîrî*/Malaye Jaziri (1570-1640) and *Feqiyê Teyran*/Faqi Tayran (1590-1660). But the most interesting name related to writing history is *Şerefname* (Sharafnama), the book of Sharafkhan Bidlisi (1543-1603). Despite Khani's criticizing comment about Sharafkhan's use of Persian language instead of Kurdish for his book, this book which was written as an imitation of Ferdowsi's *Shahname* in 1509 is to be considered the first document about the history of Kurds, Kurdish clans and tribes, and Kurdish rulers (Dost, 2016).

Sharafkhan, in his talking about the origin of Kurds, mentions the same story of Ferdowsi and Al-Masudi that Zahhak (Bivar Asp), the tyrant king in Iranian mythology, had the cancer disease in his shoulders and one of the wise men had advised him to rub his shoulders with two human brains every day. The one who was in charge of killing people to take their brains was just killing a sheep and a man and send the other man to the nearby mountains so that no one can find him. After a while those formed people who stayed, lived and proliferated in the mountains. They were from different ethnicities, but were known as Kurds. Sharafkhan also states another theory about the origin of Kurds which is also the one that Al-Masudi's book implies; that some people consider Kurds as Jinns' descendant (Awni, 1958). Here, the most important thing to be said is that, unfortunately, even Sharafkhan as a resource of the origins of Kurds depends on an Arabic resource like Al-Masudi. To go beyond the lines we figure out that there was a cultural assimilation within Persian and Arabic cultures, especially the last one, because of the religion. This important point can serve as an answer for the question of

“Why there is no Kurdish state?” One of the answers could be that Kurds did not show any objection as long as the Islamic notion of *The Umma*<sup>33</sup> was dominant rather than ethnicity and nationality. Another answer can be supposed here, that according to Shihab al-Umari (1300-1384) Kurds are a unique ethnicity from so many ethnicities (Dost, 2017). That Kurds do not come from one ethnicity; so many ethnicities with the passage of time founded the Kurdish ethnicity we witness today. Here, I would like to move to another example of Kurdish resources. Firstly, because it has a similar statement to that of al-Umari’s. Secondly, because it is the first academic historiography by a Kurd about Kurds. So, we can declare that the first Kurdish historian in 20<sup>th</sup> century is Mihemmed Emîn Zekî/Muhammad Amin Zaki (1880-1948). In his book *A Short History of the Kurds and Kurdistan* and among the reasons behind writing such a book he states an important reason that deserves to be mentioned (Zaki, 1931). The author states that after the Muslim Ottoman Empire became Turkey and the word “Turks” started to be mentioned instead of “Ottomans”, other ethnicities like Kurds who believed in *religion* more than *ethnicity* as a collective authority began to think nationally as well ((Zaki, 1931, p.48). So, we conclude that Kurds are the last ethnicity to be aware of nationalism and that the feeling of “Islamism” was dominant more than that of “Kurdishness”. Concerning the origin of Kurds, M. Amin Zaki feels sorrowful and pain about connecting Kurds’ origin to Jinns and Arabs (Zaki, 1931, p.49), and he states that Kurdish people combines two groups. The first group is the people who inhabit Kurdistan<sup>34</sup> in the beginning of the second cycle of human history (Othman, 2017),<sup>35</sup> Zaki calls them Zagros people. They are *Lolo, Koti, Korti, Juti, Judi, Kasai, Sobari, Khaldi, Mittani, Hurri, Nayri*. And the second group is Indo-European peoples who inhabited Kurdistan later in 10 B.C.E. The second group were Medes and Kardukhs<sup>36</sup> and together, as time went by, formed Kurdish people (Zaki, 1931, pp.123-135).

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<sup>33</sup> Arabic means “nation” But rhetorically used for seeing all Muslims as one nation.

<sup>34</sup> We have to differentiate between the geographical meaning of the word “Kurdistan” as (the land where Kurds inhabit) which is mentioned in some old Arabic and Ottoman era documents and books and the political meaning of “Kurdistan” that was attached with the late 1800<sup>th</sup> and beginning of 20<sup>th</sup> century with the rise of the national feelings and the formation of states on the basis of nations rather than region and religion.

<sup>35</sup> After Noah’s Flood.

<sup>36</sup> Names of Kurds and places they used to live are changing according to both other peoples and the era or time; Sumerians used to name Kurds as *Guti, Juti* and *Judi*. Assyrians and Arameans called them *Kuti, Koti, Korti, Karti Kardo, Kardaka, Kardan, Karkatan* and *Kardak*. Iranians named them as *Kortiyoy, Serti* and *Kord Raha*. Greek and Romans knew them as *Kardosoy, Kardkhoy, Kardok, Kardoki, Kardokhi* and *Kardoykay*.

So, if we conclude that Kurds are a unique ethnicity of so many ethnicities who had lived in Kurdistan and that goes back to ancient history, what will makes us call all of them Kurds? In other words, what is the essential factor of Kurdish nationalism formation?

Zaki states that the essential three factors of formatting nations are blood, homeland (land) and language. Consequently, in the case of Kurds the uniting factor is language according to him. And despite of the different dialects and accents of Kurds, he sees that there is not that much radical difference among these dialects. He confirms that like Arabs, Kurds can achieve that rapprochement through education (Zaki, 1931, pp.122-123).. But as a point of view, I think that there are differences among Kurdish dialects and these differences sometimes leave two Kurds who belong to two different dialects speak Arabic or English as a lingua franca to understand each other. The experience of KRG<sup>37</sup> in North Iraq proved that there is no way to create a common language between *Behdînan* and *Soran*.<sup>38</sup> Arabs can understand each other because of Islam religion and the language of Quran which is the official language in all Arab countries. Quran and Islam, except of gathering all Muslims under the same legislative law umbrella, they were both forming the cornerstone of Arab nationalism. Moreover, except the linguistic differences among the Kurdish dialects; Kurmanji, Sorani, Zazaki, Luri and Gorani (Kemaloğlu, 2017), there are religious differences as well, both in doctrine and sects. Yet most Kurds are Sunni Muslims following the Shafi'i<sup>39</sup> Islamic doctrine school in general and a smaller number who belong to the Sunni Hanafi school. In addition there are other groups that range among being Alevi, Shiites, Yezidis, Jews or Christians. For example, Luris who live in south-west of Iran consider that being Shiite makes them feel nearer to Persians than Sunni Kurds. The same for most of Zaza, they consider themselves closer to Alevi Turks than Sunni Kurds. On the other side, most of Yezidis' religious feelings are stronger than their national feelings (Gunter, 2003). In this respect, Dieter Christensen writes, "What, then, makes a Kurd a Kurd other than declaring his cultural identity? There is, of course, language: "Kurdish" is clearly distinct from Arabic and Turkish, despite some lexical communalities; but major dialects – in particular Kurmanji ("Northern Kurdish") and Sorani ("Southern Kurdish"), each

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Armenians called them *Kurdoin*, *Kurjikh*, *Kurtikh*, *Karkhi* and *Korkhi*. While to Arabs they were *Kurdi*, *Kardawi*, *Baqarda*, *Kartawaih*, *Jurdi* and *Judi*." (Sharafnama:2006. Page: 11)

<sup>37</sup> Kurdistan Regional Government.

<sup>38</sup> Behdînan or Kurmanj west of North Iraq. Soran east of North Iraq. Kurmanji and Sorani for dialects.

<sup>39</sup> *Shafi'i*, *Hanafi*, *Maliki* and *Hanbali* are four schools of law inside the Sunni sect of Islam named after the founders of these schools.

of which has many regional sub-dialects, are not always mutually comprehensible in spoken discourse, quite apart from the fact that the scripts used – Arabic and Latin – complicate matters for those who are literate. But then there are also languages that are linguistically close to Kurdish but where the linguistic classification – and the self-declaration of their speakers – become political issues: is Hewrami Kurdish? Are the speakers of Zazaki Kurds? Do Zaza consider themselves Kurds? Some do, some don't.” (Christensen, 2007).

So apart from the conclusion we reached with saying that Kurds are a unique ethnicity of so many ancient ethnicities, personally, I do not think of the factor of blood is a must in nation formation. Regardless of its Nazi and disgusting smell, if we take Americans or Swiss as an example, they, among themselves, do not belong to the same ethnicity, blood or family but they represent strong nations and countries now.

If we take the third factor which is land (homeland), they are being described in modern times as "a stateless people" and are distributed contiguously between almost five countries which made up artificial borders; starting with Turkey, Iraq, Iran, Syria, Armenia and Afghanistan respectively according to the rate of Kurds population in these countries (Zaki, 1931). In addition, they live in enclaves in Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Georgia, Kyrgyzstan,<sup>40</sup> in addition to Khurasan in Iran and many parts of Anatolia in the west of Turkey. In mid 1900s a great number of Kurds immigrated and started to live in the Diaspora in Europe, USA, Canada and Australia (Gunter, 2003).

So, what is important to me in this discussion and survey is not to bring all Kurds together. In other words, I am not aiming to find the common characteristic that may unify them. Even though, there could be two common characteristics for Kurds all over the world. The first one is their aspiration of founding a political Kurdistan, a state that can be their mouthpiece and protector among nations (Gunter, 2003). Keeping in mind that each part or sect has its own idea about its Kurdistan which is different from that of other sects and parts, and the most important differences are political ones. The second common characteristic is Kurds' love for music; to dance, make music and sing. Christensen states that, “There are other, more tangible ways of expressing ethnic identity, such as dress, not usually operative in every-day diaspora situations, and in the homeland very much subject to regional variation. But what about

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<sup>40</sup> Different documentaries on YouTube.

music? Are there any distinctive aspects of the music whether vocal or instrumental that Kurds practice throughout Kurdistan?" (Christensen, 2007)

Thomas Bois writes, "'Every Kurd, man and woman, is a poet," said the famous Armenian writer of the last century, Abovian<sup>41</sup> (1804-1848). He might equally well have said that every Kurd is a musician and loves singing (Bois, 1966, p.62)."

Nevertheless, there is an important thing to be mentioned here which is the necessity to differentiate between loving music and making music. Of course, all peoples love music and love to sing, but what Bois means, and I agree with him, is that Kurdish people is a people that play music and sing in all his daily activities. For example, when they seed, harvest, meet, move from one place to another according to the change of climate, when someone dies, when there is war and in so many different aspects of daily life (Bois, 1966). But the questions to be asked here are, are all Kurds the same musical characteristics? In other words, is the music of Soran Kurds who live in Mahabad (West Azerbaijan Province in Iran) the same as Kurmanj Kurds in Afrin (North-West of Syria) for instance? To minimize the frame for a better understanding, among Kurds who speak Kurmanji, Kurmanj Kurds, is the music of *Şirnak* the same as the music of *Kobanî*? So apart from similarity and difference of characteristics, do the same factors hold back or help the development of the music of the two regions?

Therefore, because it is a hard task to survey all Kurds music in one hand, and the difference of characteristics and problems in the other hand, I will focus on Kurmanji music, and especially, music of Syrian Kurds with specific focus on *Kobanî*.

Furthermore, since we are still at a context discussing Kurdish history I would like to give this example which is one of the songs that were frequently sung in those times when we used to going out to nature and mountains to celebrate Newroz between 1998 and 2004.

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<sup>41</sup> Khachatur Abovian, father of modern Armenian literature. (Encyclopedia Britannica)

***Kî ne em?***

*Em in ew Kardox Xaldêwê kevnar,*

*Em in ew Mîtan, Nayrî û Sobar.*

*Em in ew Lolo,*

*Kardox û Kudî. Em in Mad û Goş,*

*Horî û Gudî.*

*Em in Kurmanc û Kelhor, Lor û*

*Gor,*

*Çend hezar sal in Kurdistana me*

*Perçe perçe ma bindestê dijmin!*

*Hinek bûn axa, hinek jên bûn beg*

*Hinek jên bûne cahşê jardara*

*Kurdistan firot wan tev neyaran*

*Bûne mezhebdar, bûne olperest,*

*Bûne paşverû, bi tizbî û xişt*

*Ta ku dijmin şikand li me ser û pişt*

*Me dan bin lingan dewlet û hebûn,*

*Bûn dijminê hev perçe perçe bûn...*

*Kî ne em ?*

**Who are we?**

We are ancient *Khaldis* and *Carduchis*,

We are Mittani, Nayri and Sobars.

We are Lullubi,

*Carduchis* and Kutis. We are Medes and Gosh,

Hurris and Gutis.

We are Kurmanj, Kelhor, Loran and Goran,

For thousands of years our Kurdistan

Were torn in tatters in enemy's captivity!

Some of them are chieftains, others landlords

And some of them became traitors

They sold Kurdistan to the enemies

Became sectarian, became religious fanatics,

Became reactionary, with rosaries and sticks,

Until the enemy broke our head and back.

Our state and our existence trampled far,

Hostility to each other caused disintegration...

Who are we?

A song that is written by the renowned Kurdish poet *Cegerxwîn* (1903-1984)<sup>42</sup> as “*Kî me ez?*” (Who am I?) which *Şivan Perwer*<sup>43</sup> sang it as “*Kî ne em?*” (Who are we?). A song that narrates the history of Kurds. Everybody with one voice was singing, and I think it was a kind of protest or reaction against the actions and measures that were taken by other peoples and authority towards Kurds in daily life. By reading the lyrics of this song; as an example of so many Kurdish songs that carries the same content of narrating history, feeding the national spirit, and praising national figures, one can conclude the following: first of all, it is a kind of a historical summary of the origin of Kurds being written by a Kurdish poet and it is apparent that the poet’s major resource is Zaki’s book about the history of Kurds. Secondly, the matter of music and politics which is the subject of my study. This song is a good example of what I have already discussed in the introduction; the political and national components in most of Kurds’ songs. And the important question to be asked here, does music have to be made for artistic purposes or for national and political ones?

When we were in the secondary school, about seventeen years ago, our literature teacher once told us that a political report or a chapter from a prose book cannot be a song. He clarified that music has to achieve two purposes in one formulation; to serve community with sublime language or tools. In other words, to improve the taste and situation of societies. Thirdly, by reading the lines we find out that, regardless of the national spirit, there is a rebellious tone, a call to step down the clannish and religious customs of the Kurdish people which are, according to the poet, a big factor of the bad situation that Kurds live in. At this point I agree with the poet as I have mentioned in the introduction chapter that these customs of the society, regardless of the poet’s point of view, that they affected the national spirit and got it toppled. I see it playing a negative role in the progress of Kurdish (Kurmanji) music which I will be handling in details in the coming chapters.

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<sup>42</sup> Or Cigerxwîn. One of the well-known Kurdish poets. Most of his works are national, revolutionary, and imply religion and feudalism criticism.

<sup>43</sup> PERWER, ŞIVAN (1955– ). Famous contemporary Kurdish singer born in Turkey, but exiled from there since 1976. Sivan Perwer travels extensively, and political songs constitute an important part of his repertoire. He is much admired by Kurds throughout the world, and his songs serve to unite otherwise divided Kurds and promote their sense of Kurdish nationalism. He is also famous for singing traditional epic and love songs. (Gunter: 2003 – Page 165) *Kîne Em* was released in 1979.

### 3. THE KURDISH MUSIC

#### “Zimanê Dayê”

*Dîroka dêrîn e, gewher û zêrîn e*

*Dayê, zimanê te gellekî şêrîn e*

*Van dijminan hinde çêkirin berbende*

*Lê çemê te her ma pirr viyan û jîn e*

*Kurê te em pênc in: Kurmancî, Soranî,*

*Yê siyê Kelhur, lek, Feylî û Luristanî,*

*Yê çarê Zazakî, dumilî Kirmanckî,*

*Dayê, Kurê pencê Hewramî, Goranî.*

#### “Mother Language”

It is a proud history, with valuable materials.

Mother, your language is the most beautiful  
language.

Although the enemies put a huge number of  
barriers in your way,

But your *heart* [river] remains full of love and  
life.

We are your five sons: two of us are called  
Kurmanji and Sorani,

The third of us has several names Kelhor, Lek,  
Faili and Luristani

The other brother [the fourth] is called Zazaki,  
Dum[i]li or Kirma[n]jki.

Our fifth brother is called either Hewrami or  
Gu[o]rani.<sup>44</sup>

In the previous song “*Kî ne em/Who are we?*” there was a historical review about the origins of Kurds. While in the lyrics of this song “*Zimanê Dayê/Mother Language*” we see a review of Kurdish dialects; Kurmanji, Sorani, Luri, Zazaki and Gorani. As I have mentioned before, I will be focusing on Kurmanji dialect.<sup>45</sup> And in some points in relevance to the music of Kurds of other dialects in other parts.

Going back to the two songs, and so many other Kurdish songs, we can understand how the nationalist and political features are dominant in the Kurdish songs. And one of the major

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<sup>44</sup> Translated as existed in the official video by Vîn Production on web. Lyrics: *Edîb Çelkî*. Singer: *Narîn Feqe*.

<sup>45</sup> In Turkey, Iraq, Syria, Urmia and Kurds of Khurasan in Iran and Kurds who live in ex Soviet Republics.

reasons behind the predominance of these features is that songs altogether form a very important library and archive for Kurds; everything related to Kurds are recorded and documented in their songs. I think it is a very essential phenomenon when it comes to Kurds, being a stateless nation that did not have the chance of governing a state and establishing institutions of their own for this purpose. In other words, Kurds inherited their culture orally over generations through songs, so by this way they preserved it from extinction (Bayrak, 2002, 52). Moreover, some people say that when a Kurdish singer dies, dozens of songs die with him, and as a result pages from Kurdish history and traditions get lost (Mirsaz, 2011).

Kendal Nezan, the president of Kurdish Institute in Paris, writes, “In the cultural life of the Kurds, split up as they were in ancient times by feudal barriers, today by State frontiers, music came to play a role beyond its usual roles - a role of a privileged, let us say unique medium: it filled a precise and basic social function. From historical chronicles to lyric poetry and from epics to certain literary works - all are sung, everything is put to music in order to be better or more easily memorized and thus passed down to posterity” (Nezan, 979).

Before delving into details about the political features in Kurdish music, the political measures depended on or adopted by the official authorities of governing countries where Kurds live in suppressing the Kurdish music (singing and songs), and the social effects, implying religious and clannish factors, by Kurds themselves in hindering the development of Kurdish music; I would like to write a concise overview about the Kurdish music with a literary analysis of the components and styles it rendered within a historical context.

In 2001 when my first musical work as composer and music director for a local singer was released, another singer friend from Kobani asked me the following question resentfully, “What genre is your work? I listened to the album. It was a mess; very disorganized and mixed. All of the songs you composed do not touch the essence of Kurdish music. Is your work *arabesk*<sup>46</sup>, *sanat*<sup>47</sup>, *halk*<sup>48</sup>, or what?”

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<sup>46</sup> “Arabesk is a style of Turkish urban popular music that originated in the 1970s in the recording studios of Istanbul. As its name suggests, it is Arab-influenced and stylistically connected with music of the Egyptian cinema.” The Arabesk Debate: Music and Musicians in Modern Turkey. Oxford; Clarendon Press, 1992.(Veronica Doubleday - Popular Music, Vol. 13, No. 2, Mellers at 80 (May, 1994)Cambridge University

I did not argue with him, but I asked myself the following questions: How far is it healthy to compare or label the neighboring peoples' genres of music to yours? In other words, if I'm making *sanat*, *halk* or even *arabesk* music, wouldn't it be borrowing a genre or style from Turkish music? Moreover, if I'm asked to label a genre from a neighbor culture, from Turkish music, why would you ask for my music to be Kurdish then? But to be honest, despite of his subjective, prejudicial and resentful statements, they implied another important question; what is the Kurdish music, and what are its characteristics?

In 1946, when Kurdistan Republic of Mahabad<sup>49</sup> was declared<sup>50</sup>, Qazi Muhammed (1893 – 1947), who was elected as the president of the republic, addressing people, raised a book in his hand and said, “*Aha, ev e Qur'an a me,*” (Look! This is our Quran). The book was “*Folklor Kurmanca*”<sup>51</sup> (Kurds' Folklore), a collection of Kurdish songs and stories (Reşîd, 2008, 33). So, if we justify this action of likening done by a religious man, Qazi Muhammed; to assimilate a collection of songs to a holy book, we can say it shows that the importance of songs in Kurds' life is not considered lesser than that of the Quran. Quran preserved Arabic culture and language, while to a nation like Kurds, a stateless nation; language, historical events, and social activities were inherited by songs. And so we can say that songs and music are the core element of Kurdish culture (Yıldız, 2005).

Ali Akbar Moradi<sup>52</sup> writes, “Music is a constant and loyal companion of the Kurds...The whispers of a Kurdish mother are heard simultaneous with the creation of fetus in her womb and the Kurdish lullabies murmured over the cradle and the wailing over the grave likely to constitute parts of the symphony of humanity and creation, which is being played throughout one's lifetime..They wake up and go to sleep with music. They pray and make contact with music. Moreover, music accompanies them while working, expressing their love and

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<sup>47</sup> From Arabic “*san'a*” which means “craft” or “profession.” Others prefer to call it Maqam or Makam Music or Classical Turkish Music. I prefer to call it Ottoman Classical Music.

<sup>48</sup> Traditional music.

<sup>49</sup> City in West Iran.

<sup>50</sup> The republic was established with Soviet aid and lasted just one year after Soviet forces withdrawal (1946 – 1947) (Encyclopedia Britannica)

<sup>51</sup> The book was first published in 1936 in Yerevan, Armenia by Heciyê Cindî and Emîn Evdal. Republished in Kurdish language with Latin alphabet by Tosinê Reşîd in Istanbul 2008.

<sup>52</sup> A Kurdish musician and composer from Gahwareh, Kermanshah Province in Iran.

affection, fighting and thinking. The Kurds cast away their woes and rebellions over the cruel mountaintops through chanting special songs...” (Moradi, 2017).

To sum up, we can say that there is an important status for music in Kurds’ life. And to be more specific, folk songs or singers (Mahler, 1981). In other words, lyrics and vocalists are the prominent components of Kurdish music. Melodies, instrumental music and even instruments themselves are of less importance on one hand, and on the other hand they are changed from a singer to another, among regions and also from generation to another (Bayrak, 2002). In view of this, I think it is because of both non-stability way of the life of most Kurds in the past and the influence of neighboring and ruling cultures. Taking into consideration another reason and factor that Kurdish music is part and parcel of Middle Eastern culture; instrumental music is not that much common in Kurdish music, and that lyrics and poetry are of the first priority. If we take Arabic music as an example, Dr. Saadalla Axa Al Kalaa<sup>53</sup> in one of his video series on his facebook page and personal website states that lyrics or poetry is the major component of Arabic music, and it is of the same degree of importance to the singer’s voice, and that melodies and instruments are used to serve the lyrics and the voice of the singer. Similar to this statement, the Kurdish singer *Mehmûd Ezîz* states that Kurdish music, like other Middle Eastern musics, is a music or singing which is constructed on a three-legged basement; lyrics, melody and the voice of the singer.<sup>54</sup> So, I find it useful to begin with this trilogy of voice, text and melody in Kurdish music in order to discuss and figure out the characteristics and features of this specific music.

First of all, we have to keep in mind the theory we have discussed about the origins of Kurds; that Kurds are a unique ethnicity that combines many ancient ethnicities within it.

This theory proves that there is a cultural diversity even inside the Kurdish ethnicity itself, so this diversity creates a variety of musical productions. In other words, the difference of dialects, regions and sects among Kurds themselves contributed in the enrichment of the Kurdish musical legacy. The other fact is that since Kurds, with all of their diversities and varieties, are a stateless people who live in the Middle East, and specifically in Turkey, Iran, Iraq and Syria, and taking into account the matter that Kurds are adhered to study, act and be

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<sup>53</sup> The Syrian academician we talked about in the introduction chapter.

<sup>54</sup> Born in 1950. A Kurd singer and oud player from *Serê Kaniyê* (Rass al Ayn) north Syria and stay in Erbil, KRG. I interviewed him last year in 2016 when making a research about *Mihemmed-ê Dûman*.

brought up according to the cultures, languages and politics of the ruler states; it is natural that Kurdish music will carry the same characteristics and features of Arabian, Turkish or Persian music. But the influence of Arabian music is stronger, especially in Iraq and Syria, because Arabic is the language of Quran and Islam religion which in turn made Arabic the official language of culture and politics since 7<sup>th</sup> century till now. Moreover, so many non-Arab Muslims contributed in the enrichment of the Arabic legacy, and Kurds were among those peoples who served Islam, Arabic and Arab culture more than serving their own language and culture (Kurd Youth, 1937).

### 3.1 The Kurdish Singer and Styles of Singing

“In the beginning was the **Word**, and the **Word** was with God, and the **Word** was God.”

*The Bible – John 1:1*

One of the translations of the word “word” in Kurdish is “*Bêje*”. And from this word so many idioms and terms were derived, such as “*Biwêj*,” which means sentence, expression or proverb.

#### 3.1.1 *Dengbêjî* Style

When talking about the **authentic** Kurdish style of singing, the first thing comes to our mind is the tradition of *Dengbêjî*.<sup>55</sup> The *Dengbêj* are the equivalent to the bards in English. It is a compound of two words “*Deng*” which means voice or sound, and “*Bêj*” which means word, saying or utterance. The *Dengbêj* usually tell epical and historical events in a singing way. They perform without musical instruments accompanying them. Concerning *Dengbêj*'s skills and characteristics, “Most important among these skills are a vast memory for names, episodes, and historical contexts; the capability to shape a story into a compelling musical and spoken-prose rendering; the ability to sustain a highly controlled vocal style and to underscore the dramatic content with auditive, mimetic and bodily gestures. Essential is also the ability to sense the mood of the audience and to understand the requirements of a specific occasion for

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<sup>55</sup> -*bêjî* is a suffix to determine the gerund or infinitive of *Bêj*. *Dengbêj*: teller. *Dengbêjî* is the art of telling.

choosing the appropriate subject and performance style. These qualities and exercise these skills are highly respected and widely recognized” (Christensen, 2007).

Concerning subjects or themes sung by *Dengbêj*, we can say that they are either historical stories that wars, acts of heroism and tragedies of wars are narrated, or else they chant heartbreaking love stories. And those love stories always end up with the death of either the two lovers or one of them, or there are always political (tribal), social, religious differences or reasons that make it impossible for the lovers to reach each other.<sup>56</sup>

### 3.1.2 *Qesîdebêjî* Style

One more Kurdish style of singing is *Qesîdebêjî*. It is “usually presented in rhymed verses with religious or fabulous rather than historical content. This group includes narrative poems... but also sung poetry of Kurdish Alevi and of Yezidi” (Christensen, 2007). The word *Qesîde/Qasida*, is an Arabic word that used by Kurds, Turks and Persians. It means “poem” or “ode”. Kurdish *Qesîdebêj* usually sing religious and mystical poems.<sup>57</sup> Yezidi Kurds call it *Qewl*<sup>58</sup> or *Beytbêjî*.<sup>59</sup> The person who sings this style is called *Beytbêj* or *Qewwal*.

Another singing style from the word “*Bêje*,” and synonymous to *Dengbêjî* is “*Çîrokbêjî*.” *Çîrok* means “story” so *Çîrokbêjî* is “story-telling” and *Çîrokbêj* means “story-teller.”

### 3.1.3 *Stranbêjî* Style

The most common and widespread style is *Stranbêjî*. *Stran*<sup>60</sup> means “song.” So, we can translate *Stranbêj* as “singer” and *Stranbêjî* as “singing”. Some Kurds state that the word “*Stran*” means aria or melody (Keskin, 2017). But there is another meaning to the word in

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<sup>56</sup> Examples: *Dewrêşê Evdî* and *Edûlê*, a love between a Yezidi Kurdish man and a Muslim Kurdish woman. *Mem* and *Zîn*, a love story full of treason. *Kela Dimdim*, a story of Kurds resistance against Ottomans and Persians.

<sup>57</sup> I remember when I was a child my uncle used to sing this style. Usually he was saying mystical poems for *Melayê Cizîrî* and other poems that praise sheikhs or religious figures.

<sup>58</sup> *Qewl* is an Arabic word which means *saying*, its equivalent Kurdish word is *Bêje* or *-bêjî*.

<sup>59</sup> *Beyt* is an Arabic word which means *verse*, its equivalent Kurdish word is *Malik* or *Mal*.

<sup>60</sup> Most people in *Kobanî* use the word *Saz* for *song*, and call the singer and sometimes the instrumentalist as well by *sazbend* or *sazvan*. I think the word comes from Persian, and Kurdish being from the same Iranian language family, *Saz* could be a common word. *Saz* in both Persian and Turkish means musical instrument, as well. The Arabs took just the derivative word *Nashaz* نَشَاز which comes from the Iranian word *ne-saz/nasaz* which means detuned.

Kurdish, that I think it deserves to be mentioned; it means the act of kneading pasta or dough. However, we use the word *stran* to state a musical work that combines the three components; melody, lyrics and singing, but in a rhythmic way with the accompany of percussion instruments, not in free narrating style.<sup>61</sup> But we have to take into consideration that in some Kurmanji-speaking regions there is a mix between the two words *stranbêj* and *dengbêj* (Yaş, 2017). For example, in Kobani *sazbend* is the name used for *dengbêj*.

Talking about songs, Mehmet Bayrak quotes a story he has read in a book about two teachers assigned to teach in *Bingöl*, a city in Eastern Turkey. The teachers had been serving for three years there and they had not heard anything related to **delight** in *Bingöl*, and that they had not heard any **song** in the period they stayed there (Bayrak, 2002, p. 29).

If I hear such a statement, my first response will be: How could it be that a Kurdish community lives without music and singing (BİN-DER, 2007) <sup>62</sup>? In my point of view, if Kurds are not good at anything, at least they are good at singing and dancing... However, Bayrak after that asks the following question, “Why did these teachers had not heard any “song” in Bingöl region?.. Is it because songs were not sung in this region, or because of other reasons? ...the people of this region own a very rich potential of making and saying songs...” (Bayrak, 2002, p. 29)

People who are interested in traditional and folk songs collected numerous songs from this region, and said that traditional songs are non-stop sung in this region, which is transferred and inherited for generations (BİN-DER, 2007). So, why are not there any songs in *Bingöl*?

Despite of the fact that this opinion by the two teachers is not an academic research; it is not more than a personal impression and experience, but the reason behind this statement, in my point of view, emanates from two factors or cases; the first one, the people of *Bingöl* did not know singing in Turkish, and since Kurdish language was prohibited in that period of time (Keskin, 2017), nobody could dare to sing in Kurdish, and especially in front of the teachers who represent the attitude of the government. It is not far from our situation in *Kobanî*. We were thinking that even simple and normal teachers like us are intelligence employees. When

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<sup>61</sup> We can say that *stran* is the common style or form that we can call “song” in English, “*türkü*” or “*şarkı*” in Turkish, “*Oghniya*” غنیه in Arabic.

<sup>62</sup> Its habitants diverse between Kurmanj and Zaza Kurds.

I was young, people used to tell me that I have a good voice. I was about eleven years-old when one of our neighbors was getting married. They called me to sing for them and I sang for three days. I still remember our weddings in the old days, they were lasting at least for three days. But at school none of the teachers could convince me to sing for them because I do not know Arabic songs and I can only sing in Kurdish, nevertheless I was afraid to sing in Kurdish at school. However, after the wedding I came to school and my friends told the teacher that I know singing. The teacher tried hard to convince me to sing, but I did not. I said it was my twin brother who sang in the wedding, not me.<sup>63</sup>

Going back to the question of the teachers in *Bingöl*, and moving to the second factor; mentioning or talking about **delight** and **song** in the same context makes me think this way, the two teachers did not consider narrating songs, narrations of *Dengbêj*, *Qesîdebêj*, *Beytbêj* or *Çîrokbêj* “music” or relevant to the “song” form or style. But if I am brought up defining music and songs as a group of instrumentalists who play their musical instruments accompanied by percussionists and a singer sitting in front of or among them, it does not mean that I will try to look for another definition or create another term except “song” or “music” to say for a person who is sitting among people with no percussions or musical instruments, as it is the case with *Dengbêj*.

Beside the two afore mentioned factors, maybe it is a political factor; there are songs and they are sung in Kurdish language, and since the official attitude showed hostility to non-Turkish aspects and appearances (Bayrak, 2002), Kurdish songs seemed weird to them.

### **3.2 The Kurdish Language (Lyrics and Texts of Songs)**

Since there is a very close relationship between Kurdish poetry and music, and to be more specific, poetry and songs or singing; I find it useful to review the Kurdish literature. Moreover, I think this is the subject of argument between Abovyan and Bois that I have mentioned previously; the first sees that “Every Kurd is a poet,” while the other prefers to say “Every Kurd is a musician.” The relationship between the two words, poet and musician, is very close, even in the present; last year when I made a research about *Mihemmed-ê Dûman*, *Bavê Moro*, a seventy-eight years-old *dengbêj* from *Kobanî* who stays in Turkey now, was

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<sup>63</sup> I do not have a twin brother, of course. (This story took place in Autumn 1991)

calling singers by “*Şa’îr*” which means “poet.” Another thing, unlike modern and contemporary singers, when a *dengbêj* or *çîrokbêj* narrates a prose story, even a piece which he learned from another or previous singer, he uses his poetical and musical skills to create a united rhythm and add some words like *lo, lo, lo*<sup>64</sup> - *lê, lê, lê*<sup>65</sup> - *hê, hê, hê*<sup>66</sup> - *oy, oy, oy*<sup>67</sup> or sometimes specific words or phrases are repeated like, *li min ê, li min ê, li min ê*<sup>68</sup> (Izady, 2009, p. 266). By making these techniques, regardless of showing their musical skills in creating a dramatic atmosphere, they try to create their own style by new additions to the story showing their poetical talent.

Before going into details and discussing the literary characteristics and features of each singing style, I would like to make a brief historical review of Kurdish language and about the first written Kurdish documented materials. In other words, Kurdish language’s history and the relationship between Kurdish literature, nationalism and politics.

Concerning the first written Kurdish documents and verses, there are so many claims and the most notable one is that some people goes to consider Median language (the language of Medes who are considered one of the ancestors of Kurds) and *Avesta* and *Zend-Avesta*<sup>69</sup>, the book of Zoroastrianism, are the first written documents of Kurdish language.

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<sup>64</sup> When calling a male by *you!*

<sup>65</sup> When calling a female by *you!*

<sup>66</sup> Has two meanings: Still and calling article

<sup>67</sup> Said to show sorrow or pain

<sup>68</sup> A lamenting and mourning phrase

<sup>69</sup> “Avesta, is the sacred book of Zoroastrianism containing its cosmogony, law, and liturgy, the teachings of the prophet Zoroaster (Zarathustra). The extant Avesta is all that remains of a much larger body of scripture, apparently Zoroaster’s transformation of a very ancient tradition. The voluminous manuscripts of the original are said to have been destroyed when Alexander the Great conquered Persia. The present Avesta was assembled from remnants and standardized under the Sāsānian kings (3rd–7th century AD).

The Avesta is in five parts. Its religious core is a collection of songs or hymns, the Gāthās, thought to be in the main the very words of Zoroaster. They form a middle section of the chief liturgical part of the canon, the Yasna, which contains the rite of the preparation and sacrifice of haoma. The Visp-rat is a lesser liturgical scripture, containing homages to a number of Zoroastrian spiritual leaders. The Vendidad, or Vidēvdāt, is the main source for Zoroastrian law, both ritual and civil. It also gives an account of creation and the first man, Yima. The Yashts are 21 hymns, rich in myth, to various yazatas (angels) and ancient heroes. The Khūrda Avesta (or Little Avesta) is a group of minor texts, hymns, and prayers for specific occasions.

Zend-Avesta literally means “interpretation of the Avesta.” It originally referred to the commonly used Pahlavi translation but has often been used as the title of Western translations.” **Britannica Academia.**

In my point of view, regardless of some arguments and debates about this subject, I go with the theory that sees the language of Medes as a language of not only Kurds (Öpengin, 2014, p. 19). Moreover, since politics decides which language to be spoken and written with, we can say it was the language of all ethnics gathered under this religious and political umbrella.

Mehmet Bayrak states that the first Kurdish verses were written in 7<sup>th</sup> century in the form of elegy. And this piece of lament, written on a piece of animal skin, was composed after the invasion of Muslim Arabs on Kurdistan, the land where Kurds live, and their occupation of Kurdish lands by killing causing Zoroastrian Kurds unwillingly convert into Islam (Bayrak, 2002, p.15). If we assume the truth about this piece of parchment found in Hezarmerd/Avroman,<sup>70</sup> the thing that Bayrak confirms, we can say that this is the first documented Kurdish text of a mourning song. And I see that the occasion and circumstances which this piece of lyrics was written under is more important, because it shows a historical context in which politics played a great role in creating such a piece of cultural artifact. When I say politics I mean that a state, here represented by Muslim Arab ethnicity, invading peoples from another ethnicity in the name of a religious conquest. And this piece of information proves that a political religious factor motivated an act of creativity related to nationalism. Here is the text (Bayrak, 2002, p.24) (Öpengin, 2017, p.15):

<i>Hurmezgan rîman atîran kujan</i>	Temples were ruined, fires were out
<i>Wêşan şardewe gewey gewran</i>	The eldest ones hid themselves
<i>Zurkarê Ereb kirdine xapûr</i>	Cruel Arabs devastated
<i>Gînay pale heta Şarezûr</i>	every village till Shahrizor
<i>Şînw we kenîkan we dîl bişîne</i>	Women and girls were taken
<i>Mêrd(î) aza tilî we rûyî hwîna</i>	The brave men were drowned in their blood
<i>Rewuşt Zereduştre manewe bêkes</i>	Zoroastrianism was left alone
<i>Bezîka neyka hurmîz we hîwçkes</i>	Ahura Mazda will not show mercy to anyone

Regardless of the fact that the existence of this parchment is controversial (Öpengin, 2017, p.23), I want to focus on the Kurmanji Kurdish writings. Furthermore, I want to shed more

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<sup>70</sup> AVROMAN is a town in Persian Kurdistan lying close to the Turkish frontier between the sources of the Lesser Zab and the course of the Diala River some distance to the north of the highway from Baghdad.

historical light on the issue of politics and Kurdish nationalism in literature, which I have already given some aluminous slight points, I would like to begin with this line from Mala-ye Jaziri (1570-1640) from his “Çi Hacet” (No Need) *Qesîde* (poem) (Zêrevan, 2004, p.60):

“*Ger lu’lu’-i mensûr-i ji nezmê tu dixwazî, wer şî’rê Melê bîn te bi Şîrazî çî hacet!*”

‘If thou longest for the beautifully opened pearl of rhyming prose,  
look but at the poems of Male, wherefore neediest thou then Shirazi ‘?’ (Nebez, 2000)

In some versions we can find Shiraz as a place in Iran, and the translation goes like this, “You do not have to go to Shiraz to see beauty, Mala’s poems are more beautiful than Shiraz.” But I think that Mala-ye Jaziri means Hafez Shirazi (1315-1390) who is a well-known Persian poet of sophism. But in both meanings, we can conclude that Mala-ye Jaziri invites Kurds to read his literature, and do not go to either Shiraz or to Shirazi’s literature. This is an apparent invitation to Kurds to look after their language and culture. The example of nationalism that resulted from the separation of Kurdistan, or the lands where Kurds live, into two different Empires; Ottoman in the west and north-west, and Safavid in the east and south-east; not only made Kurds more aware of their being a different ethnicity from Persians and Ottomans and that they have their own rights to preserve their culture and privacy non-assimilated, but made a critical split in the Kurdish culture that cooperated with the old regional and geographical dialect and accent differences among Kurds. This was eventually represented by Northern Kurdish as Kurmanji dialect and Southern Kurdish by Sorani dialect on one hand, and made Kurds divided into two political views on the other hand, I mean the one that follows Ottomans and the other that follows Safavids. But the most important note under Jaziri’s line is that Kurds were not used to write or read Kurdish language in that period.

Another example, if we summarize *Sharafnama* book of Sharafkhan Bidlisi, we can say it is a political history of Kurdish Dynasties who fought among each other with support of either Ottomans against Kurdish Dynasties that are loyal to Safavids or with support of Safavids against Kurdish Dynasties that are loyal to Ottomans. Moreover, the fellowship of

*Sharafnama*'s writer Sharafkhan Bidlisi (1543-1603) himself with Ottomans<sup>71</sup> could be a clear example of this separation among Kurds on one hand, and on the other hand it shows the loyalty of Kurds to rulers; the thing that made the Kurdish privacy or specialty be assimilated within the hegemonic cultures (Îzolî, 1979).

Then comes the pioneer of Kurdish nationalism *Ehmedê Xanî*/Ahmad the Khani (1651-1707). As apparent in his book *Mem û Zîn* (Mam and Zin), Khani speaks louder and sharper than Mala-ye Jaziri about Kurdish nationalism. In almost the entire of his work he calls for a united Kurdish status and state that should be led by a Kurdish leader (Dost, 2016).

Yet *Sharafname* was written in Persian language, but the language which the *Dîwan* and *Mem û Zîn* is written in is a mix of Kurdish, Turkish, Persian and Arabic, even with contents that calls for Kurdish nationalism. So, we ask ourselves the following question: Why did they write with these four languages and not only Kurdish? The answer, in my point of view, is because either they want to show off by writing with a non-Kurdish language or a mix of so many languages, or as intellectuals of that era; they had to use the language of rulers and the languages that most of publications were written in. Here, comes the most important question: How did Kurdish language survive despite of the fact that it was not the major language of writing for even Kurds themselves? Was it an insufficient language for writing, or not an independent language?

Answering the first question, in 2010, in a conversation with a friend called *Edîb Çelkî* (Adib Chalki), Kurdish poet and lyrics writer<sup>72</sup> and religious man who is graduate of Islamic Sciences from Baghdad University, I asked him the following question: “ How could a religious man like you be interested in Kurdish music?” He answered, “The cornerstone of Kurdish music is Kurdish songs which are the only tool that preserved Kurdish language. If there had not been Kurdish songs and people who sing it, maybe you and I could not understand and talk to each other using Kurdish language.” The same information can be seen in almost all of the academic works of Kurds in diasporas recently (Reşîd, 2008, p.15). But when was the first academic work about Kurdish language?

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<sup>71</sup> He dedicates his works to Ottoman Sultans and praise Ottomans frequently in his *Sharafnama*.

<sup>72</sup> He comes from Duhok Governorate in KRG. He is the writer of the lyrics of Mother Language song.

According to Kendal Nezan, “The Kurd language, in written form since the 7th century was used first only by a few poets of the 10th and 11th centuries (Termūki [Termaxî]<sup>73</sup>, Heriri [Elî Herîrî 11<sup>th</sup> century], Baba Tahir [ Baba Tahirê Uryan, about 10<sup>th</sup> to 11<sup>th</sup> century]), and acquired the status of language of culture in the princely courts of Kurdistan (Bohtan, Chemdinan, Bedlis, Ardelan). An abundant and relatively varied literature flowered in this language (Nezan, 1979).”

When we reviewed the history of interest in Kurds, we mentioned a stage of Westerns’ interest in Kurds that goes back to 18th century. Among those Westerns we can find missionaries, as well. The pioneer of European Kurdish studies, who is agreed to be the father of Kurdology, was the Italian missionary Maurizio Garzoni (1734-1804) who stayed in Mosul in 1762. Two years later he moved to Amadiya,<sup>74</sup> the capital of the principality of Behdinan,<sup>75</sup> the region where *Behdînanî* (Kurmanji) is spoken. There he collected materials for his *Grammatica e Vocabolario della lingua Kurda*, the first Kurdish-Italian dictionary which was published in Rome in 1787 (Saradistribution, 2017). Garzoni sees that Kurdish language is an independent language and deserves to be learned and considered. This one could be an answer for the question of whether Kurdish language was sufficient or insufficient for writing. And so the main reason behind Garzoni’s interest in Kurdish was building an economical and cultural bridge between Westerns and Kurds; that he saw Kurdish language very important to be learned that so many people, even non-Kurd Christians also speak it (Dost, 2010). And maybe this last one is the main reason behind seeing the first recorded Kurdish song in 1909 in Mosul which is sung by a non-Kurdish Christian Khosrof Malool (1880-1971), an Assyrian whose origins are from Diyarbakır/Turkey (Yaş, 2015). Another thing, Garzoni’s comment shows the economical politics in the revival of cultures.

So, after displaying a historical review about the first features of nationalism and politics in Kurdish texts that began from Arabs invasion for the Kurdish regions since 7<sup>th</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup> century, and then in 1514 after Kurds were divided between Ottomans and Safavids, which conclusively led us to focus on the part under Ottomans which is the Kurmanji part so that we

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<sup>73</sup> Mele Elî Termaxî, a philologist and religious man from Hakkari/Turkey. Lived between the end of 16<sup>th</sup> till the half of 17<sup>th</sup> century.

<sup>74</sup> A district in northern central Duhok Governorate within the Kurdistan Region of Northern Iraq

<sup>75</sup> *Behdînan* is the west region of KRG/Northern Iraq.

knew about language and literature and the relationship between them in depicting the features of Kurdish songs. We can conclude that since the Kurdish literature is the essence of Kurdish songs, and *Dengbêj* and *Qesîdebêj*, at the same time to be considered as poets, are the core of Kurdish singing, and the orality is the prominent characteristic of these traditions. In fact, we can say that Kurdish bards played a great role in spreading the sense of nationalism all over Kurdistan because those bards, minstrels, troubadours and balladeers are people who travel from place to place to tell their epics, stories and the poets' poems (Schäfers, 2015). For showing their role, Nezan writes, "Parallel to the literature developed by the men of letters there grew up a rich folklore full of freshness and vitality, transmitted by the dengbej (bards), stranbêj (popular singers) and cirokbêj (story tellers), very often illiterate and gifted with prodigious memories (Nezan, 1979)."

Now let's go back to the characteristics of these styles of singing by making literary analysis for the texts or lyrics that are sung by *Dengbêj*, *Qesîdebêj* and *Stranbêj*.

### 3.2.1 *Dengbêj*'s Texts

Firstly, I would like to begin with *Dengbêjî* style, and write a piece of the epic love story *Mem û Zîn*, known as *Memê Alan* sung by *Miço Kendes*, a singer from Kobani who stays in Switzerland now.<sup>76</sup> The song is a conversation between Mam and Zin.<sup>77</sup> In this piece Zin talks to Mem:

*De lo, lo, lo, lo...lo, lo, lo, lo...De lo, lo, lo, lo, lo...De lo, lo, lo, Memo, lo, lo...!*

*Heyrane bejna te ye zirav e ne têda hê ye, ne çi tûk e, ne kelemo!*

*Ji canê min nemaya xelkê re him şîfa û him melhemo, Memo, lo, lo...!*

*De lo, lo, lo, lo, lo...De lo, lo, lo, lo...lo...Memo, lo, lo, lo, lo...!*

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<sup>76</sup> This saga of ancestral love was passed down by word of mouth from generation to generation. The Kurdish poet Ahmed Khâni (1651-1707) then wrote it down in his work entitled *Mem û Zîn*, which was translated into several languages. Despite this, the oral version is still the more familiar and popular one.

Set in the region called Jazira Botan (Turkey), the saga recounts the adventures of two lovers who meet first in a dream. Each leaves a ring on the other's finger. It is then that the long and perilous journey of Mem begins, in search of the imaginary kingdom of Zin.

The dream soon becomes a reality, as the two lovers meet. One event follows another and the plot thickens in an atmosphere of tragedy which reach its climax with the death of the two heroes before their wedding.

<sup>77</sup> But it is always sung by one singer who takes both parts of man and woman.

Here, Zin calls Mem and describes him as a handsome fit man who does not have any imperfection or defect in his body and stature. And that she is sick and thinking of Mem's body or his presence as a cure for her sickness.

If we look at the form, we can see that some words are repeated by the *dengbêj* in order to preserve the rhythm and melody from one hand, and to give more emotion and passion to his way of singing on the other.

To frame this style inside a united feature or characteristic, we can say it is a narration of tragic historical events and tragic love stories.

### 3.2.2 *Qesîdebêjî's* Texts

When we move to the tradition or style of *Qesîdebêjî*, we do not find these additions on the text. *Qesîdebêj* sings poems that are originally rhymed verses. But there are long pauses on vowels, like 'î, î, o, û, a', especially when it comes in the end of each line of the poem. The content of the poems sung by *Qesîdebêj* is religious or mystic. For example, we can write the text of another recording for *Miço Kendes* singing the mystic poem "*Şeva Hicran*" of *Cegerxwîn* (Kendes, 2017):

*Di tarîka şeva hicran çiraxek sîfet im, ya reb!* In the dark night of separation I am like a flame, my God!

*Ji ser hetta piyan ar e, bi carek pêketim, ya reb!* I am set on fire from tip to toe, my God!

*Nema min sebr û aram e, ji ber jana evîna dil.* I am impatient of my agonies of love.

*Evîn behr e, belê tenha bi ber pêlan ketim, ya reb!* Love is a sea, but I am gone with its waves alone, my God!

Looking at the form, there are sixteen vowels in each line. The bold-marked vowels are those which *Qesîdebêj* gave them long breath with artistic vibrations to his voice to show his talent

in his performance. Even the performance is done with a free style with no percussion, however we can feel as if the performer has turned his breath into a percussion instrument while singing. Moreover, one can feel that this length in specific vowels are done according to the general rhythm.

So, we can say that *Qesîdebêjî* is more close to song forms than *Dengbêjî*. Yarsanis, Alevi Kurds of Iran, and Yezidis perform this tradition with musical instruments and percussions (Baqi, 2002). Another style could be close to *Qesîdebêjî* is the rituals of *tariqats*, *Qadirîs tariqat* specifically, in their *Zikir*. The *dervishes* (*tariqat* followers) use *Erbane*<sup>78</sup> in their *Zikir* ceremonies, which are verses of eulogy or panegyric to the Prophet or their prominent Sheikhs (Bruinessen, 1992).

To frame this style inside a united feature or characteristic, we can say it forms either mystic or religious character.

### 3.2.3 *Stranbêjî*'s Texts

When we talk about *Stran* (songs), we mean a numerous of sub-styles. Moreover, when we go back to the statements I have already mentioned about the question of genres in Kurdish songs, I find it appropriate if we name these sub-styles as the genres of Kurdish songs; rhythmic songs.

In Kurdish literature for this genre of songs they say *Lawij*. It is mostly sung in lament when the dead is young and unmarried. It is accompanied with *daf* and *bilûr* (rustic flute) or *dûdûk* (double reed woodwind instrument) and *erbane*. I think it is originally *Lavbêj*; from the two words *Lav* (to implore or pray) and *Bêj*; that is why some *Lawij* songs are of religious inspiration (Nezan, 1979).

Seven years ago, in 2010, a musician relative of mine went to Yerevan/Armenia to play music in a wedding of one of his acquaintances. When he came back I asked him about the music that Kurds in Yerevan play, he told me that there is no much difference, but he told me about an interesting musical practice he saw there; that when someone dies there, they bring a

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<sup>78</sup> Kurds in Iran call it *def* or *daf*. In Kobani we call it *êldefî*. A large frame drum.

musician who plays and sings beside the coffin where everybody else comes to say goodbye to the dead one.

I remember when I was young, women used to improvise melodic and rhythmic mourning lyrics in what we used to call *Şîn* (funeral ceremony). But this practice was not accepted by my grandfather and uncles who were austere religious men; considering this kind of mourning as a challenge to Islam regulations. So, I think this genre or musical practice has disappeared among Muslim Kurds, while Yezidi Kurds still practice it.

Another sad and melancholic genre is *Berdolavî*<sup>79</sup> (songs of the spinning wheel); sung by women when performing spinning and weaving work. This is also of sad and melancholic melody (Nezan, 1979).

*Kilamên Dila*<sup>80</sup> (love songs), “composed mostly by women, are generally short and have a simple and totally free structure. The lyrical plan is not submitted to any constraint imposed by harmony, meter or even rhyme (Nezan, 1979).”

Other genres stated by Bois are: the songs we call *Stranên Paleyê* (harvest songs) -but this kind of songs is not related just with harvest because it is sung with all kinds of everyday life works so it is better to call them *Stranên Kar* (work songs)- *Pehîzok*<sup>81</sup> (autumn songs)<sup>82</sup>, and *Serêle* (songs of the spring). (Bois, 1966)

Accordingly, there are so many other genres, and all of them depend on occasion, time of the year and region (Dost, 2010). Taking into consideration that in some regions the same genre and style are practiced but with different names (Christensen, 2010). And if we review the places where these genres are documented from; Bois, Christensen and Nezan, all of them refer to Hakkari, south-east of Turkey, or regions that are nearby; places where Kurds used to rule themselves politically. If we have a meticulous look at the history, we can find that the last Kurdish dynasty was that of *Cizîra Botan* (Jazira/Cizîrê/Cizre in Hakkari); as a semi-

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<sup>79</sup>Thomas Bois calls them *Bendolavî*. I think the correct one concerning the second syllable is to say *-dolabî*. The same thing was for *lawij* and *lavbêj*, we see that in both words there is a matter of change between “b” and “w” or “v”. It is well known that some letters differ in pronunciation from place to another, or when it comes with another letter it makes a diphthong.

<sup>80</sup>Dieter Christensen calls them *Hejîkirin* (love). We call them now *Stranên Evîniyê* (love songs). Concerning the word *Kilam*; is of Arabic origin, we can translate it into Kurdish as *Bêje*.

<sup>81</sup>*Payîzok*. *Payîz* means fall or autumn.

<sup>82</sup>Young men and women when coming down from mountains where they have spent the summer, to plains in autumn, sing love songs to each other.

independent Kurdish political authority that lasted till the mid of 19<sup>th</sup> century when Bedir Khan Beg was eliminated by Ottomans in 23 August 1847 (Aboona, 2008).

Going back to the genres of the songs, the only genre or style among rhythmic songs that has been wide spreading and still in use, despite of the influence of neighboring and hegemonic cultures, is wedding songs. In other words, we can say that wedding songs are dancing songs that differ from one region to another. As I have mentioned the difference of dances in Syrian Kurdish regions, the same thing to be considered for all other Kurmanj communities all over regions Kurmanj Kurds inhabit (Nezan, 1979).

After making a brief examination about the styles of *Dengbêjî*, *Qesîdebêjî* and *Stranbêjî*; I think it would be useful to discuss the nature of Kurdish melodies and instruments. What is the general characteristic, or impression left when listening to Kurdish music? Is there Kurdish music, or does it have the same characteristics as other Middle Eastern peoples' music? And how far social and political influences can be traced in the nature of Kurdish melodies and instruments?

### **3.3 The Nature of Kurdish Melodies**

In the spring of 2015, in one of our classes we were discussing how political, ecological and social life of peoples leave impact on their culture, and especially on their music. And when the music of Kurds became the subject, two opposite opinions emerged; the first one considered that the social and political manipulation of daily life of Kurds imposed the epic singing and mournful tone with sad melodies on their music. While the other one saw it on the contrary to what has been mentioned; that the Kurdish music is a music of dance, joy and jubilation.

We can say that there are so many factors behind these two impressions. The main factor has emerged from personal experiences related to whether it is understanding the language of sung texts or just reviewing the melodies without understanding what is sung. It is known that most of the Kurdish lyrics are sad stories or of melancholic content, even if sometimes melodies and rhythms are that of dancing (Bayrak, 2002). Another thing, if I go abroad or to another city, to live among a community that is different from me culturally and that I do not speak or even understand their language; I will evaluate their music through melodies played.

Moreover, if I reside next to a wedding hall, I will have an experience that the music of this community is cheerful. But if all I experience about the music of this community comes from people who only sing sad melodies, sad music will be my definition to the music of this community.

Another important factor to be mentioned related to instruments and melodies, when we talk about Kurdish singing, the first thing comes to my mind is “narrative songs”. In other words, we remember the sad **voice**. But when we talk about instruments and melodies, the first thing comes to my mind is dancing songs accompanied with *dahol* and *zirne* (drum and oboe)<sup>83</sup>. In other words, we remember the cheerful **sound** (Christensen, 2007).

So, to explain more about the question of the nature of Kurdish music, and whether it is of independent characteristics or the same as other regions music. It is useful to discuss it with two perspectives; insider and outsider. In other words, the way Kurds themselves see their music and the way non-Kurds see the Kurdish music.

Izady, as an insider, writes, “...Kurdish folk songs, in short, are stories told in the **company of music**. In fact, even when the words are not uttered, the music associated with these songs take on a form of “silent” song to any Kurdish listener, with the **music alone** telling the story.” (Izady, 2009)

A good example of Izady’s statement is what I observed about *M. Dûman*’s style of playing folkloric songs and *Dengbêjî* epics on his violin. When he plays a piece of solo music, you feel that there is a *Dengbêj* singing or telling you a story by singing. Sometimes I feel as if *Baqî Xido*’s<sup>84</sup> voice is coming from the space between his bow and fingers. In other words, he composes his melodic sentences according to the vocal lyrical sentences.

Concerning the outsider perspective, Izady writes, “ Much more is found on Kurdish music in the medieval Isma’ili<sup>85</sup> treatise, the *Rasa’il Ikhwan al-Safa*.<sup>86</sup> The *Rasa’il* clearly

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<sup>83</sup> In Turkish *davul* and *zurna*. In Kobani we call them *def* and *zirne*.

<sup>84</sup> A *Dengbêj* from *Kobani* who used to accompany *Dûman*.

<sup>85</sup> A branch of Shia Muslims.

distinguishes between the Kurdish musical heritage, in terms of scales, melodies, instruments, and those of the Persians, Arabians, and a few others who are mentioned.” (Izady, 2009)

Bois, in this respect, writes; “Kurdish music naturally forms part of what it has been generally agreed to style oriental music, but although it has sometimes influenced the songs of neighboring peoples, it cannot be confused with Arabic, Armenian or Turkish music.” (Bois, 1966).

While Dieter Christensen writes, “...there is a great variety of music within the vast contiguous territory that Kurds inhabit, from Northern Syria and Central Anatolia in Turkey to Armenia and the Kermanshah area in Iran, and most of that music will be recognized by Kurds and non-Kurds alike as "Kurdish".” Then Christensen continues stating that the most recognized style among music of Kurds is that of *Dengbêj* and *Qesîdebêj* (Christensen, 2007).

So, we can conclude two things; the first one is that Kurdish music plays a great role in the formation of the Kurdish identity which I have advocated previously. While the second one is that, despite of the fact that Kurds are part and parcel of the Middle East, they have a different culture which music represents the apparent demonstration of this difference. But we still have a question that most of the given examples about Kurdish music discuss narrative songs. In other words, they discuss the **voice**. And when melodies and instrumental music is discussed, **sound** seems to be as an inseparable of **voice**; they are imitating what is sung or narrated. In other words, the style or way of playing instruments does not exceed the limit of what is already sung; the **sound** imitates the **voice**.

At the end of these historical and musical reviews, I would like to ask a series of questions about Kurdish music, and try to find the answers along with political and social factors inside a context of historical frame. And concerning the questions I find useful to start the discussion with them: Despite of the fact that vocal and lyrics occupy the greatest part of Middle Eastern peoples’ music, is not there instrumental music or melodies in Kurdish music, or even musical models to be played instrumentally as we find in Arabian, Turkish and Persian music? Historically speaking, in this cultural (musical) legacy of Middle East or Mesopotamia, what are Kurds’ contributions? Are there still those “authentic” styles of singing among Kurdish

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<sup>86</sup> In English “Brethren of Purity.” A secret society of Muslim philosophers. “...are the authors of one of the most complete Medieval encyclopedia.”

communities? How far did politics, be it Kurds' or the ruling regimes', affect those Kurdish musical styles? How far did tribal and religious mentality of the society affect Kurdish music? To give answers to these questions, I would like to spot a light on the music of Syrian Kurds with a specific focus on Kobani, because answering these questions demand a huge effort if it will be done including all Kurmanji speaking regions. The thing that I have neither good information and full resources nor academic capability to make.



## 4. THE SYRIAN KURDS

After ‘the sick man of Europe’<sup>87</sup> passed away, new national states emerged. As a result, the idea and feeling of *Al-Ummah Al-Islamiyyah* (the Islamic nation) was no more valid. And the Kurds, as a predominantly Muslim ethnicity, who used to live with no interrupting borders among them as a part of this Islamic nation, have been divided more and more within these new national states. The Kurds were divided between Ottomans and Safavid Empires after 1514; but this time, with the formation of new national states, they became divided into four new identities; Kurds of Turkey, Kurds of Iran, Kurds of Iraq and Kurds of Syria (Zaki, 1931). And because neither the national interests of the newborn states nor the international ones admitted to recognize them, Kurds were doomed to be minorities in states that carry the national identity of the majority which worked to assimilate them by drifting their distinctiveness in the states political and cultural streams (Ucarlar, 2009).

### 4.1 The History of Kurdish Presence in Syria

The Kurds of Syria are used to be called as ‘Syrian Kurds’, and this title is not very old because Syria itself, as a state, is not old. The name ‘Syria’ until the end of the World War I (1918), was primarily geographical; covering the lands between the Taurus<sup>88</sup> and Sinai<sup>89</sup>, the Mediterranean and the desert.<sup>90</sup> Syria was a part of the Ottoman Empire until November 11, 1918, when Allied troops under General Allenby<sup>91</sup> had occupied the area. But about two years before this event, in May 1916, Allied Powers signed the secret Sykes-Picot<sup>92</sup> agreement dividing the region between France and Britain, and by then the San Remo (Italy) conference had partitioned the Ottoman Empire in April, 1920, giving France the mandate over Syria and Lebanon.

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<sup>87</sup>The Ottoman Empire in 1914 was commonly known as “the sick man of Europe”, a sign that he once-great power was crumbling.

<sup>88</sup>Taurus mountain range is in the southern part of Turkey, following the Mediterranean coast.

<sup>89</sup> Sinai is a peninsula in Egypt, the only part of the country located in Asia.

<sup>90</sup> The border of Arabian Peninsula where northern borders of Saudi Arabia locates.

<sup>91</sup> Sir Edmund Henry Hynman Allenby (1861-1936).

<sup>92</sup> Diplomats, Sir Mark Sykes of Britain and François Georges Picot of France.

Four months later, Turkey signed the treaty of Sevres (France) renouncing all rights to the mandated territory (Hitti, 1959).

After World War I, the border between the two new states of Syria and Turkey remained uncertain; that into the 1920s the Ankara government in Turkey and the French occupation authorities in Syria fought a war over where it should lie, neither jurisdiction recognized the other. With the Franklin-Bouillon Agreement of 1921<sup>93</sup>, France and the Republic of Turkey stopped fighting and formally recognized each other. And therefore, territories were confirmed by the Treaty of Lausanne (Switzerland) in 1923. But the border remained very loosely defined (White, 2011).

The first event that affirmed the importance of controlling the borderline tightly was the Sheikh Said Revolt of 1925<sup>94</sup>. Soon after the Sheikh Said rebellion began, the High Commissioner feared the influence of events on the Syrian zone of the Syro-Turkish frontier which is populated by Kurdish tribes, that rebels will seek refuge with their brothers in Syria and re-attack Turkey from there. French Mandate began to enhance its presence on the borderline by establishing Service de Renseignement (Intelligence Services) in Arab Pinar<sup>95</sup> (Kobani), and another one in Kurd Dagh<sup>96</sup>(Afrin) preventing gangs attacks from the Turkish side, and in the northeast in Jazira<sup>97</sup> (Al-Hasakah), French mandate troops cooperating with Turkish troops spread along the border line arriving to Tigris<sup>98</sup>. And even pushing rebels, like Hajo Axa<sup>99</sup>, thirty and fifty k.m southwards inside the Syrian side (White, 2011).

Concerning the Kurdish presence in Syria, we can recognize three categories; the first category are Kurds who were inhabiting cities of Aleppo, Homs, Hama and Damascus since the time of the Ayyubid Dynasty in 11<sup>th</sup> century. Those Kurds were, and still are, active in the cultural, economical and political life of Syria (Mundy &

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<sup>93</sup> Known as The Franko-Turkish Agreement. Took place in Ankara in 12 November 1921.

<sup>94</sup> Şêx Seîd-ê Pîran (Sheikh Said of Piran) (1865-1925), a religious man from *Naqshabandî tariqat* led a rebellious movement in 29 June 1925 after Kurds were disappointed from Turkish Republic's promises to give Kurds independence in their regions. Turkish government used to call it a movement that aims at the revival of the Islamic Caliphate era, but Kurds claim it was a Kurdish nationalist movement.

<sup>95</sup> Ottoman name, the Arabic name is translated from the Turkish one into Ayn al-Arab, its people like to call it Kobani, which comes from the English "Company".

<sup>96</sup> Kurd Dagh, Ottoman name means Mount of Kurds, its Arabic name is Afrin, its people name it as *Çiyayê Kurmênc* (*kurmanj's/Kurds' Mountain*) or *Efrîn*.

<sup>97</sup> Jazira, means island, because its location between Euphrates and Tigris. Now it's called Al-Hasakah.

<sup>98</sup> Where the triangle of Syria, Turkey and Iraq locates.

<sup>99</sup> Chief of *Hevirkan* tribe in Jazira and one of the most important supporters of Sheikh Said.

Smith, 2007), but they are an assimilated entity that just their family names and origins may recognize them as Kurds. Those Kurds were divided into two opinions in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century; an opinion that supported France against Ottomans, and another that supported the central authority in Istanbul (Yildiz, 2005). Later on, these two opinions got more involved in the Syrian affairs that aimed at finding an independent Syria without giving any interest to the matter of their “Kurdishness”. The most important figure among these Kurds was Khalid Bakdash (1912-1995), the dean of Arab Communism, who was criticizing the **Kurdish** activities and activists, believing that Syrian **Arab** nationalism was a historical necessity (White, 2011).

Concerning the second category, they were among the original inhabitants of north Syria in the three regional entities in the sense of geography: Afrin (*Efrîn/ Kurd Dag*) northwest, Kobani (Ayn Al-Arab/Arab Pinar) north middle, and Jazira (*Cizîrê/ Hasakah*) northeast of Syria. In the beginning of twentieth century, in the colonial and oriental researches, Kurds in these regions can be defined as tribal communities; some of them shepherds, lead a Bedouin lifestyle moving from one place to another seeking water and greenery, and others who are habitats and dwellers who live near water resources and subsisted on agriculture (Great Britain, 1919).

So, we can conclude that the matter of borderline affected these tribes awfully because the railway laid for the train, which was intended to start from Berlin and settle in Baghdad, was not just a locomotive curse that cut the geography and thus divided the relatives into two new regions (states) as *serxet* (up-the-railway) and *binxet* (down-the-railway)<sup>100</sup>. Moreover, it forced tribes of north Syria to get separated from their economical and cultural centers like Antep, Urfa, Mardin and Hakkari which got included in the Turkish state. Because the tribesmen dwelling in the Syrian side were mostly illiterate and worked as farmers and grazers, their cultural life became such a terrible static quagmire controlled by feudalists and tribal customs and traditions represented by *axa* and *beg*<sup>101</sup>.

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<sup>100</sup> Kurds used to call the Turkish side as *serxet* and the Syrian side as *binxet*. They did not name the two states as Turkey and Syria, and some of them still use these them, and maybe it is emanated from a denial of political entities, and that it is just the railway that separate them, not two governments and states.

<sup>101</sup> Landlords and masters or chieftains.

The third category are the Kurds who escaped from the Turkish side as a result of the failure of the Sheikh Said Revolt. And their number was estimated about 25.000 Kurds (McDowell, 2007). These recently arrived refugees were distinguished from long established residents by calling them ‘new comers’ (White, 2011). Due to the modernization of the revolutionary movement in Turkey and its national consequences, and the failure of the Sheikh Said Revolt against that movement and due to the fact that his supporters being placed along the borderline in the Syrian side in Kurdish regions, contributed in awakening the feeling of nationalism among Syrian Kurds. Especially after finding a safe shelter among the Kurds in the Syrian side, that the actors in the Kurdish cultural movement, comprising a group of intellectuals who had national and cultural projects, found collaborators in the mandatory administration. And the fact that among the French officers and administrators in Syria, there was a number of individuals with scholarly interests in Kurdish affairs, most importantly, Pierre Rondot and Roger Lescot.<sup>102</sup> (Tejel, 2009)

So, we can assume that the third category, the ‘new comers’, drilled water wells that pushed out the stagnant water and established the first Kurdish national movement in the modern history of Syria. A movement that affected the social and cultural life of Kurds in general and of Syria in particular. So many figures emerged among the third category, and apparently the most important name is Jaladat Ali Badirkhan<sup>103</sup> who became the first editor of the bilingual Kurdish-French review *Hawar* (appeal), which, together with his later illustrated publication *Ronahî* (light), promoted understanding among the diverse and often conflicting elements of the Kurdish nationalist movement and contributed to the growth of a Kurdish popular literature (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2017).

In *Hawar*, Jaladat’s journal, among so many goals to be accomplished, the third goal is: “Studying the characteristics of Kurdish folk dances with their rhythms and occasions. And studying the characteristics of Kurdish music and archiving its

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<sup>102</sup> Both of them, Rondot and Lescot, wrote works about Middle East and Kurds, especially Lescot who wrote about Kurdish Grammar and Ezidis/Yezidis. And had a great role in documenting Kurdish love epic song *Memê Alan*.

<sup>103</sup> (26/04/1893 in Istanbul/Turkey – 15/07/1951 Damascus/Syria) Diplomat, linguist, journalist, writer and political activist. He held a master degree in law from Istanbul University. Left Turkey in 1923.

melodies.”<sup>104</sup> So, since the Kurdish cultural library is represented by the *Dengbêj*, Jaladat and his *Hawar* began to focus on *Dengbêjî*, and each issue of *Hawar* was including texts from their songs.

So, after reviewing the history of the Kurdish presence in Syria, I would like to present some of my hypotheses about the music of the Syrian Kurds. Most hypotheses are based on my conclusions from political, geographic and cultural history and on the summary of my experiences with music and musicians in Syria. In other words, I intend to make a historical review to show the influence of political and social factors on the music of Kurds, in general, and Syrian Kurds, in particular. These factors changed the direction of music making; from being a natural and intuitive warden of the feelings of the Kurd that should have developed simultaneously with other peoples’ music, into being a servant to political aspects to Kurds as propaganda or as an answer to the politics of anti-Kurds as a defensive arm. Socially speaking, music was practiced secretly because of the tribal and religious customs of the Kurdish society. I see that both Kurds and Syrian regime were responsible for the influence of these factors in tumbling and paralyzing the Kurdish music in Syria. But the most important reason behind these factors result from the fact that, since borderlines made Kurds minorities in the states they live in, national characteristic has become a salient feature in their music; emanated from the sense of persecution and victimization. These two senses are important elements that justify mobilization and politicization of any revivalist movement for minorities (Romano, 2003).

#### **4.2 The Syrian Kurds and Music**

I remember it was in 1995 when the first Kurdish satellite channel, Med TV, began broadcasting from Europe.<sup>105</sup> About few years later, our Kurdish musicians from Syria started recording their songs and shooting video clips for the channel to show them. But the channel was not showing their songs. According to singers from

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<sup>104</sup> *Hawar* was edited and published in Damascus, issues of *Hawar* journal were collected and published in two books in 1998 by Ferat Cewerî, a Kurdish writer from Turkey, in Stockholm/Sweden.

<sup>105</sup> Med TV was closed in 1999 but was re-opened with another name as Medya TV, and then as Roj TV. Even it was closed an re-opened many times with different names but the policy of the channel did not change as a media wing to PKK (Kurdistan Workers’ Party).

Kobani, the channel was justifying the refusal by stating that Syrian Kurds' songs are *arabesk*.<sup>106</sup>

As we have discussed earlier, the matter of Kurdish music being influenced by Turkish, Arabian or Persian is natural because these peoples co-existed in the same geography for centuries, and it is very normal for these cultures to affect one another. Furthermore, if we consider *arabesk* music a style that has Arabian music characteristics, we should not forget the great musicians from Kurdish origins who contributed in Islamic World music, in general, and Arabian music, in particular (Nebez, 2004). For example, Ibrahim Mawsili (742-804) and his son Ishaq Mawsili (767-850) are considered as the founders of a new musical era in Baghdad in the time of the Abbasid Caliphate. Another important musical figure from Kurdish origin is Ziryab (789-857), who took the music of the East to Spain (Izady, 2009, p.265). In this respect, Bois writes, "Musical culture was highly developed in the Sassanian empire, and this tradition is maintained by the Kurds. It was a Kurd from Mosul, a famous musician and arbiter of good taste, Ziryab (789-857), who, after having started his career in Baghdad, continued it with brilliant success at the court of Abder-Rahman at Cordoba where he established a conservatoire. The Eastern music that he introduced took on an original quality recalled in the Andalusian airs which the gipsies have retained up to our own day. It is to Ziryab that we owe the fifth string of the lute. History still preserved in the IXth century the name of a whole dynasty of Kurdish musicians Ibrahim ibn al-Mahedi, his son Ishaq al-Mewsili and his grandson Hammad" (Bois, 1966, p. 61).

This review leads us to two conclusions; the first conclusion is that whatever was done or made in the past, it was done for *Al-Umma*. In other words, since it was done as a contribution to the Islamic World culture and not for a specific ethnic, it is a legacy for all ethnics or peoples gathered under this umbrella. I mean, since Arabian music is an extension of the old Islamic music, it is natural that Kurds, Turks or any other ethnicity contributed in this culture to share its legacy. The same thing might be said for Ottoman cultural legacy, as well. But moving to the second conclusion, which is related to the language of politics and the ruling state ethnicity, we can say that since Arabic was the language in which this Islamic culture was expressed with,

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<sup>106</sup> According to *Siyamend Oskullî*, a singer friend passed away drowned in Aegean Sea trying to go to Greece during recent Syrian events, and another friend, *Imerê Kanî* who stays in Mersin/Turkey now.

and since the rulers and people who were in charge of the political affairs were Arabs; this cultural legacy has no choice but to be documented as an Arabian legacy. And even in some points the word Arabian is still used as synonym to Islamic. Back to the issue of serving the dominant culture, we can witness that even in the modern history, “Rahim Moeni Kirmashani among the Persians, Nazim Ghazali among the Arabs, and Ibrahim Tatlis and Izet Altinmese among the Turks are only a few examples” (Nebez, 2004, p.43). Another example, Salim Barakat the well-known Syrian Kurdish writer, no matter of his Kurdish origin, writing his novels in Arabic makes him an Arab author; contributing in enriching Arabic literature.

Going back to the question of the music of Syrian Kurds being *arabesk*, *Xweşnav Tillo*<sup>107</sup> and *Ciwan Haco*<sup>108</sup> see that *arabesk* is a genre that belongs to Kurds as much as it belongs to Arabs. But I agree with *Dalshad Said*, a Kurdish maestro and violinist from Duhok who stays in Austria, about saying that making *arabesk* music is natural for Kurds, but when Kurds imitate the Turkish style in making *arabesk*, it becomes unnatural; it becomes an imitation of the imitation (Said, 2016). But the Kurdish TV channel, MED TV, was refusing not just the imitating style of *arabesk*, they were refusing everything related to *arabesk* or maqams music. For example, they were not showing *Reşîd Sofî's*<sup>109</sup> songs, justifying that his music is a mix between *arabesk* and *sanat* music. This musical taste and attitude is based on a political hostility towards Turkey, and was forcing singers to sing as they wish not as the singer, naturally, wishes.<sup>110</sup>

Speaking of maqams music, I would like to begin another discussion by asking this question: Is it true that there is no maqams genre in Kurdish music, especially in Syria? To answer this question, I think it is important to remember the following points I have mentioned previously: Firstly, the last independent Kurdish Dynasty was that of Bedr Khan Beg of *Cizîra Botan (Cizre/Hakkari)* which was terminated by

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<sup>107</sup> Khoshnav Tillo: Pop *arabesk* singer from Qamişlo/Syria, lives in Sweden now.

<sup>108</sup> Juan Hajo: Pop singer from *Tirbesipiyê - Qamişlo/Syria*, lives in Sweden now.

<sup>109</sup> A musician from Kobani who composes, plays oud and sings. He is an expert in *sanat* music and classical Persian and Arabian maqams. Most of his songs are a mix of many maqams in one song. He has a claim that Kurdish classical music is part and parcel of all Middle Eastern classical music. And since Safi al-Din al-Urmawi (1216-1294) who made the first academic and systematic study for Middle Eastern musics is a Kurd, according to *Sofi*, it is a prove that Kurdish music is a part of this maqams legacy.

<sup>110</sup> PKK, like some parties of leftist ideology, considers the widespread of *arabesk* as an achievement of the military coup in Turkey in 12 September 1980. But I think their attitude to *sanat* and maqams music stems from their hostility to sultanate and palaces which led to the emergence of feudalism, agha and beg, and the division of society into unequal classes, according to their ideologies.

Ottomans in 1847. Secondly, the borderline separated the Kurds of Syria from their cultural and economic centers which stayed within the Turkish side. Thirdly, the Kurds who used to dwell in northern Syria were tribal groups that lived on agriculture and livestock farming. And these tribes were led by chieftains, *axa* and *beg*.

Before I start handling this points, I would like to present some lines from *Ehmedê Xani's "Mem û Zîn"*:

“Saki, bring me from that rose-coloured wine

Not reverberating the sound of **Drum** and **Kanun**...

... I shall be droopy, reveal the secrets

And speak to myself not uttering words

Just like the **Ney**, I shall murmur

And like the *tuti* I shall gab...

...The music branches stepping out of my heart in tune

May fill the rose gardens with **Geweşt** and **Şehnaz**

Like the **Ney**, from the depth of my heart

Like the **Harp**, I may give hundreds of tones

And like **Rebab** without a **Kemancha**

The sound may come out of our **Drum** without a stick

So that the Venus listens to the voice of the **Newa**, **Uşaq** modes

And dance with the **Ewc** at the peak of the nine-layered heaven

The **Saz** of the wounded heart be of thick and fine strings

Shall I play the melody of *Zîn* and *Memo's* love...

...Those who played the instruments, those with good voice

Had dressed up in matching, fine coloured fabrics

Some had been voice-friends with the instruments

And some had been color-friends with praise and coquetry

Song voices **Violin**, **Lute** and **Tambur**

**Harp** instrument, **Drum**, **Clarion** and **Santoor**

**Ewc** with **Iraqi**, **Newa** with **Uşaq**

Would pair together and harmonize with mod of **Rast**

As the sound, toning with “**the music branches and modes**”

Like miracles and oracles, uncurtained

Came out of the jowls like **reed flute**

The reason, religion and faith would go plundered

The cupbearers mingled with grape juice

And scattered around the musicians with the sound of the **Santoor**...

...That crone, in the colour of the sky

Put forward the **Rehawi** mode to be heard

Everywhere in the world cheered up in revel

The city-dwellers and nomads, the free and the slave...

...The secrets in the heart of Mem and Zîn

Those instruments playing love’s melodies

When not on the other’s words yet

Had no harm to their owners

When the tongues of undecent ones became **plectrum**

And played that song following no melody no rules...

...The mouth rattles, rendered the playing into the **Zengul** mode

It was as if the fingertips were tightening strings ever higher

The sad **Uşak** and **Newaless** mode

And were fed with news on Zîn and Memo...

...Thus say oh sharp **Seba**

Kiss the floor that moment and stand up

Oh the Saba wind, for the sake of Allah

When you return from the presence of that beloved...

...Oh heart! If you want to be joyful

Feed on grape-juice all the time in the world instrument-house

If you throw the veil of heedlessness and confusion of the time

You will hear the heavenly mode harmonious tune of the **tambur**

If you hear the **Hicaz** mode **Huseyni** in the **Zamzam** melody

Kaaba of the heart you built becomes a prosperous house...” (Opengin, 2007)

As we can read, *Ehmedê Xanî* describes an atmosphere that is full of musical instruments, maqams, melodies, tunes and modes, which is the atmosphere of a Kurdish palace with its civilized and advanced urban life (Opengin, 2007). Another thing, in the book of *Sharafnama*, that we mentioned before, there were many Kurdish independent Dynasties which *Bayezîd/Agirî* (*Doğubeyazıt/Ağrı*), the homeland of *Ehmedê Xanî*, and *Cizîra Botan/Hekkarî* (*Cizre/Hakkari*), the region where the events of Mem and Zin took place, were two independent dynasties of them (Badlisi 2006). Moreover, in the preface of Mem and Zin by Jan Dost<sup>111</sup>, he states that after Safavids and Ottomans divided the lands that Kurds live in, the Kurds who were under Ottomans got united by Idris Bedlisi as allies to Ottomans after *Çaldıran* battle. And this act helped Kurdish *Mîr* (Princes) to lead prosperous cultural lives in their palaces until 1847 when the last independent Kurdish principdom of *Botan* was eliminated by Ottomans (Dost, 2016). Accordingly, we can say that when an independence based on good political relations with neighbours is existed, all cultural activities enjoy prosperity and progress. And music, as a cultural activity, had flourished in the Abbasid Caliphs palaces, no matter if Ibrahim Mewsili, Ishak Mewsili and Hammad Mewsili were Kurds or not, and the same thing could be said about Ottoman palaces and Abd al-Qadir al-Meraghi (1360-14354), as well. If we consider him a Kurd, as some resources claim (Opengin, 2007), the matter of his Kurdish origin is not important as much as the political situation of the state that creates a prosperous atmosphere for creating music is important.

Another example, if we look at the everyday life of the palaces which is written by Shraf Khan in his book, we can see so many occasions where boards and divans of music and singing are held (Badlisi, 2006). Palaces are always depicted as a place

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<sup>111</sup> Kurdish author, researcher and linguist from Kobani/Syria stays in Germany.

where the musical orchestras and proficient singers and musicians jostle to take a position in it. For example, the story of Ziryab and Ishak Mewsili, in which Ishak did not want Ziryab to stay in the Abbasid Caliph's palace in Baghdad, so the latter went to Andalus to Umayyad Caliph's palace and founded new musical styles and trends by combining Eastern and Western music and worked for guitar and flamenco music, the thing that was associated with the palace (Farmer, 2010). So, palaces were the arenas where music was developed and they were establishing for positive competitions. The matter that made Ziryab add a fifth string to the Oud, is a good example of such a competition (Opengin, 2007).

So, we conclude that the political life of Kurds affected their music so much; when they were living independently as allies to Ottomans, the music of maqams and the variety of musical instruments were present, and as it is apparent in *Xani's* lines, there is a connection between making music and the joyful and colourful life of urban territories.

Speaking of urban territories, I would like to move to another conclusion which is the issue of borderline that divided between rural regions of Kurds which were affiliated to Syria and their cultural and economical urban centers that stayed in the Turkish side. Dieter Christensen (Bayrak, 2002), Thomas Bois (Bois, 1966) and Kendal Nezan (Nezan, 1979) clearly divide Kurdish music into two categories; rural and urban music. And most styles can be found in urban parts, but in rural parts there are styles of music that are not available. We still can find traces and remnants of the legacy of Kurdish palaces and cities in the Kurdish musical diversity in places like *Ağrı* and *Hakkari*. And another thing that deserves consideration is that the Kurds of north Syria were tribes who were controlled by chieftains, *axa* and *beg*, a matter showing that this social structure was determined by tribal customs and traditions accordingly with the fact that we have discussed earlier that Kurds were devoted to Islam more than their devotion to Kurdishness. Added to this, the disappearance of palace and urban culture due to political reasons since the mid 19th, we can say that what is left for Syrian Kurds musically is the oral legacy which was revived with the formation of states in the beginning of 20th century on basis of political and nationalist components, and especially after the Kurdish national awakening as a result of Sheikh Said and the arrival of the 'new comers'.

## 5. HISTORY AND MUSIC OF KOBANI (AYN AL ARAB)

We first spoke about the third category of the Kurds who immigrated to the Syrian side, and their impact on cultural mobility, and we have mentioned Jaladat and his *Hawar*. The most interesting issue of *Hawar*, concerning Kobani, is the seventh one (25 August 1932); in an article written by *Herekol Azîzan*<sup>112</sup>, “Two *dengbêj* from *Suruç* [Kobani] plain<sup>113</sup> came to *Hawar* [in Damascus], *Miço* and *Xido*<sup>114</sup>. Both of them are from Berazi tribe, *Miço* is from *Pîjan* clan and *Xido* is from *Ilêdîn* clan... and they sang the epic love song of *Mem û Zîn* [Mem and Zin] for us...” (Cewerî, 1998).

One of the ‘new comers’<sup>115</sup> to Kobani was *Miço Bekebûr Berazî* (1889-1956), known as the first *dengbêj* of Kobani.<sup>116</sup> *Miço* was a soldier in the Ottoman army, and before Sheikh Said Revolt happens he escapes the military service. But when the revolt takes place he leaves the Turkish side and settles down among his relatives in the other side, in Kobani (Berazi, 2005). And because he is known to be the first popular *Dengbêj* in Kobani, I would like to begin reviewing Kobani’s history with this piece of a lament song composed and sung by him about the outcome of Sheikh Said Revolt (Berazi, 2005, p. 28):

*Hawar! Hawar! Hawar! Hawar, lo* Help! Help! Help! Help, my homeland!  
*welato!*

*Bes bilezînin teboxek kaxezî tenê bi me* Hurry up, and just bring us a piece of  
*gînin!* paper!

*Heger ku qelem û merkeb bi we ra nate* If you cannot find a pen and ink,  
*dîn,*

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<sup>112</sup> Apparently a pseudonym of Jaladat used for writing.

<sup>113</sup> In Kurdish *Deşta Surucê* (*Suruç Ovası*, in Turkish). Kurds of both sides, Turkish and Syrian, till now are used to call this plain region that implies both *Suruç* (Turkish side) and Kobani (Syrian side).

<sup>114</sup> *Miço Bekebûr Berazî* and *Xido Hindawî* are two important *dengbêj* from Kobani.

<sup>115</sup> He was technically a new comer, but his family, because of the borderline, was divided between relatives who stay in the Turkish side and others in the Syrian side.

<sup>116</sup> I say the first *Dengbêj* because there is no *Dengbêj* mentioned before by people I interviewed.

*Em e bi dirmaxan hinarê rûyê xwe* We will tear our cheeks with our nails.  
*biçirrînin.*

*Xwîna sor merkeba narîn bi ser çongê* And use our precious blood as ink.  
*xwe da birijînin.*

*Em e li Kurdistanê, ji gelê Kurd ra* We will send [our message] to Kurdish  
*bişînin.* people all over Kurdistan.

*Bira werin serokê wan me bipirsin, me* Let them come with their leaders to see  
*bibînin.* our situation

*Çaxa Şêx Seîdê kal, bavê Elî-Rîza bin* How they hang Sheikh Said, Ali Rîza's  
*sêpê da bidar xistin,* father,

*Çaxa keç û bûkê me Kurmanca sewqe* When they drove our Kurdish girls and  
*sahila dengizê kirin,* brides to seashores,

*Wan wê demê da bi hawarî, bi dengê xwe* It was then, they helplessly and fiercely  
*sert ban kirin,* yelled,

*Law, Tirkno! Ku bimrin, miradê we bi* You, Turks [Turkish soldiers]! We  
*xwe nakin!* would rather die if you touch us!

*Fadil, Mişo's son, states: "My father was very sad because of the outcome of Sheikh Said's Revolt, and felt helpless because he could not do anything. Then he decided to make national songs saying that he will awake Kurds with his songs" (Kobani, 2012).*

Before Armenian massacres take place in Turkey in 1915 and the escape of most of the Armenians who could survive to the Syrian side, and before the formation of the new two national states of Turkey and Syria in 1918 and borderlines be drawn, the present Kobani was a part of *Suruç* plain (*Suruç Ovası* in Turkish); a plain that locates south-west to *Riha* or *Ruha* (*Urfa/Şanlıurfa*). The nearest economic center and town to it was *Birecik* and all of this region was administratively subordinate to Urfa which is 100 k.m north-east to Kobani (Rûdaw, 2014).

According to *Evliya Çelebi*, in his *Seyahatname* of 17<sup>th</sup> century, he states that the dwellers of this region are tribes of *Dinayi*<sup>117</sup>, *Berazi*, *Kuh-Binik* and *Cum Kürdü* (Joom Kurds) and other Turkmen tribes, as well (Çelebi, 2006, p.197). And concerning the Berazi tribe that still forms the major population of Kobani, and some of them dwell in present *Suruç*, *Birecik* and even the centre of Urfa governorate; Mark Sykes, in his book *The Caliphs' Last Heritage*, states that there are about twelve clans in this region that belong to the same *Berazi* tribe. And the number of families in these clans in the beginning of 20<sup>th</sup> century was about seventeen thousand families (Zaki, 1931, pp. 82-83).

I remember in 2012, a group of social media activists from Kobani launched a so-called “Kobani is 100 years-old” event. By dating the birth of Kobani city to 1912, I think they mean the writing which is on the bars of the railway line which is “BBB 1912” which means Berlin-Bucharest-Baghdad in 1912. But according to some resources, the parts of railway in that region was placed between 1915 and 1918. So we can say that Kobani was born after 1915, and especially because the first dwellers of the center that is called ‘Kobani’ were Armenians who fled massacres of Turkey. Beside Armenians, there was a group of Kurdish workers who came from nearby villages to work for the German “Company” in bringing basalt rocks from *Miştenûr*, a hill in Kobani, cutting and placing them under the railway bars. So, this “Company” station became the city center and by the passage of time “company” became “Kobani” (Rûdaw, 2014). While the Arabic name of “Ayn al-Arab” comes from the Ottoman name “*Arab Pınar*” which means “Spring of Arabs”, one of the two springs that used to plant the trees, fields and orchards of the area; *Mürşit Pınar* in the west and *Arab Pınar* in the east. The city center of Kobani is built between the two springs.

*Arab Pınar* or *Arabpounar*, as Armenians used to call it (Der-Ohannessian, 2005), was known after the eastern part of Kobani which was a village that Arab shepherds were frequently bringing their herds of cattle to its springs (Dûman, 2016), and *Mürşit Pınar* was known as the name of the train station in the French mandate era

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<sup>117</sup> According to *Mihemed-ê Dûman*, Ottomans called this tribe “*Din Ayırı*” which means of other religion or non-Muslims because they are originally Yezidi Kurds. And by the pass of time “*Din Ayırı*” became “*Dinayi*”.

(Brunel, 1946). And after French left Syria in what is known as Independence of Syria in 1946, it became officially Arabized as Ayn al-Arab (Kobani, 2017), but among all these names, its people, until now, prefer to call it *Kobani* (Kobani) (Rûdaw, 2014).

Concerning the musical life in the old days, Salih Nassan, a seventy year-old sociologist from Kobani who stays in Turkey now, states that since most of the people of Kobani and surrounding area were working in livestock breeding and grazing, the most widespread musical instrument was *bilûr* (*Ney*/rustic wooden flue) and it was an instrument that all shepherds used to play. And the only singers were *dengbêj* (bards) who were narrating their stories in *axa* and *beg's divans* (guesthouses) from sunset to sunrise. And that singing another style or playing another musical instrument were not proper according to the tribal customs and traditions. According to Nassan, the attitude of the society emanates from an Islamic viewpoint because Islam considers music as “the voice of Satan”. He added that there was a group called *Gewende*<sup>118</sup> who were singing and playing other styles and musical instruments, they did not belong to the tribes of the region<sup>119</sup> and were considered from low social class, they especially played and sang for *Şahî* (entertainment) and *govend* (wedding dances). Usually they were singing and playing *def* and *zirne* (*dahol* and *zurne*/drum and oboe) (Nassan, 2016).

To understand this viewpoint about *Gewende* and their social status and way of life, there is a good writing by André Brunel, a French physician, who had been in Kobani during the French mandate over Syria. Brunel writes that if the majority of Kurdish tribes live on agriculture and livestock, some still dream of looting and invasions. They are mobile shepherds, escorting their herds to Kurdistan's vast pastures and striking their splendid tents at the top of a hill or in a safe valley, near a watercourse or poplar trees. They are still as Xenophon had once seen them: brave and cruel as the old Kardukhs. However, among them we can find men who are **less courageous** and **less adventurous**, they **do not like invasion and work**. They only like to sing and dance, moving from party to party and from village to village: they are “*Gewende*”. Not far from Arab Pinar, where the railway comes from Aleppo heading to Mosul passing along the Turkish border, the village of *Kanié Meched*

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<sup>118</sup> *Gewende* in Kobani, *Kirîv* in Afrin and *Mitirb* in Jazira. Some Kurds in Turkey call them “*dom*”

<sup>119</sup> In Kobani, they use the term “*bêeşîr*” (someone who does not belong to a tribe) as a negative characteristic to someone who belong to a low category of social class.

[*Kaniya Mişidê/Mürşit Pınar*] is located on a hilltop overlooking the blue line of the Kurdish mountains in the north and dull Syrian Desert border in the south. Some of the "*Gewende*" families live in this village. Some are housed in cubic mud houses, covered with conical roofs. But most of them live in caves dug into the hill... He [the *gewende*] is born here. And here he cooks on a blunt fire fed by some twigs and floss. Here he eats, takes shower and sits with his friends; and here he sleeps at the end of the day with the appearance of dusk surrounded by his multiple family. Here, too, he rises and **prays** at night... On the wall where the mold has been formed, there is a drum "*dahol*" and an eastern flute "*zurne*"...which seem to be the most expensive of his properties. These instruments always accompany him and help him to earn his day. With two or three of his companions, he starts with his straight, solid, rigid face, beats the drum and sings long hours at weddings and parties. He lists the history of the Kurdish tribes and their legends in the epics of love and sometimes the heroic songs of old times, singing the courage of men and the beauty of women. But with all of this, **everyone despises him**, and **no one wants to be associated with him** outside the wedding days (Brunel, 1946).

From both of Salih Nassan and André Brunel's statements we conclude that *bilûr*, as a musical instrument, and *dengbêjî*, as a style of singing, were welcomed and any other instrument or style of singing were not acceptable, they were even despised. In other words, the music that was associated with telling a story that has meaning and lesson with its oftenly sad tone was acceptable. And the people who were used to sing and play this kind of music were respected in everyday life. While the music related to dance, joy and fun was unacceptable and the people who were used to sing and play this kind of music were despised in everyday life outside the events that they are made for.

Perhaps we can summarize here that the playing of musical instruments in Kobani was a form of entertainment which is far from tribal values and to diminish the value of man in society. But it will be unfair to say that this viewpoint was existed just in Kobani or among Kurds of north Syria; it would be better to say it is a rural viewpoint, where the tribe heads, *axa*, *beg* and chieftains to be considered as the political authority that rules people according to social classes. In this respect, Dieter Christensen gives a similar example from *Mukriyan* region of Kurds in *Bukan*, northwest Iran, he states that "In these villages we can also see the craftsmen, the weavers and the potters. All the people use to live in the village over the year. The

landowners in each village are members of the same family, and that **social connection** between them and between the villagers and the craftsmen is **unacceptable**. There is a social stratification... There are no professional musicians, but it can be said that there are semi-professional musicians who make music for money as an extra work, but **they are not reputable**.” (Bayrak, 2002, p.120).

So, the questions to be asked now are: Is singing and playing music still face the same social viewpoint after the passage of a century or not? And since the first event that determined the identities of Kurds of Syria and Kurds of Turkey was linked to a national awareness; did the same characteristics, that emerged with the songs after Sheikh Said Revolt in 1925, remain in the songs of Syrian Kurds till the present time, or were they an emergency, temporary or fancy culture, so to speak?

To see whether these views and characteristics continue from that time to the present day or not, I will present the national, political and social influences on the music of Syrian Kurds in the context of a historical sequence or timeline.

### **5.1 ‘New Comers’ and the Date of Music in Kobani**

As we have discussed earlier, the Kurdish culture in the period of French Mandate until 1946 was prosperous due to two factors: The first one, a general national awareness that contributed in reproducing the Kurdish culture and worked for a distinctive identity for Kurds; that they are different from other ethnicities which co-existed under the same dome of Islam. An awareness that motivated Kurdish authors, musicians, researchers and translators to explore everything Kurdish and bring it back to life, especially with the beginning of the movement of printing, photography and recording (Zaki, 1931). While the second factor is the influence of ‘new comers’ who found collaborators in the mandatory administration, among the French officers and politicians in Syria, there were people fascinated by Kurdish culture, like Rondot and Lescot (Tejel, 2009).

According to *Salih Kobani*<sup>120</sup>, Roger Lescot was very interested in Mem and Zin story. So, in the mid of 1930s he takes Jaladat Badirkhan, and both of them go to Kobani to listen to the epic love story from the *dengbêj Mişo Bekebûr Berazi*. Then Lescot states that among all versions of the story he had read and listened, the

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<sup>120</sup> A Kurdish author and journalist from Kobani stays in Sweden.

version sung by *Miço* is the most complete one. So he writes it with the help of Jaladet, who translates it into French, and then publishes this epic love song as *Memê Alan* in 1942 (Kobani, 2012).

Kobani, in this period, beside the national awareness, was a multicultural environment that many ethnics and religions were living together in it; Kurds, Turkmens, Armenians and Assyrians as Muslims, Christians and Jews (Seyda, 2016). It is therefore natural for us to believe that this multiculturalism must produce a rich cultural atmosphere, and that music, being the easiest way of communication between people (Hajj, 2016), should have taken on new and diverse styles through the mating of these cultures, or at least will restore some of its civic styles neglected by separation from civilization centers. Unfortunately, religious and tribal customs and traditions have interfered with the intermingling with other cultures and religions. We can say that the difficult mood of the people of the region has not become flexible with the culture of others. Till now, people of Kobani call the Kurds who came from the other side, Turkey, as *Mihacir* (immigrant); despite the fact that they married, lived and even died in Kobani. Nevertheless, the French authority was creating a discriminative atmosphere between Muslims and Christians. Christians had schools, churches, clubs and scouting teams, while Muslims did not. Besides, French *Milîs* (militia) were made out of the Christians. And most of the Christians left Kobani when French authority got out of Syria. But since *Mihacir* Kurds were treated as strangers by tribal Kurds of Kobani, they had a good social relationship with Armenians, the thing that reflected in their daily lifestyle, like *Dûman* family (Dûman, 2016).

Going back again to the ‘new comers’, we can find the four cousins, *Xelîl Xazî* (Khalil Ghazi), *Emîn* (Amin), *Mistefa* (Mustafa), percussionist, and *Qedrî* (Qadri) Dûman, qanun player, who came to the Syrian side, to Kobani, from the Turkish side, from *Siwêrek* (*Siverek*). Unlike the other three musician cousins, *Xelîl Xazî*, who escapes military service and settles in *Şêran*, a village near Kobani, in 1925; he was not a musician. But four years later, in 1929, he has a boy and gives him his father’s name *Mihemmed*. *Mihemmed Xelîl Xazî* or *Mihemed-ê Dûman*, as people of Kobani till now prefer to call him, becomes the first *stranbêj* in Kobani (Dûman, 2016). *Miço Kendeş*, a musician from Kobani who stays in Switzerland since 2000, says that *Mihemed-ê Dûman* is not just a person who revived the old traditional

songs of Kobani, but he is the first singer and composer who has dozens of songs of his own (Kendeş, 2016).

But when I reviewed the first songs that *Mihemed-ê Dûman* sang, I found a rhythmic song composed by *Miço Bekebûr Berazî* (Dûman, 1995):

*Em Kurmanc gellek pîrr in.* We, Kurmanj [Kurds], are so many.

*Teyrekê baz î hirr in.* We are like free hawks.

*Heger em hevdi bigrin,* If we stand together,

*Ti çav di me nabirrin.* Nobody can defeat us.

In 2002, when I was on a visit to a cousin of mine, he showed me an old recording of *Miço* singing national songs. I was surprised to listen to a rhythmic song that goes back to the end of 1930s. Moreover, musical instruments were accompanying him; qanun, violin, oud and percussion instruments. But the instrumentalists were not from Kobani, they were musicians from Aleppo, according to my cousin (Seyda, 2016). So, we can say that *Miço Bekebûr Berazî*, despite of being the first *dengbêj* of Kobani, he is also the first *stranbêj*, and he was not only a singer who re-archived what had been previously sung, but was a composer; laying the foundation stone for singing and music in Kobani. And this fact was assured to me by *Dûman* himself when I met him in 2016. He said that he was a young boy when he was attending singing divans of *Bozan Beg*<sup>121</sup>, where *Miço* and *Xido*<sup>122</sup> were used to sing for hours, especially in winter nights. And *Dûman* told me that there was no musician or singer except *Miço* and *Xido* in all Kobani, including its 365 villages.

So, *Dûman* considers *Miço* his indirect mentor. But speaking of *Bozan Beg*'s divans, before even *Dûman* is born, there was *Qedrî Dûman*, a relative to *Mihemed-ê Dûman*, who was a qanun player and accompanied *Miço* in singing divans and even

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<sup>121</sup> (18910-1968) Şanlıurfa deputy in the first period of Turkish parliament (TBMM) in 4 April 1920.

<sup>122</sup> *Xido Hindawî* from Arab origins from Harran/Şanlıurfa - Turkey. Was a close friend to *Miço* and used to sing with him, especially love songs when there is a dialogue between two lovers, one of them becomes a lover and the other becomes the beloved.

in some weddings (Îbram, 2011).<sup>123</sup> And has composed rhythmic songs, most of his compositions did not survive. One of the rare songs that few people still remember is “*Hirço û Bozan*”<sup>124</sup> (Harcho and Bozan):

<i>Hirço û Bozan</i>	Hircho and Bozan
<i>Çavê wan çavê bazan</i>	They have eyes like that of hawk's
<i>Heta bi qîzkê Enqerê</i>	Even girls of Ankara
<i>Ew krine çalxî sazan</i>	sing about them
<i>Ew jî mîrê Berazan</i>	Both of them are chieftains of Berazi tribes

So, we can say that *Qedrî Dûman*'s role also was great in composing new songs, but he was not as effective and famous as *Miço* because he was a stranger to the local tribes.

If we focus on the content of *Miço*'s works, we conclude that they have a political dimension and a national content. And we can say that the basis of music and singing in Kobani, in the modern era is based on a political nationalist characteristic, and perhaps it influenced what came after it. The first three rhythmic songs in Kobani composed by *Miço* are: “*Welato*” (Homeland), “*Istiqlal*” (Independence) and “*Kurd Pirr in*” (Kurds are so many) (Kobanî, 2012). And if we review *Qedrî*'s song, we can consider it as a flattery to chieftains, who were considered as political leaders in that period of time; like if someone flatters presidents and kings nowadays. But unfortunately, these songs were lost with the collapse of Kobani because of the war that took place between 19 September 2014 and 26 January 2015 (Seyda, 2016).

If we make a conclusion for this period of time, from early 1920s to 1946, we can say that foundation of music and songs in Kobani is part and parcel of the national

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<sup>123</sup> *Melle Îbram* (1924-2015), a religious man and intellectual from Kobani.

<sup>124</sup> Both of them are brothers and chieftains of Berazi tribe.

movement with political and tribal contents. And the emergence of new compositions was because of the emergence of Kurdish national feelings on one hand, and on the other, the tribal loyalty. But after all, there was a free atmosphere for creating, singing and recording. Furthermore, despite the fact that French mandate was not that much fair to people and discriminated between Christians and non-Christians, but it helped the Kurdish cultural movement, especially between 1925 and 1935. And we can say that this decade was the first and last time in Syrian history that Kurds could be free in reproducing their culture. To understand this point more and why Kurdish culture prospered only a decade, I would like to make a review, and then discuss the periods that comes after.

Between 1923 and 1929, Vladimir Lenin founded *Kurdistansky Uyezd*, or what is known as Red Kurdistan, in Azerbaijan (Majdi, 2017). Both, the effect of the emergence of this Kurdish state and the failure of Sheikh Said Revolt in 1925, encouraged the self-proclaimed Kurdish state Republic of Ararat<sup>125</sup> which was declared in 1927. The republic was declared by the Ottoman Kurdish soldier and politician *Îhsan Nûrî Paşa* (Ihsan Nuri Pasha 1892- 1976) and *Xoybûn*/Khoyboun (Independence) Party members; a party that was founded by a number of Kurdish intellectuals in Lebanon in 1927. Among the members we can find Jaladat Badir Khan, *Bozan Beg* and *Hirço Beg*. But in 1930, when this republic and rebellion led by *Ihsan Paşa* was defeated by Turkish air forces, *Ihsan Paşa* went to Iran as a refugee and Kurds who were supporting the rebellion from Syria, like *Bozan* and *Hirço*, were detained under house arrest in Damascus by the French authority because in that period of time there was a good relationship between Mustafa Kemal Atatürk (1881-1938), the founder and president of Republic of Turkey, and France (Kalo, 2014). This good relationship between both authorities in Syria and Turkey can also be seen in the censorship put on musical works, for example, in 1936 French mandatory banned two phonographic disks of *Seîd Axa cizrawî* (Said Axa Jazrawi) (Kevirbirî, 2009)<sup>126</sup> at the request of Turkish government because it included

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<sup>125</sup> Mount Ararat (*Ağrı Dağı – Çiyayê Agirî*) East of Turkey.

<sup>126</sup> (1905-1957) *Seîd Axa cizrawî* (Said Agha Jazrawi), known as *Seîdê Hemo*. Originally from *Cizîra Botan* (Cizre/Turkey) but as a Kurdish activist he was sentenced to death in Turkey so he fled to the Syrian side. But later he was pardoned by the Turkish government when he sang a song in which he flatters Mustafa Kemal Atatürk.

Kurdish propaganda activity, according to the Turkish claims (White, 2011).<sup>127</sup> So, as the relationship between Turkish government and French authority got better, the Kurdish cultural movement in Syria got worse, and we can find it in 1940s.

In 1943, *Hawar* journal of Jaladat stops publishing, but the journal *Ronahî* continues until 1945 but not as effective as *Hawar*, and in many issues we can find censored subjects in *Ronahî*. And in 1951, Jaladat Ali Badir Khan passes away (Amed, 2013).

Another reason of weakening the cultural movement in Kobani was that, before Jaladat passes away the relationship between him and the leaders of Berazi tribe in Kobani gets colder, where Jaladat was criticizing the tribal customs in Kobani and the role of their chieftain in creating such a regressive social way of life (Îbram, 2011). In this respect, *Dûman* told me he remembers that when he was young, *beg* chieftains were preventing people from educating their children and opened schools only for their's. According to *Dûman*, *Begs* were afraid of letting others get educated, the thing that prevents them to govern and control people (Dûman, 2016).

I can wrap up with stating that if national activities could last longer, the cultural movement in general, and music in particular, would have flourished and created a distinctive identity. Unfortunately, the military political and national fractions of Kurds on one hand, and the improved relations between Turkey and France on the other, brought the Kurds back to tribal and religious loyalty. In other words, although I personally do not agree with the exaggeration in showing the political and national characteristics in the songs, but it is a tool of motivation for the process of creating; to create music as we have seen throughout history and through our review of crucial historical events, and with time it might be able to provide multiple materials for reference or to reconstruct again on the light of it.

## **5.2 The Tribal Influence on Music of Kobani**

In this part I am going to handle the period between French departure from Syria in 1946 and the union of Syria and Egypt in 1958. So, after World War II, in 17 April 1946, Syria gained independence from French mandatory, conclusively French

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<sup>127</sup> "In 1936, the High Commissioner banned the entry, sale, circulation, usage or publication in Syria 'of the Kurdish phonographic disks no. 507/11 and 508/11 put on sale by the "*Soci t  Orientale Sodwa*" of Aleppo and sung in Kurdish by Said Agha Jisraoui' at the request of the Turkish Consul General."

officers and researchers who were interested in Kurdish culture like Roger Lescot were not welcomed any more in Syria (Hajj, 2015). Additionally, nationalism began to rise among Arabs, and the War of Palestine 1948 produced an anti France and England feeling among Arabs (Rubin, 2007). One more reason was the fear; that the area was full of hatred towards non-Muslims that emerged after World War I and began to increase more and more after World War II (Rohat, 1991). So, Orientalists and researchers were afraid of coming to the area. And those who were daring, very few of them, were from other countries, not England and France. For example, the Swedish Orientalist Stig Wikander (1908-1983), who had been in a visit to Kobani and stayed between 4 and 8 September 1953 at *Bozan Beg's dîwan*<sup>128</sup>, in one of his notes, archived in Carolina Rediviva Library in Uppsala University in Sweden, he states that it was a rare opportunity for him, being from Sweden, to conduct a research on valuable treasures away from any obstacles in Syria; that the representatives of the major Colonial Powers are viewed with suspicion, while the representatives of the neutral States, like Sweden, are welcomed (Kobanî, 2017).

One of the songs he records in Kobani is the Kurdish love epic song *Siyamend û Xecê* (Siyamend and Khaje) where *Miço Bekebûr Berazî* sings and *Hemkê Horên* (Mohammad Horan) plays *bilûr* (Kurdish shepherds' rustic wooden flute) (Kobanî, 2012). And I think this was the last recording of *Miço Bekebûr Berazî* because three years later, in 1956, he passes away.

Wikander thinks that there were scattered ruins of Kurdish literature and that one could only benefit from them in the field of language. But the truth he had discovered was the existence of a rich folk literature that was unknown to the Westerners, and was within reach and worthy of research both materially and spiritually. He states that there is a claim among authors that folk singing is disappearing, and that he did not expect to meet one popular singer (*dengbêj*) alive, in *Maqala*<sup>129</sup>. But it turned out to be a false rumor, and it turned out that there was a rich and authentic sea of emotional songs (*Heyran*)<sup>130</sup> and popular Kurdish poetry. And this thing motivates Wikander to go back again to Kurdish regions in both Iraq

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<sup>128</sup> *Dîwan* or *dîwanxane* was said to those vast rooms that chiefs of tribes, like *Bozan Beg*, the chief of Barazan (Berazi) tribe, hosting people and negotiating the issues of people and hold meetings and at night listen to *dengbêj* reviewing historical events. After 1925, most of those *Diwans* became a place for negotiating Kurdish national issues. In English also we can call it *divan* as meetings or boards.

<sup>129</sup> A neighborhood in Kobani where *Bozan Beg* and his family used live, and where Wikander stayed during his visit to Kobani.

<sup>130</sup> Long narratives of love songs.

and Syria in order to record, and even video, those songs. Despite the rare opportunity he has acquired as a citizen of Sweden to carry out his research, he also mentions that, there are political problems throughout Syria and censorship of studies on the Kurds in particular. In this respect, he states that it is for political reasons and difficulties he had faced, he was obliged to hide two rare manuscripts about Kurdish language along with recording tapes and other materials that he wished to complete them next time he visits Syria. Unfortunately he could not go back to Syria again (Kobanî, 2017).

So, we can say that there was a gradual decline in attention towards the Kurds which terribly affected the Kurdish cultural movement. I think, the first signs of the marginalization of the Kurds became clear in the Turkish-French rapprochement in the beginning of 1930s; when French authority began to cut all means of cooperation or support between Kurds in both Syria and Turkey. It was seen later how they banned Kurdish songs of national contents upon the request of Ankara government, and send Kurd activists to exile, like *Osman Sebrî* (1905-1993), a Kurdish author and political activist who was exiled to Madagascar<sup>131</sup> by French authority. In addition to that, they detained other Kurd activists under house arrest in Damascus (Kalo, 2014). But there still was a shy movement in Kurdish culture that Kurdish gramophones recordings and publications were available publically. Moreover, we cannot ignore the important role of Baghdad, Orient, and Erivan radio broadcastings in Kurdish language which concentrated very well on Kurdish music and culture (Cewerî, 1998). But the period of time that Wikander was talking about is the period when Arab nationalism was reaching its peak, and especially in February 1954, when Adib Shishakli<sup>132</sup> was overthrown by a military coup d'etat, and Kurdish gramophone recordings and publications were seized and destroyed, after detaining their owners (Yildiz, 2005). Likewise, we can say that a more specifically anti-Kurdish hostile response slowly began; that high and middle ranking officers of Kurdish descent started to be purged from the armed forces (White, 2011).

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<sup>131</sup> A country in East Africa.

<sup>132</sup> The president of Syrian Republic between 11 July 1953 and 25 February 1954. Kurdish Syrian.

Between 1941 and 1952, *Mihemed-ê Dûman* stays in *Birecik*/Urfa in the Turkish side. He learns playing violin when he is between twelve and fourteen years-old, 1941 to 1943. Later, he joins the military service in Turkey between 1948 and 1951, and comes to Kobani as a good violin player at a young age of twenty-two. But in order to get the Syrian citizenship to himself and his family, he joins the military service in Syria, as well, and it takes place between 1952 and 1954 (Dûman, 2016).

So, if we say that *Mihemed-ê Dûman* was not available in this period of time, what about *Qedrî Dûman*, the qanun player? We are not talking about *Mistefa Dûman* because he was a percussionist, an instrument that is not used with *dengbêjî* style. Why did not Stig Wikander record a musical piece for *Qedrî*? Likewise, why was not *Qedrî* with *Miço* instead of *Hemkê Horên*, *bilûr* player? Why was not there a recording for the three of them? In other words, where was *Qedrî* and the style of *stranbêjî* in this period of time?

I am going to make a conclusion according to what *Mihemed-ê Dûman* has told me about the tribal structure in Kobani in that span of time. *Dûman* states that Kobani tribes were divided into two parties; the first party was loyal to *Bozan Beg*, and they were consistent with Syrians' general ambitions for the independence of Syria, meaning that they were standing for the Arab concerns. One of them, *Mistefa (Hirço) Beg*, was a member in the Syrian parliament. While the second party was loyal to *Besrawî Axa*, a chieftain who was loyal to French authority. We can say that those two tribes were considered as two major political parties in a state. The first party had influence in the center and the eastern parts of the city. While the second party was in control of the west and south parts of the city. When the French authorities left Kobani, the Armenians who preferred to stay in Kobani and some of the *Mihacir* (immigrants) fled to *Besrawî Axa*, which confirms that the second party was more tolerant with non-Muslims and those who do not belong to the local tribes of Kobani in their origin. Another thing, *Dûman* was sometimes playing instrumental music for *Besrawî Axa*, who mostly was drinking alcohol while listening to *Dûman*. Meanwhile the first party, along with tribal fanaticism and disdain for people who do not descend from local or prestigious tribes, were also somewhat religiously observant and preferred to listen to the singer (*dengbêj*) rather than listening to a melody or musical instrument. And after all, a feeling of enmity was growing more and more between the two parties (Dûman, 2016). But there is a fact, that the chieftains of the first party were educated and the fact that Jaladat with his two

brothers, Sureyya and Kamuran, along with Osman Sabri lived in its *dîwan* made them a destination for academics, orientalists and researchers from outside Syria (Kalo, 2014). On the other hand, their involvement in the Kurdish nationalist struggle in the beginning made them focus on the text of the songs, the language of songs and the meaning included in the songs more than their focus on the methods, melodies and instruments that can accompany or contain them. So, instrumentalists like *Qedrî* were just musicians of fun, entertainment and weddings, according to their viewpoint, which means *Qedrî* does not deserve to be presented to someone who comes to research about the Kurdish culture; for serious study about Kurds.

But this situation of both parties was going worse after the mid of 1950s; that the Kurdish presence in the political representation on one hand, and on the other the candle of Kurdish cultural movement began to fade in front of Arab nationalism winds that blew on Syria leading to the unity between Syria and Egypt in 1958.

### **5.3 The Arabian Union and Fragmentation of Kurdish Culture**

Before starting to talk about the nature of this historical stage and diving in its repercussions on the culture and music of the Syrian Kurds, I would like to make a little historical flash back to understand the merits of the stage.

As we have seen before, there is a fact that any Kurdish nationalist, cultural and political movements in any part of the region affects the Kurds in all parts. So, I think it is necessary to spot light on Kurdish political experience that played an important role, directly and indirectly, on the cultural and political life of Kurds in Syria; the experience of the Kurdish Republic of Mahabad in northwestern Iran which was founded with the support of the Soviet Union in 22 January 1946 (Aegleton, 1989).

Sorani (original)	Kurmanji (original)	English (Translated)
<i>Ey raqîb, her mawe qewmî Kurd-ziman,</i>	<i>Ey reqîb, her maye qewmê Kurd-ziman,</i>	Hey enemy, the nation whose language is Kurdish is alive,
<i>Nayşikênî danerî topî zeman. Kes nelê Kurd mirduwe; Kurd zînduwe,</i>	<i>Naşikê û danayê bi topên zeman. Kes nebê Kurd dimirin; Kurd jîn dibin,</i>	It cannot be defeated by makers of weapons of any time. Let no one say the Kurds are dead; the Kurds are alive,
<i>Zînduwe qet nanewê alakeman.</i>	<i>Jîn dibe qet nakeve ala Kurdan.</i>	The Kurds are alive and their flag will never fall <sup>133</sup>

The Republic lasted only about eleven months; which the Iranian Shah eliminated the Kurdish Republic of Mahabad in 15 December 1946 and executed the president of the republic who was the PDK (*Partî Demokratî Kurdistan/Kurdistan Democratic Party*) leader Qazi Mohammad (1893-1947) in 31 March 1947 (Ergoşî, 2007). Mustafa Barzani (1903-1979)<sup>134</sup>, a Kurd figure from Iraq who was one of the founders of PDK/KDP and Minister of Defense in the Republic, sought refuge in the Soviet Union, as a result of the elimination of the Republic (Aegleton, 1989).

Subsequently, if we trace the political and cultural situation of Syrian Kurds in that period of time, we can at least sum it up in three categories; the first was centered in Damascus and most of them were Kurds of Ayyubid era. Those Kurds considered themselves Syrians and not Kurds, even some of them preferred to be identified as Arabs. Most of them were Communists who were influenced by the Soviet Union (White, 2011). The second category was retroactive, and can be observed in Kobani where tribal customs and traditions got revived (Zengî, 2004); as if all these national and cultural liberation movements were a transient situation. While the third category

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<sup>133</sup> Written by *Dildar (Yûnis Reûf 1918-1948)*, and *Nûrî Sedîq Şawîs* composed melody for it to be the Kurdish national anthem for Republic of Mahabad in 1946. Until now it is sung as a national anthem for all Kurds, especially being the official anthem for KRG (Kurdistan Regional Government-North Iraq). It was translated by the Kurdish singer *Şivan Perwer* and sung in Kurmanji.

<sup>134</sup> Father of Massoud Barzani, the leader of Kurdistan Democratic Party since 1979, and president of KRG, Iraq from 2005 to 2017.

was swinging between the communist influence and Kurdish nationalist sense produced by the Republic of Mahabad and Mustafa Barzani representing PDK in both Iran and Iraq on one hand and between the legacy of the national movement and Kurdish culture that hit Syria after the rebellion of Sheikh Said on the other. And in the 1950s before the completion of the unity between Syria and Egypt, they formed the first Kurdish party in Syria under the name of the Kurdish Democratic Party (Derwêş, 2011). Here, we can say that the Syrian Kurds continued to clone the Kurdish experiences in other parts. The Syrian Kurds, so far as I think, have not been able to adopt a political and cultural approach private to the Syrian Kurds, to have nothing to do with the Kurds in any other parts. Therefore, so far, the Syrian Kurds are called the “forgotten Kurds” (Yildiz, 2005).

Going back to the general situation of Syria, in the second half of the 1950s Arab nationalist fervor swept across the Arab World, inspired largely by the rise of Jamal Abdul Nasser<sup>135</sup> in Egypt, the defeat of Britain, France and Israel in the Suez and Sinai<sup>136</sup> campaigns of 1956, followed by the overthrow of the Hashemite monarchy in Iraq in 1958. Arab nationalist feeling, and the excitement engendered by the idea of strength through pan-Arab unity left little room for non-Arab minority groups within the political hierarchy (McDowell, 2007). In 1952, Jamal Abdul Nasser’s Free Officers had staged a military coup and gained control in Egypt. Later, on 22 February 1958, Syria, led by the then-ruling National Front, and Nasser’s Egypt formed the United Arab Republic (UAR). Political parties within Syria were banned and Nasser dominated both countries’ economic, social and political spheres. This union served only to increase Arab nationalist sentiment within Syria, placing the Kurds in a situation where both their national and cultural identity was threatened. At the same time, arrests and misinformation against the Kurds helped to form a perception of the Kurds during this period that continued to shape Syrian policy and public opinion for many years to come (Yildiz, 2005).

In order to understand the implications of this period of the Syrian-Egyptian Union on Syrian Kurds, I would like to summarize the social, cultural and political life of Kurds with three changes brought about by the Union government.

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<sup>135</sup> Or Gamal Abdel Nasser (1918-1970) an officer in Egyptian army who led the 1952 overthrow of the monarchy in Egypt with what used to be known as the movement of Free Officers. Became Egypt’s president between 1956-1970.

<sup>136</sup> Names of places in Egypt.

Politically speaking, in this period of time, Jalal Talabani (1933-2017) a member of the political office of the KDP (Kurdistan Democratic Party of Iraq), then taking refuge in Syria, played a decisive role in the building up of the KDPS program. Jalal insisted to change the name of the party from Kurdish Democratic Party into Kurdistan Democratic Party in Syria at the beginning of 1960 (Tejel, 2009). However, the issue of the allocation of this party to address the political and cultural situation of the Syrian Kurds, although affected by the mother party in northern Iraq, was unable to play an effective role because it was in a time that Nasser launched campaigns against the Kurds, and it was an anti-Kurdish propaganda that depicted the Kurds as traitors and separatists, linking Kurdish nationalism to Zionism and Western Imperialism. Kurdish officers were removed from the military and all Kurdish political activities were prohibited and most of the activists and politicians were arrested (Yildiz, 2005).

Socially speaking, Kurds were seen to have two “faults” in the eyes of the authorities. First, they were a non-Arab “minority” and, thus, a threat to plans for Arab unity, and second, they were associated with the “feudal chiefs” and the world of the “notables” which the authorities wished to eliminate. The destiny of the Kurdish “notables” was thus tied to the general decline of Syrian notability issued from prominent families since the Ottoman and mandatory periods (Tejel, 2009, p.48). Additionally, the reform under the name of Land Reforms and redistribution programmes that had previously occurred in Egypt began to apply in Syria (Yildiz, 2005, p.31), directly targeted lands of wealthy Kurds; Kurdish notables, *Axa* and *Beg*. And maybe it sounds good when we say that all people have to live equal, and that there should not be a huge gap between rich and poor people economically; but it has created a tragedy that becomes apparent as the Baath Party comes to power in Syria, which will be discussed later.

To sum up the social life of Syrian Kurds in the Union period, we can say that Kurds were no longer able to represent their communities, neither in the political leadership nor in the military. As the influence of the tribal and feudal leaderships has been eliminated, the Kurds are no longer socially connected and became attached to the Arab nationalism away from the concerns of Kurdish society and Kurdish distinctivity; as an attempt of assimilating Kurds for the first time in a serious way in modern history of Syria.

Culturally speaking, under the name of reforms, Nasser began to make changes in Syria, and the first thing that affected the Kurdish cultural status was prohibiting Kurdish publications and among them banning Kurdish music. Gramophone disks were seized and taken by the authorities, and even sometimes they were smashed in cafés; and even the possession of books written in Kurdish language were offenses punishable by imprisonment that owners and distributors of publications and recordings were often got arrested. But the most interesting thing of all, Egyptian teachers were sent into Kurdish regions (Tejel, 2009, p.48).

In addition to the emergence of the slogan of “Arab Unity” and the violation on “Arab nationalism”, anti-Israel or anti-Zionism and anti-imperialism, even the name of the country as an “Arab” republic that left no way for minorities, and the anti-minorities feeling in the country which have become the fundamentals of ideology. The Kurds in Syria suffered the first tragedy in modern history of Syria, specifically in 13 November 1960; in an event that seems to have been inspired by ethnic hatred, 250 Kurdish schoolboys perished in a suspicious fire massacre of a cinema house in Amuda<sup>137</sup> (Namî, 1987).

In this period, Syria was under Sarraj who was the head of National Union and in his period the country was ruled by a repressive security force designed to suppress all oppositions to the regime. And there was another important thing; the monopoly of power was in Egypt, the thing that drove Syria to secede in 1961, but the union ushered a period of intense Arab Nationalism which led to heightened discrimination against the Kurds (McDowell, 2007).

To gather the whole case of music in this period, we can say that the entire cultural movement in general and music, being the core element of culture, in particular, was severely muted at the expense of Arab nationalism movement. This triggered a new trend of culture mainly represented in the style of musicians who grew up within this period; the influence of Arab music, especially the impact of Egyptian singers. But there still was a room for *dengbêjs*, who always stood like a recorder that archives events. For instance, the tragedy of Amuda Cinema inspired *dengbêjî* style, and some

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<sup>137</sup> A Kurdish city on the border with Turkey opposite to Mardin in Turkey.

*dengbêj* documented this accident with their voice, like the famous *dengbêj Rifetê Darî*<sup>138</sup> (Namî, 1987).

Before *Miço Bekebûr Berazî* (1889-1956) passes away, he goes on a visit to Afrin, northwest Syria, and sits in a popular café waiting for some acquaintances. While he is sitting and drinking his tea, he hears his own voice from the phonograph player that was playing one of his songs. He tells the people in the café, “Do you bet that I can sing like him?” One of the attendants says, “This is *Miço Bekebûr Berazî*. No one can imitate him!” When *Miço* begins singing, everybody finds out that the one who is singing to them is the same one who was singing on the player; he is *Miço* himself. So, everybody welcomes him and invites him to his house (Mestê, 2016).<sup>139</sup>

So, from this story or case of *Miço* we can conclude that there was an important role for phonographic disks which were spread throughout Syria and can be considered a vital means of cultural communication between the Kurds in the Kurdish areas in Syria on one hand and the Kurds from different countries on the other. And the matter that the union government prohibited Kurdish music in public places and even put censorship on its production created a very serious cultural void for Kurds which, in my point of view, prepared Kurds to embrace the Arabian music which was active in that period, especially the rich and prosperous Egyptian Arabic musical production that was conquering Syria (Hajj, 2015).

#### **5.4 Politics, Society and Mihemed-ê Dûman**

In this section, I will try to shed light on the period between the end of the unity between Syria and Egypt and the beginning of the emergence of the Arab Socialist Baath Party and its assumption of power until the arrival of the PKK to Syria and the impact of these historical turning points on the Kurdish culture in Syria, specifically in the case of Kobani.

After separation from Egypt, authorities in Syria continued the project of nationalization that was begun when ruled by Nasser between 1958 and 1961. In 1962, Syrian authorities had conducted the infamous “census under exceptional

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<sup>138</sup> *Rifetê Darî* (1934-1990), a *dengbêj* from Amuda, tells the story of this event and how *Mihemmed Said Agha Deqorî*, A young man from *Deqorî* tribe, one of the chief tribes in Amuda who made a heroic action saving many children from death and then himself died burning.

<sup>139</sup> According to *Mistefa Îbram Mestê*, a lawyer and politician from Kobani who stays in Erbil, KRG now. He is a relative and friend to *Miço*'s family.

circumstances” in *Cizîrê/Jazira* (the Hasakah province northeast of Syria where most Kurds live), depriving 120,000 Kurds of their citizenship (Tejel, 2009). This was a denial step against the existence of Kurds in Syria. A step which aims to demographic changes in the region and to strip the Kurds of their rights in owning their own lands; depicting that they had come from neighboring countries or they live an unstable nomadic way of life having neither civilization nor cultural entity (Yildiz, 2005).

On 8 March, 1963, a coalition of officers put an end to the conservative regime in the name of pan-Arabism via a military coup. And it was the day Baath Party became the ruler of Syria till now (Tejel, 2009). When we were students, we used to celebrate this date as the Revolution of March 8<sup>th</sup>.

### ***Zinara Erebi***<sup>140</sup>

*Ev zinara Erebi,  
Ku li Cizîrê dibî...  
Zincîrek e, ji hesin,  
Ew diavêjin milê min,  
Da min ji qurm ve rakin,  
Qada min jê leva kin.  
Ereb anîn gundê min,  
Min dijmêrin ji dijmin.  
Pêk anîne sal bi sal,  
Li Kerkûk û li Şengal.  
Basên Bexdad, Basên Şam,  
Anîn meydan ev hizam.  
Em sed hezar bê mikûs,  
Li Cizîrê bê nifûs.  
Ev Erebên şovînî,  
Kurdan millet nabînî.  
Divên me bikin Ereb,  
Bimrin bê sûc û sebeb.*

### **The Arab Belt**

This Arab Belt,  
Which takes place in Jazira...  
Is a chain of iron,  
That gets my shoulders confined,  
To take me off my roots,  
And occupy my land among themselves.  
They brought Arabs to my village,  
Considering me their enemy.  
It has been planned over years,  
In Kirkuk and Sinjar, as well.  
The Baath of Baghdad and Damascus,  
Founded this Belt.  
A hundred thousand homeless of us,  
Without citizenship in Jazira.  
These chauvinist Arabs,  
Do not consider Kurds a people.  
They want to get us Arabized,  
Or killed without any guilt.

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<sup>140</sup> Written by *Cegerxwîn* and sung by Hikmet Jamil (*Bengîn*), a Syrian Kurd singer from Afrin in 1984.

Tejel (2009) states that in November 12, 1963, Lieutenant Muhammad Talab al-Hilal who was former chief of the Secret Services in Hasakah, published a study of Jazira. His study was targeting the existence of Kurds in Jazira because, according to his study, Kurds were enemies and like a tumor in the body of Arab Nation and should be got rid of. His study contained many things, like displacing Kurds, denial of education in their regions, looting their lands and giving them to Arabs, and creating an “Arab Belt” extending 280 k.m along the Turkish border, from Ras al-‘Ayn<sup>141</sup> in the west to the Iraqi border on the east. The plan caused the displacement and deportation of 140.000 Kurds and about 332 Kurdish villages were resided by Arabs and the plan was done completely in 1973 under Hafiz Al-Assad’s rule in what is known as the Corrective Movement.

So, like Jamal Abd al-Nasser, they began with land reforms, and since most of the Kurds are landowners or peasants, it was a very frustrating step, destructing the center of Kurdish culture and nationalism. Going back to the beginning of 20<sup>th</sup> century, we can see that chieftains were seen as political leaders to Kurdish communities, and that Kurdish feudalism was the place where Kurdish nationalism and cultural movement originated from; *Dîwan* of *Axa* and *Beg*, like *Hajo Axa* in Jazira and his relation to Sheikh Said’s Revolt in 1925. Another example, *Bozan Beg* of Kobani, was the starting place of most of the prominent actors of Kurdish cultural movement of 1930s, like Jaladat Badirkhan, Osman Sabri, *Miço Bekebûr* and others (Hajj, 2015). So, “...for the regime, Kurdish nationalism was exclusively an affair of some notables and axas [aghas] representing “exploitative” classes. Thus, the authorities envisioned the application of agrarian reform in northern Syria not only as an act of “social justice” but also as a means of undermining the power of the Kurdish large landowners” (Tejel, 2009).

Concerning *stranbêjî*, because of the decline of agriculture work, which was the main resource of Kurds’ livelihood on one hand, and on the other the placement of Arab tribes in Kurdish regions, Kurds migrated to big cities, like Aleppo and Damascus. Some intellectuals, like *Cegerxwîn*, migrated to European countries like Germany and Sweden. Other famous names in Syrian Kurdish music moved to

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<sup>141</sup> A Kurdish city in northern Syria on the border with Turkey. It is located east to Kobani. Kurds call it *Serê Kaniyê*. We saw how *Suruç* Plain was divided between *Suruç* in the Turkish side and Kobani in the Syrian side. *Serê Kaniyê* was the complement part of *Ceylan Pınar* which locates in the Turkish side. The same thing can be stated to Amuda with Mardin, Qamishli with Nusaybin, and *Dêrik* with Cizre.

Greece, Lebanon, Iraq and Iran, like *Mihemmed Şêxo* (*Qamişlo/Qamishli* 1948-1989), *Seîd Yûsif* (*Qamişlo* 1947) and *Mehmûd Ezîz Şakir* (*Serê Kaniyê/Ras al ‘Ayn* 1950). The migration of musicians like these three ones, in addition to economical problems, was mainly because of the restrictions put on Kurdish singing and even Kurdish language which began to be terribly fought from late 1950s and early 1960s. But this displacement of musicians opened new directions for Kurdish music; that Kurdish music made in this period, in addition to the Arabian influence which began to leave impression on Kurdish songs during the Union of Syria and Egypt, got more Arabian characteristics, especially from Lebanese cultural atmosphere on one hand, and on the other, the recordings made for Kurdish Broadcasting in Baghdad Radio, for example the songs of *Mehmûd Ezîz Şakir* for Baghdad Radio in Kurdish Department in 1969, most of the instrumentalists are Arabs, and even the chorus which sing with him are Arabs. While the cooperation of *Seîd Yûsif* with Arab singers in playing *buzuq*, the instrument that he brought from Greece, with Fairuz’s orchestra in Beirut and his compositions for the singer Samira Tewfik, according to his statements, added some Arabian features on his songs, but not that much because his style, from the beginning till now, is Kurdish folk dance music. But the most important name among all of them is *Mihemmed Şêxo*. In addition to the apparent influence of Arab musicians on him, especially Mohammed Abdel Wahhab, he had been to Iraq and Iran to join Mustafa Barzani’s revolt against Iraqi regime. These matters added different experience on his music that some Iranian and Iraqi Kurdish features can be seen, and his national and political attitude along with his sentimental songs made him the most popular singer to be considered a national musical figure to Syrian Kurds. After all, the three of them; *Şêxo*, *Yûsif* and *Ezîz*, were pioneers of the modern Kurdish song in Syria and left a great influence until now (Hajj, 2015).<sup>142</sup>

Concerning *dengbêjî* and Kobani, as a consequence of those land reforms and plans of displacements, *dîwans*, which were the place where *Dengbêjî* flourished and grew up. For example the *dîwan* of *Bozan Beg* in Kobani, where *Mişo Bekebûr Berazî* and *Xido Hindawî* sang and met with the pioneers of Kurdish cultural actors, was no more available because neither landowners could afford hosting both singers and

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<sup>142</sup> And interview with *Seîd Yûsif* in Qamishli in 2010, videoed interview with *Mehmûd Ezîz Şakir* in Erbil, KRG in 2016, and online interview with *Brahîm Mihemmed Şêxo*, musician who stays in Germany, in 2014. [and] *Şêxoname* by Beşîr Botanî – special publication by the writer Stockholm/Sweden 2001 - Sent to me by post in 2014.

people daily for their economic loss, nor people were able to meet daily in the same place because most of them had become internally displaced to remote cities. So, this situation put a beginning for the end of *dengbêj*, *çîrokbêj*, *lawikbêj*, *qesîdebêj* and so many other traditional and authentic styles of Kurdish music (Hajj, 2015).

But maybe we have a question here, in this period of time, *Miço* and *Xido* being passed away, does not it mean that the style of *dengbêjî* was already gone?

After *Miço Bekebûr Berazî* and *Xido Hindawî* passed away, *Baqî Xido* (1913-2009), who inherited the style of *dengbêjî* from both his father, *Xido Hindawî*, and *Miço Bekebûr Berazî*; with his new friend *Mihemed-ê Dûman* began to attend *axa* and *begs'* divans. But before playing violin with *Baqî Xido*, *Mihemed-ê Dûman* was accompanying his family members, *Mistefa*, *Qedrî* and *Emîn* in weddings (Nassan, 2016).

As I have already mentioned, *Dûman* family not belonging to the local tribes of Kobani, alongside the kind of music they were playing which was attached to fun and entertainment; playing musical instruments that were not familiar to the people of Kobani and singing and playing rhythmic songs, these two reasons made people regard them as equal as *Gewende*, socially speaking. And since *Gewende* were a despised group of people, despite of the fact that they were the cornerstone of each entertainment and wedding, *Dûman* family was as despicable as them from most of the people of Kobani in everyday life, especially from those who were putting tribal values above everything. Moreover, till now some people use the word "*Dûman*" as a synonym to the word "*Gewende*" (Seyda, 2016). For example, people of Kobani still neither get married with this family's daughters nor accept to get their daughters married to their sons (Ayoub, 2017).

*Mihemed-ê Dûman*, unlike the musicians and singers of his time in Kobani, along with the musical talent he inherited from his family, he was very familiar with modern and civilized life. The thing that added rich features to his musical knowledge. For example, he spent his childhood with the Armenian neighbors who were displaced from urban places of the Turkish side and settled in the center of the present city of Kobani. Later on, he moved in places which were more civilized than Kobani; both *Birecik* and *Siverek* in Turkey. And when he joined military service in Turkey, he was serving as a special driver for officers of high ranks where he got acquainted with their daily activities especially when spent in night life of fun and

pleasure in bars and casinos. After that, his frequent visits to his relatives in the cities of Ankara, Istanbul and Izmir added more colors to his taste. When he came back to the Syrian side, he joined the military service in Homs, and while he was there he used to visit the cities of Aleppo, Hama and Damascus. He even went to Lebanon, beside his continuous musical visits to the Syrian cities. We can say, with no hesitation, that these travels left a rich experience on his musical sense and culture. (Dûman, 2016)

Concerning his musical talent, ability and culture; when *M. Dûman* started playing violin, he started to get acquainted with maqams and Ottoman *sanat* style, in addition to the traditional songs he had learned from his family and songs he learned from *Miço* and *Xido*. According to *Reşîd Sofî*, a musician from Kobani, *Dûman* was playing and singing for famous classical Arab singers like Farid al-Atrash<sup>143</sup> and Mohammed Abdel Wahab,<sup>144</sup> which was an effect of the Egyptian culture on Syrians in late 1950s and early 1960s. Moreover, *Dûman* was well aware of singing styles and instrumental musical modes, so that when he was visiting *Sofî*, both of them were choosing a specific maqam and spend the whole night, *Sofî* with his oud and *Dûman* with his violin, playing all instrumental musical modes on that maqam; *taksim*<sup>145</sup>, *peşrev*<sup>146</sup>, *semai*<sup>147</sup> ...etc.

Since a musician like *Dûman* has been able to include these cultural backgrounds in his musical character, we may ask ourselves these questions: Why is not there a rich or numerous legacy of his recordings and compositions as a result of his musical activity which lasted fifty to sixty years? Why is not there even one violin player in Kobani? Unfortunately, along with two or three phonographic recordings of his own songs and recordings in which he accompanies *Baqî Xido* with his violin, *Dûman* has only a few home recordings that, in most of them, he plays and sings Kurdish songs he memorized from Kurdish broadcasters of Yerevan and Baghdad radios because it seems that they were close to the taste of the public being dancing songs.

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<sup>143</sup> (1910-1974). A Syrian-Egyptian composer, oud player and singer.

<sup>144</sup> (1902-1991). An Egyptian composer, oud player and singer.

<sup>145</sup> *Taksim* or *Taqsim* is of Arabic origin, in English means “division”. Free improvisation on musical instrument. Sometimes played before the song is sung or vocal begins.

<sup>146</sup> Is an instrumental form in Turkish classical music/Ottoman *sanat* music. It is the first piece of music played when performing *fasıl* (a group of performance).

<sup>147</sup> Coming from the Arabic word “*sama*” which means “hearing”. It is a vocal style inside the group of *fasıl*.

Certainly, apart from the social reason that restricted his musical production, there are educational and economic reasons stemming from the politics of the Kurds themselves, especially the years of the 1980s, and the politics of the Syrian state which began since the early 1960s and more particularly since the Baath Party came to power in Syria in 1963.

Let us start by expanding the social factors and then linking the religious, economic and political factors that contributed to the paralyzing of his musical production, or restricted his musical activity, so to speak.

When *Dûman* first came back to Kobani from Turkey, he joined the Syrian military service. After finishing the service, he began his musical activity mastering, at least, three musical styles; primarily *dengbêjî*, which he had learned at a young age and even when he was back to Kobani in early 1950s when *Miço* and *Xido* were still alive. He had played violin with them when they were still having the ability to sing. The second style was maqams music which nobody could understand, or even like. For example, in one of the home recordings, he begins with a piece of instrumental music on Nahawand maqam. The piece is a variation between a *longa*<sup>148</sup> composition, as I analyzed, and a marching music used to be played for Egyptian kings in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, according to the presenter of the recording. But the people attending the divan insisted that he should play and sing Kurdish dancing songs. We conclude that the part which was related to this style, maqams, inside his musical character began to disappear, or at least he kept it for himself. He was sometimes practicing it with people who appreciate it, like *Reşîd Sofî* who is considered a master in oud and maqams. Concerning the third style, it was the style he used to play with his family members in weddings and in home parties. They were traditional songs of Urfa region, including Kobani, along with his own and his relatives' compositions beside songs he used to listen to from Baghdad and Yerevan Kurdish broadcastings. Two of his relatives, *Qedrî* and his father-in-law *Emîn*, quitted music for religious reasons. Even his wife, *Emîn*'s daughter, was insisting on him to quit music, but apparently she could not change his mind. He only quitted playing music at home. Muhsin Seyda, a researcher from Kobani who stays in Denmark, stated that, "One evening I went to take him to *Sofî*'s place to listen to his music. But *Dûman* misunderstood me, thinking that I want to listen to him in his own

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<sup>148</sup> Instrumental music template.

home. So, *Dûman* told me, I am sorry. I do not play music at home.” (Seyda, 2016) I discovered the same thing when I asked his three sons about the musical life of their father. None of them knew about their father’s musical life.

To sum up these three style in his musical character and find out about the social and political factors in restricting his musical character and direction, we can begin with the effect of the politics of land reforms and the economical consequences.

*Axas* and *Begs*, along with their tribal leadership which can be considered as political as the leadership of *Mîr* (Princes) of Kurdish Dynasties, like that of *Cizîra Botan* (*Cizre*), *Bedlîs* (*Bitlis*), *Bayezîd* (*Beyazıt*) which played a great role in preserving the Kurdish national character, they can be considered as Muslim Caliphs and Sultans in taking care of their artists inside their palaces. So, *Axas* and *Begs* of Kobani were doing the same with the *dengbêj* in their *dîwans*.

When *Dûman* was playing the violin with his relatives at parties and weddings, it was with the company of singers; he was just playing the violin. For example, *Mistefa Dûman* was a percussionist and singer at the same time, as *Dûman* had told me. But day by day, *Dûman* began to feel the need to sing because the Middle Eastern societies in general and Kurdish society in particular used to give the singer more value and attention than the instrumentalist, as we discussed earlier. So far, when we play something for Kobani audience even in present time, they insist on singing. Unfortunately, although he began to sing, he did not exceed the status of *Gewende*, who were socially a despised group of people in Kobani. Therefore, to get rid of this society's view on the one hand and the financial need on the other, especially after his relatives quitted music, he began to play violin with *Baqî Xido* in *Axas* and *Begs*’ *dîwans*. But as land reforms affected the social and economical situation of people generally and those of landowners particularly, *dengbêjs*, who were respectable singers in Kurdish society, became like beggars because they did not have any other profession to do. This bitter reality bothered *Dûman* a lot and forced him to work as a driver, a profession he practiced in his military service in both Turkey and Syria. Thus, for thirty years he worked as a driver. But from time to time he played and sang in home parties with friends or as a violin player with *Baqî Xido* in home and studio recordings. In other words, his musical project which began in the early 1950s was technically came to an end in the early 1970s when he started his driving career. But unfortunately, the first recording I got of him goes back to

1971; a home recording in *Tabqa* town of Raqqa city in Syria with his friends when he was working as a driver for the European engineers who were working on *Sadd al-Fourat* (Euphrates Dam), which was considered one of the greatest achievements of Hafiz al-Asaad (1930-2000)<sup>149</sup>.

### 5.5 *Newroz*, PKK and Music Groups

*Newroz* (the new day) is the first day of spring, according to Iranian peoples. For Kurds, beside its being the first day of spring, a Kurdish mythology refers it to the day *Kawa* freed Kurdish people from the tyranny of King *Zahhak* (Perwer, 1990). So, Kurds celebrate it as a national day more than being the first day of spring as a symbol of fertility and changing. According to *Hawar* newspaper, *Newroz* was celebrated among Syrian Kurds, but it was not that much popular; it was celebrated indoors and in small groups, among notables and intellectuals (Cewerî, 1998), until 1958, in the UAR period, it began to be completely prohibited. *Newroz* days represented the symbol of existence for Kurds in Syria. Since concerts, festivals and cultural activities being prohibited in public, *Newroz* days stood as the only occasion for the Kurdish cultural presence (Tejel, 2009). Likewise, since Kurdish culture was defined as political activity, *Newroz* days were considered to pose danger to national security as a “national threat”, and it was generating a terrifying tension each year (Yildiz, 2005).

In 1986, *Newroz* saw Kurdish demonstrations in Damascus and police interrupted causing the death of a young Kurd and arresting others. Following these events, al-Assad passed a decree declaring 21 March to be Mother’s Day (Yildiz, 2005).

While Syrian Kurds in general and Kurdish political parties in Syria in particular were struggling for cultural rights with the Syrian government (Derwêş, 2011), the Syrian state sealed a strategic agreement with Abdullah Ocalan, the leader of PKK, *Partiya Karkerên Kurdistan* (Kurdistan Workers Party), against the Turkish government (Tejel, 2009). So, we can regard this alliance as an introduction for a new era in political and cultural life of Kurds in Syria (Hajj, 2015).

The Syrian government in that period of history was getting stronger. It was looking for strategic coalitions, as it had severely repressed the Muslim Brotherhood (Porat,

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<sup>149</sup> President of Syria between 1970 and 2000. Father of the present president of Syria Bashar al-Assad.

2010). Along with its strategic alliances with the Iranian revolution that had taken power in Iran and its clear military and political presence in Lebanon under the pretext of “civil peace”. It was also supporting Palestinian resistance and Palestinian anti-Israeli fronts (Yacoubian, 2006). But it had two problems, the first with the Baath regime in Iraq and was dealing with it by supporting movements opposing the Iraqi regime. For example, it supported Jalal Talabani in seceding from the Kurdistan Democratic Party and founding another party under the name of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan and fueled the spirit of hostility between the Jalal Talabani Party, which was supported by both the Syrian and Iranian regimes and the Massoud Barzani party, which was receiving support from Turkey and sympathy from the Baghdad government (Tejel, 2009). The second problem was about the Iskenderun (Sanjak of Alexandretta), which Syria claims to be a Syrian land. The problem started at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century when countries were born on the ruins of the Ottoman Empire. The French Mandate then annexed the Kurdish areas to Syria in return for giving Iskenderun to Turkey. And then became clearer with the crisis of water resources between Syria and Turkey. In addition to the Armenian community in Syria since 1915 who were supported by the regime of the Baath party against the Turkish government, Baath found the birth of the PKK in Turkey an exceptional opportunity. It contacted PKK’s leader and provided for the means of controlling his operations from Damascus. Later on, the Syrian regime opened a military camp for PKK in the Lebanese area of Beqaa (White, 2011).

As I have mentioned before, there are three Kurdish regions in Syria, Afrin (Kurd Dagħ) in the northwest, Ayn al-Arab (Kobani) in the middle-north and Hasaka (Jazira) in the northeast. The presence of PKK in Afrin and Kobani was stronger due to many reasons; the first reason is that the percentage of Kurds is almost one hundred in these two regions. The second reason is that Kurds of Jazira, because of their geographical closeness to Iraqi Kurds, were more sympathized with the political situation of Kurds in Northern Iraq. But the most important reason among all is that the Syrian regime has already “taken care” of Jazira region by making demographic changes since the early 1960s (Hajj, 2015).

One of the main issues that the Syrian Baath government had agreed upon with the leader of the PKK was the absence of a Kurdish issue in Syria. The matter that was confirmed by Abdullah Ocalan on more than one occasion later by propagating through the available media that the Kurdish presence in Syria is an emergency.

Affirming that the Syrian Kurds are not more than groups that have tribal loyalties more than national ones and have no Kurdish projects. Moreover, he stated that if Syrian Kurds want to pursue a national or political project, they can go to the other side of the border and accomplish it in Kurdistan of Turkey (al-Malham, 1990, pp.174-175). From this point of view, the Syrian government has come across a valuable historical opportunity to use the PKK to achieve two goals at the same time; to fight Turks with Kurds and fight the Syrian Kurds with Turks. The latter was very important to Syrian regime because they knew the tribal values and traditions of Syrian Kurds, especially in Kobani; in case if one person of any tribe get killed, the whole tribe will seek revenge. In other words, if a Syrian Kurd PKK fighter get killed in Turkey, it will encourage and provoke all young people from that tribe to join PKK and go to fight Turkish government beyond the border. Consequently, Syrian regime will get rid of Kurds and Kurdish problem in Syria. So, we can say that this was the last nail in the coffin of the cultural, political and social identity of the Syrians Kurds. They became the fuel for the fires of war between the Turkish government and the PKK on the one hand and between the Syrian regime and the Turkish government on the other. And, of course, one of the important tools to achieve these targets by both the Syrian regime and PKK leadership was music. So, they started founding a *kom* (musical group) in each Kurdish city and town. Most of the names of these musical groups were the names of Kurdish provinces or cities in Turkey. For example, *Koma Agirî* (*Ağrı* Group) in Amuda and *Koma Botan* (*Cizre/Hakkari* Group) in Kobani. And the songs of these groups were either propaganda, enticing retaliation feelings or glorification of the martyrs and the leader of the party. But the most important songs, which were compatible with the interests of the Syrian regime, were those that glorify the martyrs and invite people to walk in their footsteps and revenge for them (Hajj, 2015).

Since a style like *dengbêjî* was connected to feudalism and tribalism, the ideologies of socialists, communists and PKK left no space for them to be present in the dominant scene (Hajj, 2015).

Concerning *stranbêjî*, musicians like *Seîd Yûsif*, *Mehmûd Ezîz Şakir*, *Mihemmed Şexo* and others, who are still considered as the real representatives of the Kurdish music in Syria because of their experience of the circumstances and the cultural and political conditions in Syria since the 1920s, became out of the cultural scene because they did not want to put their music in the service of a particular party or

ideology (Resûl, 2017). And this matter was very clear in *Newroz* celebrations. For example, after the PKK establishment in Kobani, the number of *Newroz* celebrators got increased and in general, due to the facilities given by Syrian government to PKK, there was an apparent distinction between activities organized by PKK and those organized by Kurds of other tendencies. The whole Kurdish culture became at the service of PKK and their waged war against Turkey. Hence, PKK took over the cultural framing of the Syrian Kurds with an aim of achieving greater room for maneuvering (Tejel, 2009).

On the other side, we cannot say that everything related to Kurdish music in the time of PKK in Syria was negative; despite of the fact that the Syrian Kurdish music in this period of time was a tool that served the politics of PKK and the Syrian regime, we can say it created positive conditions, too. It paved the way to an open horizon for using Kurdish language in Syria; the basic element of Kurdish music. Kurdish music recordings were freely sold at music shops. As a consequence, we could see this oral culture for the first time, after 1950s, recorded and available for the Kurdish community (Hajj, 2015). But there was a paradox, a sort of confusion, so to speak; why would music of *kom* be legal and music of a singer like *M. Şêxo* illegal, since both of them are Kurdish music? *M. Şêxo* was a singer who frequently suffered from arrests and torture because of his music and songs (Botanî, 2014). So, we may call it a restricted freedom. Another positive role PKK played was enhancing the idea of group work in making music (Tejel, 2009). Although the music which those groups were making for about two decades was repetitive that increased and fed the feeling of mobilization against Turkey (Marcus, 2007), I can claim that those musical groups founded an atmosphere that is similar to musical institutes or musical workshops, where musicians could make use of each other's experiences and learn how to compose, play, arrange and record songs. Moreover, we got acquainted with so many musical instruments. Above all, music and musical instruments got liberated from the cage of regressive tribal views. But after all, there was no artistic quality in this accumulating quantity (Hajj, 2015).

Concerning Kobani, music *kom* helped to break the stereotype of music players from being *Gewende* and made them a respectable group of people in the eyes of the community. Each Kobani home got to have a musical instrument, especially the *tembûr* (*Bağlama/Saz*) instrument, which has become a national symbol rather than a mere musical instrument; a tradition followed because of *Şivan Perwer* and the

musicians of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) (Seyda, 2016). *Imerê Kanî*, a *tembûr* player from Kobani who stays in Turkey, states that when he was a young boy, he brought home a *tembûr*. His father rebuked him saying that “My son wants to be a *Dûman!*” The same thing is stated by *Mistefa Şêxo*, a violin player from Kobani who stays in Denmark, that when he started playing violin, his father showed his resentment stating that he does not like his son to become a *Gewende* or *Dûman*. But both of them stated that this situation witnessed changes in the late 1980s (Şêxo & Kanî, 2016).

The beginning of 1990s witnessed great changes in the world. These changes affected all aspects of life in the world in general and that of the Kurds in particular. And we can sum up these changes as: German reunification, separation of Soviet states, and the most important change was the uprising of Kurds in North Iraq which achieved the autonomy later in 1992, and resulted in notable changes in Kurdish cultural movement in Syria, as well. And when it comes to a period when the PKK has been active in Turkey and Syria almost equally, we cannot forget the impact of the Law 2932 in February 1991 on the cultural movement of Syrian Kurds, as well. A law which was introduced by Turgut Ozal, President of Turkey from 1989 to 1993, that Ankara began trying to handle the Kurdish question by allowing the use of Kurdish language. So, Kurdish language began to be freely spoken and Kurdish music cassettes were openly available (McDowell, 2007).

So, I can say that this period of time; early 1990s, created two parallel cultural poles, the first influenced by the nascent cultural movement in northern Kurdish Iraq, represented by Syrian Kurdish musicians who were sympathetic to the cause of Iraqi Kurds, and this influence could be seen in spreading music cassettes which began to reach us from northern Iraq. So, we got acquainted with the music in other Kurdish dialects such as the Sorani, which we began to recognize the vocabulary and trying to learn a little from the lyrics of songs that we were listening to.<sup>150</sup> As for the second pole, it was resulted from the cultural breakthrough in Turkey. The emergence of music of *kom* groups in Turkey began to affect the *kom* of PKK in Syria, as well (Hajj, 2015).

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<sup>150</sup> I remember in 1994 when I went to Qamishli on a visit to my relatives, I brought about twenty music cassettes in Sorani dialect to Kobani.

In Kobani, names like *Reşîd Sofî*, as a master in oud and Middle Eastern maqams who has been singing and playing music since 1970s and released his first musical album in 1980; began to be listened to by Kurds all over Syria. This widespread popularity motivated him to record his second album in 1994 (Cûdî, 2017). There was also a rediscovery for other names like *Xalid Sofî*, *Reşîd's* brother, and for the two brothers *Baran and Miço Kendeş*, who have been singing and playing music since 1980s. In addition, some people began to listen to *dengbêjî* style. *Mihemed-ê Dûman* also got rediscovered by some musicians like *Baran Kendeş* who rerecorded some of his songs.

This period began to witness the positive impact that PKK has left on people to change their perception of singers and music players. The musicians had a new musical experience, but the nature of the political stage that imposed the mobilizing and enthusiastic songs did not allow them to appear prominently. But despite the détente, the loudest voice was still that of the political song which was continuing to address people. We cannot forget that the opening of the Kurdish satellite channel MED TV, which was representing the politics of PKK, in 1995 has had an influential role in political and national music rather than *dengbêjî* of singers like *Baqî Xido*, *Hafîzê Kor*, *Bozan Ehmed* and *Mamed-ê Kaşo*<sup>151</sup>, or maqams music of musicians like *Reşîd Sofî* and *Xalid Sofî*, or new experiments that mix Eastern and Western music like the music of *Miço Kendeş*, or even Kurdish traditional songs of *Mihemed-ê Dûman* (Hajj, 2015).

Therefore, we can say that non-political music was making shy and difficult steps to return to the scene. This music was the cultural extension of the Syrian Kurds that was kept back by the politics of both the Syrian regime and the PKK. And on the Kurdish-Syrian level, names like *Mihemmed Şêxo*, even he was passed away in 1989, *Seîd Yûsif* and *Mehmûd Ezîz Şakir* were revived. Besides, new musicians had emerged in the diaspora where the presence of Kurds was increasing, and the cultural exchange started to take place among them and new styles which cherished the artistic values began flourishing (Blum & Hassanpour, 1996). Names like *Ciwan Haco*, in Kurdish pop music<sup>152</sup>, and *Xweşnav Tillo*, in pop *arabesk* Kurdish music<sup>153</sup>, began to emerge and made the very influence on Kurdish music in Syria and a

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<sup>151</sup> *Dengbêjî* singers from Kobani.

<sup>152</sup> Beside pop, he has tried so many styles in Kurdish music, like blues and jazz.

<sup>153</sup> Most of the songs he sings carries nostalgic romantic content.

nostalgic movement to restore old styles became available,<sup>154</sup> especially after Abdullah Ocalan was delivered to Turkey in February 1999, putting obstacles before PKK movement in Syria and making a new era for Kurdish music in Syria and paved the way for new styles in music (Hajj, 2015).

### **5.6 Music till the War of Kobani (19,09,2014)**

Dr. Mohammad Aziz Zaza<sup>155</sup> states that one of the main factors that prompted the Kurdistan Regional Government to open the master's department in music at the University of Salahaddin in 2004 is the traditional conflict between Sulaymaniyah and Erbil<sup>156</sup>, where the University of Sulaymaniyah was preparing for the opening of graduate studies in music at its university (Zaza, 2017). And if we go back in time just five years before, in 1999 Turkey helped the Kurdish Democratic Party of Iraq (KDP) to launch its own "KTV" television in Erbil, an "anti-PKK" TV station. And this was a necessity for KDP at the same time because it was worried that broadcasts from MED-TV were increasing PKK popularity amongst Iraqi Kurds at the expense of its popularity. And a year after, again as a reaction, PUK launched its own television channel KURD SAT in Sulaymaniyah (Romano, 2003).

So, we conclude that although the number of Kurdish television channels were increasing, each channel was spreading its own ideology which was different from the others'. And because music is the most prominent present in the programmes of each channel, it is confined under the monopoly of particular slogans that serve the politics and propaganda of each party (Hajj, 2015). Moreover, when the relationship between the PKK and the Syrian regime worsened, MED TV began to bring the Syrian Kurdish singers who were staying in the diaspora back in order to sing on its screen and in its programs. For instance, it brought the singer Hikmet Jamil (*Bengîn*), a singer from Afrin who had been in exile since 1979. He was considered one of the first Syrian Kurdish singers who immigrated to Germany as a political refugee after

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<sup>154</sup> Singers like Haco and Xweşnav started singing old songs of M. Şêxo, M. Ezîz and S. Yûsif.

<sup>155</sup> (1944) Head of music department at the Faculty of Fine Arts at the University of Salahaddin in Erbil. The first Kurd from Syria/Qamishli got doctorate degree in Musicology from Prague University in 1983. Lectured at universities in different countries like Algeria and Libya. Founded a musical center for teaching music in Qamishli/Syria between 1997 and 2003. This center played a great role in Kurdish music industry in Syria. I remember that I attended two violin classes at his center in 2001. And even when I directed the recording of the first album of my songs for a local singer from Kobani, three of his students played in the album. One of his important books is *The Science of Counterpoint* – Dar Al-Hasad Publications in Damascus 1997 [In Arabic].

<sup>156</sup> The ideological and political conflict between the two major parties PDK and PUK.

his song about the Arab Belt Project the Baath regime applied. Because of this song he was sentenced to death in absentia in 1986. This singer, who suffered from poor living conditions in Europe, began to sing according to the TV Channel's criteria to preserve his presence in the media. And here we present a sample from the first songs that he sang when he showed on MED TV (Bengîn, 2013):

*Belê em hatin MED TV, li cem dost û hevalan.* We came to MED TV, to our friends.

*Em ê bêjin çend stranê xwe ji bo dîl û şervanan.* We are going to sing about the detainees and the fighters.

*Silav, ji bo gêrîla, ji bo kesê li serê çiyân!* Greetings to guerilla, to those who struggle in the mountains!

*Silav, li serokê me Kurdan!* Greetings to the leader of us, Kurds!

There are no independent Kurdish TV channels. Each channel represents the viewpoint and politics of the party that sponsors it. It seems that the singer is forced to sing as the vision and speech of the TV channel demands. This situation reminds us of the story of the singer Said Axa Jazrawi, whose songs got banned and was sentenced to death, as we talked about previously. Said Axa Jazrawi, after spending a long time away from his family and hometown in the Turkish side, he longed for his family and wanted to return. In order to return, the Turkish authorities asked him to sing a song praising Mustafa Kemal Atatürk. In order to go back to his family, he sang the required song. And so was pardoned and returned to his hometown. Some of the lines of the song are as follows (Kevirbirî, 2009, pp. 57-58):

*Kemal e Kemal e*

*Kemal bavê me ye*

*Manto kir ber me ye*

*Şepqe da ser me ye.*

(Our father Kemal is a perfect man. He clothed us with overcoats and covered our heads with hats)

In 1999, I remember there was a tension on the Syrian-Turkish border. Of course, in that period of time Syria and Turkey were trying to improve their relationships. One of the big problems between them was the existence of PKK's leader Abdullah Ocalan in Damascus. So, the Syrian government had forced Ocalan to leave Syria. In the meantime, Ocalan was under house arrest in Rome/Italy. One of the people who went on a visit to Ocalan in Rome was the famous Kurdish singer *Şivan Perwer* (Perwer, 2017). Later, *Şivan* recorded a piece of the epic song *Dewrêşê Evdî*<sup>157</sup> and made a video clip for it, stating that the reason behind his recording for this song was that during his conversation with Ocalan, the latter had expressed his love and admiration for the story of this song. As soon as this news was spread, PKK's supporters in Kobani brought the *dengbêj Baqî Xido* and recorded the whole epic song, which is about ten hours of continual singing, as an attribute to Ocalan (Xelîl, 2016). Once again, we find the direct impact of political ideologies as a major reason behind the interest in a specific kind of music and singing. Unfortunately, *Baqî*, 88 years old in 1999, could not perform the song well. Furthermore, one feels sorry that when he was younger, he did not get the same concern and interest. The same thing to be said about *Mihemed-ê Dûman*, as well.

In 1998, a group of young singers from Kobani, who were varied between ex-members of *Koma Botan* and other singers who were marginalized in the 1980s and till the mid of 1990s due to their views which were different from that of PKK, wanted to honor *Mihemed-ê Dûman* by recording an album for him. It was a collection of folk songs and others he had composed (Demir, 2016). Regardless of being a nice gesture, the recording was bad in terms of quality, in my personal opinion. *Mihemed-ê Dûman*, who sang and played at spontaneous and unplanned home parties with live percussion instruments, was much better than the advanced recording in the studio with the synthesizer where it covered his voice and the sound of his violin, especially its loud rhythms which are very far from his beautiful and simple spirit. The most important thing, he was seventy years old in 1998. In other words, he was not at the height of his artistic career. In addition to the problem of old age, he had other problems such as the death of *Mistefa Dûman*, who was his relative and friend in musical sessions for a long time, which had a unpleasant effect on his

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<sup>157</sup> An epic love story about a Yezidi Kurdish man who loves a Muslim (Sunni) Kurdsh woman. And in order to get married with her, he fights Turkish and Arab tribes who come to fight the woman's tribe.

performance. But the most prominent crisis was the death of his younger son, who suffered greatly after losing him (Dûman, 2016).

In relation to the difference between young and old *Dûman*, I interviewed Salih Nassan because he was a close friend of *Dûman*. Nassan is considered the first person from Kobani, after *Dûman*, who tried to play violin but because of his family's opposition he reluctantly stopped trying to learn but continued loving the violin and the musicians who play it. He states that when he went to Lebanon to study in the early 1970s, the Kurds were active in preparing for cultural events, and in particular they were organizing concerts in theaters and cinema houses in Beirut. In 1972,<sup>158</sup> there was a big concert to which *Mihemed Arif Cizîrî* (1912-1986), *Îsa Berwarî* (1933-2002) and *Gulbihar* (1929-2010)<sup>159</sup> were invited from Iraq to give a concert in Beirut in a football stadium. In the meantime, Nassan was one of the fans of *Dûman* that he already had hosted him in his house in Aleppo and recorded two cassettes for him playing violin and singing. Nassan says that as soon as I knew about the concert, I remembered *Dûman* and then brought him to Beirut to play at the concert. Nassan mentions that *Dûman* performed a wonderful musical show in the concert, which prompted the singers coming from Iraq to ask *Dûman* to accompany them and play violin on Radio Baghdad in the Kurdish Broadcasting section.<sup>160</sup> In conclusion, Nassan states that *Dûman*, in that period of time, was one of the best violin players ever in playing Kurdish traditional maqams and songs. Later, in the late 1990s, Nassan listened to him after thirty years and to his surprise he found that there was a very dramatic difference between old and young *Dûman*; both his right and left hands were slow and the years had got the best of his talent (Nassan, 2016).

So, in the late 1990s and the beginning of 2000s, there was a hope that Kurdish music is getting rid of the political shackles, and especially after the new Kurdish musical experiments in the diaspora. Actually it flourished in regions like Afrin and Jazira, but in Kobani there was a gap between the old and the young generations, especially after the old generation retired from the musical activity. Moreover, the experiences that emerged in the 1980s and was marginalized, *Miço Kendeş* had emigrated to Switzerland. *Xalid Sofî* had settled in Aleppo and then emigrated to

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<sup>158</sup> According to some documents the concert took place in 1973.

<sup>159</sup> Kurdish singers from North Iraq. They were famous in that period of time in favour of Kurdish Broadcasting in Baghdad Radio.

<sup>160</sup> *Dûman* says that he liked to go but could not because of his love and care about his family.

Sweden. *Baran Kendeş*, who was more active than everyone, died at the height of his musical activity because of a heart attack in 2003. *Ehmed-ê Çep*, who was one of the most important composers and players of the *buzuq* instrument, also settled in Aleppo and then emigrated to Denmark. *Reşîd Sofî* got antisocial and introvert in his home after getting older. So, the young generation became vulnerable to what is shown on the Kurdish TV channels. And since there are no musical schools or musicians who give private classes of music in Kobani, unlike Afrin and Jazira which are full of private centers of teaching music, the young generation became far from their local culture imitating what is shown on TVs.

In June 2000, when Hafez al-Assad died, his son, Bashar al-Assad who was in London, returned to Syria and became president. The Syrian opposition had some hope that the new president, Bashar al-Assad, would make political changes. And really, in what was known by Damascus Spring, some political and cultural reforms began to take place; political salons were established and groups of intellectuals released documents asking for the state of emergency to be repealed and political pluralism to be installed. Meanwhile, the Kurdish political situation was not that much far from that of the cultural one; the departure of the PKK combined with the distrust in the old Kurdish parties, primarily among young Kurds, left a space open for new contending parties and independent activists at the beginning of the 2000s (Schøtt, 2017). I remember in that period of time when we were students at Aleppo University, so many Kurdish parties were active, and most of them were new parties derived from the old parties. Then, we could, as Kurds, play music even at the halls and theatres of the university, but on one condition; there is no singing in Kurdish. Frankly speaking, it was even better. That time, I was thinking that to allow Kurds to play music is a good thing because it might motivate Kurds to play and compose instrumental music and by the time it might create appropriate conditions for fine Kurdish instrumentalists, and produce a generation that may believe in the power of melodies, rather than lyrics and sung forms; the thing that our musicians still lack, as far as I know.

Unfortunately, this situation did not last long. After the patience of the regime ran out, many intellectuals and activists were arrested, marking the end of the Damascus Spring, among them there were Kurds, as well. And the most catastrophic event that

paralyzed the Kurdish political and cultural movement, even Kurds' existence in Syria, was the event which is known as Qamishli Revolt<sup>161</sup> which took place in 12 March 2004 (Lowe, 2006). We were at university sitting in the class when our translation professor came and wrote on the board the word "rabble" and said: "This is what Kurds are!" In the following days and years thousands were arrested and dozens of students were thrown out of Syrian universities, in addition to dozens of Kurds killed and injured (Schøtt, 2017). And one of the reasons that made me leave Syria for good in 2010 was the problems that Kurds were facing in the military service as an outcome of the Revolt of Qamishli; I had to leave Syria in order not to join military service.

The Kurdish music in Syria had not risen to the tragic occasion caused by the incidents of Qamishli so we could not see many songs about this event as we used to witness in such crucial circumstances through history. Maybe it is because the suppression was very severe that nobody could dare to sing. Or because the tragedy was so touching and painful that no one could express it properly. For example, when Islamic State in Iraq and Sham attacked Kobani in 19 September 2014, so many friends asked me to make songs about the situation of Kobani. I could not; I felt that the tragedy is much bigger than I could express in a song, or two, or even in dozens of songs. Moreover, is it necessary for a person to express the events with singing? Is not silence sometimes enough, as a form of protest?

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<sup>161</sup> The trouble began at a football match. The Qamishli football team played a home game against the visiting team from Deir al-Zor on 12 March 2004. At some point during the match the fans from Deir al-Zor displayed posters of Saddam Hussein and chanted slogans insulting the Iraqi Kurdish leaders Massoud Barzani and Jalal Talabani. The hostilities between Kurdish and Arab supporters ended with the security forces shooting dead at least seven Kurds. This was followed by further shootings at their funerals. Thousands demonstrated in Qamishli and in Kurdish areas across Syria – the Jazira, Afrin, Kobani, Aleppo and Damascus. Some protests turned into riots, government and private property was ransacked and burned and a police station was attacked in Amuda. Depictions of Hafez al-Asad were vandalized, the Syrian flag was burned and banners daringly proclaimed 'Free Kurdistan' and 'Intifada until the occupation ends'.

## 6. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

As I have already argued the matter of my view that it combines both insider perspective and outsider one; being outside Kobani and Syria for a long time made me review these problems and see them clearer. Therefore, the whole study is swaying between two tones: The first tone is “suffering”, being an insider; I present the range of problems that I have encountered and felt throughout my own experience. While the second tone is that of “criticizing”, being an outsider; I criticize and try to recommend solutions.

In my thesis, “Transformations of Kurdish Music in Syria: Social and Political Factors”, I initiated the discussion on obstructive factors in Kurdish music. According to my personal experience, these two factors, social and political, are the most influential ones in determining the process of production and even the quality of the production.

I introduced the study with repetitive personal incidents that I passed through or witnessed, in order to show how these problems may occupy any Kurdish musician’s career. It is an involvement that may decide, mostly restrict, the tendencies and trends of the musician.

To examine the diversity within the Kurdish people and show the relationship between Kurds and music, I made a historical study about the Kurds and their origins. Despite of the feeling of “Kurdishness” and the aspiration of achieving a Kurdish independent entity which can be seen as an essential indicator of the Kurdish identity all over the world, music seemed to be a pivotal element of the Kurdish identity.

The issue of different theories about the origin of Kurds, especially being ‘a unique ethnicity that includes so many ancient ethnicities’, brought us to the sureness of the musical diversity, as well. A matter which proves the difficulty of studying the music of all Kurds. So, regardless of my subjectivity in choosing Syrian Kurds - specifically Kobani which concerns me and I am more aware of - it was a difficult

task to research all Kurds. Furthermore, the historical survey gave us some clues about the tied relationship between making music and the socio-political manipulations.

Concerning **Music and Politics**; music being a product of human feelings, is influenced by political situations as much as social conditions, love, nostalgia, longing, confusion, anxiety and other psychological transformations. And what I intended to point out in my study was to shed light on two important points in the political relationship with the Kurdish music. In other words, after discussing several historical eras in which music was associated with politics, I think we have to distinguish between **the impact of political events on music** and **the use of music for political ideologies, or to make music as a political tool for propaganda and manipulation**.

With regard to the first point, **the impact of political events on music**, the first political influence on Kurdish music in Syria was represented in separating the Kurds in Syria from the Kurds in Turkey when becoming two new states, Turkey and Syria. This political action by France, England and Turkey affected the Syrian Kurds in various aspects; social, political and cultural. Consequently, these influences in one way or another affected the music of the Syrian Kurds. That is to say, it was the time of 'nationalism' and the emergence of new states.

The major and crucial result emanated from the division between the Kurdish countryside which became located in the Syrian state and the cultural cores which remained within the borders of the modern Turkish state. This separation put the Syrian Kurds in a position of necessity to build a new cultural identity. Since the situation that accompanied the partition process was a political one that led to national feelings, political and national features became dominant in the Kurdish cultural character. The most important event could be represented by Sheikh Said Revolt of 1925. The event that motivated *Mișo Bekebûr Berazî's* in making his songs.

So, according to *tabula rasa* of John Locke, we can say that when Kobani was a baby which was born in the early 1910s, the cultural identity of Kobani was shaped by national and political factors. Those factors have become an integral part of its culture to the present day, specifically after ISIS attack on Kobani in 2014.

According to Meho & Maglaughlin (2001), Kurdish national identity became not only manifested in tribe, kinship, language, religion, or history; moreover, cultural traits and music had important primary roles in fostering Kurdish nationalism, as a result of the aforementioned reasons. Besides, since Kurds are viewed as minority in Syria, their music represents their identity. It is very rational that it will be their only definition, in which they fight with and at the same time be condemned for (Romano, 2003).

In conclusion, I think there is no problem in this point; **“the impact of political events on music”**. It is very natural that the Kurdish music in Syria carries political and national features which emerged because of the politics of the others, i.e. Syrian regime, towards Kurds’ existence and Kurdish culture in Syria. It is a matter of action and reaction. Thus, music being the only tool of expression to Syrian Kurds, all measures taken by Syrian authorities against Kurds were answered indirectly by singing. But the problem, according to my point of view, lies in the marginalization of musical styles and rich subjects that the Kurds had previously possessed. But this too, obviously, was not the desire of the Kurds themselves to ignore; it was because of the social and political factors which forced the Kurds not to refer to them. In other words, authorities of the Syrian governments throughout this period of history fought anything related to Kurdish culture; being a part of the Kurdish existence. Likewise, Kurds themselves did not save their music from being a material to be condemned for, since politicizing Kurdish music in Syria has had negative repercussion on the music itself (Tejel, 2009).

Regarding the second point, **“the use of music for political ideologies”**, the music turned into a political speech based on mobilizing the Syrian Kurds to serve the war in Turkey in the time of the PKK, which extended from the early 1980s to the end of 1990s. This mobilization was serving the Syrian regime more than the Kurdish cause for the reason that it was aiming at emptying Syria of the Kurds who may demand their national and cultural rights in Syria in the future. Additionally, regardless of the content of songs made in this period of time, the melodies were simple, repetitive and overly enthusiastic. This kind of music production was necessary in order to deliver the political message without going into the details of the technical value or the musical complexity that would distract attention from the content. In my view, this issue was one of the factors that led to the impression that non-Kurdish

musicians, who did not understand the content of Kurdish songs, described Kurdish music as primitive, simple or undeveloped music (al-Sharif, 2011).

But if PKK did not exist in 1980s and 1990s, how would Kurdish music in Syria be? I think it is a difficult question to be answered, but I assume that since speaking and writing in Kurdish language was forbidden, there would not be any cultural Kurdish movement at all. From this point of view, I can say that the presence of the PKK in Syria created an opportunity for musical activity so that there was at least Kurdish music. But if we ask the question in a different way; would it be better if there was no active Kurdish music in Syria, or at least was its existence in this way better than its absence? I, personally, believe that the nonappearance of this kind of music would be better, because, despite the obstacles it would have faced and the difficulty of getting a chance to be sung and recorded, these few produced songs would have been a natural development and a progressive evolution of the Kurdish cultural identity in Syria that had begun with the emergence of Syria as a state. Moreover, it would have been affecting and influencing as any culture in the world in a natural way; far from manipulation.<sup>162</sup>

Concerning **Music and Society**, apart from the fact that political factors also played a role in neglecting musicians such as *Dûman*, social factors are seen to be much effective. The tribal customs and traditions of the Kurdish rural community divisions put musicians in a despised category; a category which lacks courage, seriousness and prestigious social status. In such social conditions, the musician has three options: to retire music, to get closer to the society by reconciling playing a music approved by the society and getting a “real job” that fills his hunger and life needs, or to run away from society and settle in a strange environment so that he can become himself. In the case of *Dûman*, he followed the second option; he ignored his multi-sided musical talent at the expense of pleasing the community. Beside making music, he worked about thirty years as a driver for different vehicles to appear as a practical

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<sup>162</sup> Despite the obstacles to Kurdish culture and language in Turkey, there are active musicians in Turkey of Kurdish origins. Some of them also sing Kurdish alongside Turkish and some sing only in Turkish. But in Syria there is a gap between the Kurds and the Arabs on the musical side. We can see famous writers and painters in Syria of Kurdish origin, but there are no singers of Kurdish origin, as far as I know.

person in the eyes of society. But unfortunately, he could not please both his musical and non-musical character.

In order to elaborate the relationship between the society and musician, I am going to make a conclusive comparison between *Miço Bekebûr Berazî* and *Mihemed-ê Dûman*.

First of all, when we make a comparison between *Dûman* and *Miço*, we should not ignore the historical context. *Miço* was in a period of time that Kurdish identity in Syria was freshly shaped. Furthermore, despite that the actors who shaped this identity were more inclined to the Kurdish issue in Turkey, they were creating a balance between the national and cultural movements. And Kurdish music, especially *dengbêjî* which archives stories and narrations, was considered as a cornerstone in Kurdish culture. So, a *dengbêj* like *Miço* had an important status because he was a singer, on the contrary of instrumentalists, such as *Qedrî Dûman*, a qanun player. But later it seemed as if Kurdish intellectuals were indirectly enhancing the social prejudices towards instrumentalists. Instrumentalists who were already likened to *Gewende* as an inferior social class in the collective tribal mentality of the people of Kobani. Later, when *Mihemed-ê Dûman* moved in, he was confronted with this prejudice which lasted till the arrival of PKK. When the party spread over the borders, both folk songs and *dengbêjî* were ignored at the expense of propaganda and ideological music, a music that *Dûman* was not interested in. And maybe it was because of *Dûman*'s sympathy for Barzani's movement,<sup>163</sup> as I concluded during my interview with him.

An additional point, *Miço* belongs to the local tribes of *Suruç Plain*, unlike *Dûman* family who goes back to Sorani origins from Kirkuk in Iraq. And even this fact about his origin a few people knew about. People of Kobani considered this family of gypsies or of bohemian origins. And I think, if there was other instrumentalists who belong to the local tribes of Kobani instead of *Dûman* family members, who were the only people who play unfamiliar musical instrument, we would have dozens of musical instruments players in Kobani by now. Moreover, if a son of any chieftain or head of a clan, like *Bozan Beg*, was a musician or a singer, all people of Kobani

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<sup>163</sup> Mustafa Barzani (1903-1979) father of Massoud Barzani. A great national figure among most Syrian Kurds before the emergence of PKK. Besides, there still is a cold war between PDK, the party of Barzani, and PKK.

would be interested in music, or at least would not despise musicians. The most vivid example of this accordance between ruling class and their subjects appears in the inclination of the majority of Kobani students to study Law, because the first group who studied Law in Kobani were the children of *Bozan* and *Mustafa Beg*.

After the people of Kobani fled due to the attack of ISIS on the city in September 2014, Kobani suffered a severe destruction. Most of the documents and recordings which were representing the cultural archive of Kobani were either burnt or lost. But there still is a great repertoire in the collective memory of the people. And before the present generations lose this memory, they have to revive it. So, this escape may turn into a positive chance, especially most of the people have settled in European countries. It is an opportunity for us to practice our favorite hobbies and have the potentials to shift our musical interests from mere ideas and possibilities to practical reality because of freedom, support and facilities provided. In other words, the causes of problems, shortages and obstacles in Kurdish music in Syria should be examined through academic studies and researches. So that they can revitalize this heritage. We have to collect documents and republish what is available, look for the problems and places of imbalance and equilibrium, and offer options to produce them in a better way so that musicians can perform in a manner that combines the originality and the conditions of the stage.

Even before the war of Syria in general and that of Kobani in special, the musical conditions, which were not healthy due to social and political pressures and suppressions, led to the loss of identity in the production of the new Syrian Kurdish musicians because with the world being opened up due to the modern technology progress and being freed from both the political and social authorities, imitation and lack of creativity were the apparent traits of presented music. Therefore, it would be better to do researches on the Kurdish musical styles and return to the sources in order to reconstruct in accordance to modern visions and tastes. For instance, one of the styles that can be revived is *dengbêjî*. Although the introduction of this style

began to appear in the bars and theaters<sup>164</sup> in its traditional form,<sup>165</sup> but I think it would be great if we present it in technically complicated form, in addition to the traditional simple form. As most of these epic narratives take on a dramatic characteristic, it is not harmful to be conducted in an orchestral approaches such as operas and operettes. If we take the popular epic of Mem and Zin as an example, which is a dialogue love story between two lovers. Since the traditional tribal views of the Kurds, in general and those of Kobani in particular were preventing women from appearing on the public and singing, is not valid any more, a female singer can take Zin's part and a male singer can take Mem's part. In addition to the two major characters there are narrators and minor voices. These roles can be performed by the choir. By this way, we can remind the young generations with this tradition as well as developing the technical tools in the Kurdish music, which was marginalized for decades at the expense of highlighting speech and Kurdish language.

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<sup>164</sup> In Istanbul, just in January 2018, there was at least two *dengbêjî* concerts, as far as I know. One of them was in *Zebercet Cafe and Bar* in 4 January 2018. While the other took place in Boğaziçi University in 10 January 2018.

<sup>165</sup> Either *dengbêj* sings with no musical instrument accompanying or just one traditional instrumentalist accompanies him.

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**Demir, Subhi.** Stays in Germany. Videoed interview in 30 October 2016.

**Dûman, Mihemed-ê.** Stays in Konya, Turkey. Personal interview in 10 and 11 September 2016.

**Îbram, Melle.** (1924-2015), A videoed interview in Kobani, Syria. 21 August 2010.

**Kanî, Imerê.** In Mersin, Turkey. Personal interview in 21 September 2016.

**Kendeş, Miço.** Stays in Switzerland. Videoed interview in 30 September 2016.

**Mestê, Mistefa Îbram.** In Mersin, Turkey. Personal interview in 20 September 2016.

**Moro, Bavê.** In Suruç, Turkey. Personal interview in 15 September 2016.

**Nassan, Salih.** In Şanlıurfa, Turkey. Personal interview in 16 September 2016.

**Seyda, Muhsin.** Stays in Denmark. Videoed interview in 30 November 2016.

**Sofî, Reşîd.** Stays in Kobani, Syria. Videoed interview in 30 September 2017.

**Soreklî, Şahînê Bekirê.** Stays in Australiya. Videoed interview in 30 October 2016.

**Şakir, Mehmûd Ezîz.** Stays in Erbil, KRG. Videoed interview in 30 January 2017.

**Şexo, Brahîm Mihemmed.** Stays in Germany. Online interview in 20 March 2014.

**Şexo, Mistefa.** Stays in Denmark. Videoed interview in 30 October 2016.

**Xelîl, Abdullatif.** *Mihemed-ê Dûman*'s son. Stays in Erbil, KRG. Online interviewed in 30 January 2017.

**Xelîl, Fewaz.** *Mihemed-ê Dûman*'s son. Stays in Kasel, Germany. Online interview in 20 January 2017.

**Xelîl, Xelîl.** *Mihemed-ê Dûman*'s son. Stays in Konya, Turkey. Personal interview in 10 September 2016.

**Yaş, Zeyneb.** Stays in Diyarbakir, Turkey. Videoed interview in 30 August 2017.

**Yûsif, Seîd.** Personal interview in Qamishli, Syria in 10 October 2010.

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### PUBLICATIONS, PRESENTATIONS AND PATENTS ON THE THESIS:

- **Hajj, Hussain.** 2016: *Türkiye’deki Suriyeli Müzisyenler: Devrim içinde devrim.* Türkiye’de Suriyelilerin Durumu **Geçicilikten Kalıcılığa** – GR Göç Araştırmaları Platformu, April 16, 2016 Istanbul, Turkey.
- **Hajj, Hussain.** 2016: The Syrian Musician in Istanbul: The Relationship between Repertoire and Stage. *Alternatif Politika Dergisi, Cilt 8, Sayı 3, Ekim 2016.*
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